

# Navigating Policy and Culture: A Guide to Understanding Japanese Students' Participation in EFL Classrooms

Adam Crosby

Department of Linguistics, Kobe City College of Nursing, Kobe, Japan  
Email: [crosby@kobe-ccn.ac.jp](mailto:crosby@kobe-ccn.ac.jp)

**How to cite this paper:** Crosby, A. (2026). Navigating Policy and Culture: A Guide to Understanding Japanese Students' Participation in EFL Classrooms. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 16, 72-96. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2026.161007>

**Received:** January 21, 2026

**Accepted:** February 24, 2026

**Published:** February 27, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

Silence in Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is a culturally and socially mediated phenomenon that challenges Western pedagogical assumptions equating verbal participation with engagement and competence. In Japan, students' silence often reflects attentiveness, respect, careful consideration, and adherence to social and classroom hierarchies, rather than disengagement or lack of proficiency. Rooted in high-context communication, collectivist values, and hierarchical norms such as the *sempai-kohai* system, Japanese learners prioritize group harmony and social appropriateness over individual expression. Turn-taking, listening practices, and nonverbal behaviors further exemplify culturally specific communicative strategies. Traditional teacher-centered pedagogy and exam-oriented education reinforce these patterns, even as curricular reforms promote communicative language teaching (CLT) and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Understanding the cultural, social, and educational underpinnings of silence enables educators—particularly native English-speaking teachers—to interpret student behavior accurately and design culturally responsive instructional strategies that foster effective participation and intercultural communication.

## Keywords

Cultural Pedagogy, Japanese EFL, Participation, Silence

---

## 1. Introduction

The silence of Japanese students in English classes has been a well-researched topic (Mitchell, 2017; Ohashi, 2015; Harumi & King, 2020). However, silence in the language classroom is often interpreted through a Western pedagogical lens

that privileges verbal participation as evidence of engagement, learning, and communicative competence. Within this framework, students who speak less are often perceived as passive, unmotivated, or lacking proficiency in their language. However, such interpretations risk oversimplifying complex classroom behaviors, overlooking the cultural, educational, and interactional meanings that silence may carry (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). As globalization has increased intercultural contact in educational contexts, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, there is a need to re-examine silence as a culturally situated phenomenon.

When comparing silence through a cultural lens, it is difficult to avoid stereotyping and generalizations. As Holliday (1999) and Karas and Uchihara (2021) note, students' in-class behavior, including silence and oral participation, is shaped by their cultural backgrounds and educational experiences; however, these influences must be interpreted with caution to avoid broad generalizations. King (2013) and Harumi (2023) further highlight the complexity of examining how culture influences learner behavior. Although King (2013) warns against making broad generalizations, he recognizes that cultural differences do exist and, along with other factors, influence how learners behave. Likewise, Harumi (2023) notes the risks of stereotyping and cultural essentialism, but notes that Japanese learners' interactional practices are frequently framed in contrast to dominant interactional norms of learning.

Silence can be understood as both the omission of sound and a culturally shaped form of communication. Although some degree of silence is natural in interactions, the amount of silence and how it is used and interpreted depend largely on cultural norms (Ishii & Bruneau, 1994). In educational contexts, some cultures view silence positively, while others interpret it negatively (Su, Wood, & Tribe, 2023). Moreover, the meaning of silence is influenced by several factors related to the receiver, including educational background, language-learning experience, and cultural orientation (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). Silence should not be understood merely as the absence of speech but as a meaningful communicative resource shaped by cultural norms, institutional practices, and learner identities (Harumi, 2023).

Within the Japanese context, silence plays a significant communicative role. Culturally, Japanese individuals are encouraged to avoid drawing attention to themselves (Akiyama, 2017). As a result, communication often involves a careful balance between speaking and silence, depending on what is considered socially appropriate in a given situation. This does not imply that Japanese people are generally quiet or non-talkative; rather, they may be expressive in different social contexts than those commonly emphasized in Western cultures. Notably, Japanese communication tends to place greater value on reception than on transmission (Kim et al., 2016).

The cultural norms of silence observed in Japanese society extend directly into classroom behavior. In Japanese educational settings, silence is often interpreted

as attentiveness, respect, and careful consideration rather than disengagement or lack of interest (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). Students may remain quiet when they do not know the answer, when reflecting on a teacher's question, or when using silence as a communicative tool. Understanding these culturally grounded patterns is essential for educators, particularly those from Western backgrounds, to accurately interpret student behavior and foster more effective intercultural teaching strategies (Ohashi, 2015).

