

# Perceptions on the Implementation of L1 Use in the Classroom

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Suggested Citation: Koga, A. (2024). Perceptions on the Implementation of L1 Use in the Classroom. *Nagoya JALT Journal*, X(1), xxx-xxx.

## Abstract

The Japanese education system has notoriously pushed for an English-only language policy for foreign teachers within EFL classrooms. This approach has, unfortunately, led to undue stress and perplexity not only for students but for educators as well. To empower students to reach their utmost linguistic potential, it is essential to grant them access to their complete language repertoire.

Using a mixed methods survey with both closed and open questions, the research presented in this paper examines the perspectives of students and teachers at university level on the implementation of Japanese into the English learning process. Teacher's frequency and context of Japanese use will be analyzed as a teaching tool. Invaluable student feedback and insights will be examined, shedding light on how integrating L1 in the classroom can substantially enhance the educational experience for lower-level students, fostering comprehension, confidence, and interpersonal connections.

**Keywords:** L1, Japanese use, L1 integration, L1 implementation, translanguaging, student perspectives

## **Perceptions on the Implementation of L1 Use in the Classroom**

The objective of this research is to explore student perspectives regarding the foreign English teacher's use of Japanese, looking at both positive and negative viewpoints. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the frequency, reasons, and contexts in which EFL teachers incorporate Japanese within the classroom setting. The researcher hopes that this study will help to alleviate feelings of guilt associated with language use among both teachers and students, reinforce the notion that incorporating Japanese can serve as a valuable tool, and foster a positive environment by diminishing communication barriers between students and native English teachers. Drawing on the researcher's 15 years of teaching experience in Japan, she has observed considerable success in employing Japanese language to enhance comprehension, facilitate understanding, and cultivate stronger relationships with students. While gathering the perspectives of both students and teachers at Sojo University and through the collection and analysis of the data in this study, the overarching goal is to contribute to the research advancement on learning outcomes for students by presenting successful pedagogical methods for implementation of L1 in the classroom, or translanguaging.

## **Theoretical Background**

In recent years, the concept of translanguaging has gained increasing prominence within the educational landscape of Japan. "The term has also entered the discourse of teacher education programs and professional development not only in North America but also globally" (Cummins, 2019). Initially coined by Cen Williams in the 1980s, the term was used after observing his Welsh students using a blend of Welsh and English to communicate in the classroom. Another definition was put forth by Ofelia Garcia in the early 2000s, characterizing translanguaging as "the deployment of a student's full linguistic repertoire" (Garcia, 2014). It is important to distinguish translanguaging from code-switching, which denotes the practice of bilingual individuals moving, or switching, between languages within a single sentence or thought. Unlike code-switching, translanguaging "emphasizes an

individual's comprehensive linguistic repertoire encompassing all known language elements” (Liu, 2023). Students leverage this repertoire to facilitate communication, using their first language (L1) to compensate for deficiencies in their second language (L2) proficiency. Understanding this difference can help both students and teachers realize the benefits of using translanguaging in the classroom because translanguaging can be seen as a tool rather than an involuntary act. Previous research on the topic of the importance of translanguaging states that:

On the one hand, educators must continue to allocate separate spaces for the named languages although softening the boundaries between them. On the other hand, they must provide an instructional space where translanguaging is nurtured and used critically and creatively without speakers having to select and suppress different linguistic features of their own repertoire. (García & Lin, 2017: 127)

Gwyn Lewis has stated that utilizing translanguaging will:

Give multilingual students an advantage within educational systems because it: (1) promotes a more thorough understanding of content; (2) helps the development of the weaker language for bilingual or multilingual speakers; and it (3) fosters home-to-school links within language use; and (4) integrates fluent speakers with early learners, thus expediting the language learning process. (Lewis, 2021)

In Japan, researchers such as Darlene Yamauchi have discovered in their studies that Japanese students prefer to use L1 in the classroom. “Preliminary results indicate that students found the use of L1 during class beneficial in every class evaluated and based on these results no students perceived the use of L1 detrimental in this study” (Yamauchi, 2018). This research is an important step into dismantling the traditional monolingual English classroom ideals as well as a step in the right direction for supporting students’ needs. Yamauchi’s research also showed that “Overall student comments portrayed a positive opinion of L1 usage with comments about ease of activity completion” (Yamauchi, 2018). The implementation of

translanguaging in the Japanese English classroom holds significant promise and stands to yield numerous benefits for both language learners and teachers.

### **Research Issues and Questions**

*Research Question 1:* In what frequency and contexts and for what reasons do teachers use Japanese in the English language learning classroom?

*Research Question 2:* What are the perceived merits and demerits of Japanese use in the English language learning classroom by both teachers and students?

