

# Story-based Methodology for Developing English Language Proficiency

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## **Abstract**

Carefully selected stories can motivate and engage students in the language classroom. Additionally, in the context of Japan where students entering university are unfamiliar with language learning strategies, the integration of strategy instruction within a course could lead to huge learning advancement for students (Tanahashi, 2009). Comprising six story-based units of learning, the proposed course is designed to develop the English Communication skills of upper beginner / lower intermediate level university students. Students will engage in activities geared towards developing their understanding of basic story elements, developing their ability to tell a fictional narrative and a personal narrative, developing language skills, developing their ability to participate in discussion using different discussion skills, and enhancing their interest in extensive reading. Moreover, students will be introduced to six different language learning strategies with the aim of enabling them to develop learner autonomy, integrating self-regulation into their language learning process.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Throughout the world and since ancient times, storytelling has played a significant role in the human experience. Wajnryb (2003) points out how the cave drawings of prehistoric people provide us with the earliest proof of people communicating in story. In that respect, storytelling is connected to the language used in society, how new ideas and concepts are learned and how information is acquired. In first language education, when storytelling is successful, Roney (1996) points out that children are provided with “practice in several social skills” (Roney, 1996, p. 7), in addition to “active practice in problem solving” (Roney, 1996, p. 7), exercise for both hemispheres of the brain, and literacy development. Where second language education is concerned, in recent years, storytelling has been “promoted as an effective way to teach the English language to non-

native speakers” (Fitzgibbon & Wilhelm, 1998, p. 21) While story-based activities have the potential of answering why a language learner should learn the second language, language learning strategy training answers the question of how to learn the second language. A class which utilizes storytelling as a vehicle for language learning could serve as a suitable context for integrating language learning strategy instruction. Learning strategies, as defined by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) are “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information” (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990, p.1).

Considering the history, appeal and positive potential outcomes of story-based lessons and the importance of LLS training, the review of literature will proceed in discussing these points individually. First, the value of story will be discussed. Secondly, the role of story, in both education in general and second language education, will be introduced. Thirdly, the definition of language learning strategies will be examined.

### **Value of Story**

When well-told, anyone, regardless of age, would appreciate a good story. Since ancient times, human beings have relied on storytelling as a source of sharing ideas, wisdom, values and culture. In the realm of Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra, the highest of Shakyamuni’s teachings, contains a number of parables which serve the purpose of conveying precepts? which Shakyamuni wished to impress upon Buddhist practitioners. Through the parables the wisdom which would otherwise be beyond the capacity of Shakyamuni’s followers to grasp, was rendered easily comprehensible. In the world of literature, Duff and Maley (2007) identify story as being central to literature and where the objection is raised that literary texts are irrelevant to the objectives of language instruction, the authors argue that not only do literary texts upgrade communication skills, but such texts also contribute to an elevated understanding of oneself and others and can create a more motivated atmosphere within a group of learners. Spiro (2007) identifies how the value of stories in the realm of English language teaching lies in the fact that they heighten motivation, offer an abundant variety of spin-off activities which reinforce language proficiency, and contribute to leading the learner towards developing a “creative, risk-taking relationship with the language” (p.3). Regarding oral activity, Stenson (2003) discusses the benefits of learning conversational storytelling. Of the two main styles of conversation—interrogative and conversational storytelling—the author asserts why conversational storytelling is of value to the language learner, arguing that the majority of conversations are different and in everyday

conversation, the interrogative style is hardly ever used. Instead, native speakers of English engage in conversational storytelling. Thus, when English language learners learn conversational storytelling, they have a greater advantage towards understanding and following the conversation of native speakers.

### **Story in Education and Second Language Acquisition**

Several authors in the field of education are proponents of the powerful role stories play in the language classroom. Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm (1998) comment on how interest in storytelling as an ESL teaching method is continuing to grow. In describing how stories can serve as a pedagogical tool, Pinto and Soares (2012) identify storytelling as a means of providing successful learning, and a good technique for transmitting information. Additionally, Deacon and Murphey (2001) point out that stories “provide students with opportunities to listen to language in context rather than in bits and pieces” (p.10). Moreover, Tooze (1959) declares how stories are “not just to give knowledge of the literary forms in which man has expressed himself, but they may enable one to understand man’s development better through those forms” (Tooze, 1959, p.78). In other words, when students receive education on certain learning objectives through stories, not only do they accomplish the objective but they are able to gain a deeper understanding of human nature.

