

Developing Classroom Interactional Competence of Pre-service
Teachers at University through Online Lesson-Plan Studies and
Reflective Practice

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Abstract

Classroom discourse plays a significant role in communicative English classes. Interaction between a teacher and students creates an 'acquisition rich' environment in the classroom if it can be managed effectively. However, English classes in Japan have not been interactive, not meeting the latest policies set and mandated by the national guidelines for teaching. This study investigates classroom interactional competence (CIC), focusing especially on its development in pre-service teacher training programmes at the university level. It reports the problems found in lesson-plan studies. It shows that the training through lesson-plan studies and reflective practice (RP) can be effective even in online classes.

Keywords: classroom interactional competence, lesson plan studies, teacher training, online discussions

Introduction

Second language (L2) acquisition requires the learners' continual effort over an extended period of time. This is especially so when learners study a target language in a country where it is not a means of daily communication. In Japan people study English as a foreign language (EFL), and English learning heavily depends on school education. The government has made some major reforms recently. Until 2019 the official English education started when pupils entered secondary school at the age of twelve. In 2020, however, it was introduced to ten-year-old fifth graders attending primary schools. Furthermore, the latest guidelines expect English teachers to conduct classes in English at secondary schools. The rationale behind this policy is that students should be given more opportunities to use English inside the classroom. Students are expected to learn English not merely to pass university entrance examinations but to

gain the ability to use it in a variety of situations in the future. Accordingly, there has been a growing demand for English teachers to develop their communicative teaching skills. Walsh (2006) introduced the concept of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC). In what follows, I will argue that this concept will play an important role to enhance teachers' interactional abilities. The current research investigates CIC development of pre-service teachers at a university where I teach.

Classroom interactional competence

Language acquisition is mysterious. First language (L1), at least its core knowledge, is acquired naturally without much effort. In contrast, L2 acquisition requires a tremendous amount of effort and intentional leaning, which may last for a lifetime. Sadly, even such hard, sustained work may not guarantee native-like acquisition of a target language. A number of theories have been proposed to explain the nature of L2 acquisition. For example, Krashen (1985) proposed the input hypotheses, in which he claimed the important role of input and the subconscious processes of acquisition. Long (1996) examined the role of interaction and argued that negotiations of meaning facilitate L2 acquisition. Swain (2005) formed the output hypothesis, in which she drew attention to output and its function to facilitate acquisition. These theories have illustrated various aspects of acquisition, but questions still remain: Do EFL learners acquire a target language in the same way as ESL (English as a second language) learners, who learn a language in the target language community? Would it be worthwhile for learners to study the target language in the classroom? Most learners, whether EFL or ESL, study their target language at schools. Walsh (2011) explored the nature and functions of classroom interaction, and he developed the concept of CIC. He argued that it would mediate and assist L2 learning in the classroom. Mann and Walsh (2017) further developed this idea and proposed Reflective Practice (RP) as a tool to improve and aid professional development.

Pre-service teachers face a variety of problems in teacher-training programmes. What problems they have depend on the knowledge and abilities they have acquired by the time they start the programmes. In case of EFL students, their problems are generally twofold. One is that their English abilities are not sufficient enough to conduct communicative classes in English. Communicative language teaching (CLT) requires

advanced English abilities of teachers. Therefore, it would be vital to improve their English competence at university. The other is that most students do not know how to teach English communicatively because they were not taught by teachers who adopted this approach in secondary schools. These problems are serious, but guided CIC and RP training might change this situation.

Method

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of CIC and RP training through online chat sessions. The study was conducted at a private women's university in the 2020 school year, from April 2020 to January 2021. I will explain the modules and lesson plans below.

Students who wish to become English teachers are required to take four methodology modules at the university where I work. Modules I and II are taught for second-year students, and III and IV for third-year students before taking practicum in their fourth year. Each module is fifteen weeks long. Students meet once a week for a 90-min class. In Modules I and II they learn teaching theories and methods, and in Modules III and IV they conduct practice lessons to improve their practical teaching abilities.

The lesson procedures in Modules III and IV are as follows. Students write detailed lesson plans before class, which are submitted to the department office and printed for all the remaining students to use in the classroom (Step 1). During a 90-min class, three students conduct 20-min practice lessons (Step 2). They are followed by short reflective sessions, in which a teacher together with the students review each lesson. Practice lessons are videotaped and later made into DVDs (Step 3). The students who conducted practice lessons receive their DVDs, watch them at home and write reflection reports (Steps 4 & 5). Figure 1 shows the process of before-, during-, and after class activities.