The research aims to gather insights through surveys to evaluate the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the utilization of Japanese (L1) within an English classroom. The researcher hopes that the data collected from the survey will reinforce the notion that incorporating Japanese can serve as a valuable tool and foster a positive learning environment by diminishing communication barriers between students and native English teachers. Additionally, teachers can supplement instructions and information with the students' L1 to further comprehension as well as to foster rapport, trust, and better relationships with students. Allowing foreign English teachers in Japan to “promot[e] pupils’ translanguaging would enhance knowledge acquisition as it enables students to develop metacognitive aspects, interact in fluent and confident ways, manage tasks, mediate understandings and co-construct meaning” (Vallejo, 2018).

## **Method**

The research methodology used in this study is centered on a mixed methods survey approach. The survey included Likert scale closed questions for quantitative data collection and open-ended questions for qualitative data collection. Analysis and interpretation of open-ended questions within the student survey have been conducted and manually translated by the researcher from the original Japanese. At this stage of the research, the open-ended questions have undergone a broad analysis rather than a meticulous examination on a phrase-by-phrase basis. The focus has been on assessing responses in a general sense, comparing the frequency of negative and positive sentiments expressed. The discussion will center on summarizing the collective opinions of the students based on an overall assessment of their responses and exploring ways teachers have used L1 in the classroom. In the case of open-ended questions within the teacher survey, the collected responses will serve as a basis for advancing discussions during subsequent follow-up interviews. However, it's important to note that at this point of the research, these interviews have not yet been conducted. For further analysis, a flexible and open approach has been adopted for organizing the collected data. Subsequently, during the forthcoming phase of the research, responses obtained from the teacher interviews will be subjected to a similar methodological treatment and analysis.

### **Participants and the Research Context**

English Communication 1, 2, 3, and 4 courses are taught to first- and second- year students belonging to various departments including Computer and Information Sciences, Art and Design, Biology and Life Sciences, Nanoscience, Architecture, Mechanical Engineering, and the Pharmacy and Pilot programs at Sojo University in Kumamoto. Most students have low English proficiency, and taking these courses is a prerequisite for graduation. This survey was given to 359 first- and second-year students at Sojo University in November and December of 2023. Their English proficiency levels, departments, histories, and teachers vary.

The survey was completely anonymous.

The 7 teachers surveyed have various teaching experiences and Japanese proficiency: some having Japanese N2 proficiency while some only beginner level Japanese.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

Students in both first- and second- year English Communication courses were given an anonymous survey with questions using both the Likert scale as well as open-ended questions using Microsoft Forms. The Likert scale quantitative data was counted and analyzed using percentages provided by Microsoft Forms. The qualitative data provided with the open questions has been translated and compared and has undergone a broad analysis using descriptive coding and comparing the frequency of negative and positive sentiments expressed. The teachers involved were also given a mixed methods survey, though only the quantitative data was analyzed using tables and percentages provided by Microsoft Forms. The open answer questions will later be analyzed before conducting future one-on-one interviews.

There are several research concerns, including the Japanese proficiency of the teachers involved with the survey. Discrepancies in student responses may arise based on their teacher's proficiency in Japanese, while the teacher's responses may also vary depending on their self-perceived competence. Currently, the data cannot be analysed based on the teacher's Japanese proficiency, necessitating a more in depth look in future. Additionally, a notable research gap exists in the absence of survey elements exploring students' preconceived notions regarding the use of their first language (L1) in the classroom and their understanding of translanguaging. Consequently, interpretations of student responses to the open questions must be accepted at their stated face value.

### **Results**

Overall, the data shows that both students and teachers are using Japanese in the classroom to some extent. Teachers express a stronger acknowledgment of the benefits of

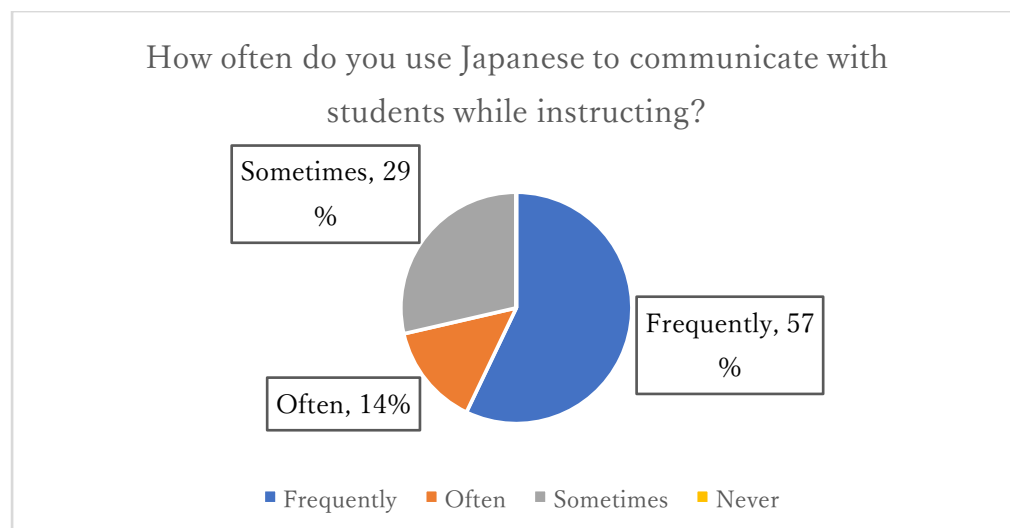
using L1 to supplement instruction while students view their own use of L1 in the classroom slightly more negatively. However, notably, the students' responses about their own teacher using Japanese were overwhelmingly positive. This paper will not examine in detail each response to every question in both surveys but will highlight a few more important and striking results followed-up with practical ways for L1, or translanguaging, to be used within the English classroom.

