Meeting-Style Classroom Approach: Enhancing English Learners' Meeting Competency

Yukie Kondo[1*], *Keiji Fujimura*[2]

[1*]Ritsumeikan University
[2]Aichi Institute of Technology

Emails: kondoyu@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp, kfujimura@aitech.ac.jp

Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of the Meeting-Style Classroom approach in enhancing English communication skills and meeting competency among Japanese university students. Some studies suggest that professionals from various linguistic backgrounds may face challenges with active participation in English meetings, despite potentially high scores on standardized English tests. The Meeting-Style Classroom aims to address this gap by simulating real-world meeting scenarios while allowing for instructor guidance. The study was conducted across three courses at Japanese universities. A post-course survey assessed students' perceptions of their skill development in areas such as spontaneous speech, opinion expression, and nonverbal communication. Results indicate that while students felt confident in structured speaking scenarios and providing reactions, challenges remained in spontaneous speech and opinion expression. The majority of participants reported improvements in both verbal and nonverbal communication skills. The research highlights the importance of developing "Meeting Competency," which encompasses Willingness to Communicate, discourse integration, nonverbal communication, and shared leadership. By providing students with practical experience in meeting management and discussion facilitation, the Meeting-Style Classroom approach shows promise in preparing learners for effective communication in professional English-speaking environments. This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on innovative pedagogical methods for enhancing English communication skills in higher education, particularly in contexts where English is not the primary language of instruction.

Keywords: Meeting-Style Classroom, meeting competency, communication skills, Willingness to Communicate, discourse integration, shared leadership

Introduction

Effective English communication skills are essential for success in globalized business and academic settings where English often serves as the lingua franca. In Japan, traditional language education has focused on language proficiency, with an emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and the four key skills. Despite several educational reforms, such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization introduced in 2014 (MEXT, 2014), traditional approaches remain insufficient in equipping students with practical communication skills required for active participation in real-world English discussions. Many students and professionals still continue to struggle with active participation in meetings.

In various EFL contexts, students recognize the importance of English communication and understand its value for their learning and future opportunities; however, despite their linguistic competence, many remain hesitant to actively participate in discussions. For example, a study

conducted in Indonesia found that although many students recognized the importance of communicating in English and understood the value of English for their learning and future opportunities, they were still very hesitant to speak during discussions (Rihardini et al., 2021). Japanese professionals often struggle with active participation in meetings due to a lack of experience in interactive and spontaneous communication despite their high English proficiency test scores (Sakimoto & Saito, 2019). This indicates that active discussion participation involves more than linguistic competence and emphasizes the need for improving "meeting competency" to effectively contribute to discussions and decision-making.

To address these challenges, pedagogical methods have been developed. The "Meeting-Style Classroom," drawing inspiration from the "Student Leader Method" (Wade, 2009), has been introduced in this study to better address the communication challenges students face. The "Student Leader Method" focuses on improving communication skills in EFL classes by giving students leadership roles in classroom discussions. Building on this concept, the Meeting-Style Classroom further develops the idea by integrating real-life meeting scenarios, offering greater flexibility in the course structure. In this approach, students take on roles such as chairperson, timekeeper, minute taker, as well as other essential roles needed for effective meeting management. By engaging in these scenarios, students not only improve their English language proficiency but also develop essential meeting skills, or "meeting competency," including leadership, time management, and decision-making, as well as skills such as making timely utterances, encouraging others to contribute, sharing opinions, deepening ideas through collaboration, and fostering teamwork—all of which are crucial for professional success.

While the Student Leader Method limits the instructor's involvement mainly to an advisory role, the Meeting-Style Classroom offers a more balanced model, allowing students to lead while receiving expert input from teachers. Despite its potential, there is still a need for empirical research to assess the effectiveness of this approach in enhancing both language and communication skills, particularly for learners who often face challenges with spontaneous speech and leadership in discussions.

This study aims to address the existing gap by examining the effectiveness of the Meeting-Style Classroom approach in improving students' English communication skills and Meeting competency. The study focuses on the following research questions:

How do students perceive the development of their communication and meeting competency (e.g., timely utterance of their ideas, leadership, time management, verbal feedback) after engaging in the Meeting-Style Classroom?

How did collaborations influence the development of communication and Meeting Competency after engaging in the Meeting-Style Classroom?

What challenges did students continue to face in conducting and participating in the meeting, and how can these be addressed?

How Meeting Competency is related for students' active participation in discussions, as revealed by this study?

Through this investigation, this study hopes to provide insights into how experiential learning approaches, the Meeting-Style Classroom, can better prepare students for professional communication in English.

Literature Review

English learners often face challenges in actively participating in meetings with English speakers, despite their language proficiency. A survey by Japan IBM revealed that, although Japanese IBM employees score higher on English proficiency tests compared to their Chinese counterparts, they feel less proficient in practical English communication skills (Sakimoto & Saito, 2019). The study used a survey to assess perceived abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for complex tasks, revealing that Japanese employees feel they have lower capabilities primarily due to less frequent use of English in their work environment. In particular, 48% of Japanese employees surveyed preferred pre-prepared questions or avoided discussions. This suggests that active participation in discussions requires more than just language proficiency; it involves a comprehensive set of skills that encompass not only verbal and nonverbal behaviors but also the ability to engage meaningfully in discussions. This set of skills can be conceptualized as "Meeting Competency," which will be discussed further in the following section.

To enhance learner engagement, responsibility, and practical communication skills, Wade (2009) advocated for a student-centered approach, the "Student Leader Method", using a business meeting setting where students take turns acting as chairpersons with minimal instructor intervention (see also Ward et al., 2008). The teachers' role is to offer constructive feedback post-session. The method emphasizes real-world application, encouraging students to lead discussions and manage classroom activities, thereby improving their English proficiency in a practical and interactive manner. However, the Student Leader Method may not be entirely appropriate for university classes as it limits the instructor's role to mainly giving advice. To address this, we propose the "Meeting-Style Classroom" approach where students lead the class in a meeting format, while teachers also provide necessary guidance or specialized lectures during the sessions. The Meeting-Style Classroom approach allows students to take charge and develop leadership skills, while also benefiting from the teacher's expertise. The Meeting-Style Classroom is adaptable to various university courses, offering a balanced approach that combines student autonomy with appropriate experts' guidance.

