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Professional Development Activities: Understanding How Cultural Stigmas Impact the Participation of Japanese English Learners in Universities

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Oral Language

Hamline University

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

If there is one reminder that I think every language teacher should come across, it is this: "The teacher's primary responsibility is response-ability," by Peter Wilberg (Lewis, 2000). This quote reminds me to step back and realize that my teaching needs to be mindful of the culture and language in which my students identify. In other words, it is simply my responsibility as a language teacher to respond to student struggles by bridging my lessons to the language and culture of my students so that they can academically thrive. As this is what culturally relevant teaching stands for, academic success happens when cultural integrity is maintained. In fact, culturally relevant pedagogy does not only help students achieve academic success, but also increases social, emotional, and intellectual well being (Erten, 2015). It is within our power as language teachers to uphold these principles for our students.

Having already lived and taught English in Japan for roughly two years, it is both my honor and privilege to dedicate my capstone research to English as a foreign language (EFL) within the Japanese university context. The question that guides my research is: *How do cultural stigmas impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?* The goal of this research question is to shed light on the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity for language teachers so that they can see the impact culture has on teaching and learning.

Chapter Overview

There are two main sections to this chapter. First, I will expand on my research question and what its intentions are, including the rationale of the project. This section

will touch on the compelling reasons that drew me in to pursuing the topic and research question in addition to what I hope to learn from the study. This section will also detail why I chose this topic with native English teachers (NETs) being the primary audience for my capstone project.

Background and Context of Interest in the Project

In my personal experience of teaching in primary, secondary, and higher education in Japan, I have observed many accounts where there is an obvious classroom culture gap between non-Japanese EFL teachers and Japanese English Learners (ELs). One cultural gap, in particular, that this project focuses on is the participative expectations that language teachers have for Japanese ELs in the EFL classroom. This appears in the form of both the voluntary and involuntary responses from students. A common frustration among my former coworkers (sometimes myself included) would be that students are seemingly just too shy or unwilling to participate in classroom discussions and activities. This rather poor view of students then eventually becomes a blanket statement that influences student assessments. For instance, students who speak more in class are received more favorably by their teachers than those who do not speak as much. Thus, these favored students tend to do better on assessments. This is harmful because although it is wonderful that students are actively engaging in class, it may not be an accurate measure of their actual ability on given tasks. It should be well understood that a student who is silent may even know more than students who are verbal (Cheng, 2004). However, it is difficult to see below the surface and it is probably the reason why I often find myself advocating for students when my coworkers would label them as quiet,

shy, or as a learner with a disability on ‘the spectrum’. This, to me, is an unjust way of teaching.

Another reason why I took interest in this issue is because of what some of my former students would tell me outside of the classroom context. Students would tell me what their concerns were and currently are in the classroom. To my surprise but also affirmation, these concerns would echo conversations and misunderstandings that I would have with my co-workers. My former students would tell me that they do not wish for their teachers to think they are lazy or incompetent if they are not responding to questions and tasks. From this conversation with my former students, I now firmly believe that if language teachers take the time to know their students (in addition to their culture) and accommodate for their needs, teaching and learning would be much more meaningful. They could see that Japanese ELs are not necessarily shy, but instead understand that there are cultural factors that affect learner behaviors in the EFL classroom. They might see that their ‘shy’ student is glowing with things to say during one-on-one, or that they work better with certain groups of people, or that they just need some warm-ups before a whole class discussion.

A review of current research suggests that the interference of the Japanese cultural stigmas on participation in the EFL classroom is an important topic to explore. Previous research includes examining the classroom culture gap in a Japanese university (Sasaki, 1996), research on the general education system in Japan (Macwhinnie, 2017), and attitudes and motivation of Japanese university students (Takahashi, 2012). All of these studies connect to this capstone’s research focus on the relationship between culture and language as it pertains to participation in the EFL classroom.

Survey studies which are explored more in-depth in Chapter Two, suggest that there can indeed be misunderstandings between ELs and their English language teachers (Osterman, 2014; Sasaki, 1996). Such miscommunications involve the cultural expectations between teachers and students on classroom behavior, group work, and general participation to name a few. It is discoveries like this that prompted me to keep researching cultural assumptions of participation (and how that contributes to a classroom culture gap), which have helped me understand why language teachers, such as myself, can become perplexed and be of a disservice to our Japanese ELs at the university level. I plan to expand on this in more detail in Chapter Two.

Rationale of Project

As previously stated above, the burning question of my research narrows in on *how* as opposed to *why*. Thus, it is best to assume that there are indeed cultural stigmas to speaking in the EFL classroom for Japanese university ELs in Japan. Answers to *how* will be presented in Chapter Two. Specific cultural stigmas will be addressed and tied into how they are connected to participation in the EFL university classroom taught by NETs. In other words, educators must understand that elements of culture are carried over from society and education to the EFL setting. From here, it is one of Capstone's primary concerns to research what that translates to, as well as what it looks like in the EFL classroom at Japanese universities.

There are good and just reasons for a high increase in cultural awareness and sensitivity training in the ESL/EFL field. Both language teachers and researchers alike have increasingly become eye-to-eye on the value of considering culture in the curriculum (Campos, 2009). After all, cultural awareness does not have any

drawbacks—it can only aid in the process of second language acquisition. Thus, my project consists of a series of professional development (PD) activities provided on a website for NETs in Japan focusing on the cultural stigmas of participation in the classroom. Further information will be provided in Chapter Three where the objective is for teachers to gain insights into the cultural background of their university students so that they can effectively plan their lessons and give mindful assessments.

From both observation and self-reflection, when a lesson does not go as planned because the students do not meet our expectations, we often attribute it to reasons such as personality, potential disability, and other factors that are seemingly out of our control. However, not accurately pinpointing and addressing the matter does not benefit anyone—not our students, the school or company that we work for, and certainly not ourselves. This is why it is important for me to create an accessible website filled with effective PD activities which empowers language teachers so that they can gain a deeper understanding of their students' culture. Then, in turn, (although not the focus) for my project to hopefully inspire teachers to provide quality teaching and assessment related to participation for their students in class. The exact methods, design, and components of the capstone project will be explained in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Summary

In Chapter One, I introduced an overview of my topic with the guiding research question, *How do cultural stigmas impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?* I have noted the importance for language teachers in Japan to understand the culture of their students through relevant pedagogy such as culturally relevant teaching. I have also tied in my personal experience

with teaching in Japan and how it connects to my findings on this topic, stressing the significance of my project on cultural awareness and sensitivity training for current and prospective EFL language teachers at Japanese universities. In Chapter Two of this project, I draw on a variety of literature as it relates to my research question. This section makes connections to research on Japanese culture and education, classroom culture gap, and teaching pedagogy and methods. It emphasizes what the cultural stigmas look like in the EFL classroom and where they are coming from. In Chapter Three, I give a detailed description of my capstone project. It entails the product of my project, frameworks and methods used, its context, setting, audience, and time frame. Finally, Chapter Four reflects on the capstone project. It touches on the research, learning, and writing process. Personal thoughts, expectations, and experience in regards to the research and project is highlighted in this chapter along with limitations and implications towards the EFL field.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two focuses on the literature surrounding the research question: *How do cultural stigmas impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?* Here, *stigmas*, concerns the socio-cultural factors that play a role in the stigmatization of participation in the classroom.