In practice, remaining silent when unsure of an answer is considered normal in Japanese classrooms (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). Generally, students speak only when the teacher calls on them. Even in such cases, long pauses before responding are common, which has led some observers to describe Japanese students as exhibiting a low level of communicative behavior (Ito, 2021). This silence typically stems from politeness and respect. Students are expected to listen attentively without asking questions or seeking clarification independently. Even raising a hand to ask a question may be seen as disruptive or wasteful. This practice extends from junior and senior high schools, where students are taught to stand when answering a teacher's question (Hammond, 2007). As a result, questions directed to the entire class rarely elicit responses; only individually nominated students provide answers (Harumi, 2023). Consequently, Japanese students generally hesitate to ask questions or request clarification in front of peers unless explicitly called upon (Anderson, 1993; King, 2013).

## 2. Cultural Practices in Japanese Classrooms

Native English-speaking (NES) teachers often perceive students from Japan and other East Asian countries as preferring silence in the classroom (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009). While silence is noticeable among Asian students in EFL classrooms (Hammond, 2007), Japanese students are particularly noted for their quietness compared to their Chinese and Korean peers. King's research (King, 2013) highlights this phenomenon in conversational activities, showing that Japanese students dedicated only 0.3% of a 90-minute class to dialogue. This pervasive silence was observed across nine universities throughout Japan.

Although Japanese students are often described as being silent (Karas & Uchihara, 2021), teachers should not assume students are disinterested simply because they are quiet. Bao (2023) similarly advises against interpreting silence negatively, noting that it can be meaningful and thoughtful. Silence should not be confused with reticence: "silence turns into reticence when it is not intended for learning" (Bao, 2014: p. 152).

Much of the research on silence has historically taken a Western perspective as the norm. NES teachers may therefore attribute Japanese students' silence to an unwillingness or resistance to speak (Su, Wood, & Tribe, 2023), but such interpretations are problematic without considering the pedagogical and cultural context of Japan. King (2013) notes that silence is a consistent feature of Japanese university students in English language classrooms, even among those motivated

to improve their English. In Japan, silence is not necessarily a refusal to communicate; rather, it can function as a means of communication itself (King, 2013). Unlike in many Western contexts, where silence may carry negative social connotations, in Japan it is generally associated with harmony and social cohesion (Ishii & Bruneau, 1994).

Japanese students often use silence to maintain harmony by avoiding interruptions or disruptions in the classroom (Banks, 2016). Harumi (2023) investigated the culture-specific uses of silence in Japanese classrooms and found that it serves multiple purposes beyond indicating a lack of understanding or English proficiency. Her research highlights that silence is a significant social factor, shaped by individual communication styles, psychological tendencies, and linguistic practices. Consequently, classroom silence is a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood without considering these interrelated cultural, social, and pedagogical factors.

### 2.1. Turn-Taking

Besides the use of silence, topic changing and taking turns are different between Japan and the West. According to Barraja-Rohan (1997), taking turns is a very culturally specific custom. Turn-taking has been described as the “least tackled in pedagogical materials and classroom instruction, mostly because it’s the least understood” (Wong & Waring, 2010: p. 14). Turn-taking in a Japanese context culturally allows more silence than in a Western context (Furo, 2001). According to Hammond (2007: p. 46), Japanese turn-taking is punctuated by patiently awaiting one’s turn, whereas turn-taking in a Western context is a “volley of speech between speakers” that involves interruptions.

Sakamoto and Naotsuka (1982) explained the difference between Western and Japanese turn-taking through a simple analogy. Western turn-taking may be imagined as a game of volleyball in which the ball represents the conversation topic. Once the ball is hit, the person who is in the nearest vicinity to the ball will hit it back; it is constant, and waiting for someone to take a turn hitting the ball is not a consideration. If someone hesitates to hit the ball, another person steps in and takes the initiative to hit the ball. The responsibility for taking a turn lies with the individual. There are even times when two people go for the same ball. However, a conversation carried out in the Japanese context is more like a game of bowling. First, a player rolls a ball, and this is followed by another player rolling a different ball. The players are waiting patiently until the previous player has rolled the ball; the order is often determined not by who is the best or who wants to speak, but by status. Sakamoto and Naotsuka (1982) note that attempting to try Western-based discussions in Japan is bound to be unsuccessful, as it is very different from how Japanese-based discussions are carried out. Following Sakamoto and Naotsuka, it would be challenging for Japanese students to speak English in the setting of a university classroom in front of an NES teacher because the way that conversation takes place, or is expected to take place, varies due to the culture of

the speakers. It is necessary to remember that many Japanese L2 students have not had the opportunity to experience cross-cultural discourse styles (Harumi, 2023), which makes turn-taking difficult for them.

