

# THE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND ENCOURAGE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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## Abstract

This paper examines effective instructional strategies that make foreign language learning more comprehensible and meaningful. It also examines how foreign language teachers can promote student engagement and how lessons can be effectively taught during the limited time of a lesson period. The research was conducted in the northeastern United States, employing a survey for five foreign language teachers, three foreign language class observations in a public high school, two interviews with Japanese students, and self-reflection on my teaching experience in Japan. The data were analyzed through coding and comparative analysis of teaching in the U.S. and in Japan. The results indicate that foreign language teachers can enhance students' learning through incorporating a variety of materials and activities to keep students interested and motivated with continuous practice, even within a prescriptive school curriculum. This research indicates that foreign language teachers, especially English teachers in Asia, should explore and utilize different types of instructional strategies.

**Keywords:** engagement, English as a foreign language, English as a second language, instructional strategies

## Introduction

I was an English teacher at a high school in Japan, and when I think of qualities of a teacher, I first think of the skills of effective teaching in a direct instruction model. Since the focus of English education in my country is mainly on gaining knowledge about English grammar to pass the entrance

examinations for college, I strongly felt that teachers play a significant role in helping students understand English through explicit teaching.

Looking back at my years of teaching, however, the lessons were mostly teacher-centered, and I experienced difficulty having students actively participate in lessons. I myself had lecture-style lessons and just listened to my teachers when I was a student, so giving lectures as a teacher seemed natural to me. The admission system in Japan, which is college exam preparation-centered, has been promoting “cramming knowledge,” and this ruined autonomy and ability of identifying a problem as individuals did not develop his or her intellectual curiosity (Kato, 1975, as cited in Takamatsu, 2008). It seems that this teacher-centered instructional style could be a possible factor that makes it more difficult to increase student motivation in learning.

As for teaching materials, lessons in secondary schools in Japan still focus on doing a lot of exercises, mainly using workbooks and vocabulary books for the entrance exams. This type of lesson lacks variety at times, and cookie-cutter teaching styles could reduce students’ interest and motivation in learning. Carrier (2006) suggested that incorporating multiple modes of input and output (MMIO) can make content accessible for ELLs. For example, to utilize MMIO, teachers incorporate manipulatives, real-life objects (realia), demonstrations, and hands-on activities. This way, students can learn the lesson in a more meaningful way as if they were experiencing it. Thus, MMIO can be an incentive for students to utilize the knowledge they have acquired. This is important to increase students’ motivation.

While student engagement should be encouraged, under cramming education and the exam-based system in Japan, making immediate and precise correction to students’ work has been considered necessary. However, error correction could cause “fear of making mistakes” and “loss of enjoyment and confidence” (Truscott, 1996, as cited in Falout, 2005), and demotivation could result from these negative emotions (Falout, 2005). Considering these studies, examining the components of student engagement is essential to successfully engage students even if following the school curriculum is required in some schools. In addition, when I looked at the lessons my colleague English teacher was teaching, I noticed that students looked more interested and engaged in the class. One of the students wrote in the classroom diary that she enjoyed the English teacher’s lesson so much that she did not feel the class was very long. In actuality, those students did well on the English exams. This indicates that students’ engagement can bring them better understanding of what they are learning. These thoughts have led me to my current wonderings.

Because of these reasons, I conducted research on the strategies used by foreign language teachers in the United States that can make lessons more comprehensible and meaningful to students that are possibly different from those used by English teachers in Japan. I was also interested in the approaches concerning how foreign language teachers can engage students during lessons while teaching reading and writing explicitly. This is because I believe that the more students are involved, the more motivated they will be to study, which can enhance their learning.

In this study, I examined the effective instructional strategies that help students who study a foreign language understand reading and writing in the target language. I also examined in what ways teachers can encourage and motivate students to learn a foreign language, how the strategies that teachers in the United States use compare with my experience teaching in Japan and with that of Japanese students I interviewed, and how teachers manage time to involve students while teaching a huge amount of content, which might take up most of the class period.