### Teacher Perspectives

7 instructors at Sojo University participated in this survey. Participants were invited to anonymously respond to the survey queries, with an option provided for those amenable to participating in subsequent interviews to disclose their identities. The following data shows the frequency for Sojo EFL teachers' Japanese usage as well as how often they allow their students to use it. The data also shows their confidence in their own Japanese proficiency.

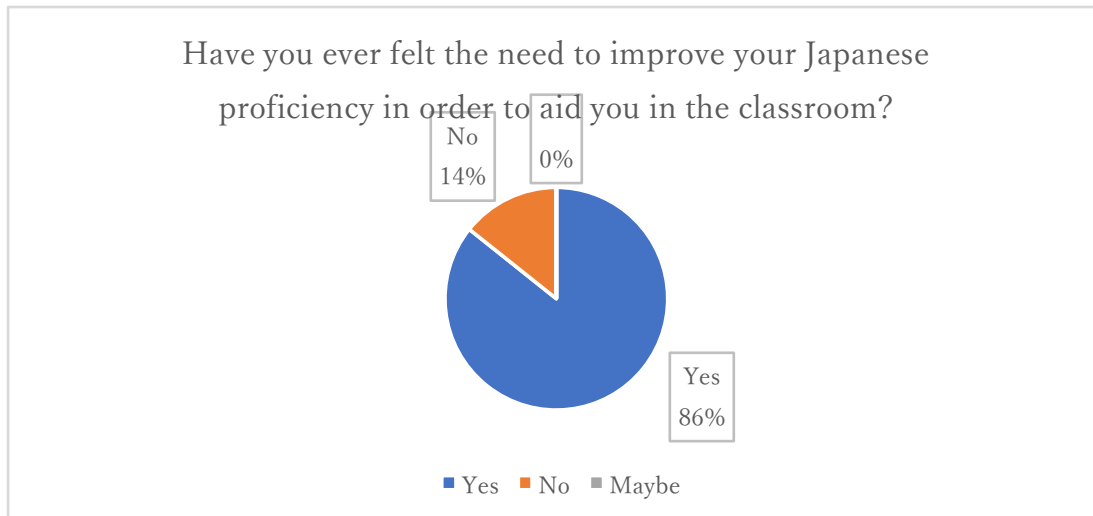
**Figure 1**

***How often do you use Japanese to communicate with students while instructing?***



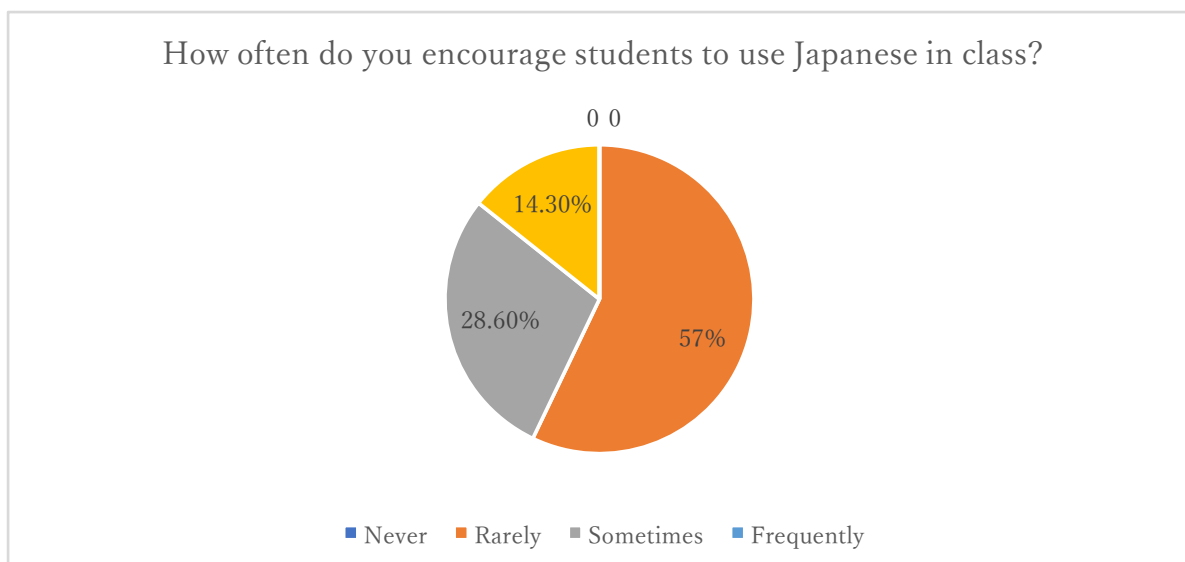
**Figure 2**

*Have you ever felt the need to improve your Japanese proficiency in order to aid you in the classroom?*



**Figure 3**

*How often do you encourage students to use Japanese in class?*



The results above indicate a noteworthy departure from the conventional assumption that English Communication courses operate exclusively in English. Instead, it can be concluded that because the teachers are so frequently using Japanese to communicate with students (Figure 1), teachers understand that the use of L1 in the classroom is useful and