According to Harumi (2010), compared to English, the Japanese style of communication exhibits less spontaneous interruption and turn-taking. She used a survey that was distributed to 197 university students in Japan. One of the findings was that taking turns was challenging. Similarly, Ellwood and Nakane (2009) discovered that Japanese university students' capacity to speak in class during discussions was constrained by their inability to take turns. For instance, Furo (2001) examined how American and Japanese groups differ in their discourse styles, with a particular emphasis on turn-taking. She discovered that while taking turns by interrupting is common and accepted among Westerners, it is less common among Japanese people. These findings are consistent with those of Karas and Uchihara (2021), who found differences in turn-taking between Japanese and Canadians. Harumi (2023: p. 147) suggests "raising awareness of cross-culturally invisible turn-taking practices".

Japanese and Western cultures have distinct approaches to taking turns. Hammond (2007) notes that Japanese-style discourse normally expects both participants to respect turn-taking, whereas Western-style discourse entails a back-and-forth interchange of speech with interruptions. The Japanese communication style allows for longer acceptable periods of quietness, pausing, and silence (Nakane, 2007). NES listeners may interrupt without waiting even when the speaker has not completed speaking, and according to Kumagai (1994: p. 23), this behavior is "extremely rude and aggressive in the Japanese context". Therefore, because turn-taking is very culture-dependent, Karas and Uchihara (2021) suggest introducing culturally friendly turn-taking practices.

Japanese conversational turn-taking involves paying attention to non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, hand gestures, and shifts in tone (Doi, 2001). These cues play a role in turn-taking, speaking, and listening. Facial expressions are considered universal across cultures (Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989); however, certain cultures refrain from showing too much facial expression in specific situations. Research by Friesen (1972, cited in Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989: p. 144) showed that Japanese participants, when being observed by people of a higher status, "masked their negative expressions".

## 2.2. Listening

One may assume that the way of listening is consistent regardless of one's culture, nationality, or upbringing; however, the way of listening in Japan is unique. Subtle, non-overwhelming communicators are admired by the Japanese, who hope that the listener will be receptive enough to comprehend the dialogue with minimum clarification (Lebra, 1987). In Western countries, the speaker is taxed with the burden of making sure the contents are delivered to the listener. The listener lets the speaker know to what degree he or she has understood. The listener does

this by asking questions. The speaker then answers the queries from the listener by adding or clarifying information to ensure that there is no confusion about what has been said. In Japan, however, it is quite the opposite. The listener in Japan has the responsibility of understanding what has been said, and it is the responsibility of the listener to make sure that the content or message is understood (Anderson, 1993; Takanashi, 2004). Requesting clarification often does not happen due to the embarrassment associated with not interpreting the message correctly (Bowers, 1988). Takanashi (2004) notes that in Japanese culture, expressing ideas accurately holds less importance than understanding what has been said through inferences. Because of this, everyday communication in Japan requires somewhat limited interaction and dialogue between speakers, and the use of clarification techniques is not expected.

### 2.3. High-Context Communication versus Low-Context Communication

Culture significantly impacts communication patterns, including language usage and verbal expressions. Language, as a crucial element of culture, reflects unique societal values, beliefs, and customs. Hall (1976) emphasizes how cultural differences affect communication styles, illustrating distinctions between high-context and low-context cultures. High-context cultures, such as Japan, rely on implicit cues, context, and nonverbal communication, while low-context cultures, like those found in Western societies, emphasize explicit and direct verbal communication.

According to Hall (1976), people from high-context cultures generally communicate in ways that are intended to engage others rather than just convey information. Most of the time, messages are conveyed by implication rather than outright statement; context is frequently more significant than word choice. One way to interact with someone is through nonverbal communication. Dialogic interactions heavily rely on nonverbal indicators like facial expressions, movements, body language, and silence (Hall, 1976).

Employing high-context communication entails minimizing the use of verbal communication, being considerate of others, and comprehending and applying implicit messages. People from low-context cultures might interpret this kind of communication as evasive or unclear. People from high-context cultures usually communicate slowly and deliberately, emphasizing the development of interactions over the transmission of information. Relationship building is a slow, intentional process (Gudykunst & Kim, 1988).

As Hall (1976) notes, when engaging with others, a person from a low-context culture will mainly rely on the message and what is being said directly. As a result, messages are clear and concise. For people from low-context cultures, discourse is more about exchanging ideas and information than forming bonds with others (Hall, 1976). People from low-context cultures are conscientious about how much time they spend communicating with other people. The interactions are usually focused on a single message and are scheduled, brief, and direct. Gudykunst and

Kim (1988: p. 516) state that because this kind of communication “involves being direct, precise, and open”, it may come across as impersonal to people from high-context cultures. For people from low-context cultures, establishing relationships is not the main goal of discourse (Hall & Hall, 1990). **Table 1** summarizes notable differences between Japanese-style and Western-style communication.