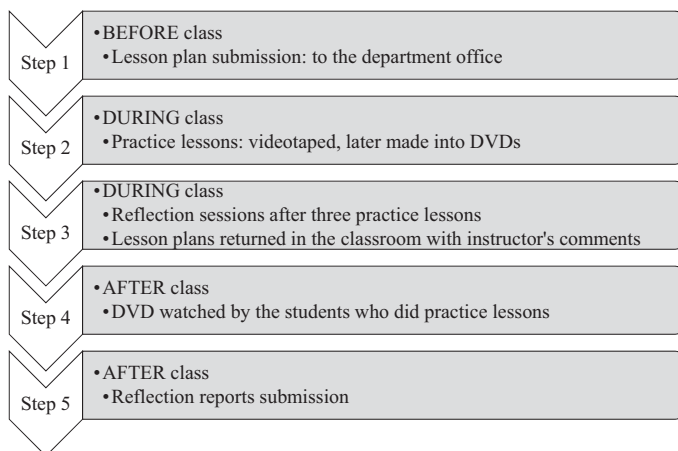


Figure 1: Processes of before-, during- and after class

Class 2020 was significantly different from classes in previous years, however, because all the lessons were conducted online because of the pandemic caused by COVID-19. Therefore, major changes had to be made. In 2020 fifteen students enrolled in Modules III and IV. Because of the class size, it became unrealistic to conduct practice lessons online, and they had to be cancelled. Instead, it was decided to conduct lesson-plan studies online and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each lesson plan.

Figure 2 illustrates the procedure of the Class 2020 module. First, three students in charge of practice lessons submitted their lesson plans to the instructor by email (Step 1), who reviewed the lesson plans, wrote his comments, and uploaded them onto the online classroom system (Step 2). Then all the students downloaded and analysed them before class (Step 3). During online sessions, each lesson plan was carefully analysed and discussed by all the students. Their comments, opinions and questions were exchanged using the online chat system. The instructor contributed to the discussion by commenting during the chat sessions (Step 4). After class, reflection reports were submitted to the instructor by all the students (Step 5).

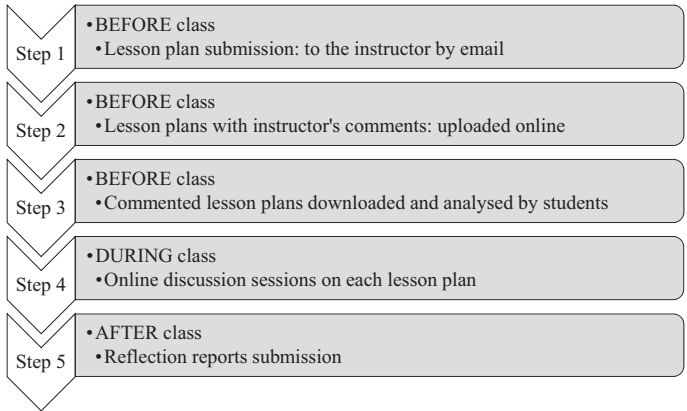


Figure 2: 2020 class procedure

Four students voluntarily participated in this research study, and agreed to have their lesson plans thoroughly investigated. Since this study was conducted at a women's university, all the participants were women. Table 1 depicts the whole semester schedule for Module III. The first two classes were used to teach how to write lesson plans for a communicative English class. Lesson-plan studies started in Class 3 and ended in Class 12, during which each student was required to submit their lesson plans twice; one for an introductory class and the other for a reading class. Classes 13 to 15 focused on grammar and discussed communicative grammar activities with all the students.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
			A		B	D		A		B	D			
					C					C				

Table 1: Participants' lesson plan sessions in Module III, 2020

Table 1 also shows when the four participants, A, B, C and D, conducted their lesson-plan studies. Each class from Class 3 to Class 12 consisted of three lesson-plan sessions. Table 1 only shows the session schedule of the four participants. From the table we can see two clusters; one from Class 4 to Class 7, and the other from Class 9 to Class 12.

Participants B and C did the sessions on the same day, so they worked on the same part of the textbook.

Let us see how each session was conducted. The textbook used in Module III was *New Horizon English Course 3*, an authorised junior high school textbook for the third-year students. The book was selected because it was one of the most popular textbooks used at junior high schools. The lesson activities and the units given to the participants were as follows.