Meeting Competency

Meeting Competency requires not only having Communicative Competence (Bachman, 1990; Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980) but we propose the following four elements to use effectively. The first element is Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre et al., 1998). WTC is influenced by various factors, including learner's perceived communicative competence, anxiety, and motivation. Anxiety, especially in language learners, is often triggered by fear of making mistakes or being negatively evaluated, which can inhibit students from initiating speech (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Rihardini et al., 2021). The combination of perceived competence and low anxiety is a significant predictor of WTC (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004). In other words, the higher the perceived competence and the lower the anxiety, the higher the WTC. Learners with higher WTC are more likely to engage in L2 communication inside and outside the classroom (Yashima et al., 2014). Classroom environments that induce positive experiences for learners have a direct impact on higher perceived competence and lower anxiety (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Factors influencing positive classroom environments for learners include supportive teachers, students who share the sense of cohesiveness and attachment to group members (Peng & Woodrow 2010; Wen & Clément 2003). However, some studies revealed that WTC is a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon that fluctuates based on interpersonal and task-related factors in a specific situation (Kang, 2005; Toyoda & Yashima, 2021), individual characteristics, classroom environment, and linguistic factors (Cao, 2014). Hence, the study of

WTC provides an in-depth analysis of speaker's willingness, but if it does not translate into actual communication behavior in group conversations and discussions, success in meetings cannot be achieved.

The second element is discourse integration (DI), which encompasses the ability to integrate one's communication behavior naturally and appropriately into the flow of group conversation after having the WTC. The most prominent expression of communication behavior often occurs through verbal forms, namely utterances. There are two types of utterances in meetings: one is when a person is prompted by a chairperson or another third party, and the other is an utterance that occurs naturally in the flow of group conversation without being prompted by them. In particular, the latter is challenging for many L2 speakers, as demonstrated by the cases of Indonesian students and the Japanese company workers mentioned earlier. We argue that DI cannot be acquired simply by learning interruption phrases, as is done in conventional 'English for Meetings' textbooks, but involves developing a sense of timing, understanding the nuances of turn-taking in group conversations, and being able to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse without disrupting its flow. Such ability to adjust timing and participate naturally and appropriately in discussions extends beyond verbal utterances and is influenced by nonverbal communication behaviors as well, which will be discussed next.

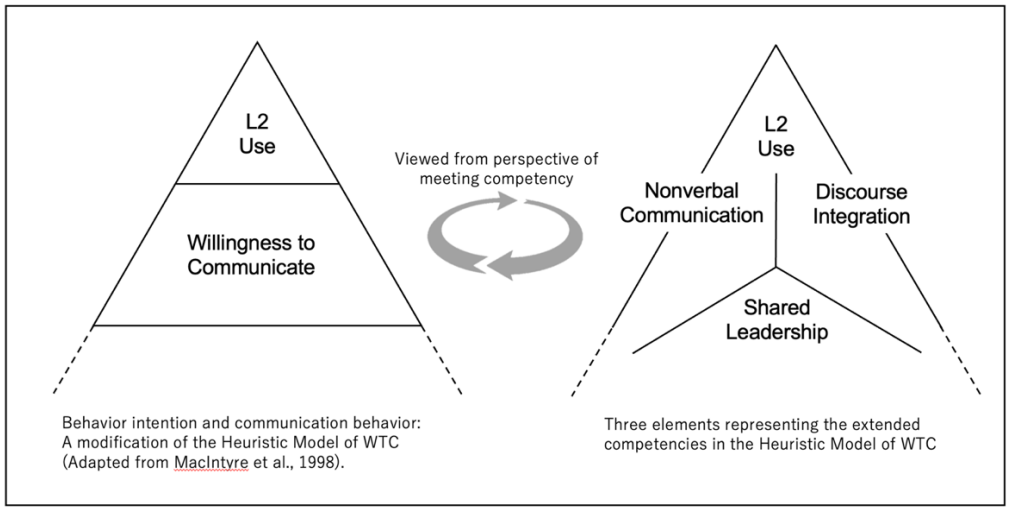
The third element is nonverbal communication. In meetings, participants use body language, such as raising a hand to signal a desire to speak or pointing to indicate someone's turn, to communicate. They may also use tone of voice or facial expressions to convey their intentions (Peleckis et al., 2015; Wiemann & Knapp, 1975). These nonverbal cues are important aspects of communication that convey meanings in human interactions (Knapp et al., 2014) and differ across cultures (Anderson, 1999; Matsumoto, 2006). Therefore, when L1 speakers use an L2 within a cultural context different from their own, they must learn the nonverbal communication styles specific to the cultural background of that L2. In addition to these well-known nonverbal cues, physical and spatial environments can also be considered nonverbal communication, affecting human interactions (Anderson, 1999; Knapp et al., 2014). In the context of meetings, factors such as how tables are arranged, atmosphere in which the meeting is conducted, or even the design and sound of the presentation slides used during the meeting possibly affect the performance of the participants.

The fourth element is shared leadership. Participants must demonstrate leadership to facilitate the smooth running of meetings within the limited time. This is not the leadership in the conventional sense, where one or a few leaders guide the group vertically, but rather what can be described as shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), where each person in a team or organization takes on responsibilities, facilitates collaboration, and helps with operations, problem-solving, and decision-making. Research has shown that this shared leadership encourages more collaboration during team tasks and influences the direction, motivation, and support among team members (Carson et al., 2007; Clark, 2008; Wang et al., 2014). When conducting a meeting led by L2 learners, additional support beyond what is typically needed in L1 meetings plays a particularly important role for the success of the meeting. This includes creating an atmosphere where participants feel comfortable speaking, offering help when someone struggles to convey, and patiently waiting for speakers who take more time to express themselves, compared to when speaking in their L1. These behaviors may contribute to the factors influencing WTC, as previously outlined by Peng and Woodrow (2010).

Meeting Competency can be explained through an extension of the Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing Willingness to Communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547), which visualizes the relationship between WTC and L2 Use. While the Heuristic Model highlights the progression from WTC to actual L2 Use, it does not fully capture the broader skills needed

for effective participation in meetings where learners use their L2. Therefore, we propose incorporating three additional elements—Nonverbal Communication, shared leadership, and discourse integration—into the model to better represent Meeting Competency. When the Heuristic Model is viewed from a different angle, specifically through the lens of Meeting Competency, these three elements emerge as crucial components that enhance the framework and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the skills needed for effective communication in meetings. These elements complement the foundational relationship between WTC and L2 Use, providing a more holistic view of the competencies needed for successful participation. Figure 1 illustrates this extended model of Meeting Competency, showing how the original Heuristic Model can be expanded to include these critical components for effective communication.