**Table 1.** High-context cultures versus low-context cultures (adapted from Hall & Hall, 1990).

High-context cultures	Low-context cultures
Both implicit and indirect messages are used in communication.	communication, explicit and direct messages are exchanged.
Frequently use nonverbal communication.	Rarely use nonverbal communication.
For a message to be understood, the individual and the context are crucial.	Knowing a message requires knowing its words.
Emotions, sentiments, and intuition are crucial components of communication.	Facts and information are crucial components of communication.
Long-term relationships are frequently formed through numerous interactions.	Most relationships are temporary and situational.
Most communication is haphazard and doesn't prioritize how much time it takes.	Communication is frequently planned and carried out swiftly.
Conflict that arises in conversation are frequently tailored to the individual. Resolving conflicts is a prerequisite for engaging in new conversations.	Conflict that arises in conversation is depersonalized with a clear explanation of the disagreement and/or problematic behaviors.
Common in Asia and Japan.	Common in Western countries.

Hall's (1981) comprehensive research identified the differences in the style of communication between countries like Japan and the USA: A culture whose language is formed around high context, and a culture whose language is formed around low context, respectively. Japan is a high-context culture, and its language is indirect and requires the listener to infer by considering the feelings and situation of the speaker. The USA, on the other hand, is a low-context culture where ideas and dialogue are expressed directly without ambiguity (Hall, 1976). In the USA and other Western countries, silence between speakers is generally viewed as uncomfortable and awkward, and therefore, speakers tend to fill the silence with often unnecessary chit-chat. However, in countries like Japan, silence is seen as a normal part of conversation. Hall's concept of high and low-context culture is influential in EFL as it offers a framework for the comparison of cultural differences and intercultural differences (Hall, 1976).

## 2.4. Collectivism

The way that people view interpersonal relationships between each other can be described in terms of collectivism or individualism. According to Hofstede et al.

(2010), individualistic cultures often prioritize direct communication, whereas collectivist cultures stress harmony and indirect communication to maintain social cohesion. The sense of shame or embarrassment is much stronger in collectivist societies, and if the bond that keeps the group together is broken, the whole group will feel shame because of the actions of one individual. Collectivism is prominent in Asian countries, including Japan, whereas individualism is common in Western countries.

Japanese students tend to be group-conscious and have a tendency to want to belong to a group (Anderson, 1993). One reason why students rarely answer questions asked in class is that there is a reluctance to be seen as being different from the group: A reluctance to stand out (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). Students want to speak as a member of a group rather than as an individual (Anderson, 1993). In the classroom, Japanese students do everything they can in order not to stand out (Harumi, 2010). Some Japanese students want to actively take part but do not because of the reluctance to stand out in front of their classmates (Hammond, 2007). Identifying students who want to take part but remain silent can be very difficult, as they do not want to be visible in front of the class.

In Japan, there is social pressure to conform and meet the expectations of others. The social pressure present in everyday society is brought into the classroom (Brown et al., 2000), and students are conscious of their peers (Sugimura & Mizokami, 2012). The presence of other classmates in university classes prevents students from expressing their ideas, as they do not want to draw attention to themselves. Sugimura and Mizokami (2012) found that when Japanese students are asked to perform activities that require self-expression, they first weigh up how they would be seen by their classmates and the instructor before speaking out. In Japanese society, including the classroom, the group outweighs the individual; the group's opinion and actions are given more value than the individual's opinion and actions (Harumi, 2010). According to Klopff (1991), Japanese people are far less likely to speak honestly regarding their thoughts and feelings in group contexts. The reason for Japanese people refraining from speaking out in group situations may be that they are afraid of upsetting the social equilibrium in the situation, as noted by Klopff (1991: p. 137): "In their close-knit groups, the members couch themselves in silence and ambiguous expressions".

The awareness that Japanese university students have of their peers in the classroom may impact in-class activities. Solutions to problems are highly appreciated when they are achieved through a group consensus rather than individual efforts (Woods, 2006). The extent and nature of communication can also be influenced by students' attitudes and values regarding groups and collaborative work (Woods, 2006).

According to Wen and Clement (2003: p. 25), "having the desire to communicate does not necessarily imply a willingness to communicate". While Japanese students might want to speak with someone or a group, sociocultural values learned in the classroom—like respect for the instructor, the reluctance to be

seen as being different from the group, and consideration for other people—may make them reluctant to do so (Peng, 2020; Wen & Clement, 2003). Put another way, these particular students may want to speak English, but they remain silent.

According to Nakane (2005, 2006), Japanese students' views on class participation indicate that they may tend to be quiet because of characteristics of their own Japanese culture and communication style. Some students choose to maintain "their inherited learning style" (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017: p. 90), and there is a tendency towards conformity within groups, which may discourage individuals from expressing opinions that differ from the group consensus. This inclination to maintain unanimity can limit the contributions of Japanese students in class discussions, as they may be reluctant to challenge established ideas and cultural norms (Anderson, 2018; Hammond, 2007; Harumi, 2010).