Lesson activities:

- The first turn: Unit introduction
- The second turn: Reading comprehension

Lesson units and their titles:

- Participant A: Unit 3. Fair Trade Event
- Participant B & C: Unit 5. Living with Robots – For or Against
- Participant D: Unit 6. Striving for a Better World

Now let us look at Table 2, which shows the schedule of Module IV. This module focused on teaching senior high school students. The first two classes reviewed the important points found in Module III and introduced the senior high school textbook for Module IV. Lesson-plan studies started in Class 3 and ended in Class 12. All the students in Module IV were also given two opportunities to present their lesson plans. In this module, they first wrote lesson plans for reading lessons, which was followed by a plan for grammar lessons. The last three sessions discussed grammar activities with all the students. The current study focuses only on the reading sessions.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
		D	C	B	A									

Table 2: Participants’ lesson plan sessions in Module IV, 2020

The textbook used in Module IV was *UNICORN English Communication 1, New edition*, a widely used authorised senior high school textbook. The units and the themes used for the lesson studies were as follows.

Student D: Lesson 2. Holmes and Watson
Student C: Lesson 4. Forests for the future
Student B: Lesson 6. El Sistema: The Miracle of music
Student A: Lesson 7. Why are you sleepy?

In Module IV the presentation order was reversed to keep fairness for evaluation. All the students agreed to this reversed order policy.

Writing good lesson plans is crucial for good teaching, so it would be the first step that pre-service teachers should take as they embark on teaching. There are two versions of lesson plans: simplified and detailed plans. The simplified lesson plans show a rough idea about how lessons will proceed, in which only the important points to teach and the time to be spent on activities are written. In contrast, detailed lesson plans describe exactly what to be taught, what to be said by the teacher and what reactions to be expected from students. Writing such a plan may sound time consuming because actual lessons do not always progress as planned. Having said that, it is the detailed lesson plans which help students to improve their teaching abilities, especially the ability to control classroom discourse. Therefore, the students were asked to write detailed lesson plans.

The students wrote 20-min lesson plans when secondary school classes are in fact 50 minutes long. This was because 50-min lesson plans would be difficult for the students to write and because three students had to present their plans in a 90-min class. For these reasons, 20-min lesson plans were used. The lesson plan format was made by the instructor, and its digital file was sent to all the students at the beginning of Module III.

Findings

All the students who took Modules III and IV struggled to write lesson plans for communicative English classes. Various problems have been found through lesson-plan studies, but I will focus only on the issues, which are critically related to CIC. They are (1) contextualization, (2) question formation and (3) discourse flow.

(1) Contextualization

Contextualization is a process that involves presenting contextual information to students and keeping classroom discourse within this

context. Since various questions and comments are exchanged in the classroom, they need to be cohesive and coherent. This is of great importance for learners, especially for beginners, because they need to follow English lessons with little support in Japanese.

We will look at the extracts presented by two participants below. But before that, let me show the notations used in the lesson plans.

Notations:

T: teacher

S: student (single)

SS: students

C: class (all the students)

T refers to teacher, and S, SS and C refer to a student, some students and the whole class, respectively. Please note that all the responses written in the lesson plans are imaginary, i.e., made by those who wrote the lesson plans. They are not transcriptions of actual classes.

Extract 1 is for an introductory class, introducing a new unit. The topic is 'Fair Trade Event'. The textbook presents a context in Japanese under the unit title. It says 'questionnaires are being delivered to people at the entrance of an international convention centre'. Below this the questionnaire is printed with the fair trade mark. Under the questionnaire, there is a photograph in which more than ten fair trade products are shown. The content of the questionnaire is as follows:

1. Have you ever heard of 'fair trade'?

Yes, I have. / No, I haven't.

2. Have you ever seen this mark?

Yes. I have seen it before. / No. I have never seen it before.

Come and discover the world of fair trade.

The lesson plan in extract 1 was presented by participant A. As Table 1 shows, it was conducted in Class 4. Since lesson-plan studies started in Class 3, participant A was able to refer to three previous sessions. Keeping that in mind, let us see how the classroom discourse was constructed in her lesson plan. Extract 1 only shows the main part of the 20-min lesson, so greetings, vocabulary practice and other parts are deleted. The teacher first addresses that she is going to teach a new unit and elicits the title of

the unit from the students (Q 1). Then she starts talking about chocolate, and asks if the students like it or not (Q2). After this, she asks what chocolate is made from (Q3), and after checking the answer, cacao beans, she asks where people can get them (Q4). For this question she expects answers such as 'in Africa' and 'in Ghana'. Then she asks about what image of Africa the students have (Q6). After some information exchanges, she refers to the fair trade mark printed on the questionnaire (Q7), and then draws students' attention to the photograph of fair trade products (Q8).