Research on the stigmas of communicative performance such as participation is important because it is often an overlooked element that occurs in the Japanese classroom. To be more specific, this literature review focuses specifically on Japanese university students in English classes where teachers are Native English speakers. In short, from various literature and research, the main cause as to why Japanese ELs in university are not proactively speaking in class is due to a classroom cultural gap between native English teachers (NETs) and Japanese ELs. In this chapter, I will first provide context on the interrelationship between Japanese education and English. This section will help us understand how learning English in the primary and secondary level influences participation at the university level. This first section will speak on the differences in skills and values between traditional Japanese education and general Western education. In the second section, I will provide literature on how the preferred learning styles of Japanese ELs do not correlate with the teaching styles and expectations of NETs. Afterwards, there will be separate sections covering cultural values and culturally relevant teaching strategies that NETs can use to reduce or prevent anxiety and

increase participation. However, before going into these main sections of Chapter Two, it would be beneficial for us to properly define cultural stigmas.

Defining and Understanding Stigma as Cultural

In *Conceptualizing Stigma*, (Link & Phelan 2001) stigma is described as the intersections of components such as labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination that affects different areas in people's life by negatively weighing on the distribution of life chances such as earnings, housing, and health. By this definition, we can assume that the cultural stigmas of speaking-related tasks have weight on student performance relating to participation.

It is important to highlight that although student motivation and attitude towards English may be positive, there are barriers such as stigmas that prevent students from performing certain tasks. It would be a mistake to categorize positive motivations and attitudes as an absolute variable to the likelihood of students speaking in class without seeing cultural factors. According to Benson's (1992) data surveying college Japanese freshman, there is no strong correlation between how students' positive motivation and attitude towards learning English impacted their participation performance in class. Thus, it makes sense that despite learning English for instrumental and experiential reasons, Benson's (1992) students performed better in reading and writing exercises than they did in speaking. Research on motivation and attitude as it relates to student speech production neglects to account for the underlying social and cultural role of Japanese society and how it impacts Japanese ELs in the classroom. To put simply, motivation and attitude for learning behavior (Benson, 1992) is at the individual level and may not necessarily contribute to participation performance. It is not an accurate measurement for

understanding why Japanese ELs, as a general whole, seemingly lack a drive for participation. Instead, understanding the cultural aspects of Japanese society through stigmas can help teachers see behavior as a result of culture that their students bring with them to the EFL classroom.

Therefore, a greater understanding of the stigmas of classroom participation in Japan through the lenses of cultural norms and values provides more insights concerning student performance in the EFL classroom. For instance, literature on Japanese education and its relationship with English shows us the difference in teaching methods between the typical Japanese education and the typical Western education (a theme that we will be further detailed below). Knowing about this helps teachers understand what Japanese ELs are comfortable with when in the classroom setting.

As for literature on cultural values, the importance of harmony and use of risk-aversion strategies illustrates the potential reasons why Japanese ELs respond the way they do in EFL classrooms. This further deepens the importance of understanding Japanese ELs beyond individual factors such as motivation, attitude, and personality. Additionally, literature on teaching strategies for Japanese ELs that struggle with participation involving oral communication can often be neglected in research. Although there is a myriad of literature on best practices for teaching EFL, there seems to be disconnect (or even neglect) on teaching EFL to specific groups of learners in specific areas of learning—in this case, helping Japanese ELs in university successfully perform in classrooms that demand extensive participation. Accordingly, it is important for us to first answer the guiding question by looking into the role of English in the traditional Japanese education system.

Japanese Education and English

A major concern that many NETs have of Japanese ELs is that they lack communicative skills as it relates to the class (Ryan & Stiller, 1996). The communicative skills in question involve the participation of answering questions, volunteering answers, and having meaningful conversation in group work among other oral-related tasks. This is not a new issue in Japan in respect to the EFL field. The goal of this section is to illustrate background information on two themes: the role of English in the primary and secondary education in Japan, and the differences in teaching/learning pedagogies between western and Japanese educational practices. These two themes will help us understand how issues about participation in the EFL classroom at Japanese universities take form.

The Role of English in Primary and Secondary Education

Having been made aware of this communicative issue that Japanese learners face when in real-world situations, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (also known as MEXT) has been encouraging public schools to incorporate cultural factors with an oral focus in English classes since the 1990s (Mckenzie, 2008). MEXT then officially required all public elementary and pre-senior high schools in Japan to implement the Rainbow Plan (Ohtani, 2010). The objective for this plan was to increase international understanding and for students to become functional in English within a five year plan. Because of this call for a more communicative-driven curriculum, the need for many public schools to hire assistant language teachers (ALTs) has been in demand and is now a very common component for learning about world cultures through English. It is very debatable, however, whether or

not this rapid intake and implementation of ALTs in the schools is effective in helping Japanese students improve their communicative English skills.

To gain some insight as to why Japanese ELs in university lack participation skills, it is necessary to look into the education system at large. First, the fundamental means of learning English in primary and secondary education do not have the same learning goals as the goals would be different in university (Macwhinnie & Mitchell, 2017). English is simply a subject that is mandated by the government for all elementary, junior high, and senior high schools in Japan to have (Mckenzie, 2008). During this time, students are generally taught by Japanese teachers who may or may not have any certification or qualification for teaching English. To add, although students may have exposure and experience with NETs during their pre-university years, it is most likely that these NETs are hired as an ALT. And unfortunately, however, the role of an ALT in the English classroom is ambiguous and often very limited; ALTs typically serve as an assistant in that they do not plan the lesson nor teach the class. It is very common for ALTs to act as voice-recorders—pronouncing words that are prompted for them to say (Sponseller, 2016). Hence, experiencing English in traditional Japanese education contradicts the hopeful gains and implementation of MEXT. To understand why this is a barrier, we need to look at the characteristics of a traditional Japanese school and that is teacher-centeredness.

Traditional Japanese Education: Teacher-centeredness

A major difference between student-centered and teacher-centered practices, generally speaking, is the value and skills that are promoted as a result of teaching. As noted by Sasaki (1996), unlike students in Western education, students are not taught to

develop verbal skills such as argumentation, opinion, and self-expression. These are values reflecting student-centered approaches. Moreover, students taught under Japanese education are guided to practice skills that uphold harmony (Sasaki, 1996)—skills that save face or practice inference, for instance. These are cultural skills and values in Japan that are promoted through teacher-centered instruction. Whereas a student in western education is expected to be an active and assertive learner, Japanese students are expected to be passive (Hyland, 1994).

Regardless, student-centered pedagogy has been favorable and long standing in the EFL field. Research and studies show that a teacher-centered approach to learning does not promote meaningful learning in language acquisition (Kassem, 2019). Therefore, because EFL teachers today are trained to apply student-centered learning, Japanese ELs at the university level do not feel that their English learning experiences in primary and secondary schooling did not prepare them well for university level learning expectations (Osterman, 2014). It is understandable, then, that the classroom culture gap on participation is due to the differences in learning/teaching practices between NETs and Japanese ELs.

Detailing Classroom Culture Gap

Today, in the field of ESL/EFL, pedagogy and practices encouraging a student-centered learning approach is steadily increasing. Naturally, then, there is an overwhelming volume of desire to change student behavior to a more active learner (Ryan & Stiller, 1996) in the English-learning classroom. However, while data may suggest that student-centered teaching methods may optimize meaningful learning, traditional methods still have its place in how receptive students may be towards learning

(Kain, 2003). This is where the classroom culture gap takes shape. NETs with well-meaning intentions of creating a student-centered classroom fail to recognize that they themselves also have a responsibility to meet the needs of their learners beyond their own beliefs about teaching and learning (Ryan & Stiller, 1996). This failure to accommodate student needs further widens the learning and teaching gap between NETs and students. Examples of this cultural gap will be explained in the following subsections.