Figure 1. Framework of Meeting Competency



Methods

The primary objective of this study was to determine whether simulating professional meetings could help cultivate the skills necessary for active participation in discussions. The Meeting-Style Classroom approach was introduced across three different courses at three universities in Japan, referred to as Course A, Course B, and Course C. Course A was a general English course, Course B focused on Business English, and Course C was not an English language course but rather a Liberal Arts Seminar, where students from various disciplines gathered to engage in discussions in English. Each course consisted of 90-minute sessions conducted once a week over a period of 15 weeks. The details of each course are summarized in Table 1. A total of 23 students participated in a post-course survey. The survey aimed to assess how students perceived their improvements in their communication and meeting-related skills. Following the survey, we analyzed the results to evaluate the participants' self-reported skill development throughout the courses.

Table 1: Overview of Courses Implementing the Meeting-Style Classroom Approach

	Course A	Course B	Course C
Course Description	General English	Business English 1 & 2	Liberal Arts Seminar

Main objectives	To hone facilitation, discussion and presentation skills.	To promote themselves in English to professionals in your field.	To expand their knowledge in their area of interest and create original content to share.
Number of students enrolled	7	16	15
Number of survey participants	4	6	13
Course Format	Online (Zoom)	On-site	Mostly on-site

Meeting-Style Classroom

Format of the Meeting-Style Classroom

The Meeting-Style Classroom (See Kondo, 2024) is designed to transfer the entire initiative in the class from the teachers to students, including the facilitator's role, instead of the teachers prompting them to work in groups. By enabling students to take on the role of giving cues and guiding the class, the Meeting-Style Classroom aims to authentically nurture students' leadership skills while also fostering their ability to take proactive roles in discussions and decision-making. Teachers participate in the meetings as "advisors" or "experts", providing occasional advice and feedback. Teachers may also actively join the discussion or offer lectures when necessary, but the primary leadership always remains with the students.

Unlike traditional student-led classrooms, where the teacher often gives initial prompts or instructions, the Meeting-Style Classroom shifts the responsibility entirely to the students, encouraging them to independently organize and manage their meetings. While inspired by the Student Leader Method (Wade, 2009), which "uses a business meeting model in which students take turns acting as group chair, and conduct the whole lesson with minimal instructor involvement but with the instructor generally giving constructive feedback after the session" (Ward et al., 2009), the Meeting-Style Classroom offers greater flexibility. In most cases, teachers remain in the background, allowing students to lead and manage the class. However, teachers can occasionally intervene as experts to offer targeted advice, feedback, or even lectures, while still ensuring that students maintain full responsibility for meeting management. This balance between minimal intervention and strategic guidance helps students develop both collaborative responsibility and shared leadership. The adaptable nature of the Meeting-Style Classroom makes it suitable for a wide range of educational contexts, from active learning to lecture-based settings, where students can still take the lead in driving the session forward.

Roles and Structure in the Meeting-Style Classroom

The Meeting-Style Classroom is structured to simulate a real-world business meeting, allowing students to take on various roles necessary for conducting an effective session. Each meeting follows a pre-designed agenda along with a clear timetable. The following roles are typically assigned to facilitate the meeting:

- Chairperson: Leads the meeting, ensures discussions stay on track, and facilitates the flow of conversation according to the agenda.

- Timekeeper: Manages time, ensuring that each agenda item is covered within the designated timeframe.
- Minute Taker: Records key points, decisions, and provides a summary of the discussion for later review, ensuring that all important aspects of the meeting are captured.
- Other roles: Depending on the needs of the session, additional roles may be assigned. These could include an IT Assistant, who manages any technical or audiovisual needs. In one case, a student proposed a DJ role, where they selected background music to set the mood for each activity in the meeting. Though unique, such a role could add creativity and enhance the engagement and atmosphere of the session.

Agenda and Pre-Meeting Preparation

A crucial element of the Meeting-Style Classroom is the agenda, distributed to participants before each meeting. The agenda outlines the meeting's goals, key discussion points, and provides necessary guidance, including a timetable. An example of the agenda is shown in Figure 2. While teachers typically create and distribute the agenda, given their role in shaping the course's educational objectives and framework, it can be advantageous to let students design their own agendas as the course progresses. This shift, especially toward the end of the course, fosters greater ownership and leadership among students.

Figure 2. Example of the Agenda

Session 6 (September 19, 2024), AGENDA

Roles	Absentees
Chair: Erika, Timekeeper: Ken	XX

Goals

- Use action verbs to summarize your background and skills.
- Describe your personality using adjectives.
- Learn how to promote yourself in 30 seconds.

Time table

Time (min.)	Tasks	Directions	Notes
09:00 09:15 (15)	Preparation	To all: Prepare for class. Start your computer. Check the classroom setting. To Chair: • Start the class. • Take attendance. • Post ice-breaker questions. To all: • Enjoy talking with your group members.	English only
09:15 09:25 (10)	Review	Review the previous class. • Review the key learnings. • Highlight interesting/important points in your classmates' portfolios. To Chair: • Present some of your classmates' portfolios and review the in-class activity from the previous class. • Handover to the teacher when you have finished.	English and/or Japanese
09:25 09:55 (30)	Presentation: Your background and personality	To Chair: • Be a moderator for this presentation session. • Invite questions and comments. To all: • Share your assignment. • Exchange questions and comments. • Be an active listener! Handover to the teacher when you have finished. "Yukie, can I handover to you?"	English Comments may be in Japanese.
09:55 10:20 (25)	Explaining your background and skills	Teacher will deliver a workshop about "30-second self-promotion".	
10:20 10:30 (10)	Closing	To Chair: • Summarize today's class. • Invite the timekeeper's remarks. • Decide next week's roles. • Conclude the class	

This pre-meeting preparation mirrors real-world business practices, where agendas are used to organize and guide productive meetings. Students are expected to prepare for their specific roles, such as chairperson or timekeeper, by researching the topics on the agenda and thinking about how they can contribute to the meeting. This preparation fosters self-directed learning, ensures that the meeting runs smoothly, and helps cultivate a more focused and productive environment.

Results

The questions posed to participants were broadly divided into four categories: 1. skills related to communication during meetings, 2. overall verbal and nonverbal communication skills, 3. attitudes towards engaging in meetings, and 4. the influence of the Meeting-Style Classroom —both in terms of how others influenced the participant and how the participant influenced others. Additionally, participants were asked about other non-communication skills they felt had improved through the course.