important. The survey responses from EFLteachers at Sojo University show that L1 is used predominantly for instructional purposes, followed by one-on-one interactions with students, email correspondence, and finally for written elements in class presentations and lectures. Moreover, spoken Japanese emerges as more prevalent than its written counterpart. Interestingly, while teachers readily utilize Japanese themselves, they appear less inclined to actively encourage its use by students (Figure 3). However, instances where encouragement is extended typically manifest in activities like reflections and email communication with teachers.

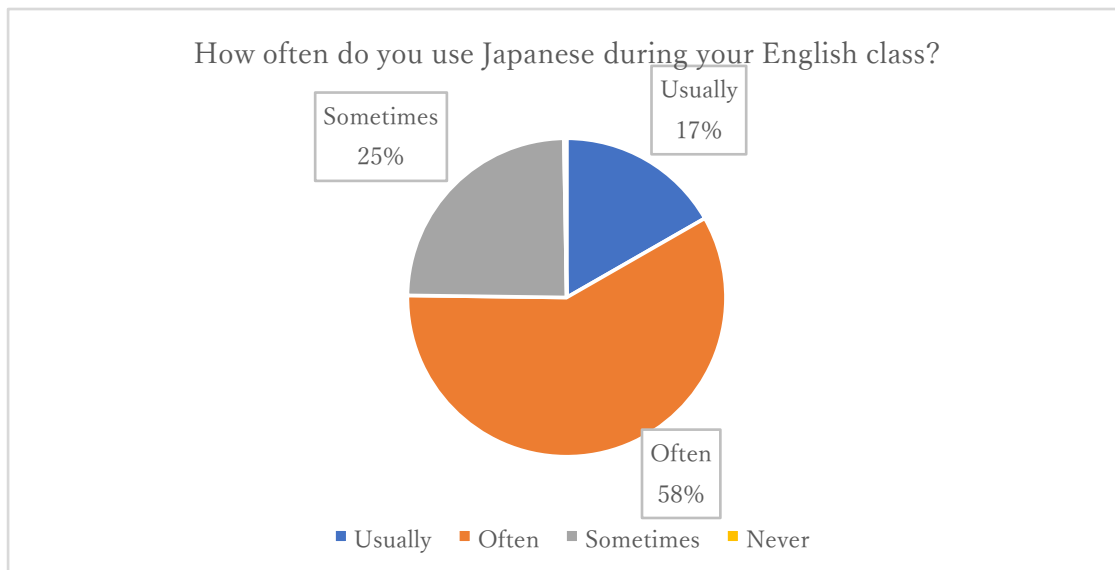
Furthermore, a significant majority of teachers expressed a desire to enhance their proficiency in Japanese (Figure 2), a testament to the perceived usefulness of L1 for instruction. These findings collectively support the notion that L1 integration holds value within the classroom, warranting further exploration and consideration in pedagogical approaches.

### **Student Perspectives**

This survey was given to 359 first- and second-year students at Sojo University. Their English proficiency levels, departments, histories, and teachers vary. The survey was completely anonymous. The following data shows students' frequency of L1 use, how often they perceive their teachers to use Japanese, their preferred type of English class, and whether they perceive using L1 as useful when learning English.