In first language education and in second language education as well, teachers utilize stories in classroom activities. Wajnryb (2003) points out how ‘story’ can be suitably applied to the conditions of language learning proposed in the model created by Willis (1996). The model suggests that when the conditions of exposure, use and motivation are sufficiently satisfied, the learner is capable of learning the language. For example, when the learner listens to or reads a story in the target language, the learner is being exposed to the language and absorbing all of the ‘comprehensible input’ or “language that is within the range of access of the learner” (Wajnryb, 2003, p.7). Additionally, the opportunity to use the language is equally essential in order for the learner to learn the language. Tasks connected with stories can provide such opportunity. Lastly, a good quality story in and of itself has the potential to motivate learners, capturing their interest and intriguing them in such a way, the learners naturally perceive meaning in the target language. Similarly, Inal and Cakir (2014) suggest that in the field of English language teaching, the materials used to teach language should naturally be able to impel learners to engage in the lesson. The authors state that not only do carefully chosen stories have the ability to increase the motivation of learners but such stories can provide suitable contexts to support learning. Also touching on the point of how stories motivate students, Erkaya (2005) points out that because short

stories more often than not consist of a beginning, middle and an end, such stories inspire students, regardless of their proficiency level, to read them in their entirety to discover how the resolution of conflict is reached.

### **Language Learning Strategies Defined**

The definitions, types, and classifications of language learning strategies are outlined in a number of writings. One of the earliest definitions is “behaviours, steps, or techniques that language learners apply to facilitate language learning” (Rubin, 1987, cited in Hardan, 2013, p. 1715) Often mentioned is Oxford (1990)’s definition of learning strategies which is “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (p.8). Learning strategies, as defined by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) are “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information” (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990, p.1). Ultimately, one key idea to be highlighted is that, as Oxford (1990) concludes, “learning strategies are keys to greater autonomy and more meaningful learning”.

## **Rationale for the Project**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Japanese EFL learners encounter problems when they advance to university. As part of the university curriculum, English language instruction focuses heavily on communication. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), encourages communicative activities to be taught in the classroom. However, the problem that surfaces for many students is that they never received training in language learning strategies since they were never expected to communicate in English for exams. In addition, since instruction in the classroom tends to be teacher-centered, Japanese students are not aware of the value of learner-centered communicative activities (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). Another issue is the anxiety associated with communicating in English which students experience. With high levels of anxiety, students’ affective filters can potentially become too high in order to engage in classroom activities and comprehend the teacher’s instruction. Therefore, a methodology is needed which not only has the potential to reduce students’ anxiety but allows them to cultivate their inherent power as human beings, such as communication skills and listening skills.

### **Purpose of the Teaching and Learning Project**

The main purpose behind developing the curriculum is to address the needs of Japanese students who need to develop communicative ability in order to be successful in language acquisition during their time in university and beyond. Furthermore, instructional activities need to reduce the anxiety of students and story-based activities have the potential to do so. Moreover, through engagement in story-based activities, the hope is that the majority of students will recognize the value of storytelling and be reminded of the importance of their own personal stories. In developing such an outlook, language can become more alive for them and can be imbued with more meaning.

### **Significance of the Teaching and Learning Project**

When Japanese students receive strategy training they can be equipped with the skills necessary for learning language inside the classroom and independently outside the classroom. Courses which integrates language learning strategy training with instructional activities are unlikely to be found at most Japanese universities due to the fact that although Japanese students at the university level “finally have a chance to study English for reasons other than doing well on an exam...most students have no notion of how to proceed” (Tanahashi, 2009, p.129). When Japanese students have the opportunity to experience such a course, especially one in which the activities are story-based, they can have a positive, low anxiety learning experience. Not only can students develop language learning strategies which they never knew existed, they can become more autonomous and self-reliant learners. Furthermore, their self-perception of their L2 selves can improve as they build confidence and begin to believe that they are capable of communicating in English with English speakers. The joy of being able to tell a story of their own personal account can also give them confidence and help them to feel more connected to the English language.