Q1. Skills related to discourse integration during meetings

This section of the survey focused on participants' skills related to communication during meetings. Six specific questions were asked to assess various aspects of their communication abilities, with responses given on a five-point scale: Yes, Mostly yes, Neutral, Mostly no, and No. The six questions were:

Q. 1-1. Can you speak when prompted?

Q. 1-2. Can you speak without being prompted?

Q. 1-3. Can you join conversations smoothly?

Q. 1-4. Can you effectively express your opinions?

Q. 1-5. Can you respond verbally to others?

Q. 1-6. Can you respond nonverbally to others (e.g., using gestures)?

Results are shown in Figure 3.

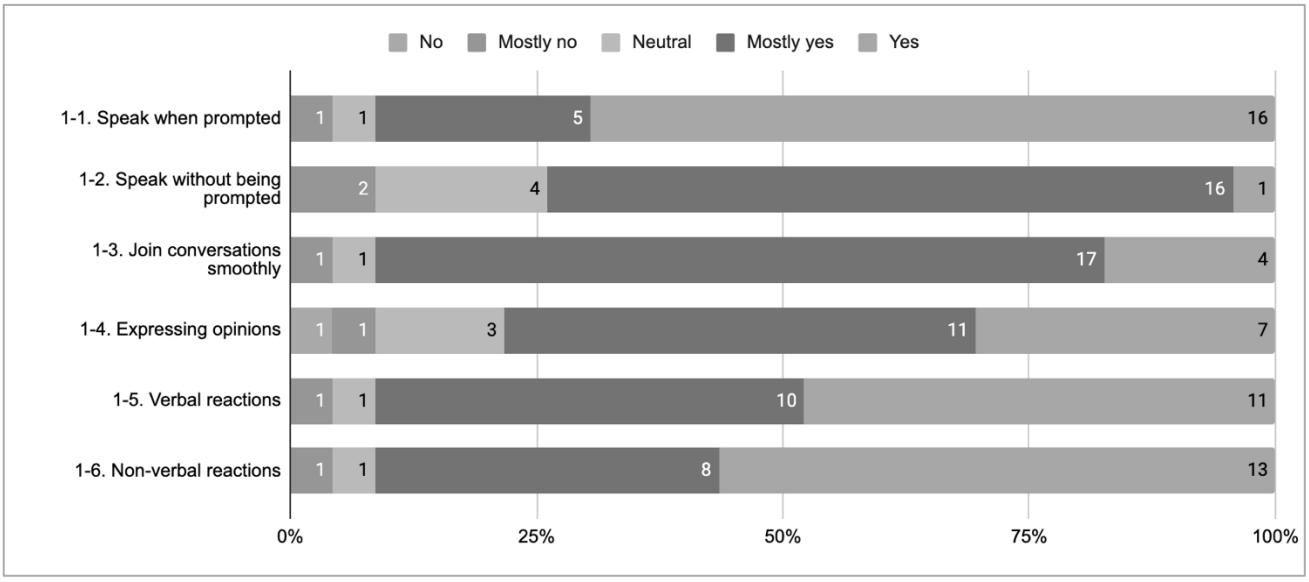
For speaking when prompted (Q. 1-1), the majority of participants (16) answered Yes, with another 5 selecting Mostly yes, reflecting high confidence in responding when asked. Similarly, most participants (17) felt comfortable joining conversations smoothly (Q. 1-3), with only 2 participants expressing some difficulty in this area, selecting Mostly no or Neutral.

However, when asked about speaking without being prompted (Q. 1-2), the responses were more diverse. While 16 participants answered Mostly yes, only 1 responded Yes, highlighting that full confidence in unprompted speaking was rare. Additionally, 4 participants selected Neutral, and 2 responded with Mostly no, suggesting that unprompted speaking remains a challenge for some. A similar trend was observed for expressing opinions (Q. 1-4), where 11 participants answered Mostly yes, and 7 responded Yes, but 5 felt neutral or struggled to express their views confidently.

Regarding reactions during meetings, both verbal (Q. 1-5) and nonverbal (Q. 1-6), the results were largely positive. A combined 21 participants felt confident in providing verbal reactions, selecting Yes or Mostly yes. Nonverbal reactions showed even greater confidence, with 13 participants selecting Yes and 8 choosing Mostly yes, indicating that participants felt comfortable using gestures or facial expressions to support communication, even when verbal exchanges were more challenging.

In summary, while participants showed high levels of confidence in responding when prompted and providing reactions, there were noticeable challenges in spontaneous speaking and expressing opinions. These findings suggest that while structured speaking scenarios are more comfortable for participants, unstructured or spontaneous speech may require further practice and support.

Figure 3. Survey Results on Participants' Communication Skills During Meetings



Q2. Overall communication skills

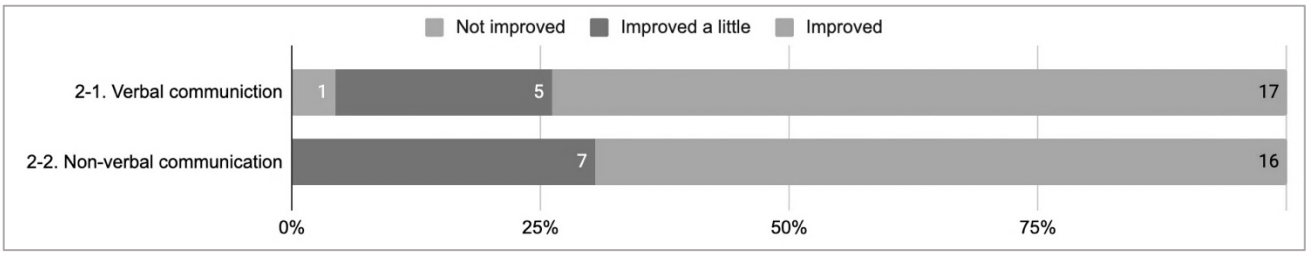
This section of the survey focused on changes in participants' overall communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, over the 15-session course. Participants responded to two specific questions using a three-point scale: Not improved, Improved a little, and Improved. The questions were:

Q. 2-1. Through the meetings, do you think your English communication skills have improved?

Q. 2-2. Through the meetings, do you think your nonverbal communication skills have improved?

The results are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Survey Results on the Change in Participants' Overall Communication Skills (Verbal and Nonverbal)



The results indicate that the majority of participants felt their communication skills during meetings improved. For verbal communication (Q. 2-1), 17 participants responded that their skills "Improved," while 5 indicated they "Improved a little," and only 1 participant felt their verbal skills had "Not improved." In terms of nonverbal communication (Q. 2-2), 16 participants selected "Improved" and 7 chose "Improved a little." Nonverbal communication here included reactions such as better eye contact, appropriate gestures, and nodding, all of which are crucial for demonstrating attentiveness and understanding in professional meetings. None of the participants felt that their nonverbal communication skills had not improved. These results suggest that most participants perceived notable gains in both verbal and nonverbal communication abilities.