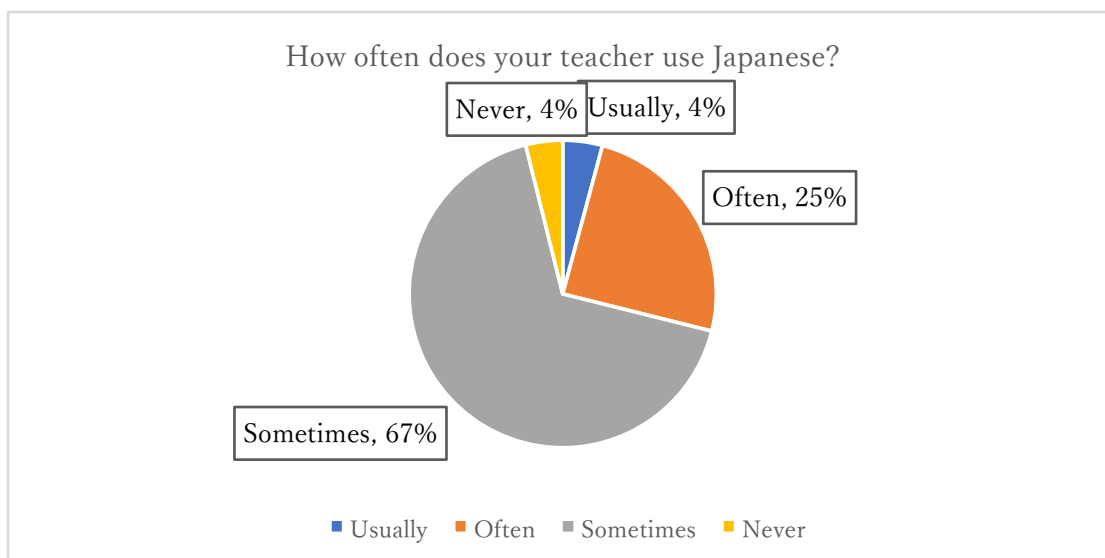
**Figure 4**

*How often do you use Japanese during your English class?*



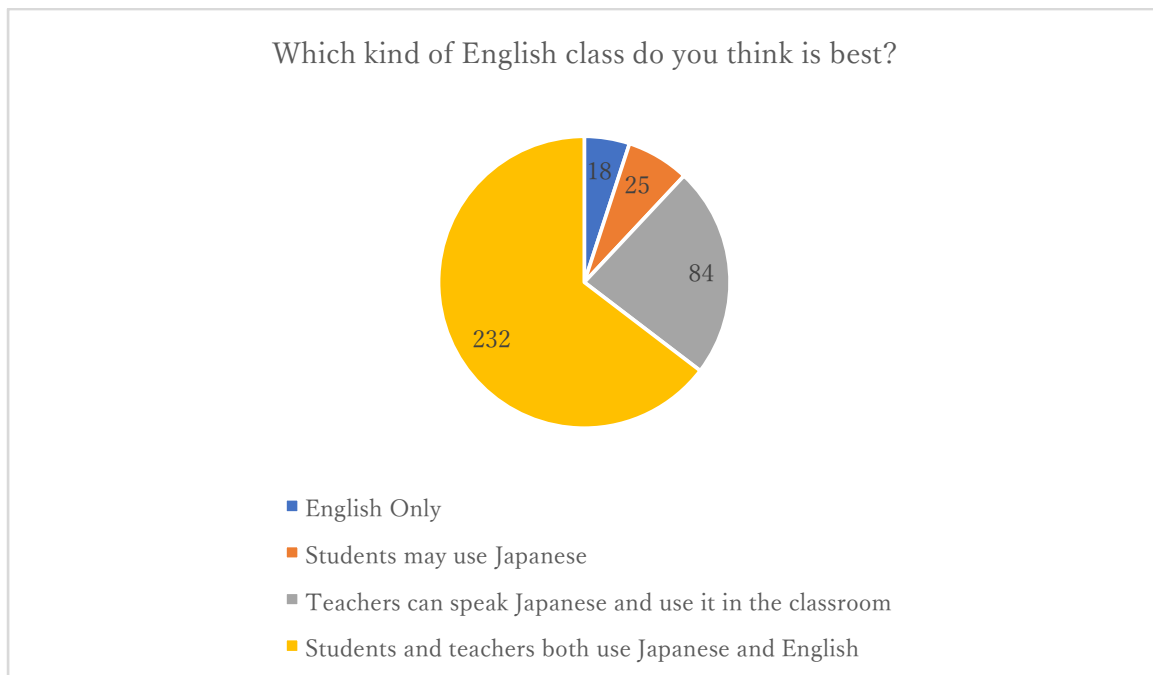
**Figure 5**

*How often does your teacher use Japanese during your English class?*



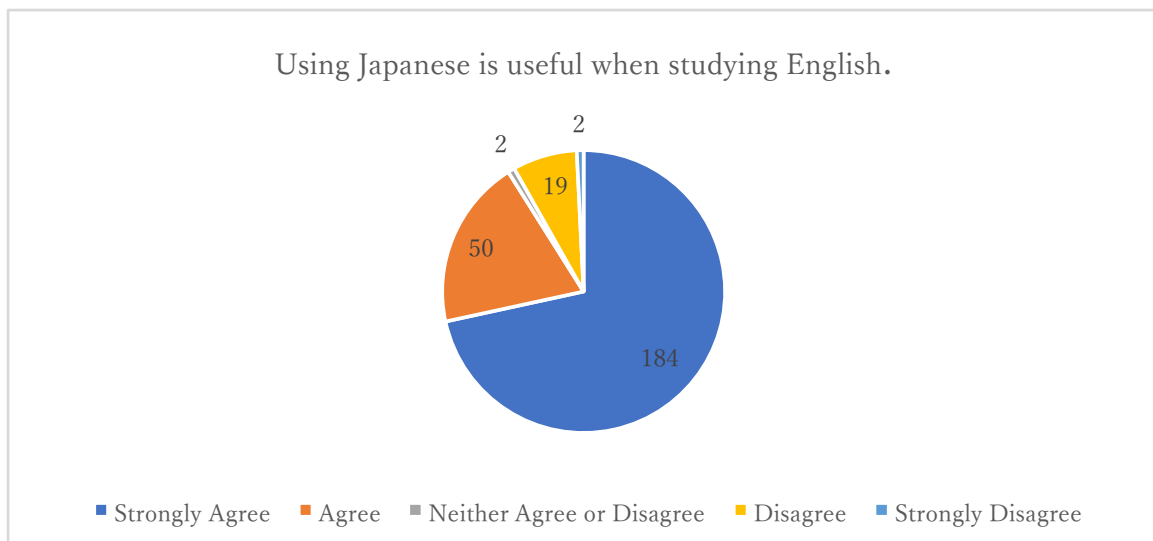
**Figure 6**

***Which kind of English class do you think is best?***



**Figure 7**

***Using Japanese is useful when studying English.***



Based on the analysis of the graphs presented above, it is evident that both students and teachers are utilizing L1 in the classroom. However, it is interesting to note that while teachers all responded that they use L1 to some extent, this is not necessarily reflected in the students' responses (Figure 5). Some students answered that their teacher "never" uses

Japanese while all teachers reported using L1 to some degree. This suggests a potential discrepancy in perception between educators and learners. This is perhaps due to a flaw in the research surveys or perhaps there are nuances to the use of L1 by the teacher that cannot be researched using a survey alone.

Additionally, students overwhelmingly expressed a preference for a classroom environment where both teachers and students use Japanese (Figure 6). This underscores students' appreciation for instruction and communication in L1. Furthermore, most students recognize the utility of L1 to facilitate English language learning, although they tend to view their own use of L1 negatively, possibly due to perceived inadequacies and language deficiencies. The following are a sample of some of the student responses that have been translated manually by the researcher. It is also interesting to note that most students chose to respond to the survey with Japanese, with only the last comment here being given in English.

*"I think it is okay to use some Japanese as long as it is when I don't understand or to check with my friends what the teacher is saying."*

*"I should use English as much as possible, but I suppose (using Japanese) is better than a stilted conversation."*

*"I think this is a good idea because I use it to communicate necessary information."*

*"I want to use it when communicating with other students."*