## **Review of Literature**

In this section, research on language learning in a foreign country, cultural backgrounds, and instructional strategies are reviewed.

### **Language Learning in a Foreign Country**

Language learning settings in foreign countries might vary. However, there are some similarities with regard to foreign language lessons among Asian countries. According to a survey conducted in Turkey about the use of teaching materials, textbooks selected by the Ministry of Education were usually prepared for English lessons, but they were sometimes artificial and not authentic (Gocer, 2010). Besides this, the focus of the lessons was on English grammar, which might hinder students from using the language and cause their low interest (Gocer, 2010). It was suggested that the limited schedule of the language lessons could also be a factor in students' lack of proficiency and interest in English in some schools in Vietnam and Malaysia (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010; Suppiah, Subramaniam, & Subrayan, 2011). In addition, similar to Japan, the number of the students in one classroom was around 40 in many secondary schools in Vietnam, which would make it difficult for teachers to provide effective instruction (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010). The qualities of a teacher, such as desire to learn and teach a foreign

language, and eagerness to teach a language overseas, were important components to teach English as a foreign language (Gocer, 2010).

### **Cultural Backgrounds**

When learning a foreign language, Asian students might have difficulty, for example, understanding a writing format, as the English writing format can be different from theirs. For example, in Chinese and Japanese, a conclusion comes at the end in typical writing, which is opposite to English writing. Therefore, a Chinese female student studying at a university in Canada had difficulty in writing essays in English (Li, 2007).

Regarding differences in students' perspectives toward English lessons, some students from Asia thought that peer evaluation was not effective, and errors should be corrected promptly. On the other hand, their Canadian teacher viewed peer evaluation and making errors as useful steps to learn from others and themselves (Li, 2007). Thus, it is indicated that teachers should consider cultural contexts as well as the personalities of the students when teaching English to students with diverse cultural backgrounds.

### **Instructional Strategies**

One of the factors that can help promote language acquisition is to notice the difference between the current level of the target language proficiency and the level of the language proficiency learners need to reach (Seong, 2009). Through making the language features more noticeable, learners can learn more effectively. It was found in research conducted by Seong (2009) in Korea that there are strategies that could make learners aware of language features, which are restatement, repetition, expansion, that is, "supplementing learners' incomplete words or sentences, to help them notice the language" (p. 119), error correction, imitation, and translating into English (2009).

Metacognitive reading strategies help foster reading comprehension through making connections between background knowledge and new information, monitoring understanding, and evaluating thinking processes (Wichadee, 2011). In the research about the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in Thailand, Wichadee (2011) stated that after the participants were taught metacognitive reading strategies, they used more of those strategies during English readings. As a result, their scores in reading tests became higher.

Gorsuch and Taguchi (2010) reported the effectiveness of repeated reading (RR) in their research among English learners in Vietnam. After the 11-week RR sessions, the participants said that the skills they gained through RR, such as questioning, making connections, and summarizing, helped them read fluently and comprehend the text more. Also, RR helped increase students' motivation to read. Although RR is an effective strategy to promote reading fluency and comprehension, the report from the participants showed that writing skills improved as well, since it is likely that readers remember the structures and styles and the words in stories as they read repeatedly.

In conclusion, useful instructional strategies reported to develop reading and writing skills included strategies that help learners notice the language features to learn the target language more effectively, such as metacognitive strategies and repeated reading. Similar to Seong's and Wichadee's research, I examined instructional strategies that help foreign language learners understand reading and writing focusing on student engagement as well.

## **Methods and Procedures**

My research questions are as follows: What instructional strategies most help students who study a foreign language understand reading and writing in the target language? Sub-questions: In what ways can teachers encourage and motivate students to learn a foreign language? How do the strategies that teachers in the United States use compare with my experience teaching in Japan and interviews with Japanese students? How can teachers manage time to involve students while teaching a large amount of content, which might take up most of the class period?