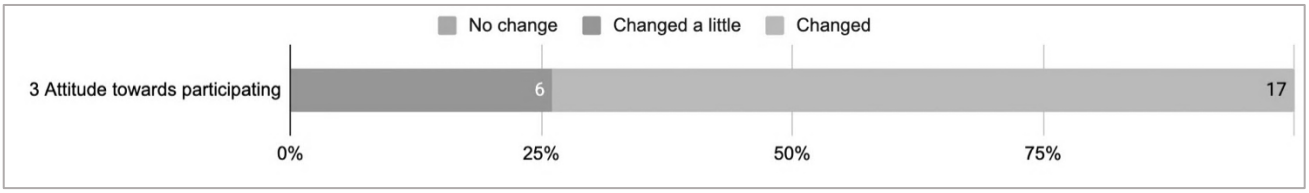
The following insights are based on the free responses from the participants who indicated that their verbal communication skills improved through meetings. Several participants highlighted that the increased opportunities to practice English in real-life discussion settings were refreshing and stimulating, offering experiences they had not encountered in other classes. The frequent participation in meetings, as well as assuming roles such as chairperson and timekeeper, helped them become more comfortable speaking English in front of others. They appreciated the challenge of responding to unpredictable questions and topics, which allowed them to think and speak more spontaneously. Some participants mentioned that this course fostered a more supportive environment, making it easier to speak without fear of mistakes and encouraging active participation. Additionally, the interaction with classmates, both in and out of class, provided a sense of community that lowered the barriers to speaking up. Through repeated practice, participants felt more confident expressing their thoughts clearly and responding to others, even when they didn't have the perfect vocabulary or grammar.

Participants who reported improved nonverbal communication skills noted an increased ability to express themselves through gestures, facial expressions, and vocal tone, even when they struggled to find the right words in English. Some highlighted their growing confidence in reacting during online meetings, such as nodding, smiling, and using tone to indicate engagement. Others mentioned that they became more aware of nonverbal cues, both in expressing their own ideas and understanding others, which enhanced their overall communication during meetings.

Q3. Attitudes towards participating in meetings

This section of the survey focused on participants' attitudes towards engaging in meetings. Participants responded to the question "Q. 3. Have your attitudes towards participating in meetings changed compared to the first session of this course?" using a three-point scale: No change, Changed A little, and Changed. As illustrated in Figure 5, 17 participants indicated that their attitudes had "Changed," while 6 participants selected "Changed a little." Notably, no participants chose "No change," suggesting that all respondents experienced some improvement in their engagement with meetings.

Figure 5. Survey Results on Attitude Towards Engaging in Meetings



In the follow-up questions to Q. 3, participants cited various reasons for their improved attitudes towards engaging in meetings. One participant noted that facilitating discussions without a teacher fostered a sense of responsibility and lowered the barrier to speaking, creating a sense of group cohesiveness (Wen & Clément 2003). Others emphasized the value of practical communication experience, which they found lacking in other classes. As one participant said, "I seldom had chances to communicate in other classes, so practicing here was refreshing."

Participants also noted that repeated exposure to English discussions helped them overcome their fear of mistakes and speak more freely. The unpredictable nature of the discussions improved their ability to respond flexibly. One participant even expressed initial doubts about this new approach but eventually grew to enjoy the format. The program also fostered a sense of empowerment, with one participant stating, "By speaking up, instead of leaving things to

others, I realized that my words could move others and even change the world." This mindset encouraged active engagement and responsibility.

In response to the follow-up question about how their attitudes changed, many participants shared that they became more proactive and engaged in class over time. Initially passive or unsure, they gradually took on more responsibility, contributing actively to discussions rather than relying on others. One participant noted that their mindset changed "from merely participating in the class to considering the management of the class with a broader perspective." Others noted that preparing for class in advance helped them feel more confident and allowed them to contribute meaningfully. Over time, participants seemed to have found joy in receiving feedback and discussing with peers, which further motivated them to refine their participation. The supportive class environment also helped participants feel more comfortable expressing their ideas.

Q4. The influence of the Meeting-Style Classroom —both in terms of how others influenced the participant and how the participant influenced others

This section of the survey focused on the impact of the Meeting-Style Classroom —both in terms of how participants were influenced by others and how they influenced others. Participants responded using a three-point scale: No, Somewhat yes, and Yes. The questions were:

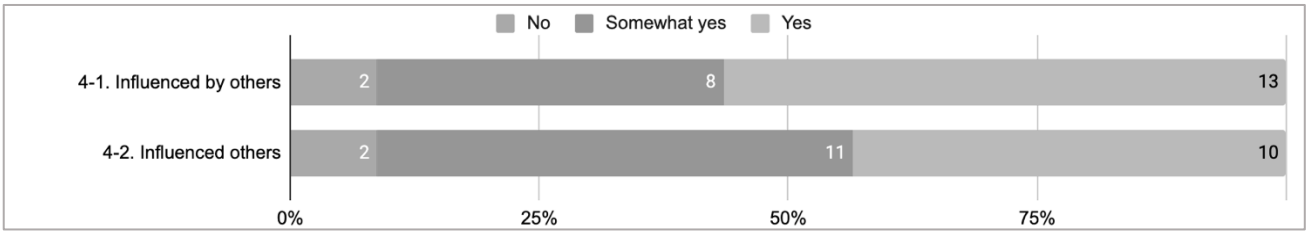
Q. 4-1. Do you think you were influenced by your classmates' words and attitudes through meetings?

Q. 4-2. Do you think your words and attitudes during meetings influenced your classmates through meetings?

The results are shown in Figure 6.

For the influence by others (Q. 4-1), 13 participants responded "Yes," 8 responded "Somewhat yes," and 2 indicated "No," showing that the majority felt influenced by their classmates through the course. For the participants' influence on others (Q. 4-2), 10 participants responded "Yes", 11 responded "Somewhat yes," and 2 chose "No." These results suggest that while most participants felt that they were both influenced by and had an influence on others, a smaller group felt they received or give no impact.

Figure 6. Survey Results on the Influence of the Meeting-Style Classroom (Influencing and Being Influenced by Others)



In response to the follow-up question for 4-1, "What words or attitudes from your classmates influenced you?", participants shared that they were inspired by their peers' positive attitudes and efforts to communicate in English, even when making mistakes. Watching others strive to communicate despite difficulties encouraged many participants to be more proactive and confident in their own participation. Supportive gestures, such as nodding and maintaining eye contact, as well as constructive verbal feedback, helped boost their confidence. Several participants mentioned being motivated by their classmates' enthusiasm, active participation,

and willingness to take on challenges. Others highlighted how hearing diverse perspectives and observing fluent English speakers pushed them to improve their own skills. Overall, the positive and collaborative environment fostered a sense of focus and deeper engagement in discussions.