## 2.5. Status

Another cultural value in Japanese communication is high-status awareness. Hofstede et al. (2010) conducted research into status and developed a scale that measures and ranks status. He refers to status as power distance. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), power distance refers to the level of acceptance of hierarchy within society; a high-power distance score indicates that hierarchy is accepted. People of lower status—subordinates—rely on people of higher status when making decisions. They accept that power is the norm in society and follow the instructions of their superiors accordingly. Western countries have lower power distance scores than Japan and other Asian countries (Hofstede et al., 2010).

However, it is important to note that power distance should not be understood as a fixed or universally experienced cultural rule. Attitudes toward hierarchy in Japan vary depending on context, generation, institution, and individual personality. In particular, younger generations and university students may display more flexible or situational interpretations of hierarchy than earlier generations, influenced by globalization, study abroad experiences, digital communication, and increased exposure to Western educational practices. Thus, while status awareness remains a salient cultural tendency, it should be understood as a spectrum rather than an absolute norm.

Japanese society is based on a system of rank and status: People of higher status have more rights to speak out and to be heard. This hierarchical relationship-based system is easily observable in any Japanese classroom from junior high school onwards in the form of *sempai* or *kohai*, which translates to senior or junior. This is of particular relevance in schools and universities, as junior students are expected to display respect for their senior peers. McVeigh (2002) explains that junior students are expected to take on a passive role, unlike seniors, who take on more active roles. There are roles for each *sempai* and *kohai*. *Sempai* is seen as someone worthy of seeking advice from, someone worthy of depending on, and worthy of taking instruction from (Ono & Shoji, 2015).

However, *sempai* and *kohai* can also create situations in the classroom that may impede participation. Imagine the situation where the NES teacher is trying to teach opinion-giving; this is culturally difficult in Japan anyway (Gorsuch, 1998) and becomes even more complicated when the *sempai/kohai* hierarchical relationship is relevant. Japanese are taught from an early age to respect *sempai*, and this respect includes taking what a *sempai* says as being correct.

Even in university classes where the makeup is mostly of students of the same age in the same academic year, there always exists a *sempai* in the classroom—the teacher. The teacher is the person in the class of the highest status. It is therefore expected that the students show respect and obedience to the teacher or the knowledge the teacher embodies. A well-known Japanese proverb, *Sensei no mae de mikka, sensei no ato de sannen*, which translates to “Three days in front of a teacher, three years behind them”. This proverb emphasizes the impact of learning from a teacher, implying that even a short period of learning from a teacher is valuable and should be respected and followed diligently.

The concept of *sempai* and *kohai* is a fundamental aspect of Japanese social structure, emphasizing the importance of respecting elders and learning from those with more experience. This relationship is not merely confined to age but extends to seniority within a specific context or field. For instance, a younger employee may hold a higher position in a company but is expected to show deference and respect to older colleagues who have been in the company longer, adhering to the *sempai-kohai* dynamics. In Japanese schools, this relationship is prevalent, with older students guiding and mentoring younger ones. The senior students, or *sempai*, are expected to offer support, advice, and assistance to their junior counterparts, the *kohai*, creating a nurturing environment for personal and academic growth. This mentorship extends beyond the classroom, shaping the values of responsibility and camaraderie among peers (Ono & Shoji, 2015). The *sempai-kohai* relationship is a significant aspect of Japanese culture, emphasizing respect, guidance, and hierarchy. Rooted in tradition, it shapes social interactions, fostering mentorship and responsibility among individuals.

## 2.6. Feedback and Consensual Decision-Making

In the context of Japanese educational practices, the approach to feedback and decision-making in classroom settings is oriented to the group rather than the individual. Unlike the typical Western teaching style, where immediate individual feedback may be offered to students, Japanese educators tend to reserve their comments until after group discussions have ensued (Anderson, 1993, 2018). It is noteworthy that these comments often target ideas that have been collectively deliberated upon by students during group work sessions, emphasizing the significance of consensus-building within the classroom (Anderson, 2018).

Banks (2016) observed that group discussions in Japanese classrooms generally lead to a consensual decision, elucidated to the entire class by a designated leader during classroom interactions. This emphasis on a group consensus and the sub-

sequent summary of collective discussions by Japanese teachers distinguishes their instructional approach from the more individual-centric feedback given by Western educators in front of the class.

The impact of this group-oriented dynamic is conspicuous within Japanese university classrooms, fostering a heightened awareness among students of each other's perspectives. This collective consciousness significantly influences in-class activities, particularly evident during problem-solving tasks. Students demonstrate improved interaction within small groups or pairs, assigning a higher value to solutions reached through a group consensus rather than individual efforts (Anderson, 2018). Such dynamics in collaborative problem-solving may be attributed to the students' attitudes and values towards group work, thereby affecting their willingness to communicate effectively within these settings (Woods, 2006).