From this lesson plan, we can see that the teacher does not refer to the contextual information written in the textbook. After checking the title of the unit, she moves to the topic of chocolate. Questions 3 to 5 refer to the content written in the reading section a few pages after the introduction page. Therefore, these questions are not appropriate for this class, and should be saved for later, after reading further into the text. Questions 2 and 6 are open-ended questions about students' preference of chocolate and their images of Africa, respectively. Open-ended questions usually elicit various responses from students, which would contribute to building meaningful conversations. Question 6, the image of Africa, however, might be vague to the students, and some of them might be confused about how to respond to this question. And the answer to this question would not contribute to the understanding of fair trades. Unlike questions 3 to 6, questions 7 and 8 are relevant to the topic, and the answers can be found in the photograph. Although the lesson plan does not refer to the content of the questionnaire, this decision would be acceptable if we consider the lesson's timeframe.

Extract 1: Junior high school lesson / Unit 3. Fair Trade Event

- 1 T: 'Today we're going to study Unit 3.'
- 2 T: 'What is the title of Unit 3?'(Q1)
- 3 C: 'Fair Trade Event.'
- 4 T: 'Yes, that's correct.'
- 5 T: 'By the way, do you like chocolate?'(Q2)
- 6 C: 'Yes, I do.'
- 7 T: 'Good. I like chocolate too.'
- 8 T: 'What is chocolate made from?'(Q3)
- 9 SS: 'It's made of cacao beans.'
- 10 T: 'That's right.'

- 11 T: 'Where can you get them?'(Q4)
12 SS: 'In Africa.'
13 T: 'Does anyone have other ideas?'(Q5)
14 S: 'In Ghana.'
15 T: 'Correct.'
16 T: 'What is Africa like? What is your image of Africa?'(Q6)
17 T: 'Talk to your partner. Does anyone have any ideas?'
(some exchanges deleted)
18 T: 'Do you know this mark?'(Q7) showing the fair trade mark
printed in the textbook.
19 SS: 'No, I don't.'
20 T: 'This is a fair trade mark. Actually, cacao beans, from which
chocolate is made, are included in fair trade products.'
(textbook)
21 T: 'Now look at your textbook. Page 34.'
22 T: 'There are pictures on this page. Those are fair trade products.
What other products are there?'(Q8)
23 C: 'Coffee, nuts, soccer ball, crayon ...'

The exchange between question and answer is well thought out if they are looked at locally. The problem is that half the questions do not help establish the overall context of the text by introducing the learners to the central theme of fair trades. This lesson would be improved if the teaching material were more carefully examined, incorporating contextual information more effectively.

Let us look at another introduction lesson presented by participant D. As Table 1 shows, this lesson was conducted in Class 7, which was the last session for introductory lessons in Module III. Participant D had the opportunities to see twelve introductory lessons before her presentation. The context of this introduction lesson is as follows: 'Ms. Baker is talking about a book which she brought from the US'. And below this sentence, the following message by Ms. Baker is written:

This is a book I brought from the United States. These are some of the people I found in it. They're the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Is there anyone you've seen before?

Below this passage are placed the photographs of five Nobel Peace Prize

winners: Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Wangari Maathai, Barack Obama and Mother Teresa.

Look at extract 2. The teacher starts a lesson by checking the title of the new unit (Q1). She draws students' attention to the word 'world' in the title 'Striving for a Better World'. Then she continues to talk about countries (Q3 & Q4). After some information exchanges, she refers to Myanmar (from Q5 to Q7). Then she refers to the five photographs (Q8). However, she refers to Myanmar again and asks which person in the photographs is from Myanmar right before closing her class (Q9). Since the teacher does not establish the overall context of the text, the students may not understand the link between the questions to the five photographs. Questions 2 to 7 are related to each other, but are not relevant to the main point of this lesson. Later, this unit describes the life of Aung San Suu Kyi, who ushered a democratic movement in Myanmar. She is one of the five people in the photographs. Probably, participant D read the whole unit before writing her lesson plan, and gained a strong impression that the unit was about Aung San Suu Kyi. This impression misguided her because the main point of the text is not Aung San Suu Kyi nor Myanmar. It is to introduce five Nobel Peace Prize winners, who 'strived for a better world'.