In response to the follow-up question for 4-2, "What words or attitudes of you do you think influenced others?", participants reflected on various ways they felt they influenced their classmates. Many participants noted that their persistent efforts to communicate in English, despite difficulties, served as an inspiration to their peers. Nonverbal responses like nodding during presentations were seen as ways to show support and encourage the speaker: "I think by nodding while my classmates presented, I showed that I was engaged and they were being understood." Some participants felt their active participation, such as answering questions or giving feedback after presentations, helped foster more engaging discussions. One participant specifically mentioned how speaking first in meetings helped break the ice. Additionally, several participants believed their positive attitudes, humor, and efforts to keep the conversation going helped create a more open and lively class atmosphere.

Discussion

In this section, we address the Research Questions posed in this study, using the findings to explore how the Meeting-Style Classroom impacted students' communication and meeting skills.

RQ 1: How do students perceive the development of their communication and meeting skills after engaging in the Meeting-Style Classroom?

The findings from this study suggest that students generally perceive a significant improvement in their communication and meeting skills after engaging in the Meeting-Style Classroom. A majority of students reported improvements in both verbal and nonverbal communication skills, as well as specific meeting-related skills such as time management and feedback.

One of the most evident areas of improvement was their utterance or verbal communication. For example, Q. 1-1 (Can you speak when prompted?) and Q. 1-3 (Can you join conversations smoothly?) show that most students felt more confident in responding when asked and smoothly joining conversations, with 16 and 17 participants, respectively, responding positively. This suggests that the structured nature of the Meeting-Style Classroom, where a chairperson and other roles are appointed and the meeting progresses according to a pre-distributed agenda, helped promote student utterances. The agenda provided a clear structure and goals to achieve that allowed students to anticipate discussion points and feel more prepared to contribute, thereby enhancing their verbal communication skills in a practical, real-world context.

Another critical skill that students perceived improvement in was leadership. By taking on leadership roles in the meetings, such as chairing discussions or facilitating group conversations, participants gained firsthand experience in managing discussions and guiding their peers. While the opportunity to act as chairperson was limited due to the 15-session course, participants gradually realized that leadership is not confined to the chairperson alone. Instead, the Meeting-Style Classroom takes this further by promoting shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), in which leadership is distributed among all participants, rather than concentrated in a single role.

Also, participants reported gains in feedback skills. As seen in the free responses, participants appreciated the opportunities to provide constructive feedback to their peers after presentations, as well as receiving feedback themselves. This process not only helped them improve their own communication skills but also contributed to a collaborative learning environment, where participants could learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.

A comparison with alternative pedagogical methods highlights the unique strengths of the Meeting-Style Classroom. For instance, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2003) emphasizes practical task completion in real-world scenarios but often lacks the importance of structured leadership training. Likewise, Flipped Classroom approaches promote preparatory learning outside class and interactive activities during sessions, yet they do not prioritize strategies to foster spontaneous communication. In contrast, the Meeting-Style Classroom offers a distinctive blend of role-based structure and real-time interaction, creating a comprehensive framework for developing both leadership and communication competencies.

In summary, participants felt that their participation in the Meeting-Style Classroom enhanced a range of communication and meeting skills. The structured yet interactive nature of the classroom provided them with repeated opportunities to practice speaking, taking leadership, managing time, and exchanging feedback, all of which are crucial in real-world professional settings.

RQ 2: How did collaborations influence the development of communication and meeting skills after engaging in the Meeting-Style Classroom?

Collaboration played a crucial role in the development of participants' communication and meeting skills in the Meeting-Style Classroom. The results show that through working closely with peers, participants became more comfortable with both verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as meeting-related tasks like providing feedback, leading discussions, and time management.

Additionally, the concept of shared leadership was clearly demonstrated. While the chairperson had a formal leadership role, all participants contributed to the success of the meetings by managing time, providing feedback, and encouraging participation. In the free responses to Q. 4-1 (Do you think you were influenced by your classmates?) and Q. 4-2 (Do you think your words and attitudes influenced others?), participants frequently noted how they supported each other, whether by acknowledging their peers' efforts or encouraging them to speak up. This recognition of one another's contributions and hard work helped create a collaborative atmosphere and a sense of cohesiveness where participants felt motivated to participate actively. This supports Peng and Woodrow (2010) and Wen and Clement (2003). The distributed responsibility fostered a deeper understanding of leadership and collaboration, where participants worked together to ensure the meeting's success.

This collaborative environment also played a significant role in developing discourse integration. By observing and supporting each other's attempts to contribute to discussions, students were able to learn from their peers' successes and challenges in naturally integrating their utterances into the conversation flow.

RQ 3: What challenges did students continue to face in conducting and participating in the meeting, and how can these be addressed?

Despite the positive outcomes of the Meeting-Style Classroom, students continued to face challenges related to active participation, such as spontaneous speech and expressing opinions. As shown in Q. 1-2 (Can you speak without being prompted?) and Q. 1-4 (Can you effectively

express your opinions?), many participants struggled with unprompted participation and confidently presenting their thoughts. This hesitation likely stemmed from a lack of confidence in unstructured communication and/or interrupting or contradicting others in discussions, as observed in Yashima's studies (2002; 2004).

These challenges are particularly relevant to the concept of discourse integration. The ability to seamlessly integrate one's utterances into the flow of conversation without prompting is a key aspect of effective meeting participation, and the results suggest that this remains an area of difficulty for many students.

The challenges observed in spontaneous speech can also be linked to the concept of WTC in second language learning (MacIntyre et al., 1998). WTC is influenced by various factors, including learners' perceived communicative competence, anxiety, and motivation. In this study, it is likely that while students felt more competent in structured roles, their anxiety remained high when faced with situations that required spontaneous contributions. This is consistent with Peng and Woodrow's (2010) findings, where anxiety—especially among language learners—is triggered by fear of making mistakes or negative evaluation, inhibiting students from initiating speech.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to create a low-anxiety environment where students feel comfortable making spontaneous contributions. One possible intervention is to gradually reduce the structure of the meeting roles over time, allowing students to transition from highly structured to more open-ended discussions. Another approach could be to integrate specific training focused on building WTC, such as reflective exercises where students assess their own willingness to engage in group conversations and explore the reasons behind their hesitation.