It has been suggested that Japanese identity is significantly shaped by affiliations with a group (Anderson, 1993). This emphasis on group interconnectedness and shared values underscores the essence of Japanese identity, fostering a collective consciousness that permeates various facets of societal interactions, behaviors, and perceptions (Anderson, 1993). Japanese feel a sense of discomfort when they are not within their group (Koike & Tanaka, 1995). They value harmony within the group. This is referred to as belonging to the group (*uchi*) or being outside the group (*soto*). This concept of belonging to a group is relevant to all aspects of Japanese life, including friendships, study, school, and work. An example of this is if you ask a Japanese person what they do for a living, they generally reply that they work for such and such company, belonging to the group. Their reply indicates the importance attached to the identity of belonging to a group. The concepts of *uchi* and *soto* define social circles. Those within the *uchi* are considered closer, while those outside, or *soto*, occupy a more distant, albeit not necessarily distant in a physical sense. Japanese society emphasizes harmony and group cohesion, which is reflected in the management of spatial boundaries.

Yamagishi (1998) highlighted that Japanese cultural customs limit their engagement with individuals outside their social circles. In educational contexts, this tendency results in reduced communication among Japanese students when they lack affiliations with their peers (Koike & Tanaka, 1995). Within classroom dynamics, students exhibit a preference for collective participation over individual expression (Anderson, 1993). Consequently, even though they may possess knowledge, Japanese students often refrain from voicing their thoughts unless expressly prompted by the teacher (Harumi, 2010). This hesitance to engage independently underscores the significance of contextual and cultural factors influencing communication patterns among Japanese students within academic environments. Because Japanese classrooms are structured around *uchi-soto* boundaries, TBL activities that assume spontaneous peer interaction often fail unless group belonging is first established. **Table 2** is a summary of differences between Japanese and Western-style communication.

**Table 2.** Differences between Western and Japanese cultural values in communication (adapted from Hofstede et al., 2010; Miller, 1995).

Japanese-style communication	Western-style communication
High-context	Low-context
Collectivism	Individualism
High power distance/status	Low power distance/status
Consensual decision-making and feedback	Individual decision-making and feedback
Group identity	Individual identity

From secondary school right through to university, Japanese classrooms have long embraced a pedagogical approach predominantly centered on lecture-style classes. Here, the teacher assumes the role of the primary disseminator of information, while the students are positioned as passive recipients (Hashimoto & Fukuda, 2011; Rohlen, 1983). Consequently, there exists an expectation among students to attentively receive lectures in a quiet and contemplative manner (Hammond, 2007; Maftoon & Ziafar, 2013). This is noted by Cogan (1995: p. 85), who points out that Japanese teachers are seen “as authoritative, particularly concerning the subject matter taught, whereas in the West, teachers are increasingly seen as facilitators and resource persons”. Because of the teacher-reliant study habits that Japanese students have been subjected to during secondary school, communicative English classes are challenging for them (Egitim & Garcia, 2021). This stands in contrast to the evolving Western perspective, where teachers are increasingly regarded as facilitators and resource persons rather than sole providers of knowledge (Hammond, 2007; Hazel & Ayres, 1998). This stark contrast in pedagogical paradigms underscores the differing cultural values and educational philosophies shaping classroom dynamics between Japan and the West, influencing the roles and expectations placed upon educators and learners.

Japanese L2 learning is based on practicing something until it is perfected, often through repetitious drills, listening and repeating, and grammar-based translations (Bennett, 2013). Western countries are different in their approach to education, as communication and discussion are the preferred processes seen to empower students through deep understanding (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009). Class instruction taught by native Japanese-speaking (NJS) teachers that centers on the teacher is still the norm in Japan, with little opportunity for student input unless specifically requested (Mitchell, 2017). In contrast, university English classes in Japan taught by NES teachers frequently incorporate Western-style activities and pedagogy, such as student-centered practices and student-centered learning (Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006; Park, 2002).

The Japanese educational system is thought to be a factor for why Japanese students are silent, along with their communication and cultural tendencies (King, 2013). According to Hammond (2007), the Japanese educational system favors passive, teacher-centered learning. The students, upon entering university, probably expect their roles to be similar to those of secondary school—silent learners

who respect the teacher (Maftoon & Ziafar, 2013). A teacher-centered style of teaching is very different from the student-centered classroom environments that require active participation, which most NES teachers use. NES instructors typically promote dialogue, evaluate verbal involvement as a sign of participation, and look at silence as non-participation or a lack of interest (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). As a result, student silence tends to conflict with the expectations of NES teachers (Maher & King, 2022).