Being that the Japanese education system is still largely traditional in teaching methods, it is understandable that students going into an English class at university for the first time may have a difficult time adjusting to the changes in teaching styles. Without having the proper transition or accommodation to learning methods, Japanese ELs do not have ample opportunity to speak English—an expectation or desire that students wish to have (Osterman, 2014). In fact, according to Osterman's (2014) survey, students largely complain that they are not receiving enough speaking practice. This result suggests that Japanese ELs are indeed willing to speak English, but they feel uncomfortable for a variety of culturally-related reasons. This now points us to a dissonance in learning styles and expectations that NETs may not be fully aware of in their classrooms.

Dissonance in Learning Styles

As noted earlier, emphasis on learner-centered approaches in the EFL field is significant in today's teaching practices. This learner-centered approach can partly be owed to Reid's (1987) research and categorization of six different learning styles of ESL/EFL learners: kinesthetic, visual, auditory, tactile, individual, and group. Reid

(1987) had summarized that regardless of the various learning styles available, learners preferred student-centered approaches that involve both individual and group work. Now, although Reid's research (1987) was ground-breaking in the EFL field, it neglects to address the interactions of culture and learning styles that are seemingly unique to Japanese ELs that NETs fail to recognize (Ozeki, 1996). Two learning styles that Japanese ELs at the university level prefer can be broken down into two elements: communicative-based learning and games.

In a fairly recent study, Hayashi and Cherry (2014), surveyed 63 Japanese ELs at Hokuriku University with a questionnaire on learning preferences. In this study, students answered 28 questions in which each question was a statement about a learning preference. One salient result from the questionnaire suggests that students prefer to learn through games, pictures, and interaction. However, a separate result shows that students have a low preference for talking in pairs. This implies that while Japanese ELs may prefer interactive and group learning, it should not be assumed that they are comfortable with paired activities such as free-talk or guided discussions. This is especially important if students are not quite familiar with each other (Harumi, 2010). Along the same lines, Japanese ELs do not prefer textbook or grammar-focused learning styles. This reinforces the finding that Japanese ELs are indeed willing to learn through student-centered practices. And that students are wanting their teachers to help them with establishing this in a culturally sensitive way (Osterman, 2014). This misunderstanding is a result of a dissonance between NETs' expectations and Japanese ELs' expectations.

Dissonance in Expectations

In a survey conducted by Sasaki (1996), results show a detailed and striking evidence of classroom culture gap between NETs and Japanese university students. In the first part of the survey, NETs were given a list of 25 student behaviors. For the 25 student behaviors, NETs were instructed to 1) mark the preference for each behavior and 2) mark the frequency at which each behavior was observed in their lessons. In the second part of the questionnaire, the same NETs were asked to provide descriptions of both desirable and undesirable student behaviors. As a result, Sasaki (1996) discovered that there is significant data showing a dissonance in student expectations and student behavior according to the experiences of NETs. In one example, while NETs largely preferred their students to initiate conversation with the teacher and other students, students instead remained quiet and unresponsive to classroom tasks. What this suggests is that there may be a lack of understanding between NETs and students. This idea suggesting that there is a cultural gap concerning expectation can be supported by one of the results from Osterman's qualitative study (2014). In this study, it was found that Japanese ELs in university do not only have a desire to participate more, but they have a desire to become familiar with their classmates. In situations akin to this, students hope (or expect) their teachers to facilitate an environment where students can become familiar with their classmates so that they can practice English with each other (Harumi, 2010).

Listener Responsibility VS Speaker Responsibility. Another cultural gap in the Japanese EFL classroom taught by NETs is the notion of listener responsibility VS speaker responsibility. Generally speaking, in the United States, the responsibility lies on the speaker whereas the listener is open to ask for clarification if needed (Leung, 2020).

This means that it is the speaker's responsibility to communicate their thoughts effectively to whomever their audience is. In a high-context communication society like the United States, the ability to be articulate is highly praised and often associated with the qualities of a good leader. TED talks, workshops, and presentations where the ability to speak well are examples of functions in which speaker responsibility is exercised and glorified (Yamada, 2015). Contrastingly, Japan is a society where communication is low in context. Thus, details are unnecessary where having the ability to inference is. This then, in communication, gives the responsibility to the listener. It is the listener's duty to understand what the speaker is saying through attentive listening and inferences.

What this looks like in the typical classroom in the United States is that silent students are often portrayed negatively. Silence is understood as not paying attention and even being defiant (Yamada, 2015). To put simply, participation in Western-structured education systems requires students to be assertive and outspoken. In Japan, however, that is not the case. In a traditional Japanese school setting, students show participation through silence. As such, a silent student in Japan is seen as being obedient rather than defiant. For this reason, both NETs and Japanese ELs can become frustrated. NETs become frustrated because they expect Japanese ELs to be active learners. Meanwhile, Japanese ELs can be equally frustrated because their teachers are interpreting their silence as unwillingness to participate (Harumi, 2010). This frustration, or even anxiety, along with the dissonance in learning styles and expectations are characteristics of a classroom with cultural gaps between NETs and Japanese ELs. Another way we can grasp understanding for these cultural differences is by looking at the cultural values in which Japanese ELs are brought up in.

Cultural Values

As mentioned by Maher (1984), it is possible that students are not participating because they simply do not understand. However, it is also possible that when students do not perform a speaking-related task as expected for them to, then it could be that the task is expecting far too much from the students. The learning target may have all the essential communicative needs, but it would be far-fetched to expect students to disregard societal rules of communication such as initiating or interrupting talk as we have previously discussed (Dwyer & Heller-Murphy, 1996).

Harmony

Harmony is an undeniable cultural trait of Japanese culture. Deriving from Shinto, an indigenous religion of Japan, the importance of being in harmony with nature and people is a consistent theme of practice even in modern Japanese culture (Konishi et al., 2009). The characteristic of harmony, as expected, is also prominent in the education system where complex social roles exist. Though it may sound all and well, this Japanese concept of practicing harmony in the schools is what causes the cultural stigmas of what NETs understand as participation. As a reminder, participation in a student-centered environment includes students speaking up, sharing thoughts and ideas, and responding to content. These are student qualities that are not commonly practiced and instead generally frowned upon in traditional Japanese schools (Yamada, 2015). In any case, these three specific cultural concepts—*amae, Ijime*, and *kuuki yomenai*—are concepts that are directly tied to upholding harmony in the traditional Japanese classroom while also creating stigmas that impact student participation in the EFL university classroom taught by NETs.

Amae. As we have already learned, a key element of a traditional Japanese school through primary and secondary education is the emphasis of teacher-centeredness (Hyland, 1994). Students are not guided to question their teachers nor each other. It is not common to express opinions, engage in debates, or anything that would suggest disagreement. In fact, there are cultural reasons and one concept that can help us understand this is *amae*. In Japan, the cultural concept of *amae*, is an important structure in which individuals along the spectrum of social roles take part in interdependent relationships (Doi, 2005). Through *amae*, Japanese teachers have responsibilities to guide their students beyond academics.This socio-cultural structure involves individuals being taken care of by other individuals who are often seen as more knowledgeable—just as children rely on their parents for care, students in Japan may also rely on their teachers for that same level of intimate care (Doi, 2005). And just as children should not question their parents, students do not question their teachers. In other words, the responsibilities that come with being a teacher in Japan are not the same as they would be in a typical Western school. Teachers and students in Western education do not generally subscribe to this kind of relationship that *amae* holds in traditional Japanese schools.