RQ 4: How meeting competency is related for students to actively communicate and participate in discussions, as revealed by this study?

The findings from this study demonstrate that meeting competency is crucial for fostering active communication and participation in the Meeting-Style Classroom. According to the framework discussed earlier, four key elements are required: WTC, verbal communication, in particular the ability to integrate utterances naturally, nonverbal communication, and shared leadership. Each of these elements was observed in the students' experiences throughout the course.

Element 1: Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

WTC was a critical factor in determining how actively students engaged in unprompted speech and spontaneous contributions. As seen in Q. 1-2 (Can you speak without being prompted?), many students hesitated to initiate speech, indicating that their WTC was still developing. Although structured roles like chairperson helped guide them, gradually fostering WTC through more open-ended, less scripted discussions is essential for creating a more dynamic participation environment.

Element 2: Discourse integration (DI)

Discourse integration, which refers to the ability to naturally incorporate one's utterances into the flow of group conversation, was challenging for students. As the study revealed, students were relatively comfortable responding when prompted but were struggled with unprompted contributions. This challenge highlights the importance of building this competency, not merely through scripted language practice, but through authentic, real-time opportunities for students to engage in group discussions without relying on external prompts. Providing more

opportunities to engage in spontaneous conversation within unstructured dialogues is essential for improving this competency.

Element 3: Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication played a significant role in facilitating smoother interactions. Many participants, as reflected in Q. 1-6 (Can you respond nonverbally?), became more confident in using gestures, facial expressions, and body language to show engagement and signal their intentions. These reactions and responses are vital in meetings when students struggle with verbal communication, helping bridge gaps in understanding while supporting smoother group dynamics. Strengthening nonverbal communication can also support students in overcoming challenges related to joining conversations naturally and speaking up without being prompted. By honing these skills, students may find it easier to engage in discussions more spontaneously, even when they are not directly invited to contribute. Nonverbal communication also varies across cultures (e.g., Matsumoto, 2006). Cultural awareness of differences in nonverbal behaviors, such as the interpretation of eye contact or gestures, can be crucial for effective communication in multicultural settings. Incorporating such knowledge into Meeting-Style Classroom practices enhance students' readiness for global professional environments.

In this context, nonverbal communication extends beyond gestures and body language to include subtle yet powerful actions, such as rearranging chairs or desks to create a more conducive setting for conversation. It also involves adjusting the environment or introducing small elements, such as the colors used in slideshows or background music, that energize the day's session and foster a more inviting atmosphere for participation. This kind of silent communication and attentiveness will help build a space where everyone feels encouraged to engage actively, creating a supportive meeting environment.

In online meetings, the simple act of turning the camera on or off can itself serve as a powerful nonverbal gesture that conveys one's willingness to engage. Participants made various efforts to enhance their presence in online settings, such as turning on their cameras and using facial expressions like smiling or nodding during peers' presentations to demonstrate attentiveness. This illustrates that participants were mindful to create a supportive environment even in a virtual context by themselves. Considering that strategies for fostering effective nonverbal communication vary between face-to-face and online settings, further research should explore these contextual differences to optimize communication in both environments.

Crucially, this aspect of nonverbal communication is not limited to teachers. One of the key features of the Meeting-Style Classroom is that students themselves take on the responsibility of shaping the meeting environment and setting the tone for the discussion. By proactively managing both the physical and interpersonal dynamics of the meeting, students act as the driving force behind the success of each session. This form of nonverbal communication, where students take ownership of facilitating the environment, contributes to the unique experience of the Meeting-Style Classroom and promotes active participation from all members.

Element 4: Shared leadership

Shared leadership was essential in managing the flow of meetings and encouraging participation from all members. As the shared leadership model suggests, this competency goes beyond the formal role of a single leader. Students learned to share leadership responsibilities, from managing time and ensuring all agenda items were covered, to facilitating engagement among their peers.

In the Meeting-Style Classroom, the first step of the leadership is transferring control of the class from the teacher to the student leader, who assumes the role of chairperson. The second step involves assigning additional roles, such as timekeeper or minute-taker, ensuring that multiple students take on different responsibilities. This process makes students aware that leadership is not confined to the chairperson but is distributed across several roles. The third step encourages all participants, regardless of assigned roles, to contribute to the meeting. Even when students do not hold a formal position, they are expected to step in, sometimes guiding the discussion or supporting the leader to ensure the success of the meeting. Leadership is understood as a collective effort, not something achieved by a single charismatic figure or the most vocal person, but by the contributions of everyone involved. The survey results indicated that students developed leadership when acting as chairperson, and several comments in the survey suggested that they contributed to supporting others in fulfilling their roles, fostering a more collaborative environment.

The final step, as students transition from the classroom to the professional world, is applying this understanding of shared leadership to real-life settings. Even if they do not hold formal leadership positions, such as a “chairperson,” they can leverage their strengths to contribute effectively in various types of meetings, whether it is friends planning a trip, a company meeting, or other collaborative projects. By working together and utilizing their individual skills, students can become active, engaged members of any discussion or team, regardless of their official role.

In a future study, it would be worthwhile to investigate the relationship between leadership maturity and participation in discussions. Although many Japanese students may not see themselves as "leader types," deepening their understanding of shared leadership could help them recognize various leadership roles that suit their personality, thereby enhancing their engagement in discussions.

Summary of the Meeting competency

In conclusion, the development of these four elements—Willingness to Communicate, discourse integration, nonverbal communication, and shared leadership—is key to helping students develop overall meeting competency. This comprehensive competency ensures that students can navigate the complexities of group communication, contributing meaningfully to the overall success of meetings. Future instructional approaches should continue to emphasize these areas to better prepare students for real-world communication scenarios.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Meeting-Style Classroom approach; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the reliance on self-reported data may not fully capture the nuanced development of students’ communication skills. Future research could benefit from incorporating triangulation methods, such as objective evaluations of recorded meetings and linguistic analysis of student utterances, to provide a more comprehensive assessment of skill development.