## **Setting**

The research was conducted in the northeastern United States employing four types of methods: a survey for five foreign language teachers, three foreign language class observations in a public high school, two interviews with Japanese students, and self-reflection on my teaching in Japan. I also examined literature that is related to strategy use. Since I am not currently teaching, I examined my research questions through asking survey questions to five foreign language teachers whom I met through graduate courses at the University of Southern Maine (USM). Besides the survey, I

observed three foreign language lessons in a public high school in Portland, Maine. I also asked two Japanese students studying at USM about the English education they had in Japan.

## Participants

### Survey participants

Respondents were five foreign language teachers. I invited four female teachers and one male teacher to the survey because I met them through the graduate courses in the Literacy Education, ESL Concentration program at USM. Two out of the five teachers taught English as a second/foreign language in Iran and Egypt. One of the three teachers taught Russian and Serbian, another teaches Spanish, and the other teaches French in the United States.

Table I. I shows the participants' teaching subject areas and years of teaching experience. Each teacher has been assigned a pseudonym.

**Table I.I** *Survey Participants' Information*

Teachers' Names	Subject areas and years of teaching experience
Yelena	Taught English as a foreign language to adolescents and adults in a language institute for three years in the classroom and one year in tutoring in Iran.
Jeff	Taught both Russian and Serbian for nine years at a military school in the United States. Students were university age from about 18 to 25 years old.
Erica	Currently in the 12 <sup>th</sup> year of teaching Spanish: four years in high school and eight years in middle school in the United States.
Cathy	Currently in the 7 <sup>th</sup> year of teaching French: one year in middle school in France, and two years in middle school and four years in high school in the United States.
Heather	Taught English as a second/foreign language in Egypt to graduate and post-graduate students for eleven years in total: four years as a private tutor for middle school EFL students, and six years in language institutes for adults.

### Teachers who taught the classes I observed

I observed three foreign language lessons of English to English Language Learners (ELLs), Spanish, and French in a public high school in Portland, Maine. All of the teachers are female. The English teacher taught one of the graduate courses I took at USM, so she organized the class observations for me. Table 1.2 shows the teachers' background information and the information about the classes I observed. The names are pseudonyms.

**Table 1.2** *Information of the Classes I Observed*

Teachers' names	Subject areas and years of teaching experience	Grade level	Size of the class
Amy	Currently teaches English to ELL students: nine years at a high school, one year at a middle school, two years in a mixed K-12 district, and one year at a university and in adult education.	ELL 3: level 3, the level which is right before moving to a mainstream class. Mixed class of 9 to 12 <sup>th</sup> grade students.	Total of 11 students (6 girls, 5 boys)
Karen	Currently teaches Spanish: four years at a high school and eleven years at a middle school.	Mixed class of 9 to 10 <sup>th</sup> grade students.	Total of 17 students (6 girls, 11 boys)
Sue	Currently teaches French: five years at a high school and for eight years at a middle school.	French 5: highest level, 12 <sup>th</sup> grade students.	Total of 15 students (10 girls, 5 boys)

### Interviewees

I interviewed two Japanese students studying at USM. We met through the international student orientation, which the Office of International Programs held for the fall semester 2012, where I was helping. Kaori is a female student at the age of 23. She takes regular undergraduate courses as well as English courses at USM. Shinya is a male student at the age of 24. He works for a trading company in Japan, which sent him to USM to develop his English skills.

Table 1.3 shows their background information. Their names are pseudonyms.

**Table 1.3 Interviewees' Information**

Interviewees' names and ages	Background information
Kaori (23 years old)	She went to an English-specialized course at a high school in Japan. Then, she went to an American university on a Japanese campus, where courses were taught in English. She started learning English when she was 13 years old. She went to an English conversation school from the age of 13 to 18.
Shinya (24 years old)	He is originally from China, but now he is Japanese. He studied English at a Japanese middle school in China, later attending a Chinese high school and a university there. At the university, he did not really study English, but he had some chances to meet international students through activities that required him to use English. He started learning English right before he entered middle school.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through the survey from the five foreign language teachers, the three foreign language class observations in a high school, and the two interviews with the Japanese students. The survey was created with SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>) and sent to the survey participants via email (Appendix A). They answered the survey by going online from the link and submitted the answers online. One follow-up question was added and asked after the first survey, as the background information of years of teaching experience the teachers had was considered to be necessary. I did not ask for names on the survey; however, I was able to identify who each respondent was because of their teaching role noted on the survey. Therefore, I used pseudonyms for the teachers.