Ijime. In Japan, although there is a culture of *amae*, a social system of dependence, bullying is a major issue that is often overlooked in the Japanese education system (Yoneyama, 2008). Broadly speaking, a proverb that Japan as a society adheres to is “the nail that sticks out gets hammered in (Armetta, 2019).” This popular proverb encourages individuals to not disrupt the peace by breaking the socially accepted rules. So while harmony may appear to be a positive aspect in the traditional Japanese school, it may bear negative consequences. An example of *ijime* and how it impacts participation in

the EFL university setting is students maintaining shared negative attitudes towards the English classroom. As a group, if the general attitude towards English, the classroom, or even the teacher, is negative, then that dictates the general atmosphere of the classroom environment (Peng, 2012). In this kind of environment, participation may very well be non-existent. And the minority that actually have a positive view of the English language gets drowned by the majority. The few students that do participate would almost certainly be isolated or seen negatively by the majority. Other shared acts may involve students sleeping in class, using Japanese, and not responding to teacher questions. Again, this is because Japanese students will not typically stray from the norm (Armetta, 2019).

Similarly, in Osterman's observational data (2014), when asked why students were not talking in their groups, they revealed that since no one initiated conversation, communication did not occur. This does not mean that the students are incapable. It reflects the value of harmony because although no one is trying to speak English, they did not want to push each other to do something they did not want to do. This may also explain why, mentioned in Ozeki's (1996) survey, that students who experience extensive learning in English-speaking countries tend to prefer individual work rather than group work. This experience alone could possibly make them the nail that needs to be hammered down (Armetta, 2019). As a result, to avoid potential risks or consequences, students default to risk-aversion strategies such as remaining silent.

Kuuki Yomenai. Akin to Ijime (bullying), there is a genuine fear of being labeled as *kuuki yomenai*. Straying away from the communicative norm in Japanese culture means that you cannot read the air. And not being able to do so would cause you to be socially ostracized by your peers (Kimura, 2010). Therefore, being labeled as *kuuki*

yomenai is not desirable as it may lead to social isolation and bullying (Yoneyama, 2008). The American English equivalent to this concept is someone who cannot read the room. It describes someone who may be socially awkward or clueless.

Kuuki yomenai, commonly abbreviated and used as KY, is an essential skill in the communicative ecology of Japanese society if you want to ensure a quality of life in Japan (Kimura, 2010). This fear of being labeled as KY is a contributing influence on expectations and behavior in social communication in Japanese society and culture (Kimura, 2010). An example of what this looks like in the classroom can be observed in a survey by Osterman (2014). Students in Osterman's survey noted that if the general classroom is quiet, it prevents them from talking. This phenomenon can be very well attributed to the fear of being labeled as KY.

Since students are fearful of causing disharmony and being labeled as KY, it is only understandable that it would impact student performance. Aside from the fear of initiating conversation, another example is that students may not be as forthcoming or honest in their participation tasks. Armetta (2019) explains that students are more likely to lie about where they are from to avoid being a potential target for bullying. These are but a few examples of why students would lie or remain silent in the classroom. These are reasons why teaching methods need to be carefully considered when teaching Japanese ELs.

Teaching Strategies for Japanese ELs

Culturally relevant teaching is one effective pedagogy to incorporate in lesson plans. In essence, realizing the importance and connection between academic achievement and culture is a key feature of culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000).

There are three criteria that make up culturally relevant pedagogy in which teachers must stand by (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The first two criteria point to both the academic success and development/maintenance of cultural competence in students. The third criteria involves teachers understanding cultural challenges that students experience in the norms of the current social and cultural order. The third criteria is important to this theme because it implicates the social/cultural barriers that students are met with when in the ESL classroom. Realizing the importance of academic achievement while advocating the culture of their students is what culturally relevant teaching encompasses (Gay, 2000). This means that NETs teaching EFL in Japanese universities can still teach student-centered approaches (a learning preference, as mentioned previously). What will be different, however, is creating lesson plans with the intention of being culturally responsive to their Japanese learners. There are many techniques to ensure culturally responsive teaching. With the main objective to reduce or prevent learner anxiety, I will offer a variety of culturally relevant teaching reasons and strategies in the following sections: reducing and preventing learner anxiety, attribution retraining, and activities.

Reducing Learner Anxiety and Raising Confidence

Since the education system in Japan is still very teacher-centered (Askew, 2008) as opposed to a student-centered approach, not addressing the classroom culture gap may negatively impact both teachers and students. NETs may become flustered with their students responding too slowly or at all during lessons (Sasaki, 1996). However, as mentioned previously, what NETs may not fully understand is that it is simply uncommon for Japanese students across all subjects to engage in oral-based tasks such as expressing their opinions (Osterman, 2014).

The expectations that NETs have of their Japanese ELs in addition to the failures to meet student expectations may result in anxiety, create negative perceptions about the teacher or even the English language and culture (Macwhinnie & Mitchell, 2017). Thus, further impacting students' willingness or ability to participate in various classroom tasks. Learner anxiety concerning participation can be classified into three types: cognitive tension, affective tension, and task tension (Williams & Andrade 2008). Cognitive tension can be experienced when student expectations about learning are not met. This includes learning content, learning styles, and general classroom organization. Affective tension, on the other hand, refers to a discontentment that students feel towards about either student-student interactions or student-teacher interactions. Lastly, task tension involves anxiety that is experienced when students are instructed to perform out of their comfort level. Some examples are public speaking, responding to whole-class discussions, or sharing an opinion on a given task. To close the classroom cultural gap and reduce or prevent learner anxiety, the following sections can offer NETs valuable information for their teaching.

Providing Motivational Feedback. There are multiple teaching strategies to reduce or prevent learning anxiety. Because traditional Japanese education attributes academic success to student effort rather than ability (Holloway, 1988), one way to reduce or prevent anxiety is to offer positive reinforcement by praising a student's effort. Leung (2020) recommends giving positive reinforcement prior to pointing out a student's mistake to increase willingness to communicate. Giving positive reinforcement before pointing out a mistake boosts confidence and avoids centering on an error. In addition to this, since Japanese ELs may be concerned about causing disharmony, Leung (2020)

recommends that teachers give a balanced wait time when waiting for student responses. By giving students ample time to process their thoughts, it reduces risks such as embarrassment which ultimately increases student confidence and participation.

Attribution Retraining. In addition to providing positive reinforcement and praising students on their efforts, changing student perception about associated attributes for their accomplishments or failures is another way NETs can help their Japanese learners.To define, attributions are the personal explanations for the results in an academic task or situation (Weiner, 2010). Therefore, attribution retraining involves reframing the learner's thought process for attributing factors to their academic successes or failures (Gobel et al., 2015). Here are two examples in the Japanese student context. Example one, students may attribute passing an exam because of luck (Eten, 2015). And example two, students may attribute their failure to participate in speaking-based tasks because of their low communicative ability (Osterman, 2014).

Example one is an illustration of attributing success on external reasons while example two demonstrates internal reasons. In either case, a teacher could assure their students that they should be proud of themselves because the *effort* they put into learning is what helped them pass. This is culturally responsive to Japanese culture because (as we have learned previously) academic achievement is often associated with effort rather than ability (Holloway, 1988). Attribution retraining empowers students and guides them to see that they can be in control of their failures and successes (Erten, 2015). As Weiner (2010) puts it, attributions tell us about how students self-evaluate their learning process. And this self-evaluation may influence how the past is interpreted which inevitably impacts effort for learning in the future (Erten, 2015).