While this study provides a snapshot of students’ perceptions immediately after the course, it does not address the long-term impact of the Meeting-Style Classroom approach. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (1984) emphasizes the importance of a cycle of learning, where students gain concrete experiences, reflect on their performance, and actively apply their insights to new contexts. This framework suggests that the skills developed in the Meeting-

Style Classroom could maintain long-term value in professional settings. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to track students' progress over time, including follow-up assessments after graduation to evaluate how the skills developed through this approach transfer to real-world professional settings. Additionally, comparative studies between the Meeting-Style Classroom and other pedagogical approaches could offer valuable insights into its relative effectiveness in developing meeting competency and communication skills.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Meeting-Style Classroom is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing English communication skills and meeting competency among Japanese university students. By simulating a real-world meeting and assigning students roles used in professional settings, the approach provides practical experience that goes beyond traditional language instruction. The findings indicate that while students became more confident in structured speaking situations and were adept at providing verbal and nonverbal feedback, they continued to face challenges in spontaneous speech and unprompted participation. This emphasizes the importance of focusing not only on language proficiency but also on the key elements that constitute meeting competency—Willingness to Communicate, discourse integration, nonverbal communication, and shared leadership—to develop comprehensive communication skills.

The collaborative environment fostered by the Meeting-Style Classroom played a significant role in students' skill development. Shared leadership allowed students to support each other, promoting a deeper understanding of teamwork and collective responsibility. Despite persistent challenges in spontaneous communication, the overall positive outcomes suggest that with continued practice and targeted interventions, such as creating low-anxiety environments, students can further improve their ability to actively participate in discussions.

The implications of this study extend beyond language education. The Meeting-Style Classroom not only enhances linguistic skills but also equips students with crucial soft skills, such as leadership, decision-making, and time management, that are transferable to their future careers. By balancing student autonomy with expert guidance, this approach fosters both independence and structured learning, creating a comprehensive educational experience.

In conclusion, the Meeting-Style Classroom offers a promising framework for preparing students for the communication demands of global professional environments. By addressing both the linguistic and interpersonal aspects of effective communication, and by focusing on the essential elements that make up meeting competency, this approach not only enhances language skills but also equips learners with the necessary competency to contribute meaningfully in meetings. Future research should explore long-term impacts and consider integrating strategies to overcome the challenges identified, thereby refining the approach for broader application in diverse educational contexts.

Notes

Part of the content of this paper is based on what the authors presented (Kondo & Fujimura, 2024) at AILA 2024.

References

Andersen, P. A. (1999). Nonverbal communication: Forms and functions. Mayfield.

https://archive.org/details/nonverbalcommuni0000ande/

Bachman, L. F. (1990). Fundamental considerations in language testing. Oxford University Press.

Carson, J. B., Tesluk, P. E., & Marrone, J. A. (2007). Shared leadership in teams: An investigation of antecedent conditions and performance. Academy of Management Journal, 50(5), 1217–1234. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.20159921

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. Applied Linguistics, 1(1), 1–47. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/i.1.1

Cao, Y. K. (2014). A sociocognitive perspective on second language classroom willingness to communicate. TESOL Quarterly, 48(4), 789–814. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.155

Clark, J. T. (2008). Developing collaborative leadership: A study of organizational change toward greater collaboration and shared leadership [Doctoral dissertation, Antioch University]. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=antioch1229720750&disposition=inline

Ellis, R. (2003). Task-based language learning and teaching. Oxford University Press.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. Modern Language Journal, 70(2), 125–132. https://doi.org/10.2307/327317

Hymes, D. H. (1972). On Communicative Competence. Sociolinguistics. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), Sociolinguistics: Selected readings (pp. 269–293). Penguin.

Kang, S.-J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. System, 33(2), 277–292. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2004.10.004

Knapp, M. L., Hall, J. A., & Horgan, T. G. (2014). Nonverbal communication in human interaction (8th ed.). Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice Hall.

Kondo, Y. (2024). Meeting-Style Classroom. Retrieved July 30, 2024, from https://me.engstudio.jp

Kondo, Y., & Fujimura, K. (2024, August 12–16). Meeting-Style Classroom approach: Enhancing English learners' discussion skills and engagement in business settings [Conference presentation]. AILA 2024. Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. The Modern Language Journal, 82(4), 545–562. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). Subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. Language Learning, 44(2), 283–305. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x

Matsumoto, D. (2006). Culture and nonverbal behavior. The SAGE handbook of nonverbal communication (pp. 219–236). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412976152.n12

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). (2014). English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization. Retrieved September 20, 2024, from https://www.mext.go.jp/en/news/topics/detail/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/01/23/1343591_1.pdf

Pearce, C. L., & Conger, J. A. (2003). All those years ago: The historical underpinnings of shared leadership. In C. L. Pearce & J. A. Conger (Eds.), Shared leadership: Reframing the hows and whys of leadership (pp. 1–18). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452229539

Peleckis, K., Peleckienė, V., & Peleckis, K. (2015). Nonverbal communication in business negotiations and business meetings. International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences, 62, 62–72. https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ilshs.62.62

Peng, J.-E., & Woodrow, L. (2010). Willingness to communicate in English: A model in the Chinese EFL classroom context. Language Learning, 60(4), 834–876. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2010.00576.x

Rihardini, A. A., Yaniafari, R. P., & Mukminatien, N. (2021). Students' willingness to communicate using English: A survey study. Paramasastra, 8(1), 75–94. https://doi.org/10.26740/paramasastra.v8n1.p75-94

Sakimoto, M., & Saito, A. (2019). Nihon kigyo no gurobaruka ni hitsuyo na soshiki eigo-ryoku ni kansuru chosa oyobi kokateki na kyoka shisaku no kento to jissen [Research on organizational English proficiency required for the globalization of Japanese companies, and study and implementation of effective measures to strengthen it]. Journal of Digital Practices, 10(4), 784–802. http://id.nii.ac.jp/1001/00199589/

Toyoda, J., & Yashima, T. (2021). Factors affecting situational willingness to communicate in young EFL learners. JACET Journal, 65, 107–124. https://doi.org/10.32234/jacetjournal.65.0_107

Wade, L. (2009). Discussing the Leader Method. In JALT2008 Conference Proceedings, 467–474.

Wang, D., Waldman, D. A., & Zhang, Z. (2014). A meta-analysis of shared leadership and team effectiveness. Journal of Applied Psychology, 99(2), 181–198. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034531

Ward, D., Wade, L., & Dowling, A. (2008). Pushing the student-centered envelope: A corporate meeting-style approach. The Language Teacher, 32(9), 13–17.

Wen, W. P., & Clément, R. (2003). A Chinese conceptualization of willingness to communicate in ESL. Language, Culture and Curriculum, 16(1), 18–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310308666654

Wiemann, J. M., & Knapp, M. L. (1975). Turn-taking in conversations. The Journal of Communication, 25(2), 75–92. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1975.tb00582.x

Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. Modern Language Journal, 86(1), 54–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00136

Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L., & Shimizu, K. (2004). The influence of attitudes and affect on willingness to communicate and second language communication. Language Learning, 54(1), 119–152. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2004.00250.x