*"I agree with this because sometimes it is difficult to convey a message without using Japanese when the English translation is not clear."*

*"I disagree using Japanese in the English classroom. However, I don't have the courage to speak English in communication"*

Although this sample only represents a small fraction of the 359 student responses, it's evident that many students find it advantageous to use L1 due to necessity and lack of proficiency in English.

Students generally appreciate the benefits of their teachers' L1 utilization, considering

it "very helpful" and "useful." Concerns regarding potential overreliance on L1 were raised by some students, but overall, responses were predominantly positive. Notably, students value L1 supplementation for conveying new, challenging, or crucial information. Negative comments were in the minority and included concerns about how using Japanese too much may affect their language acquisition. Some examples of student responses are as follows:

*"To be honest it's very helpful"*

*"I think explaining in Japanese will help students understand the content, give a sense of security to students who find English difficult, and increase familiarity with the teacher, thereby lowering the hurdle for communicating with the teacher."*

*"It is good for ours to use Japanese. Because, if we can't understand the word or sentences, we can understand it."*

*"I think this is a good thing because it makes explanations easier to understand."*

*"Most of the explanations are in simple English, so I can generally understand them in English, but the explanations in Japanese are easy to understand."*

*"I would like them to use a little Japanese because sometimes I don't understand what the teacher is saying and I don't know what I am supposed to do."*

*"It is helpful because they can use it when students do not understand the meaning."*

From this limited set of responses, it is apparent that many students perceive it positively when their teacher utilizes L1, particularly for supplementing explanations. Negative comments were sparse, with only a few expressing sentiments such as "sometimes it's okay" and "Japanese shouldn't be used too much."