The three foreign language lessons at a high school in Portland were observed in one day. During the observations, I took field notes. After the observations, I asked the teachers questions about the lesson schedules, students' grades, and their levels. Due to bad weather on the day of observations, each lesson was 60 minutes that rather than the typical 75



minutes long. The high school had two different schedules of Blue Day and White Day. The schedule rotated, and because of this, foreign language lessons were offered every other day; students had five lessons in a rotation of two weeks. Appendix B is one example of the field notes taken during the observation of the English lesson.

The two interviews were done separately: I interviewed Shinya first, and the next day, I interviewed Kaori. Each interview was recorded. After I interviewed Shinya, I found that I needed to change the questions and to add more questions, such as strategies that teachers in China and Japan used, so I made different questions for each interviewee. In addition, I interviewed Shinya twice on a different day because I realized that I should ask follow-up questions to clarify his responses. Appendix C and D show questions for the interviewees.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed through the process of coding, which was comparing and contrasting the answers from the survey participants, the discoveries from the class observations, and the interviews with the Japanese students. The survey questions and answers were copied from the online survey pages to a Word document. The answers were used as the participants wrote; no change was made in their answers. As for the class observations, I looked carefully at the field notes I took and reflected on what I actually saw and listened to during the lessons by writing memos to identify patterns. Also, I listened to the recorded interviews a couple of times and took additional notes to confirm what the interviewees talked about and identify patterns.

## **Findings**

Through the survey from the five foreign language teachers, the three observations of foreign language lessons in a high school in Portland, and the interviews with the two Japanese students at USM, as well as my own reflections on teaching in Japan, I have examined the instructional strategies that would most help students who study a foreign language understand reading and writing in the target language. I have also examined in what ways teachers can encourage and motivate students to learn a foreign language, and how teachers can manage time to involve students while teaching a huge amount of content, which might take up most of the time in one lesson.

The findings were categorized into four groups: teaching materials, teaching strategies, student engagement, and time management. I describe the findings from those four categories considering the survey results and the class observations. I also compare the situation that the foreign language teachers talked about with the situation in Japan using the interviews and my own self-reflection.

### **Teaching Materials**

The results showed that most of the teachers used visually powerful teaching materials and audios, which I think is because visual aids are effective in the sense that students could make sense connecting the concept of their learning with the objects they actually see, and audios are helpful in getting used to real English sounds.

Considering the findings from the survey and the class observations, the findings can be categorized into three groups: visual, audio, and other types of materials. Visuals included videos, arts, films, artifacts, picture dictionaries, and word walls. Audios included music CDs, listening CDs such as narratives of a native English speaker speaking English, and songs. Other types of materials included textbooks, worksheets, news articles (including current events), games, the Internet, and computer-based learning materials. Erica, a Spanish teacher, stated, "I use a variety because I find it motivating for students to have the opportunity to respond to various stimuli." Thus, a variety can be a key.

On the other hand, I found from the interviews that English lessons in Japanese schools were mostly text-based rather than visual-based such as using graphic organizers or pictures, and that a lot of quizzes and tests were given for the exam preparation. The limitation of the material used in Japanese schools can be due to the fact that most of the schools need to follow the guidelines and use the teaching textbooks that were directed by each school or the English department of a school. The student interviews matched my teaching experience. I rarely used authentic materials for reading and listening, and the focus was mainly on the exams, which were usually written tests. I felt that reading texts and listening CDs were created for a classroom setting, and some were created for the exam preparation. However, listening to English CDs of native English speakers was considered to be a must because non-native English teachers, Japanese people, usually teach English in middle and high schools in Japan, so it is hard for the teachers to produce "real" English sounds.