A more specific type of attribution is self-enhancement bias. Self-enhancement bias is attributing success to internal factors (Gobel et al., 2015). Reframing this learner attribution is important because Japanese students typically blame themselves for their failures, just as in example two above. In a meta-analysis research conducted in Japan by Heine and Hamamura (2007), it is concluded that Japanese ELs do not have the tendency to self-enhance their achievements. On the contrary, Japanese ELs proved to display more self-critical attributions for either failures or successes. This may be connected to the Japanese culture of seeing oneself as a social unit rather than an autonomous individual (Gobel et al., 2015). Exhibiting self-critical attributions is an example of avoiding social disharmony because it protects the individual from potential consequences like becoming a victim of *ijime*. Luckily, there are culturally relevant strategies that NETs can use to help their Japanese ELs be successful participants in the classroom.

Culturally Responsive Activities. It is a general consensus that speaking-based objectives contribute to high success rates in the development of students' language abilities (Shawer, 2010). With this in mind, it is important to remember cultural stigmas of speaking in the EFL classroom that Japanese ELs may have. Based on the knowledge from a previous section on learning styles and preferences of Japanese ELs at university, NETs can apply various culturally responsive teaching strategies. In that section, we learned two important pieces of information. One, Japanese ELs desire communicative-based activities and prefer teachers to not practice teacher-centered teaching (Dikilitas et al., 2015). Two, Japanese ELs may not feel comfortable with pair work for reasons related to anxiety and harmony (Hayashi & Cherry, 2010). One method to optimize participation is to provide speaking-based homework to help increase

practice. Results from a study surveying 114 students indicated that this method has a positive learning outcome (Provenzano & Yue, 2011). This allows students to prepare ahead of time for activities and discussion, which in turn increases confidence in carrying out speaking tasks. Similarly, allowing students to convene in small groups rather than checking for answers as a whole class can save face and increase student-student rapport (Hyland, 1993). This is why a teaching aspect to keep in mind is how NETs should respond to certain behaviors or actions exhibited by Japanese ELs. For instance, as we have already learned, it is common for Japanese ELs to remain silent although given a question to answer (Catrone, 2010). It is important for NETs to remember that students guided in traditional Japanese education are not used to providing their opinions or ideas. In this case, it is not advised for NETs to react unfavorably or assume that this particular silent student is unwilling to participate. After all, Japanese ELs might be thinking that silence is what their teacher wants (Sasaki, 1996). Neglecting to find other means of checking comprehension in the class will not increase student performance and instead increase learner anxiety.

Along the same vein, it is rather difficult to judge whether or not Japanese ELs are silent because of cultural reasons or because they simply do not know how to engage with the task. Hence, one way to find clarity is for NETs to offer and practice conversation-repair strategies. In fact, West (2018) conducted a research and found that Japanese ELs at the university level show to make exceptional use of communicative-repair strategies in the classroom. An example of a communicative-repair strategy is The data suggests that if Japanese ELs are versed in conversational repair phrases, they would use it. In any given situation, providing communicative-repair

strategies do not only promote speaking in the ESL classroom, but it is an effective tool for learners to convey meaning and intentions with both their classmates and teachers (Catrone, 2010). By practicing this in class, learning can become more explicit and NETs can gain a sense of student comprehension or willingness to speak during certain tasks.

Building Rapport. A strategy to dispel silence in the classroom is by building rapport through showing interest in the Japanese language and culture (Gay, 2000). Just as Catrone (2010) states, showing interest in the Japanese language and culture can accomplish two goals: 1) fostering intercultural communication and 2) setting a good example of acculturation and encouraging learners to do the same with the target language. Building repertoire and setting a comfortable tone for the classroom is crucial and impacts performance. One way that NETs can build rapport through showing interest in Japanese language and culture is to encourage code-switching between Japanese and English. Despite popular belief and programs where there is an English-only policy, Hawkins (2015) finds that there are many benefits to code-switching in the Japanese EFL university classroom. Aside from helping classroom management and constructing or transmitting knowledge, code-switching can boost student confidence and thereby increase participation. Hawkins (2015) finds that rather than enforcing an English-only policy (proven to negatively impact student learning, participation included), NETs supporting code-switching in the classroom can improve interpersonal relationships. The importance of interpersonal relationships, or building familiarity and boosting the classroom atmosphere (as we have previously learned), can increase student participation (Peng, 2012). This includes both student-student familiarity and student-teacher familiarity. By extension of increasing interpersonal relationships, learner anxiety is

reduced or prevented in the classroom. Moreover, students who have extensive experience learning English abroad may also feel more comfortable (as opposed to keeping silent to protect oneself from sticking out) because by encouraging code-switching in the classroom, both advanced and less advanced students get an opportunity to produce language to their best abilities (Hawkins, 2015).

Summary

To summarize, it is without a doubt that understanding the research question, *How do cultural stigmas impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?* is vital to EFL education. The collective literature above highlights key information for grasping a better hold on understanding the research question. The literature, in its separate sections, are: Japanese Education and English, Classroom Cultural Gaps, Cultural Values, and Teaching Strategies for Japanese ELs.

In Japanese Education and English, I supported the guiding question by offering context to how Japanese ELs receive education prior to university. The main takeaway from this section is understanding that transition from learning through a teacher-centered context can be difficult for Japanese ELs in university to adjust since NETs typically come to Japan versed in student-centered approaches (Osterman, 2014; Ryan & Stiller, 1996; Mckenzie, 2008). In the following section, Classroom Cultural Gaps, I detail literature on the impacts of cultural expectations concerning participation that NETs have of Japanese ELs at the university level. Key highlights from this section include how these cultural expectations and dissonances in learning styles inadvertently and negatively affect classroom participation (Harumi, 2010; Osterman, 2014; Sasaki, 1996).

Afterwards in Cultural Values, the third section of Chapter Two, I review literature on the cultural value of harmony that is prevalent in both Japanese society and traditional Japanese education (Doi, 2005; Konishi et al., 2009; Yamada, 2015). I also highlight crucial literature on learning mechanisms that Japanese learners use such as risk-aversion to avoid social consequences like ijime (Armetta, 2019; Harumi, 2010; Leung, 2020). The main point of this section is to demonstrate how harmony encourages cultural stigmas that would later impact student participation in the EFL classroom. Finally, in the last section of Chapter Two: Teaching Strategies for Japanese ELs, I respond to highlights in previous sections and describe how culturally relevant pedagogy can be effective for reducing or preventing learner anxiety while boosting student confidence and participation (Catrone, 2010; Gay, 2000; Gobel et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Williams & Andrade 2008; West, 2018).

In Chapter Three, I will gather the literature learned in Chapter Two and put it into practice for a website containing PD activities for NETs teaching EFL in Japanese universities. I will use methods to show how cultural stigmas of participation impact performance in Japanese ELs in university in order to help both current and prospective teachers in Japan better serve their students. A project description, frameworks, timeline, materials, and details on intended audience and setting will be outlined and detailed in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Chapter Overview

In the previous chapter, a collection of literature was reviewed on the research question, *How do cultural stigmas impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?* Literature shows that recognizing and addressing cultural stigmas is important for increasing the participation of Japanese ELs in university, and this can be achieved by offering culturally relevant frameworks to educators during professional development (PD). In this chapter, I will present the project overview, the target audience for the PD, relevant frameworks, assessment information, a project description as well as a timeline.

Project Overview

This project aims to create a variety of activities for PD for current and prospective native English teachers (NETs) teaching at university in Japan. These activities will be provided through Wix, a website provider, in which I have specifically designed to inform educators about the cultural stigmas of classroom participation in Japan. The website will include two main contents: 1) information on literature gathered in Chapter Two, and 2) a total of 15 professional development activities. Minor contents include my project rationale and a space for user experience to contact me to provide feedback. All contents along with their specific intentions will be further elaborated below.