At this point in the research, while a full analysis of all student responses to both open-ended questions has not yet been completed, a preliminary examination suggests a prevailing positive perception of both the students' and the teachers' use of L1 in the classroom.

Moving forward, a more comprehensive analysis of student responses is warranted

to delve deeper into their perspectives on teachers' L1 usage. Future research endeavors will aim to explore the nuances of L1 incorporation in the classroom setting, shedding light on the specific ways in which teachers leverage L1 to enhance student learning experiences.

### **Discussion**

Following the analysis of this preliminary research, it is evident that both students and teachers at Sojo University who participated in this survey are using Japanese within the classroom environment for instructional purposes, communication, and relationship-building by fostering communication between teachers and students. Drawing upon the initial findings of the survey, it is possible to discuss a variety of approaches to incorporate the use of L1 within classroom settings. Since teachers surveyed have shared that they use Japanese to some degree or another in the classroom, it can be assumed that the incorporation of L1 in the classroom can be incredibly useful when teachers seek to facilitate students' understanding of instructions, familiarize them with class rules and expectations, communicate important dates and information, help them use words and phrases appropriately, and provide rationale for various learning activities. In future follow-up interviews, the details of how teachers are using Japanese can provide more insight into how it can be incorporated as a useful teaching tool. Providing explanation in L1 enables students to attain a deeper understanding of these concepts and in turn might create greater engagement. Teachers can supplement English instructions with follow-up verbal L1, ask students for questions and allow them to answer in Japanese, and can communicate with students before and after class. Through written L1, teachers can effectively communicate via email, provide clearer explanations of class syllabi, incorporate translations into presentations and lectures, and offer supplementary instructions in L1 on worksheets.

Additionally, teachers can promote the use of L1 among students by providing opportunities for asking questions, reporting absences, and expressing concerns to the teacher in L1. Responses from students in the open-ended survey questions indicate that when given

the chance to communicate in L1, it makes it easier to interact with the teacher and helps to overcome communication barriers. To foster student engagement with L1 during classroom activities, teachers can advocate for its use in tasks like pre-writing exercises. This allows students to access their entire breadth of knowledge and effectively plan and prepare their thoughts or presentations in their native language, thus eliminating potential barriers stemming from language proficiency limitations. Allowing students to perform pre-writing tasks in L1 can also limit the time hurdles or in fact, reduce time wasted by eliminating the language barriers with which students struggle. “The use of L1 as a mediational means becomes imperative to achieve the object of the task” (Columbo, L. 2012). The students can then translate and submit their writings or presentations in English for assessments. Furthermore, permitting reflections on activities and assessments to be written in L1 can facilitate greater openness and depth in students' expression of thoughts and opinions. Writing reflections in their native language tends to encourage more thoughtful responses, thereby enabling teachers to make more accurate assessments and adjustments based on students' feedback. Further research is needed to look into the effect a teacher's Japanese proficiency could have on their student's L1 usage. In the classroom setting, teachers can facilitate communication by permitting students to use L1 when preparing for conversations, prior to responding to discussion questions, and when providing peer feedback. “A student's home language can serve as a scaffold in the process of acquiring additional languages and a scaffold for learning academic content in the new language” (Freeman, 2017). Allowing students the opportunity and space to utilize L1 fosters their readiness and confidence to engage in activities, ultimately encouraging them to use English as needed, equipped with the necessary tools and preparation.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings thus far from this research underscore the importance students place on teachers who augment instructions and integrate the use of L1 in the

classroom. Furthermore, the data supports the notion that there is no need for teachers to feel guilty about using L1 as an overwhelming number of students had positive feedback relating to their teacher using Japanese. Instead, teachers can demonstrate to students the beneficial ways of incorporating L1 themselves showcasing to students that feeling guilty for L1 use is unnecessary. When teachers are at liberty to utilize L1 for instruction, communication and relationship-building purposes, students tend to experience enhanced learning outcomes. This research is currently in its preliminary stages, with the qualitative data from open-ended responses yet to be extensively analyzed, relationships between quantitative and qualitative data analysed as well as other factors that could contribute to a better understanding of the research.