## Teaching Strategies

From the survey and the class observations, it can be determined that a variety of activities is helpful to interest and engage students in learning the target language. The important elements of effective strategies are to include visuals, incorporate authentic materials containing current events, entail practice, and provide enough exposure to the target language.

First, incorporating different activities was effective to interest students, such as pair and/or group work and reading or writing groups, student journals or diaries, discussion, presentation, games, and role plays. Above all, I found that communication and interaction among students and also among a teacher and students were important. Four out of five teachers from the survey used either pair work, group work or both, all five teachers used either presentation or discussion or both, and all five teachers used games. All of the foreign language teachers in the class observations also used group work and/or discussion. These results showed that students could benefit from communication and interaction through the group activities which help enhance learning because of student engagement.

Second, regarding strategy use, the strategies that the teachers stated can be classified into four parts: using a visual component, involving vocabulary teaching, including real life materials, and encouraging practice. Exposure to the target language was vital as it is related to the “real life,” as seen in the class observations: All of the teachers spoke the target language of English, Spanish, and French during the lessons, and two of them showed current news online, which was broadcast in the target language. The survey answer from Jeff, who taught Russian and Serbian, supported this point by saying that “strategies involving a visual component and that use current [*sic*] and ‘real’ materials prove most effective.” Furthermore, sufficient practice time can be considered to be crucial, and practice can be encouraged such as by having students act out and focus on the learning process of the students rather than on the product. In addition, Erica, a Spanish teacher, stated, “Use of context is extremely important,” which was also seen during the English class observation. Amy, who teaches English to ELLs, was demonstrating how to choose correct verb tenses, the simple past tense or the present perfect tense using the context, which helped students find the answers.

On the other hand, in Japan many of the English teachers who are Japanese do not speak English to teach. Likewise, when I taught English in Japan, I did not use the target language while teaching and also did not use

various activities and real life materials to help engage my students. However, the strategies can vary with regard to the purpose of a foreign language lesson. For the purpose of helping students pass the exams, for instance, it could be effective to teach explicitly how to handle the exams by analyzing and practicing the exam patterns, as Shinya, a Japanese student, stated. As students continue practicing the patterns, they can feel more comfortable and confident taking the exams. A good amount of memorization in vocabulary and grammar learning and tests about those was helpful as well for the exam preparation. The English lessons in Japan, however, are mostly teacher-centered, as Kaori mentioned.

### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement seems to be a source of effectiveness of teaching a foreign language. This is because the more students are involved, the more motivation to study they will have, which can enhance their learning.

The findings can be divided into four parts: keeping students interested, showing students a valid reason to learn, helping students gain a sense of being part of learning, and motivation of the teacher. To keep students interested, telling teachers' own learning experiences could work to foster students' interest. In addition, giving students a reason to learn is important. Jeff, who taught Russian and Serbian, stated, "You have to link learning to something valuable to each student so that they understand why they are learning." Heather, who taught English as a foreign language, also stated that helping students find clear goals for them helped increase their motivation. Furthermore, involving students in making learning decisions could be meaningful because that way, students can feel a sense of engagement in learning. I also found from the class observations that frequent interaction was an important component of student engagement because students were able to deepen their understanding through communicating with a teacher and other students. Besides these, the teacher should be motivated first, as the teacher cannot ask others to follow his/her advice or direction if the teacher has not actually attempted something by himself/herself.

In Japan and also in China, a high score on the exams is an incentive for students to study hard. However, as Kaori reflected on her English teachers, when the lessons were teacher-centered in reading and writing classes, it seemed hard to motivate students because students were just listening to the lectures most of the time without active participation. On the other hand, a teacher of her English oral communication class

selected relevant topics to the students' interest to increase their motivation. Kaori also suggested the effectiveness of student participation in the lesson by saying that her writing teacher had students think critically, which was helpful. Furthermore, it is essential for teachers to help promote students' understanding because if a student gets a good score on the test and has confidence in learning a particular subject, the student will usually love the subject and will be motivated, according to Shinya.