Extract 2: Junior high school lesson / Unit 6. Striving for a Better World

- 1 T: 'Today we're going to study Unit 6.'
- 2 T: 'What is the title of Unit 6?'(Q1)
- 3 C: 'Striving for a Better World.'
- 4 T: 'Yes, that's right.'
- 5 T: 'Do you see the word "world" in the title?'(Q2)
- 6 C: 'Yes.'
- 7 T: 'OK, we will have a world country quiz today.'
- 8 T: 'First question. In which country do we live?'(Q3)
- 9 C: 'We live in Japan.'
- 10 T: 'That's correct.' Nominating a student, 'Do you have a favourite country?'(Q4)
- 11 S: 'My favourite country is Korea.'
(Similar questions will continue)
- 12 T: 'Next, do you know the country, Myanmar?'(Q5)
- 13 T: 'Please raise your hand if you know Myanmar?'(Q6)

- (After this question, the teacher puts a map on the board.)
- 14 T: 'Look at the picture here. Can you see it, everyone?'
- 15 C: 'Yes, I can see it.'
- 16 T: 'All right, which one is Myanmar?'(Q7)
- 17 SS: 'No.1.'
- 18 T: 'The answer is No.1. That's great. Thank you. Actually, Myanmar is an important country to study this unit.'
- (After aural reading practices)
- 19 T: 'Now, take a look at the photos on page 82.'
- 20 T: 'How many photos are in the textbook?'(Q8)
- 21 SS: 'Five photos.'
- 22 T: 'You're right. Now, I'll give you homework.'
- 23 T: 'One of the photos is the leader of Myanmar. Who is it?'(Q9)

It is clear that participants A and D strived hard to write good lesson plans. The classroom discourse presented by the two students are not of low quality, but both of them failed to contextualise classroom discourse.

(2) Question formation

One of the most challenging tasks pre-service teachers face would be to make meaningful questions. Most students do not experience Q and A activities in their secondary English classes. They mainly study grammar and vocabulary, and translate English passages into Japanese. When resorting to this teaching style, teachers do not have to make meaningful questions. Therefore, students do not have a role model to emulate when they try to conduct communicative lessons.

Extract 3 is from a lesson plan presented by participant C in Class 4 in Module IV (See Table 2). The textbook used for this module was *Unicorn English Communication 1* written for first-year senior high school students. The excerpt below is from the first paragraph in Lesson 4. This paragraph is accompanied by a photograph, which shows some baobab trees growing in the field as well as two small children standing on a broken baobab tree lying on the ground.

Textbook

A huge tree lies on the ground. It broke at its base during a strong cyclone. The tree was a baobab called Number 30 and stood along Baobab Alley in the western part of Madagascar. Some baobabs live

to be more than a thousand years old, but Number 30 was there for only 200 years. In fact, many baobabs around Baobab Alley are now in danger.

Look at extract 3. The teacher generates twelve questions in total, six of which are from the photograph. First, she asks a general question, 'What can you see?', and elicits the answer 'people' (Q1). Since this is an open-ended question, a variety of responses might be expected. Then she asks the number of people (Q2), and if they are adults or children (Q3). She attempts to elicit other information too (Q4) and points to the tree in the photograph (Q5). Then she asks about the tree's physical state (Q6) and the reason that brought it about (Q7). Question 8 is different in kind from the other questions. It is a direction statement. Then she asks students to explain the differences between 'cyclone' and 'typhoon' (Q9), getting them to use their background knowledge. After that she asks about the name of the broken tree (Q10), its location (Q11), and its age (Q12). To summarise, questions 2 and 3 focus on the children, and questions 4 to 6 on the broken tree in the photograph. To answer question 7 and questions from 10 to 12, the students need to read the passage. Only question 9 asks for their general knowledge. All the questions are related to each other, and come from the photograph or the passage.