### **Curriculum Goals**

The goals of the course are created based on information found in the review of literature. In addition, Graves (2000) writings on curriculum design was helpful in deciding the area of focus for each goal.

The overall goals of the course are as follows:

**Goal 1:** (Language) Learners will develop their language skills, improving upon their ability to perform certain language functions.

**Goal 2:** (Method) Through engagement in story-based activities, learners will develop the ability to tell a story in English.

**Goal 3:** (Teacher) The teacher will fulfill the role of instructor, monitor students in each class and give students guidance or feedback in response to their needs.

**Goal 4:** (Strategic) Students will understand all of the language learning strategies taught in each session and develop the ability to implement all of them by the end of the course.

**Goal 5:** (Socioaffective) As a result of the students' comprehension of strategy instruction provided in each class session and participation in classroom activities and course assignments, students will deepen their understanding of their role as language learners and adopt a positive attitude towards English communication.

**Goal 6:** (Philosophical) Students will discover their potential towards learning language using learning strategies, resulting in a positive change in attitude and beliefs towards language learning.

Based on these goals, activities will be planned for each lesson.

## Methodology

### Introduction

In accordance with the established customs of research studies in story-based methodology and language learning strategies, a needs analyses focused on two separate areas—the needs of students in regards to story-based activities and the needs of students in regards to language learning strategy instruction—was conducted using two types of instruments: a questionnaire and interviews. Participants in the needs analyses mostly included both teachers and students from Soka University. Soka University was an ideal source of participants because most of the types of teachers and students needed for the analyses teach or attend classes there. The only type of teacher which needed to be secured from outside the university were the teachers who fell in the category of those who have experience implementing story-based methodology in the language classroom.

### Data Collection

In this section, the method in which data was collected will be explained.

The data collected served the purpose of allowing the author to 1) analyze the needs of students for the proposed course, 2) gather a clear understanding of what story-based activities

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would be more in demand than others based upon the language skills students are most keen on developing, and 3) formulate a list of learning strategies which Japanese learners would be most interested in developing throughout the course.

**Context.** Within the context of Soka University, several teachers within the Faculty of Letters teach language courses for the purpose of developing the students' communication skill, as well as certain language skills, such as writing for academic purposes. Such being the case, Soka University is recognized as a "super global university", with a high-ranking participation in international exchange of students. For this reason, many Soka University students are motivated towards language learning, taking classes where they develop communicative ability in English as a second language or in a foreign language of their choice. The classes offered at the university satisfied the classes needed as a resource of data.

**Participants.** For this study, participants were categorized into four different groups. In the first group, participants consisted of upper beginner to lower intermediate Japanese students enrolled in an English language course at Soka University. Indeed, students who match this proficiency level are the students that the proposed course is geared towards. In the review of literature, at least three studies were identified which involved a number of student participants between 25 to 30 (Kim & McGarry, 2014; Fewell, 2010; Nguyen, Stanley, and Stanley, 2014) For that reason, 28 students were selected for this study. Following the guidance of an Assistant Lecturer, students who were selected by the lecturer were requested to answer the questionnaire. Only after they read and sign the informed consent form, were they given the questionnaire. This group was labeled "Students".

In the second group, participants consisted of teachers who were teaching English language courses at Soka University. There are not enough studies in which interviews are conducted with teachers (in relation to storytelling or language learning strategies) to determine how many teachers to interview. Therefore, three teachers were chosen to participate. At Soka University, an example of teachers who were selected for the first group would be Assistant Lecturers in the World Language Center. The rationale for choosing these teachers was that they teach upper beginner/lower intermediate classes of students, and therefore would be able to answer questions directed toward this group of students. This group was labeled "Teachers, group 1".

In the third group, participants consisted of teachers who had used storytelling in their language classroom. University level teachers at Soka University typically do not use storytelling in their language classrooms. Consequently, one could safely assume that many university level teachers who teach at universities in Japan typically do not use storytelling in the language classroom. Therefore, teachers in the second group were teaching at the kindergarten, elementary or junior high school level. This group was labeled “Teachers, group 2”.

Finally, the fourth group of participants consisted of teachers who were teaching language learning strategies in their course. These teachers will be teachers at Soka University whose course goals and objectives include using skills or strategies in order to improve language use. This group was labeled “Teachers, group 3”.