Perceptions of ideal classroom behavior differ between Japan and Western countries. Western education is centered around critical thinking and expressing oneself, whereas rote learning and memorization are mainstream in Japanese schooling (Gorsuch, 1998; Kawabata & Barling, 2020). For example, in the United States of America, students are exposed from an early age to expressing their opinions, debating, and discussing (Hammond, 2007). Western teachers ask their students what they think and why, and there are even students who challenge the teacher (Kawabata & Barling, 2020). Good students are thought to be the ones who actively participate and speak out. By the time students reach university, they are fully accustomed to such behavior in the classroom. However, in Japan, students are taught very differently: They are expected to be quiet and always respect the teacher. The use of silence by Japanese students is a way of showing respect to the teacher (Kato, 2010). In Japan, good students are thought to be those who display traditional Japanese cultural traits: Being obedient, quiet, and good at tests (Nozaki, 1993). Students rarely challenge the teacher, and by the time they reach university, they are fully accustomed to such behavior in the classroom.

### 3. Policy to Improve English Communication

Japanese secondary school students have a concrete goal of passing university entrance exams and, at the same time, a vague goal of being able to communicate with people in the world (Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001). Because of this, the communicative element that is required for communication to take place has largely been ignored. The result of this is that after six years of secondary school education, many Japanese students lack the confidence to converse in English. This has been acknowledged by the government through the change in the curriculum policy by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) that aims to raise the English communicative ability of all high-school students.

Over the past few decades, a lot of curricular innovation has concentrated on implementing communication-based approaches to language instruction (Humphries & Burns, 2015). In the 1970s, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology was developed in Europe. Its goal was to make language classrooms more amenable to students' practical and communicative requirements. CLT gained widespread acceptance and popularity as a response to the limitations of earlier methodologies like the Direct Method, Grammar Translation, and, later, the Natural Approach. Language structures alone could not account for the uniqueness

and innovation seen in spoken language (Horwitz, 2008).

CLT evolved into derivatives and variations after migrating to North America during the mid-1970s, but its core principle remains: Emphasis on function, definition, and fluency over grammar (Suemith, 2011). Students are urged to contribute as much as they can in class. For this reason, engaging in small-group work is essential to fluency development. Students are urged to apply the language with one another and take some ownership of their own learning, rather than just being passive recipients of explanations (Parrish et al., 2006).

Since the late 1980s, MEXT has implemented a number of programs aimed at fostering students' communicative competence. More recently, administrative reforms have been put in place in an effort to have high school English classes taught using English-as-the-Medium-of-Instruction (EMI). JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) programs have been put into effect, and several thousand NES assistant language teachers (ALTs) have traveled and worked in Japan to support Japanese English teachers in classrooms and schools (Kikuchi, 2009). The Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities, which was put into effect by MEXT in 2003, had as its stated goal the production of English-speaking high school graduates. Lastly, the Global 30 program has also been put into practice. This initiative aimed to make Japan's top 30 universities more globally recognized by converting two faculties at each university into EMI departments (MEXT, 2003).

To increase the linguistic ability of Japanese secondary school students, MEXT announced an ambitious plan in 2002. It aimed to increase the communicative English ability so that students who graduated from high school would be able to communicate in the English language (MEXT, 2003). While there would still be a concentration on English in terms of university entrance examinations, MEXT was also indicating that more energy should be devoted to raising the communicative ability of Japanese students. Despite these sweeping reforms aiming to overhaul the curriculum and teaching styles of the English language policy in place at that time, the plan and reforms received criticism as being too rash, given the limited teaching hours provided for oral English classes (Hato, 2005).

In 2011, MEXT started directing teachers to increase the opportunities to engage students in English communication activities in English classes (MEXT, 2011). Using English to encourage communicative activities has been encouraged by MEXT (2011, 2013). This requires NJS teachers to use English in their teaching and instructions to students; however, many Japanese teachers are still teaching English classes in their native language of Japanese (Humphries, 2014). In addition to the 2002 plan, MEXT began to implement English communication classes from Grade five classes in all public elementary schools from 2011 (MEXT, 2009). Even though the government is actively trying to encourage English communication in school, many students are still silent in English classes. The students' English abilities have even decreased since the government started to stress the importance of communication in English classes (Ito, 2021). MEXT announced that, in addition to the above goals and plans, instilling attitudes that are positive re-

garding English communication among students is a goal of English education in Japan (MEXT, 2021).

Consequently, English instruction has been gradually shifting from a grammar-translation approach to one that incorporates communicative approaches that are based on CLT. Nonetheless, there is still a significant gap between declared educational goals and actual implementation in this effort to improve communicative ability and oral involvement among Japanese students (King, 2013). Many university students have limited experience conducting practical conversations, even though they have studied English at secondary school (Talandis & Stout, 2014).