Extract 3: Senior high school lesson / Lesson 4. Forests for the Future

- 1 T: 'Look at the big picture on page 48.'
- 2 T: 'What can you see?' (Q1) 'Talk to your partner.'
(Pair work)
- 3 T: 'OK, time is up. Any volunteers?'
- 4 S: 'People.'
- 5 T: 'Good. How many people?' (Q2)
- 6 C: 'Two.'
- 7 T: 'Yes, there are two people.' 'Are they adults?' (Q3)
- 8 C: 'No, they're children.'
- 9 T: 'Great.' 'Anything else?' (Q4)
- 10 SS: 'Trees.'
- 11 T: 'Good. There are a lot of trees.'
- 12 T: 'What is this?' pointing to the tree on which the children are standing. (Q5)

- 13 C: 'Tree.'
- 14 T: 'Yes. This is a huge tree.'
- 15 T: 'Is it standing?' (Q6)
- 16 SS: 'No. It's lying on the ground.'
- 17 T: 'That's right.' 'But why? What happened? What do you think?'
(Q7)
- (Expected answers from the students: typhoon and cyclone)
- 18 T: (Nominating a student) 'Could you please read the second sentence?' (Q8)
- 19 S: 'It broke at its base during a strong cyclone.' (from the textbook)
- 20 T: 'Thank you. Yes, the textbook says "cyclone".'
- 21 T: 'Tell me the differences between "cyclone" and "typhoon"?' (Q9)
- 22 C: ...
- 23 T: 'All right. Actually, these are almost the same. The names change depending on the region.'
- 24 T: 'This tree has a name.' 'What kind of tree? And what is it called?' (Q10)
- 25 S: 'This is a baobab. It is called "Number 30".'
- 26 T: 'Where did it stand?' (Q11)
- 27 SS: 'A long Baobab Alley in the western part of Madagascar.'
- 28 T: 'How many years did the tree stand?' (Q12)
- 29 SS: '200 years.'
- 30 T: 'Good.'

Participant C managed to make simple and clear questions, which should be highly evaluated. However, most of her questions are factual questions except for question 9. It is a good idea to start with factual questions in order to enhance students' understanding of the text. Having said that, more referential questions should be added to deepen students' understanding of the text. For example, questions such as 'Have you seen a huge broken tree?', 'Have you seen such large trees in Japan?', 'Do you know any trees which have numbers as their names?' might be effective to elicit active, deeper responses from students. Such meaningful classroom discourse would enhance students' abilities to express their ideas beyond reciting answers that can be found in the textbook. Participant C already has the ability to prepare and pose good factual questions. Her next task would be to make meaningful referential questions.

(3) Discourse flow

Finally, we will examine discourse flow. The ability to control discourse would be the most challenging task for pre-service teachers because it requires highly trained skills, which can be developed through actual teaching experiences.

The following textbook excerpt is from Lesson 6 in *Unicorn English Communication 1*, the same textbook used in Extract 3. The lesson was presented by participant B in Class 5 in Module IV (See Table 2). The story is about El Sistema, a national music education system, which brought the joy of playing music to people in Venezuela. The excerpt is from the first paragraph of Lesson 6.

Textbook

One February evening in 1975, about ten youths gathered at a garage in Caracas, Venezuela. They brought in musical instruments and played them. It was the beginning of the first orchestra of the Venezuelans by the Venezuelans, for the Venezuelans.

Look at extract 4. Participant B made five questions from this short paragraph. Question 1 is given as a topic transitional marker, which signifies a shift in activities. With regard to the passage, the teacher asks four questions about the event which happened in 1975: about the time and the location of the event (Q2 and Q3), and the number of people who gathered at a garage (Q4). All these questions come from the first sentence in the passage. These are display questions as they require students to retrieve information from the text. The teacher attempts to draw students' attention to the event in Caracas, Venezuela. However, she fails to construct a natural mode of communication with students. For example, the referent of 'it' in 'When did it take place?' (Q2) is not clear. To make the question comprehensible, she should first provide information that something happened in Caracas, Venezuela. Thus, she should have started with a 'what' question before asking peripheral questions such as 'when' (Q 2), 'where' (Q3) and 'how many' (Q4). Statements such as 'All right, everyone. This is a story of music. Something happened in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1975. What happened? Can you tell me?' would be more helpful and useful. Providing core information first would help students to construct a cognitive space or foundation to understand the text in question. After a reply from question 2, the teacher says 'This story took

place 45 years ago.' This statement can also be made into a question such as 'People gathered in 1975, so how many years ago?' It would ask for the calculation of time, and have the students get involved in the comprehension task. In this way they can find that the event took place a long time before they were born. After checking the location, the teacher asks 'how many people gathered?' (Q4). Again, to answer this question, the students need to know that people gathered somewhere. Question 5 'what did they bring?' also presupposes that they brought something to the garage. She should have given a scaffolding statement such as 'They brought something. What do you think they brought?'. Then, it will be much easier to answer question 5 and to visualise the situation. Lastly, question 6 misses and fails to address an important point, namely the expressions in the last sentence resembles the famous Gettysburg address by Abraham Lincoln, 'of the people, by the people, for the people'.