**Pilot study.** The pilot study served the purpose of confirming that the Japanese language which is to appear on the questionnaire is appropriate and easily comprehensible. The pilot study took place at Soka University and included five or six language learning students who read the Japanese translation of the questionnaire and confirmed whether or not the language for each question was appropriate and easy to understand. Before participating in the pilot study, the students were given an informed consent form in Japanese to read and sign. The students were not selected randomly but rather an Assistant Lecturer in the World Language Center who has experience teaching the students suggested the students to participate in the study. Once confirmed to be appropriate and comprehensible, the questionnaire was used as an instrument.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation consisted of a questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was for students; the interviews were with the three groups of teachers. Each item in the questionnaire and in the interviews led to a deeper understanding of how the course could be shaped to better serve the needs of students. The questionnaire contained both open-ended questions and Likert scale items. Completing the questionnaire was not expected to take more than ten minutes. Students completed the questionnaire at Soka University.

The interviews lasted for up to forty-five minutes because interviews were the only instrument being used with teachers. Each interview consisted of no more than 16 questions and interviews were recorded so that they could be transcribed and used for data analysis. Interviews with Soka University teachers took place at Soka University whereas interviews with teachers

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working at other institutions took place at a location convenient for those teachers or through Skype, a video conferencing software application.

**Needs related to story-based lessons.** The needs analysis served the purpose of clarifying pieces of information which would allow for the curriculum to better respond to the needs of students in relation to story-based lessons. Such pieces of information include, but are not limited to: 1) Whether Japanese students are generally interested in stories only in Japanese or also in a second language; 2) whether Japanese students are keen on developing any language skill more than others; 3) whether university level Japanese learners have ever worked with stories in class and if so, whether the stories proved to be useful for them; 4) whether stories are reportedly useful in lowering anxiety for Japanese learners of a second language in the language classroom; 5) ideas in regards to how storytelling in the university level classroom would be approached differently than in classrooms of young learners; and 6) would university-level teachers be interested in using story-based lessons in the language classroom.

**Needs related to language learning strategies.** The needs analysis also helped to identify the needs of students in relation to language learning strategies, such as: 1) a list of language learning strategies that are especially of interest to Japanese university students to learn; 2) whether students who are taught language learning strategies actually use them; 3) whether interaction with peers is effective in learning how to implement the strategies; 4) whether reflection journals are useful in implementing affective strategies, such as “encouraging oneself”, or “taking one’s emotional temperature” (Oxford, 1990); and 5) whether there is any report indicating that students used any of the learning skills or strategies implemented in the course outside of the classroom after the course was completed.

### **Data Analysis**

The analyzation of the data extracted from the student questionnaire enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of types of stories that students like, their attitudes towards stories and their familiarity with language learning strategy use, in addition to their interest in learning strategies. The questionnaire featured open-ended questions and Likert scale items. Therefore, the investigator analyzed the responses to open-ended questions by translating and taking note of each response, grouping the same responses together, and transferring the data to tables, indicating the number of responses for each response. The Likert scale items were

analyzed by tallying the number of times students selected each number on the scale—from 1 to 5—and converting the collective number to percentages. Following this, the data was transferred to tables. The first step in the analyzation of interview data was transcribing the interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, keywords and themes were identified and main categories of themes were assigned a color for coding. The next step involved color coding the transcription according to the themes. Next, the coded transcriptions were interpreted by the investigator in order to ascertain key findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Pilot Study**

One of the Assistant Lecturers which the investigator interviewed agreed to a visit to both of her English classes so the investigator could explain about the needs assessment and ask if any of the students could volunteer to participate. One class consisted of 20 Literature major students and the second class consisted of 10 baseball major students. The investigator required upper beginner to lower intermediate students to participate in the questionnaire because such was the proficiency level of students the proposed curriculum is geared towards. For the pilot study, the investigator only visited the Literature class since only five students were required for the pilot study. Towards the end of the class session, the Assistant lecturer welcomed the investigator and the investigator briefly explained about her needs assessment to the students, and how their participation will help her assessment. After the needs analysis explanation, five students volunteered to participate in the pilot study. The investigator thereupon gave each volunteer an informed consent form and a questionnaire. The students read and signed the consent form, took less than ten minutes to check the Japanese language of the questionnaire, and returned the signed form and questionnaire with their corrections to the investigator. The investigator was able to adjust the Japanese language of the questionnaire according to the students' corrections and feedback. Only a handful of items were adjusted and the issues were minor, involving the correction of a couple of kanji in each sentence. For example, the kanji for the term “strategies” was corrected since the kanji which the investigator originally used referred to strategies or tactics used in war. With those corrected questionnaire items in more easily understandable Japanese, the questionnaire was ready to be answered by all of the student participants in both classes.