In conclusion, keeping students interested in learning the target language is influential in student engagement because not every student is highly motivated to learn a foreign language where the language is not officially spoken. In addition, exposure to the target language can encourage students to learn the language actively such as by having students actually use the language, by a teacher speaking the language, and by giving them real materials. Finally, when students feel engaged and confident, they will enjoy learning. Therefore, student engagement can be critical to successful learning.

### **Time Management**

To me, time management was always challenging because I had to cover a certain amount of topics in English lessons for the mid-term and final exams within a small number of lessons. This made it difficult to encourage students' participation. Because of this, time management is an issue that I have wanted to examine. The findings can be categorized into two parts: the class sizes and successful student engagement.

In terms of the class sizes, "It is hard to give your full attention to students when there are such varying needs, from classroom management to instruction, all at the same time", according to Spanish teacher, Erica. The three classes that I observed all had a small number of students, ranging from 11 to 17 students, although the teachers mentioned some students were absent.

Successful student engagement seems relevant to time management. If teachers have difficulty having students use the target language when they answer the questions from the teachers, for example, it may take more time to move on to the next step, as a French teacher, Cathy, suggested. I felt this way during the Spanish class observation because the lesson did not move very smoothly when the students hesitated to speak Spanish to answer the questions. On the other hand, Yelena, who taught English, stated that it could be possible for teachers to teach content through involving students in group work and activities.

The number of the students in one class in my high school was usually from 30 to 40. Therefore, it seemed to promote “teacher-centered” lessons instead of promoting students’ participation. It can be challenging to encourage students’ active participation in Japanese schools because some students might be shy to speak up in front of a large audience. However, incorporating small group work could help students talk in a more comfortable way.

## **Discussion**

After considering the findings, I came up with the four parts that can be discussed here. The four parts are interest, confidence, active learning, and better understanding. All of them are intertwined to promote student engagement, which seems to be a source of effectiveness of teaching a foreign language.

## **Conclusions**

First, interesting lessons can be made with various types of teaching materials, such as audio CDs, songs, visual aids including videos and films, computers, the Internet, news articles, and current events, and the lessons that interest students are engaging. A variety of activities, such as pair/group work, presentation, discussion, and games, is helpful to interest students as well. According to Shinya, a Japanese student, English conversation practice with a native English speaking teacher and using English songs to learn grammar during the lesson kept him interested in learning English when he was at a middle school. Thus, “interest” connects with “student engagement.”

Second, effective teaching strategies that work with the use of visuals, authentic materials, a key content vocabulary, and enough practice can increase students’ confidence. Sufficient practice finds students actually using the language including important vocabulary, and authentic materials help them use the language in a real life situation, all of which are a key for students to feel confident. The connection with real life is especially important because students become interested and motivated when learning is related to their surroundings (Suppiah et al, 2011).

Third, active learning is promoted by student engagement, such as exposure to the target language and interaction. Ample exposure such as input from visuals and sounds actively involve students in learning the language. This factor is related to time management, for when students are

engaged, they can learn with more concentration. As a result, students understand more, and they can move forward more quickly. Kaori, a Japanese student, stated that interaction was also beneficial, because working with her classmates enabled her to learn a different point of view.

Furthermore, there would be a connection between active learning self-awareness. Students will be more able to self-monitor their learning when they are engaged. As Seong (2009) stated, it is significant that learners are aware of linguistic features of the target language and noticing what level they are at in the learning process. Wichadee (2011) also stated that metacognitive strategies helped learners become more skilled by monitoring comprehension. With these elements, students will be able to enhance their learning with a dynamic attitude, and teachers play an important role in what way they can help develop students' ability.

Fourth, better understanding results from confidence and motivation brought from continuous practice. When students are aware that they can make themselves understood in the language, confidence occurs, and then motivation to learn increases. This process makes a positive cycle and results in better understanding of language learning. As learners practice what they have learned, their comprehension will increase, as Gorsuch and Taguchi (2010) reported increased reading fluency and comprehension through Repeated Reading (RR).