Website Goals

There are two main interconnected objectives for this website project. The first main objective is for NETs to gain knowledge about how cultural stigmas impact their classes. Information related to this objective aims to help NETs understand why their Japanese ELs in university may not be as forthcoming when it comes to participation and speaking-related tasks. Some examples include debates, critique, counter-argument practices, asking questions, and volunteering answers. Through acquiring knowledge on the cultural stigmas of participation, the second objective then is to encourage NETs to practice culturally relevant teaching methods in their lessons through activities. Strategically allocating time for group work, speaking warmups, or distributing different key roles for a task are some examples that may make learning experience more effective. These are elements that can be found in my activities. While the activities on the website are specifically for the professional development of NETs, these activities are inspired by my own teaching experiences in which I have used them in my classrooms. To have NETs themselves to experience culturally relevant learning in the Japanese EFL university context would be how I can encourage NETs to practice culturally relevant methods. In this way, NETs can gather ideas for their own lessons teaching Japanese ELs at university.

Frameworks

Because my project will be shared online, I have frameworks for both my PD activities and website. In regards to my PD activities, I incorporate two frameworks for adult learning and professional development, and one for how I design my activity layout. As for my website, I use a single framework focusing on optimizing positive user

experience. I will provide detail on how I built these frameworks into my capstone project in the sub-sections below.

Professional Development Activities

The frameworks for my PD activities featured on Wix come from three sources: 1) *Effective Teacher Professional Development* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), 2) *Second language research methodology and design* (Mackey & Gass, 2005), and 3) *Integrating culture into EFL texts and classrooms: Suggested lesson plans* (Turkan & Çelik, 2007).

In the first source, frameworks concern adult learning in the aspects of active learning and culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Darling-Hmmond et al (2017), active learning involves straying away from models that are lectured based. Lessons, as well as PDs, are proven to be effective through a combination of active learning and culturally relevant pedagogy. These two frameworks (active learning and culturally relevant pedagogy) are the underlying principles of all of my PD activities. I ensure that my PD activities require participants to be interactive and engaged in a variety of culturally relevant ways that is mentioned in Chapter Two. Through my PD activities, active learning allows participants to experience culturally relevant learning. Other frameworks adopted in this project follow activity designs mentioned in Mackey and Gass (2005). These two adult learning methods are Simulated Recall and Think Alouds, two methods that I will mention in the following sub-section. Some examples of introspective measures include self-report, self-observation, and self-revelation for some think-pair-share and whole-group discussions.

Framing the Activity Layout. The general layout of my PD activities is an integration of frameworks from lesson plans inspired from Turkan and Çelik (2007) and activity designs from Mackey and Gass (2005). I chose to use Turkan and Çelik (2007) for framing the layout of my PD activities because it is a framework that immerses culture in lesson plans. I decided to design my PD activities in the form of a lesson plan because it would be most appropriate for EFL professionals. EFL professionals coming across my website would be able to understand and use the PD activities with ease. In order, the general layout for my activities are:

1. Activity Name
2. Category of the Activity
3. Estimated time to complete Activity
4. Requirements/Materials
5. Description of Activity
6. Objectives
7. Pre-Activity/Warm-Ups
8. Activity Steps
9. Post Activity: Discussions, Reflection
10. Activity Rationale

However, because my activities are not designed for learners, there are parts in a typical lesson plan that I exclude such as assignment homework and extended work. As a replacement, I include learning strategies aforementioned above from Mackey and Gass (2005): Simulated Recall and Think Alouds. Stimulated Recall refers to tasks that encourage participants to gather their ideas, experiences, and knowledge on a given topic.

This is a method that requires participants to make personal connections to the task at hand. Similarly, Think Alouds refers to methods for participants to openly share relevant ideas, experiences, and knowledge with other participants. These are two adult learning methods that I employ after each PD activity is experienced by participants. To conclude, each activity will have what I call an *Activity Rationale*. This is similar to Turkan and Çelik's (2007) *Cultural Context* where essential information is provided for the given lesson plan. Similar to how *Cultural Context* is both meaningful and intentional for a specific group of learners, my *Activity Rationale* provides reasons why the activity is culturally relevant and can be effective for Japanese ELs at the university level.

User Experience: Selecting a Website

Although I am not an expert web designer, careful consideration was given to the choice of which website will host my project. I have chosen Wix as a host for three prominent reasons. The first reason relates to cost and features. While Wix offers a variety of business premiums with exclusive features, a free version would still provide quality access to layouts, templates, and plug-ins to maximize user experience. Integrating videos and images are also a free feature to take advantage of to increase user experience. The second reason for choosing Wix is its accessibility across multiple platforms. Users would be able to access the website via PC or mobile. Moreover, both android iOS and mac OS users would be able to download an application version of Wix, increasing user experience and preference. The final reason for selecting Wix to host my project is because it is user-friendly towards novice web designers like myself. I have the option to choose from over 500 pre-made templates and customize my website

accordingly. Reviews highlight Wix's user-friendliness for first-time web designers, and I would have to agree.

Creating the Website. Immediately after creating a website for my project, I chose to go through the tutorials using Wix's ADI (Artificial Design Intelligence) to help aid me in designing a website appropropriate for my project. Through a series of questions asked by Wix's ADI, keywords I chose to help set up my website include *school project* and *professional development*. This helped me find professional templates and layouts that are intuitive for users to explore my website. Upon completing the tutorial with Wix's ADI, I come to a page with templates before me so that I can organize the content of my project on the website. I have the flexibility to decide on how much information from my literature to include. I also have the flexibility to lay out my website so that PD activities are given relevant information, supported by literature. After deciding on preset templates and designs, I then weigh how much does my website layout fare with Krug's framework (2014) on website usability.

After choosing my templates and design, I then check off two essential rules stated by Krug (2014) in *Don't Make Me Think: Revisited*—a guidebook for creating user-friendly web pages and apps.The first box I checked off is having an intuitive website. Krug (2014) calls this "self-evident" (p. 25), and it is his first rule of creating a user-friendly website or app. Krug writes that a self-evident website should be self-explanatory and not demand users to think too much. One characteristic of a self-evident web page is choosing words that are familiar to your audience. Since my audience are EFL professionals, I believe that users would be able to move around my website just fine. With this rule in mind, I also considered naming my tabs so that it

requires less thinking. For instance, instead of naming my tab '*Capstone Project Activities*', keeping that short to just *Activities* would optimize usability. Another rule that Krug (2014) suggests is building a website designed for scanning. Since users are typically on a website with a mission, it is key to keep information organized and straight-forward. Understanding this, it is safe to assume that the majority of the EFL professionals on my website would go directly straight to the *Activities* tab. With this assumption,I have created sub-tabs for each category of my PD activity. One way to access a specific category is by hovering over the *Activities* tab. By doing this, users will immediately see three sub-tabs corresponding to their respective names: *Get-To-Know-Your-Students*, *Teambuilding*, and *Optimizing Speaking*. Guided by these two rules, I apply them throughout my entire website. I ensure that my word choice is user-friendly, and include straight-forward information for scanning.

Website Content

All contents, both major and minor, can be found within the menu bar. The tabs in my menu bar from left to right order are: *Home*, *The Research Question*, *Activities*, *Project Rationale*, *References*, and *Contact*.