### **Student Questionnaire**

After the questionnaire was corrected based on the students' feedback from the pilot study, the investigator visited the Assistant Lecturer's Literature class again a second time, followed by a visit to the Baseball class. In the Literature class, 19 students participated in the questionnaire after reading and signing the Informed consent form. After about 10 minutes, all of the signed consent forms and questionnaires were returned. When the investigator visited the Baseball class in the afternoon, again an explanation of her needs assessment was given and afterwards all 11 students conveyed that they wished to participate. (Unexpectedly, the class had one more student than anticipated.) However, because the investigator only made ten copies of the questionnaire for the class, only 10 of the students received an informed consent form which they read and signed, followed by the questionnaire which they took less than ten minutes to complete. Both the consent forms and questionnaires were returned to the investigator at the end of the class session. A total of 29 students participated in the questionnaire.

**Interest level in language learning.** The first question on the questionnaire asks students to circle the two language skills they are most interested in learning. The data reflects that by far, the two language skills which students are most interested in learning are speaking (in 96% of student responses speaking was circled) and listening (in 51% of student responses listening was circled). Thirteen percent of the students did not circle a second skill. Of the 13% (n=4) who didn't circle a second skill but only circled one skill, 25% percent circled reading and 75% circled speaking.

**Learning strategies utilized.** The results of the students' responses to the second question on the questionnaire which asked students to name strategies which are used to learn language are as follows: Of the 29 students who participated, 65% of students answered the question. Of the 65% who answered the question, 52% wrote "memorization", 15% wrote "listening to English songs" and ten percent specifically wrote "memorization of vocabulary". Isolated answers included: "watch video", "comprehend the meaning", "repetition", "reading aloud", "pronunciation practice", "writing", "conversation", "sound of conjugation", and "say something" (note: answers were translated from Japanese). Additionally, in response to the second part of the second question on the questionnaire which asked students whether they want to learn new learning strategies, ninety-three percent of students responded "Yes" while six percent of students responded "No". Therefore, the data confirms the investigator's assumption that most first-year university students use memorization to learn language.

**Student story preferences.** The fifth question on the questionnaire asked students to identify two types of stories that they like. Additionally, in response to question number six students listed titles of stories/movies which fall within those two types of stories. Worth noting is that of the 29 students who participated, 27 answered the questions. Furthermore, of the two genres listed by two students, one of the genres written was illegible therefore, the investigator was unable to include one of their two genres listed among the results. The results reveal that the genre which most students liked is Fantasy (listed by 25% of students), followed by Sci-Fi, Love and Comedy (with all three genres being listed by 22% of students). Therefore, the data indicates that if teachers present story-based activities which utilize stories which are of the Fantasy, Sci-Fi, Love, and Comedy genre, the stories would be well-received by students.

**Students' responses to Likert scale items.** Items nine through fifteen on the questionnaire were Likert scale items related to students' interest in stories in regards to different language skills. The results of students' responses to the items serve to compare students' interests in using language skills with stories in general compared to their interest of using language skills with stories in a second language. The results reveal that students are always more interested in stories when the stories involved are in their first language than when involved with stories in their second language. The investigator deduced that such data implies that the more students become comfortable and proficient with the second language, the more they will be interested in reading, writing, and listening to stories in the second language.