### **Implications for Future Research**

Since I conducted research only by asking the five foreign language teachers with the survey, observing the three foreign language classes, and interviewing the two Japanese students, the study has its limitations. The voice from foreign language learners was not reflected. Therefore, the student perspectives on effective strategies and student engagement might not be exactly the same as the perspectives from the teachers. Another limitation is that the survey was not conducted under the same condition. That is, three participants of the survey out of the five teachers have taught in the United States, whereas two of them have taught outside of the United States. Although comparing and contrasting the teaching strategies used in different countries would yield interesting results, I wonder if the difference in the setting can hinder reliability. Besides, the subject areas of the teachers and the number of their teaching years vary. The variation of the student age groups might be one of the factors that make the survey results difficult to be viewed in the same situation. Also, it cannot be directly told that whether the

length of one lesson and the frequency of lessons offered a week affected students' motivation to learn or effectiveness of the foreign language lessons. Time management can be influenced as the class sizes become larger, as two of the teachers mentioned in the survey. Nonetheless, the actual sizes of the classes were not asked in the survey question. Moreover, some of the survey questions were not answered in a way I expected, probably because of the ambiguity of the statements.

Given these facts and the research findings, the future research should continue to be pursued in three points. First, it is more reliable to ask both teachers and students to find out what strategies are effective and how students as well as teachers feel about student engagement. If possible, asking more teachers and students from many subject areas should be recommended in terms of reliability. Third, how survey questions are posed should carefully be examined so that the survey covers every possible aspect to explore the wonderings and may not bring misunderstanding among participants when they answer the survey.

Despite the limitations, however, the foreign language teachers from different backgrounds brought richness to this study, and this could be a strength. Even though the teachers have taught in different places, they came up with the same strategies, which can be noted.

### **Implications for Classroom Practice**

Because of the college entrance examination system in Japan, English teachers there sometimes have no choice but to teach exam-based lessons to help students pass the exams. Even so, however, teachers would not need to stick to the traditional and typical text-based and teacher-centered lessons: Teachers can seek for which materials will enhance learning in what ways. Even for grammar teaching, that is, even for the exam preparation, visuals will work powerfully. If students find learning interesting because of this kind of attempt, students' motivation to learn will increase, which will support their learning. Furthermore, teachers play a critical role in how they can help students learn the target language with effective strategies in an engaging way because student engagement can greatly affect their understanding. The strategies are to have students practice the target language in pairs and/or groups through using authentic materials and visuals during even the part of the lesson period. As every day practice accumulates, students will gain confidence. Most important, teachers should strive for what they can do for students' development and success despite the constraints of the learning situations.



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## Appendix A

### Survey questions

#### Instructional Strategies in Teaching a Foreign Language

1. Please explain 1) a foreign language and 2) grade levels you teach/have taught, and 3) a country where you teach/have taught.
2. Please explain 1) how long one lesson is, and 2) how often the lesson is offered a week.
3. What is a main goal of a foreign language lesson? Choose all that apply.  
For students to learn reading and writing skills.  
For students to learn speaking and listening skills.  
Other (please specify)
4. The focus of the lesson is \_\_\_\_\_ of the use of a foreign language.  
very much on fluency  
mostly on fluency but on accuracy too  
on both fluency and accuracy almost equally  
mostly on accuracy but on fluency too  
very much on accuracy  
other (please specify)
5. What content do you teach? Choose all that apply.  
Grammar  
Vocabulary  
Pronunciation  
Conversation  
Other (please specify)
6. Please explain 1) what kind of materials you use in teaching a foreign language, and 2) why you use those materials.
7. What activities do you use in teaching a foreign language?  
Student journals or diary  
Reading group (working on reading with peers)  
Writing group (working on writing with peers)  
Other group work  
Pair work  
Presentation  
Discussion  
Games

\*\*\*Please write comments here if you need to specify what you answer above, or if you use other activities.

8. Which instructional strategies are the most effective in teaching reading and writing in a foreign language lesson? Why are they effective?
9. How do you encourage and motivate students to learn a foreign language?
10. How do you manage time to involve students during the lesson while teaching content?