The first tab, *Home*, is a simple welcome and summary of my capstone project. It tells the reader what they can find in my website. This is the page that users will first see upon entering my website. The second tab in the menu bar, *The Research Question*, includes information answering the guiding question of my capstone. In this page, readers can find my guiding question and the answers I discovered through reviewing literature in Chapter Two. The third tab, *Activities*, will then lead readers to the PD activities themselves. Readers will be able to see that my PD activities are divided into three

categories: Get To Know Your Students, Teambuilding, and Optimizing Speaking. As mentioned earlier, these categories (and the PD activities) all reflect the literature I reviewed in Chapter Two: Teaching Strategies for Japanese ELs. The fourth tab is called *Project Rationale*. In this tab, readers will be able understand what inspired me to create PD activities for NETs teaching EFL in Japanese universities. Information in this page will reflect information I wrote in Chapter One. Following the fourth tab is *References*, a page where I give credit to all the sources I used throughout my entire capstone project process. Lastly, the sixth tab is where users accessing my website can provide feedback under the *Contact* tab. In the feedback form, I encourage users to share their thoughts in either how they experience the website or any comments/questions they might have about anything regarding my PD activities.

Audience and Setting

This capstone project is primarily intended for NETs who are not familiar or experienced in the cultural learning styles of Japanese ELs. Any language teacher with any variant of English—whether it is Canadian English, Indian English, or American English for examples, could benefit from this project. As long as the NET is not familiar or experienced in the cultural learning styles of Japanese ELs, this project should provide valuable information. Moreover, this is a project for NETs who either have been teaching in Japan (and want to know more about teaching Japanese ELs at university) or are new to teaching in Japan.

While having knowledge of the Japanese language provides valuable insight to Japanese culture, language teachers that do not speak or understand the Japanese language can still gain professional development from this project. Being that this project

is designed for both current and prospective language teachers teaching in Japanese universities, this project (as noted by Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) requires language teachers to have some level of interest and draw on their own classroom experiences or needs. Whether a teacher is experienced or inexperienced at teaching Japanese university students, they would still benefit from this project by reflecting on their own classroom experience.

Since the project is on a website, the setting would be online. Access to the internet would be required to access the website. Activities along with their respective information and steps would be downloadable in PDF format. Additionally, my project can be accessed through a PC or mobile. Another option would be through Wix's free application that is available with either android iOS or mac OS.

Materials

Materials for this website project will all be provided by myself. However, participants of various activities must provide for their own materials and space, if needed. Materials for each activity will be listed under 'Requirements' in which I have mentioned in the *Framing the Activity Layout* section above. Examples of materials include copies of worksheets, blank or lined paper, post-it notes, poster paper, portable whiteboards, and writing utensils. Some activities will have an optional Powerpoint supplement for participants leading the PD activity.

Project Timeline

The timeline of this project spans throughout three semester's worth of writing, revision, and one semester of project creation. The project and its website has received feedback from professors, colleagues, and content experts. Upon completion, the website

will hopefully be available for as long as Wix remains a free and functioning web host. Updates to layout and templates may occur to the designing portion of the website whereas the content will remain the same. As for the application for my project, it would ideally be used before an upcoming semester. However, in between semesters or after a semester would be just as effective.

Summary

In this chapter, I have overviewed the project, highlighted frameworks used, stated the audience, setting and materials, and provided the layout for my PD project and website. By providing literature guided by the research question, *How do cultural stigmas impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?* teachers can better understand the impact that cultural stigmas of participation related to speaking tasks in the EFL classroom have on their students. Moreover, this project strives to challenge teachers on their current teaching and assessment practices. Thus, it is relevant for both inexperienced and experienced teachers in Japan. It is arranged so that teachers can become culturally aware and sensitive through various activities that include introspective and retrospective methods. And by extension, it is my hope that NETs would then be able to better offer culturally relevant lessons for their Japanese ELs at university.

In chapter four, the last chapter of this capstone project, a reflection touching on the research, learning, and writing process is entailed. Personal thoughts, expectations, and experience in regards to the research and project is highlighted in this chapter along with limitations and implications towards the ESL/EFL field.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

My guiding research question is *How do cultural stigmas in the classroom environment impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?* Through this question, the objective for my project is to create a website containing various professional development activities for native English teachers (NETs) teaching Japanese ELs in university. These activities would better deepen and equip EFL teachers in Japan with methods that are not only culturally relevant, but effective in promoting student participation.

In Chapter One, I provide context for which my research question is inspired from. It also includes the rationale for why I have chosen this topic. Through my experiences teaching in Japan (elementary, junior high, and university), I have come to a collective understanding that there is a major gap in regards to cultural expectations of participation between native English speakers teaching EFL and Japanese ELs.

In Chapter Two, I gather literature related to my research question to show how and why cultural stigmas in the schools might negatively impact the participation of Japanese university ELs in an EFL classroom environment. I review research such as surveys and data, and journal articles to shed light on the classroom cultural gap between Japanese ELs and NETs. From here, I also include culturally relevant pedagogy so that NETs teaching EFL in Japanese universities understand the effectiveness of incorporating culturally relevant teaching methods.

In Chapter Three, I give a description of my capstone project. I detail what my artifact is and what the goals are—to create a website with 15 culturally relevant

activities which can be used for professional development. I include the framework of my activities and website, the intended audience, setting, and time frame.

Here in Chapter Four, I reflect on major learnings and unexpected findings that took place during the process of writing and creation of this capstone project. I also specify potential implications and limitations, future and related projects, and how I will communicate my capstone project results in their own respective sections. Afterwards, I complete Chapter Four by adding my thoughts on how my capstone project benefits the EFL field.

What I Learned

Throughout the process of reviewing the literature, I have a deeper understanding of how Japanese ELs respond to the participation expectations of NETs in university. I have become more knowledgeable about the specific cultural stigmas that may play a role in the seeming lack of participation displayed by Japanese EL. My research has further deepened the call for EFL teachers to use culturally relevant teaching methods to close the classroom culture gap and promote adequate learning.

The major sources that contributed to my findings on culture and education (Armetta, 2019; Doi, 2005; Kimura, 2010) highlight the learning experiences, expectations, and practices that Japanese students go through in the traditional Japanese educational setting. They reveal cultural stigmas related to how students should behave and respond to their teachers as well as each other, heavily reflecting the importance of cultural concepts such as harmony through *amae,* a hierarchical social system of interdependence. I learned that these concepts are crucial to adhere to because should students not practice *amae*, it is possible that they may be ostracized, isolated and labeled

as *KY*. Becoming a victim of *ijime* (bullying) is also another possibility for not practicing harmony in the classroom.

By learning about culture and the traditional educational setting of Japan, I was able to connect that literature to literature on classroom cultural gaps between NETs and Japanese ELs (Hayashi & Cherry, 2014; Osterman, 2014; Ryan & Stiller, 1996; Sasaki, 1996). With these sources, I was able to look at the cultural comparisons between Western education and Japanese education. I learned that in regards to participation, the teacher-student relationship in traditional Japanese education may shape student learning while simultaneously promoting teacher-centered teaching methods. Thus, what contributes to a classroom cultural gap is the expectation that NETs have for their Japanese students. These expectations (and teaching methods) do not correlate with what their students have learned prior to university.

Unexpected Learning. Through the research, writing process, and creation of my project, I learned surprising information related to my research question. Before doing research, I was unaware of a study resulting in a stark contrast between the expectations of NETs and Japanese ELs (Osterman, 2014), which is further supported by Sasaki (1996) on classroom cultural gaps in the EFL classroom at university. For instance, a major cultural gap from Osterman's (2014) survey concludes that there is a conflict between what teachers expect from their students and what students expect from their teachers. This information is one key to understanding why Japanese ELs may not participate and engage in classroom activities as teachers would like.

Another unexpected learning that occurred was finding a learning and teaching pedagogy to bridge the classroom cultural gap—and that is culturally relevant pedagogy.