Extract 4: Senior high school lesson / Lesson 6. El Sistema, The Miracle of Music

- 1 T: 'All right, I'd like to ask you some questions.' 'Are you ready?'
(Q1)
- 2 C: 'Yes.'
- 3 T: 'Good.'
- 4 T: 'When did it take place?' (Q2)
- 5 T: 'Please tell me the month, time and year.'
- 6 S: 'One February evening in 1975.'
- 7 T: 'That's right. This story took place 45 years ago.'
- 8 T: 'Where did it take place?' (Q3)
- 9 T: 'Please tell me the name of the country and city.'
- 10 S: 'It is Caracas, Venezuela.'
- 11 T: 'Good.'
- 12 T: 'How many people gathered in a garage in Caracas, Venezuela?' (Q4)
- 13 SS: 'Ten.'
- 14 T: 'That's right.'
- 15 T: 'What did they bring?' (Q5)
- 16 SS: 'Musical instruments.'
- 17 T: 'Good. They brought in musical instruments.'
- 18 T: 'Who did they do their first orchestra for?' (Q6)

- 19 T: 'This question may be a little difficult. Please discuss it in pairs.'
(Pair work)
- 20 T: 'Anyone?'
- 21 SS: 'They did for themselves.'
- 22 T: 'Thank you. That's a good answer, but it's not.' 'Anyone else?'
- 23 SS: 'They did it for Venezuelans.'
- 24 T: 'That's right. They did it for Venezuelans. Thank you.'

What is missing in Extract 4 is discourse flow. The purpose for asking questions is not 'comprehension check' but 'comprehension support'. To assist students, teachers need to provide numerous supporting questions and comments.

Discussion and conclusion

Classroom interactional competence

As we have seen, all the participants faced a variety of problems in writing lesson plans. Several reasons can be thought of. Firstly, students observe classes from the learners' point of view. To teach a class, they have to change their perspectives and plan a class from the teachers' point of view. The shift of perspectives is not easy to make. Secondly, most students do not have a sufficient command of English to conduct classes in English. Communicative English teachers need to respond to dynamic interactional changes emerging in the classroom. Therefore, they need advanced English abilities. Thirdly, most students have not studied English communicatively at secondary schools. Thus, they do not have a role model they can refer to when they write lesson plans. These are some of the more fundamental problems all the pre-service teachers grapple with.

With these problems in mind, let us discuss the three issues we have examined separately. The first issue is contextualization. Whether we are aware or not, contextual information supports our comprehension of almost everything and anything. For example, when we talk with someone, we are not blindly listening to the words coming from that person. We are consciously or subconsciously using our knowledge to fill in the gaps and read between the lines. In this process, contextual information plays a significant role because contexts activate our schematic knowledge and make it easy to identify what information we should retrieve from our memory. Extracts 1 and 2 show that the participants could not start their

lessons naturally. They did not pay enough attention to the contexts given in the textbook. Therefore, some of their questions were not related to the topic. Decontextualized discourse can easily cause confusion. Especially in classes conducted in English, it is crucial that students understand what is going on in the classroom. Once they get lost, they may fail to make much sense of the interaction that is taking place in the classroom. To avoid this problem, teachers should carefully examine the textbook and present contextual information as clearly as possible. They can construct a cognitive base or activate their students' background schemata so that they can understand classroom discourse and the passages written in the textbook. If pre-service teachers understand this, they will be able to establish contextual information more efficiently and keep classroom discourse within the confines set by the context. This may also ease the tension which often emerges during verbal exchanges and eventually create an ideal environment for learning.

The second issue is question formation. Pre-service teachers struggle to make meaningful questions. As we saw above, there is a clear reason for this. English classes in Japan had been text-based for a long time. Only recently has it been shifting to communicative teaching. In text-based classes, the main activities are building vocabulary, understanding grammar and translating English into Japanese. Priority is given to building an accurate understanding of the English language. This is why students engage in activities that involve the meticulous analysis of grammar and vocabulary. Under these circumstances, teachers do not have to make meaningful questions and discuss the content of a passage with students. As a result, students miss an important opportunity to learn English through interaction in the classroom. Pre-service teachers struggle to form meaningful questions because they are not familiar with the ways to scaffold student learning through interaction. To overcome this problem, teacher trainers should first show the kind of questions that ensure meaningful interaction and then teach how to make them. In communicative classes, teachers' role as guided communicators would become important because for the most part teachers take the initiative to speak English in the classroom (Walsh, 2011). They can build interactions that facilitate language acquisition with students (Ellis, 2000).