### **Survey follow up questions**

Instructional Strategies in Teaching a Foreign Language - Follow up question

1. Please describe the years of your teaching experience which you have mentioned in the previous survey. If you mentioned you have taught more than one place, please explain them all including current work. For example: "I have taught English for 10 years in total. 2 years in a middle school in Japan, 3 years in a high school in Japan, and 2 years in a language institute for adults in Taiwan. And I have been teaching English in ELL classes in the U.S. for 3 years."

Appendix B

Field note from the English class observation

Present perfect: \* started in the past but still continuing now  
 9:05 ~ explain. "I have read many books since I was 5 years old."  
 X <sup>now</sup>

\* Present perfect:  
 Ask ⑤ if sb knows the difference bet. past + present perfect:  
 "Can anyone give me an example?"  
 awake read    awoke read    awoken read

\* Simple past:  
 Last week I read the Portland Press Herald.  
 X <sup>now</sup>

\*\* After the explanation on past + present perfect go to the game online: "Spin the Wheel Past"  
 study

\* whether the grammar is correct.  
 spin the wheel 〇 質問文の形が正しいか → 答えは 4) か 5) か 2) か  
 〇 正解が 5) である

\* "The Answer ~~is~~ is going to be the same tense as the question"  
 (e.g.) When did you (ase) try doing sth dangerous?  
 → I tried it (last week).

Make ⑤ notice  
 \*\* Ask + ~~make sure~~ that the question is simple past or present perfect.  
 確認

\* ⑤ と 話しの 間 合 意 あり かつ 合 意 あり.  
 \* How many people have over 6 points? "points"  
 "Who has over 8 points?" "How many people did you have?"  
 〇 答え 3人 "誰が 8 点 以上 得たか" ... 〇 答え 2人 "誰が 8 点 以上 得たか"

## Appendix C

### Interview questions for Shinya

10/17/12 Interview with Shinya

- How long have you studied English? Where? How long in Japan and how long in China? (You were in middle school in Japan and high school + college in China, right?)
- What were the English lessons like in Japan and China? E.g. How long is one lesson? How often a week? accuracy-/ fluency-centered, activities, tests, etc.
- What was the focus of English lessons in China and Japan?
- What were the most effective activities in English reading and writing class? What did you like best?
- What do you think needs to be improved in English lessons you had?
- Do you think lessons for English speaking and listening are necessary? What do you think it should be?
- How does English education you had affect your current English learning? What is good and bad?

\*Additional questions to clarify some points with Shinya:

1. (According to the previous interview) In China, teachers teach almost all the strategies or techniques to help students to get a good score in the exams. What are the best strategies your teachers used? If Japanese teachers taught similar or different techniques, what were they?
  - China
  - Japan
2. How did teachers motivate and encourage students to learn English?
3. How old are you? What is the number of years studying English?
4. Where is your birthplace, and what is the number of years you were in China and Japan?

## Appendix D

### Interview questions for Kaori

10/18/12 Interview with Kaori

#### 1. Strategies that help students learn English reading and writing

#### 2. Approach to engage and motivate students

- How long have you studied English? Where? \*Background information
- In middle and high school, what were the English lessons like? What was the focus of English lessons? (e.g.) How long is one lesson? How often a week? accuracy-/ fluency-centered, activities, tests, etc.
- About the reading and writing strategies your English teachers used, what were the most effective in middle and high school? Why? What did you like best?
- How about English lessons in university?
- About your own ways of studying reading and writing in English, what were the most effective ways of learning English reading and writing? (both inside school and outside school; e.g. going to cram school)
- About student motivation and engagement in English lessons in middle and high school, what did your English teachers do?
- How about in university?
- Do you think student engagement and/or motivation will influence effectiveness in learning English?
- About the environment of studying English in Japan, what do you think is good and bad? (including the aspect of using practical/communicative English)
- How does English education you have had affect your current English learning? (What is good and bad?)