Through culturally relevant teaching, NETs can still use student-centered learning as opposed to teacher-centered (a learning method that Japanese ELs may be more comfortable with), by mindfully creating lesson plans using learning styles that Japanese ELs are familiar with. An example of this would be creating specific roles in activities so that each student has a clear understanding of how they can contribute to a given task. This is culturally relevant because the concept of roles and group work is a learning style that Japanese ELs may have been exposed to in their educational upbringing (Hyland, 1994).

As an EFL teacher myself, although I have been incorporating culturally relevant teaching methods in my lesson plans, I was never truly aware of the value and impact that such a pedagogy could have on both teachers and students. After learning more about culturally relevant pedagogy and what it encompasses, I was able to retrospectively analyze my own teaching experiences. Analyzing my own teaching experiences helped inspire my own PD activities—ensuring that the activities and the steps involved are culturally relevant and mindful to the learning experience of Japanese ELs.

Implications and Limitations

The vision for my project is to offer effective teaching methods for NETs teaching EFL in Japan, and by extension, giving Japanese ELs optimal learning experiences in the EFL classroom. The findings included in my capstone project lends itself to this vision. Schools and organizations hiring NETs to teach EFL in Japanese universities can find PD activities on my website for purposes such as teacher training and workshops. The information and PD activities on my website would encourage teachers to think critically about their current teaching practices and student expectations, and prompt teachers to

analyze whether or not their teaching practices and expectations align with culturally relevant pedagogy. Moreover, by participating in the PD activities, teachers would also be able to experience culturally relevant teaching methods as they pertain to teaching Japanese ELs. Through experiencing these PD activities, I hope it challenges the way in which NETs grade their students—especially in programs where participation is a graded criteria. It would be best if teachers assess their lesson plans regarding participation to see if they are culturally relevant.

Although my PD activities are inspired from successful lessons that I have done in the past, it is important for participants to understand that my activities on the website are designed specifically for NETs teaching EFL in Japan. The content I included in these activities are just one example of how I have tailored my activities for professional development. The intention of the contents I used is for helping NETs gain a deeper understanding of their students by experiencing effective practices for learning. Thus, although I include notes for teachers such as in the Activity Rationale section of my activities, I cannot say with certainty that my activities would be effective should teachers replicate something similar for their students. If that is the case, teachers should use their best teacher's discretion and make appropriate changes for their classes if necessary. This would be one example of limitations regarding my capstone project.

Another limitation to call into attention concerns the audience for my PD activities. The literature and research reinforcing my capstone project is exclusively for EFL rather than ESL. Therefore, while NETs teaching ESL to Japanese ELs may find the information on my website useful, it could misinform them on their intention to know about their Japanese ELs. Research related to the experiences of Japanese ELs in the ESL

setting is likely different from the experiences of Japanese ELs in the EFL setting. The same should also be said for the age group of Japanese ELs. The information on my website addresses university students.

Future and Related Projects

I have only lived and taught in Japan for two years. As I have plans to continue teaching in Japan, I can say that I am now more equipped at fortifying culturally relevant teaching methods into my lesson plans. However, I still have plenty more to learn about not the interrelationships between EFL and Japanese ELs. During the process of my learning, an area of interest was finding more literature and research about *ijime*—bullying, here in Japan. There certainly have been cases of bullying in my classrooms and while I have addressed them in my own way, I would like to dig deeper into studies about effective measures or policies about this culturally sensitive issue. Personally speaking, I feel that this is an area of issue that is quite prominent but under-researched. Therefore, I would be interested in even conducting my own case studies about *ijime* and how to combat it in the EFL classroom.

Communicating Results

Being that the artifact for my capstone project is a website, I am able to communicate my findings on there. I have included valuable information from Chapter Two, the research, in a section of the website called *The Research Question* and *Activities*. In *The Research Question* I restated the research question with results directly below. Professionals in the EFL field are able to read summaries of various elements contributing to cultural stigmas and how they may impact participation in the EFL classroom. Then, in the *Activities* section of my website, I communicate the results of my

capstone project in three different categories, of my PD activities: *Get To Know Your Students*, *Teambuilding*, and *Optimizing Speaking*. Research such as preferred learning styles, traditional Japanese education, cultural concepts and stigmas, and culturally relevant pedagogy can be found in each of these categories as well as in each individual activity. In each individual activity, I communicate a rationale for the activity at hand. I support these rationales with research mentioned in Chapter Two. In addition, after each activity is experienced by participants, there is space for discussion. I provide a list of discussion questions related to the activity and encourage participants to think both retrospectively and introspectively.

For how I will share my website, I plan on networking with other NETs in both formal and informal settings. As a NET myself, I plan on sharing my website with former co-workers by providing them a link in which they are more than welcome to extend to their own teacher-friends. This is an example of how I would share my project informally. As for a more formal setting, I do not have any current plans of attending conferences. However, this is an idea that I am not completely closed off to. In Japan, there is the Japanese Association of Language Teaching (popularly known as JALT) with yearly conferences throughout the country that I can consider. Another idea that I am considering is reaching out to my former Academic Director at a university here that I used to work at. I am quite familiar with their program and school calendar so this idea is also within reach. Although I am currently uncertain about the last two ideas, one idea that I am certain of is communicating my results during future job or school interviews. I am yet unsure whether I would like to pursue a PhD or go back to becoming an EFL teacher at the moment. In any case, having completed my capstone project related to

Japanese ELs, I am confident that the knowledge I gained is valuable and will give me an upper-hand to my future endeavors.

Benefits to Profession

As mentioned in Chapter One, there are two main reasons why I chose this topic. The first reason is the frustrations or misunderstandings that I felt my co-workers would feel towards their Japanese ELs. The second reason is the out-of-classroom conversations I had with past students concerning their wish that their teachers understood them a little more—hoping that they are not seen as lazy or incompetent by their current teachers at the time.

Unfortunately, those sentiments by my previous students are not so far off. There would be assumptions from former co-workers about student personalities, learning (dis)abilities, and blanket statements about Japanese culture when a lesson would not go as smoothly as planned. This would not settle well with me. Therefore, my recommendation for NETs teaching EFL in Japanese universities would be to reflect on their own expectations and lesson plans to see if there are possible cultural gaps between themselves and the students they are serving. Analyzing my own expectations and lesson plans have saved me from unnecessary stress, potential student biases, and accurate student assessments.

Recalling my experiences, it is a wide and accepted notion (by both Japanese people and foreigners), that Japanese people are not very good at speaking English. As an EFL teacher, I know very well why such a notion is so well-believed. Thus, I want professionals discovering my website and for participants experiencing my PD activities to feel empowered and utilize the information I provide—extending gained knowledge to

better serving their Japanese ELs. By doing so, this can increase the learning attitude and productivity towards English in Japan, or I can at least hope for this kind of ripple effect.

Summary

Guided by my research question: *How do cultural stigmas impact the participation of Japanese ELs in the university EFL classroom taught by native English speakers?*, I have gathered invaluable literature. My learnings from the writing and creating process of my capstone project have fortified my view on the importance of enriching the knowledge that NETs have of Japanese ELs. I have included research on topics such as traditional Japanese education, culture and education, preferred learning styles, and expectations between NETs and Japanese ELs in university to answer the research question. I have also added research on culturally relevant pedagogy to support teaching methods fostering student learning. All of this information is incorporated in my website and PD activities which professionals in the EFL field can have access to. I did not have prior experience in making a website before this capstone project, but I am confident that it is resourceful and intuitive to use.

Teaching Japanese ELs in university is an incredible joy. But I know that it can be quite challenging for many foreign NETs (myself included) teaching in Japan. Thus, I have various hopes for this capstone project with my main hope being: to inspire and empower NETs teaching EFL to Japanese university students. And to close the classroom cultural gap between teacher and students as it relates to participation.

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