Moving forward, a more thorough examination of this data may uncover new discrepancies or provide additional insights. Moreover, conducting further interviews with teachers and designing a new set of questions for a student survey could yield valuable information illuminating the benefits of translanguaging or the use of L1 in the classroom. These future steps hold the potential to enhance our understanding of the topic of translanguaging in the classroom and contribute to the advancement of pedagogical practices in Japan.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of the NUFS Teacher Symposium for affording me the opportunity to present my research. Additionally, I extend my appreciation to those who contributed to the peer-review process of this manuscript. Special thanks are also due to the survey participants, with particular recognition to Gareth Humphreys, Jon Rowberry, and Branden Kirchmeyer for their invaluable support and assistance in developing this research project.



## **BIO DATA**

Alison KOGA holds a BA in East Asian Languages and Cultures and an MA in Education for Multilingual Learners. Her interests lie in the study of translanguaging in the classroom and its benefits for lower-level students. She is currently a Senior Assistant Professor at Sojo University in Kumamoto.

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## **Appendix A Teacher Survey**

The following survey was taken by 7 first- and second-year English communication lecturers at Sojo University.

1. How often do you use Japanese to communicate with students while instructing?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

2. In what cases do you use Japanese?

- To give instructions
- Written cues (on Power Points / worksheets)
- During 1 on 1 meetings with students
- In emails
- Never use it
- Other

3. Do you use spoken or written Japanese in the classroom

- Spoken mostly
- Written mostly
- Both equally
- No Japanese

4. How often do you encourage students to use Japanese in class?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

5. In what cases would you encourage students to use Japanese?

- Pre-writing
  - Group conversations
  - Worksheets / Reflections
  - When speaking to you
  - Emails
  - Other
6. Do you agree that English only environments are best for learning English?
- Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
7. Please explain your reasoning for your answer to number 6.
8. Have you ever felt the need to improve your Japanese proficiency to aid you in the classroom?
- Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
9. Have you heard about the benefits of translanguaging in the classroom?
- Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
  - What's translanguaging?
10. Data published from the results of this survey will remain anonymous. If you would be comfortable with a follow-up interview, please enter your name below. Thank you for your contributions!

### **Appendix B Student Survey**

The following survey was given to 359 first- and second-year English communication

students at Sojo University.

1. How often do you use Japanese during your English class? 英語の授業中に日本語を使うことはどれくらいありますか？

- Never 使わない
- Sometimes たまに使う
- Often よく使う
- Usually いつも使う

2. How often does your teacher use Japanese in your English class? あなたの英語の授業で、先生はどれくらいの頻度で日本語を使っていますか？

- Never 使わない
- Sometimes たまに使う
- Often よく使う
- Usually いつも使う

3. How do you feel about using Japanese in your English class? 英語の授業で自分が日本語を使うことについてどう思いますか？

- Not good at all 全然よくない
- Not very good あまりよくない
- No Opinion 特になし
- It's good いいこと
- It's useful 役に立つ

4. How do you feel about your teacher using Japanese in your English class? 英語の授業で先生が日本語を使うことについてどう思いますか？

- Not good at all 全然よくない
- Not very good あまりよくない
- No Opinion 特になし
- It's good いいこと

- It's useful 役に立つ
5. Which kind of English class do you think is best? どのような英語の授業が良いと思いますか?
- English Only /英語のみ
  - Students may use Japanese /生徒は日本語を使うことができる。
  - Teacher can speak Japanese and uses it in class /教師は日本語を喋れることができる、授業で使うこともある
  - Students and teachers use a blend of both English and Japanese / 生徒も教師も英語と日本語を使い分ける
6. When do you use Japanese in English class? / 英語の授業で日本語を使うのはどんなときですか?
- When I plan what to say or write / 何を話すか、何を書くかを計画するとき
  - To communicate with classmates / クラスメートとのコミュニケーション
  - To communicate with my teacher / 教師とのコミュニケーション
  - Other / その他
7. Using Japanese is useful when studying English. 日本語を使うことは、英語を勉強する際に役に立つ
- Strongly agree / 非常に賛成
  - Agree / 賛成
  - Neither agree nor disagree / どちらでもない

- Disagree / 反対

- Strongly disagree / 非常に反対

8. Please share your thoughts about your personal Japanese use in the English classroom.

英語の授業で自分が日本語を使うことについて、意見を教えてください。

9. Please share your thoughts about your teacher using Japanese in the English classroom.

英語の授業で教師が日本語を使うことについて、意見を教えてください。

10. We will use the information you provide in this survey to improve our research and

English education. The information you provide will be used for research purposes only, and will not be processed or disclosed in a way that identifies you. If you agree to the use of your survey data, please check the "consent" box. 今回、皆さんに回答いただいた情報は研究や英語教育の向上に役立てるために活用させていただきたいと思います。またご提供頂いた情報は研究目的のみに用いられるものであり、回答者を特定する形で処理・公表されることはありません。尚、アンケートデータの活用にご同意される方は「承諾」にチェックを入れてください。

- 承諾

- 拒否