How could teachers make meaningful questions? The key point would be to mix two kinds of questions: display and referential questions. Display questions ask students to 'display' what they know. Teachers already know

the answers. They want to make sure if students understand what is being asked. Interaction ends when the answer is given from students. That is why display questions are called closed-ended questions. In contrast, referential questions ask students to provide new information to teachers. They are open-ended questions because interaction continues until conversation participants reach a satisfactory consensus or closure. As extract 3 shows, pre-service teachers tend to make more use of display questions than referential questions. One reason is that they are accustomed to 'comprehension check' questions printed in a textbook, which consist mostly of display questions. Another reason is that display questions are easier to make than referential questions. Display questions will suffice if the purpose of posing questions is only to check students' surface understanding of a reading passage. If teachers want to scaffold students, however, they need to enrich classroom, oral interaction with referential questions. It is not easy to make referential questions because they tend to be difficult and go beyond what students are capable of doing. Pre-service teachers need training to acquire the ability to make efficient referential questions. Once they learn how to make them, they could with their students help construct an interactive exchange of ideas and opinions that is rich in meaning and content.

The third problem is discourse flow. It refers to a dynamic interactional development by teachers and students. For interactive classes, it would be essential for teachers to acquire the ability to manage classroom discourse. Acquiring such an ability, however, would be the most challenging task for teachers. As extract 4 shows, pre-service teachers often fail to relate questions and comments meaningfully, which may cause a breakdown in discourse. It is an arduous task indeed to construct a cohesive and coherent discourse flow throughout a class. To overcome this problem, teachers should (1) fully understand what to teach and how to teach it, (2) be well prepared for the questions which students might ask, (3) understand what students know, (4) consciously check if the interaction taking place in class is cohesive and coherent and (5) evaluate what students need. These points are necessary, but certainly not sufficient to maintain natural discourse flow. Asking teachers to internalize many skills might seem demanding, but they are essential for creating a classroom that is both dynamic and interactive.

Online lesson-plan studies

As indicated above, Modules III and IV in 2020 were taught exclusively online because of the pandemic. As a result, the students could not conduct practice lessons in the classroom. Both modules consist of three important pillars: writing lesson plans, conducting practice lessons, and engaging in reflective practice (See figures 1 and 2 above for the differences between the regular and the 2020 courses). Class 2020 missed the most important pillar of the three, i.e., practice lessons. After completing the two modules, however, the students conveyed satisfaction in what they gained. I will review why online studies brought this result.

The lesson-plan studies were conducted by using the chat function of Google Classroom. Their active participation was evident in the number of their chat comments, which amounted to 163.8 posts on average in a 90-min class. This number is remarkable given a class with fifteen students. In the regular classroom lessons, students do not express their opinions so much in the reflection session. This is partly because only fifteen minutes are allocated for the session after practice lessons. In contrast, class 2020 students had ninety minutes for reflective sessions, so they had more time to participate in discussions. The active participation did not result from online anonymity because the commentators' names appeared in the chat boxes on the computer screen. It might be because young people are accustomed to online communication or online communication is less stressful than face-to-face communication. Whatever the reason may be, the sheer number of chat comments imply that the students certainly recognised the importance of lesson-plan studies.

As for the quality of lesson plans, some improvements have been noticed during the two modules. At the beginning of Module III, most students did not know how to make lesson plans. As the online sessions proceeded, they learnt what points they should pay attention to when writing lesson plans. As a result, near the end of Module IV, the quality of classroom discourse in their lesson plans notably improved. The students attempted to include contextual information and to enrich classroom discourse with questions. As for discourse flow, however, they seemed to need more time, although this problem was evident in the regular classroom sessions too. These results show that even online sessions could contribute to the development of CIC and RP skills if they are carefully planned and conducted.

Conclusion

This research investigated the training of pre-service English teachers at university, focusing on classroom discourse. It has revealed some important issues on classroom discourse. They provide us with an important question: what is the ultimate goal for teacher-training? I would argue that it is to help teachers to acquire CIC and RP skills because they are essential to create acquisition rich communicative classes. Unfortunately, English classes in Japan are not communicative yet. I hope that the findings this study helped unveil contribute to the improvement of teacher training programmes, especially for the development of CIC.

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