### **Interviews with Teachers**

The interview data brought to light a number of common findings and themes, some of which were identified in the literature review, and some of which were not. The results of each teacher group will be highlighted and discussed. For each group of teachers, each semi-structured interview was completed within a maximum time of 45 minutes. Before conducting the interviews, teachers read and signed informed consent forms. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. For groups 1 and 3—the language teachers of low proficiency students and the teachers whose course goals focus on students learning learner strategies respectively—the researcher conducted the interview with the teacher in person; for group 2 or the group of teachers who utilize story in their instruction, only one interview was conducted in person while two were conducted via Skype. After the researcher transcribed the interviews, the transcriptions were

coded using a qualitative coding analysis method which involved color-coding utterances on similar themes according to theme.

### **Key Findings**

**Genre affects the success of a story-based task.** One key finding from the data analysis was that the success of a story-based task or activity depends largely on the genre of the story introduced. Such being the case, what is helpful for teachers to know is which genres are well-received by students. According to the results of the student questionnaire, the genre of story most liked by students is fantasy, followed by love, sci-fi, and comedy. Therefore, if teachers select stories of those genres, the chance that students will be interested in the stories are high. In contrast, stories which teachers should avoid selecting are those which fall under the category of horror or crime stories, since a teacher in group 2 reported that these genres are not well-received by Japanese students. Furthermore, stories which are written in inaccessible language should also be avoided because students will find such stories difficult to understand and relate to, thus decreasing their interest in engaging in any activities related to the stories. On the other hand, if students are reading stories as part of an extensive reading program, teachers need not worry about selecting a particular story for the students but instead, only direct students on the criteria for selecting the stories. For example, one criteria might be that the story needs to fall within one level of comprehension under that which the student is capable of comprehending.

**Students perceive stories as being helpful in improving all four language skills.** Another key finding was that although students are less interested in using different language skills with stories, they do perceive stories as being capable of helping them to improve all four language skills, in addition to vocabulary and pronunciation. In fact, none of the students think story is not helpful in achieving such aims. The researcher interprets this information to mean that if story-based activities are used in the language classroom, students would have a positive attitude towards engaging in the activities because their perception of such activities is positive.

**English language teachers are willing to implement story-based activities in instruction.** Another key finding is that among the first and third groups of teachers, five out of six teachers were willing to learn more about how they can implement story-based activities in their instruction. For example, they would learn more by attending a teacher training workshop on implementing story-based activities in class. Moreover, the teachers could perceive how stories could serve as a

platform for language learning activities. The researcher interprets this data to mean that teachers are willing to implement story-based methodology in their teaching. Not only do students see the power in stories, as indicated by the student questionnaire, but teachers also perceive their power as well.

### **Assessment Plan**

In the English Communication Through Story-Based Learning course, learners are assessed on class participation, peer edited writing assignments and homework, extensive reading log sheets and use of discussion skills, vocabulary and grammar quiz scores, and their final presentation. Firstly, assessment of class participation will account for 10% of students' final grade. Students will be assessed on class participation because the majority of class time will be spent in pairs or groups. Therefore, of importance is that students participate in activities throughout each lesson. Secondly, three peer edited writing assignments and completion of homework assignments will account for 30% of the final grade: 15% being accounted for homework assignments and 15% being accounted for the three peer-edited writing assignments, resulting in each writing assignment accounting for 5% of the grade. The three peer-edited writing assignments are as follows: one descriptive paragraph, one problem-solution mini story, and one personal narrative. Both the descriptive paragraph and the personal narratives are assessed based on rubrics, and students will be introduced to the rubrics before completing each respective writing assignment, so they are aware of what points to aim for in their writing. Regarding the problem-solution mini story, the assignment will be peer edited before the students submit the final draft. Thirdly, extensive reading log sheets which account for 20% of the grade, are assessed on whether the student completed written responses to all the items on the log sheet and whether the responses clearly explain the thoughts of the student. Discussion skills assessment, which accounts for 10% of the final grade, is also based on a rubric, and students are made aware of the criteria for the rubric in the second class of the course. Fourthly, vocabulary and grammar quizzes account for 20% of the final grade. Students will take six vocabulary quizzes and six grammar quizzes throughout the course. Finally, the assessment of the final presentation which accounts for 10% of the final grade, will be based on a combined evaluation of students' storytelling skills—including eye contact, posture, voice, speaking, and gestures—and students' poster. Students will be aware of the criteria on which they are being evaluated because they will receive the Storytelling rubric.

### **Educational Implementations**

The course proposed by this Teaching and Learning Project is designed to meet the needs of university level lower-intermediate EFL learners in Japan. In addition, the lesson plans are intended for a class of 20 students. Therefore, certain key aspects should be considered by teachers who teach within different contexts.

Firstly, regarding class size, in situations where the class size is greater than 20 students, the plans of each lesson could still work provided the number of students is divisible by four or five. However, for classes with more than 20 students, teachers would need to consider how to adjust an activity in the syllabus which involves story strips. Also, if the class size is more than 20 students classroom management could be more of an issue. To help maintain order in the classroom, the teacher could enlist the support of one or two student managers: students whom the instructor assigns the role of announcing when students need to be quiet and listen to the teacher and when students need to work together in pairs or as a group. The teacher is free to decide how often the role of student managers would be assumed by different students. If there are students who are particularly satisfactory in carrying out the role, the teacher may decide to let those students maintain the role for two or more weeks of the course.

Additionally, ideally materials for the class will be accessible on Google Drive, Google Classroom or Dropbox. In the event that students do not have computers but only have access to the internet through their smartphone, as an alternative the teacher can use the Moodle software application, which is available both as a Desktop and mobile application. The Moodle application allows students to access course content via online through their mobile phone. Therefore, even if students do not have a computer with internet access, if they have a smartphone they can access content through Moodle. In a context where students do not have any access to the internet whatsoever, materials would need to be printed out and distributed to students in the classroom.

Moreover, there are occasions where the central story will be broadcast on a large screen in the classroom, such as a Big Pad. In the context where such equipment is not available, alternative equipment to use are iPads which have internet access. Each student would need to receive an iPad, or pairs of students can share one iPad, and view the video of the story. In the event that iPads are also unavailable, an audio recording of the story would need to be used instead. As an alternative, students can be tasked with working together to create what is known as a *Kamishibai*, a form of visual storytelling which originated in Japan. Each student can be assigned to create one board and the story of the *Kamishibai* could be presented by one or two students, who are assigned the role of *Kamishibai* storyteller for that unit.

## Conclusion

If the goal of an individual Japanese learner of English is to develop the four skills—reading, writing, listening and speaking—for the sake of achieving an overall higher level of proficiency in English communication, then using stories in the language learning process has the potential of yielding positive results. Furthermore, when the learner puts effort into developing and applying certain key language learning strategies, they are likely to experience a breakthrough in their language acquisition over time. Japanese learners seeking to exercise the use of such strategies can use stories in different ways in order to do so. Stories with topics of interest can be used in order to develop skills such as summarizing—both in written and spoken form and connecting old information with new information. However, teachers who use stories to facilitate language instruction need to be aware of how to select the appropriate stories for different activities; depending upon the purpose of an activity, the story should be chosen accordingly. Also, before students listen to stories, the teacher ought to engage them in pre-storytelling tasks so they can activate their schemata and familiarize themselves with new vocabulary. The narration of stories should be at a speed comfortable for students; teachers need to be aware that students' reading level does not always match their listening level.

The analysis on which of the four skills students are most interested in developing revealed that students are most interested in developing their listening and speaking skills. Therefore, story-based activities which involve the development of listening and speaking ability are suspected to be evoke more motivation from students. However, since listening requires a great deal of class time to practice in class, the need for strategy instruction is all the more insistent. Students would be well served if they received instruction on language learning strategies that could enhance their ability to improve their listening outside of class. For example, strategies such as using context or making predictions call upon students to use the context of what they hear to get the gist of what is being communicated to them and to predict what they are about to listen to. Moreover, any strategy instruction which occurs in the course need not involve too much memorization since the majority of students are already familiar with the learning strategy.

The potential of stories to facilitate the development of English proficiency in the language classroom could be great. The author of the Teaching and Learning Project predicts that the more stories are purposefully used as a context for language learning, not just on the primary and secondary levels but the university level as well, the higher the percentage of students in any given context around the world will expand upon their ability to communicate in the English language.

## Story-based Methodology for Developing English Language Proficiency

Embraced by the world of story which is rich with meaning and directly connected to the human experience, English language learners are certain to discover the value of their own story and will hopefully be motivated to express themselves in their own unique way through the English language.

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