Several curricular barriers stand in the way of MEXT's aspirational goals of "enabling students to understand the speaker's intentions when listening to English" and "talk about their own thoughts using English" to "express themselves in a way appropriate to a specific situation and condition" (MEXT, 2008: pp. 2-3). It has been noted time and time again that the main focus of English teaching in Japan is getting pupils ready for entrance tests (Inomori, 2012). According to Inomori (2012), the primary goal of English language instruction in Japanese public schools is to cover all the material needed to pass entrance examinations; therefore, improving communication skills will not be possible without changing the entrance exams.

While the cultural characteristics outlined in Section 2 provide an important framework for understanding Japanese classroom behavior, their relevance becomes particularly apparent when examined in relation to national English education policy. Many of the initiatives introduced by MEXT—especially those grounded in CLT and TBL—are implicitly based on assumptions rooted in Western educational norms, such as individual expression, low power distance, and spontaneous peer interaction. However, these assumptions do not always align with the cultural dynamics that shape Japanese students' classroom behavior.

Cultural concepts such as *uchi-soto*, harmony maintenance, and hierarchical awareness directly influence how students interpret participation, group work, and verbal engagement. As a result, policy initiatives that promote student-centered learning and communicative interaction may be implemented in ways that diverge significantly from their original intent. Rather than functioning as neutral pedagogical tools, CLT- and TBL-based activities are filtered through existing cultural expectations, often leading to reduced oral participation, reliance on teacher mediation, and surface-level engagement. Understanding this cultural mediation is essential for explaining why MEXT's communicative reforms have achieved uneven results despite sustained policy emphasis.

Studies have been carried out in Japan on transforming English language education into a more communicative environment (Nakata, 2006; Osterman, 2014), but they have drawn somewhat mixed conclusions. According to Sakamoto (2023), Japanese university students are still noticeably silent in English language classes. As long as English teaching in secondary high school continues to prioritize success on university entrance examinations, teachers remain constrained in

their ability to develop students' communicative English skills (Egitim, 2021; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004). In fact, due to the importance attached to entrance examination outcomes, one way that native Japanese-speaking (NJS) teachers are evaluated is by the number of students they teach who successfully pass public university entrance examinations (Kawabata & Barling, 2020).

The use of English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI), active learning, and other pedagogical reforms have therefore met with mixed results in Japan (Egitim, 2021). In the Japanese higher education context, active learning is generally defined—following MEXT policy discourse—as instructional practices that shift classrooms away from one-way lectures toward activities that require students' cognitive, behavioral, and sometimes verbal engagement, such as group work, discussion, problem-solving, and reflection (MEXT, 2013). While this definition overlaps with Western conceptions of active learning, which often emphasize student autonomy, critical questioning, and spontaneous verbal participation, active learning in Japan is frequently implemented in more structured and teacher-mediated forms. These adaptations are intended to align with existing educational norms that value harmony, guidance, and clarity of expectations, rather than open-ended debate or confrontation.

Within English language education, this policy-driven interpretation of active learning often manifests through approaches such as task-based learning (TBL), content-based instruction (CBI), and guided interactional activities. There have been reports of positive outcomes from such approaches. For example, Toyoda et al. (2021) found that Japanese high school students demonstrated increased willingness to speak in English when using TBL. Similarly, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) reported that junior high school students engaged in content-based instruction showed higher willingness to communicate than those who were not. Stone and Kershaw (2021) developed a rubric that enabled Japanese university students to self-evaluate interactional difficulties, leading to improvements in classroom communication without direct teacher intervention.

However, there are also reports of unsuccessful attempts to implement active learning in English language classrooms. The expansion of EMI-based content courses at universities has generated challenges for both teachers and students (Egitim, 2024). Karas and Uchihara (2021) found that TBL and CBI were difficult for Japanese students and, when implemented without sufficient scaffolding, placed pressure on students to speak prematurely. Similarly, Burrows (2008) reported that TBL was often ineffective in Japanese classrooms due to mismatches between pedagogical expectations and students' cultural and educational backgrounds.

### Universities and University Teachers

Japanese secondary school students study intensively to pass highly competitive university entrance examinations. These examinations exert a powerful washback effect on classroom pedagogy, shaping not only what is taught but how students

are expected to engage with English. The majority of entrance examinations prioritize receptive skills—particularly reading comprehension and listening—as well as discrete-point grammar knowledge and translation accuracy (Inomori, 2012). Listening sections typically require students to select correct answers based on short dialogues or monologues, emphasizing accurate comprehension rather than interaction, clarification, or response production. Speaking, spontaneous questioning, and meaning negotiation are rarely assessed, if at all.

As a result, English instruction in secondary schools is largely oriented toward training students to listen silently, process information internally, and demonstrate understanding through written or multiple-choice responses. This exam-driven focus reinforces a view of listening as a passive, one-directional activity, aligning closely with the culturally embedded listening practices described in Section 2.2, where listeners are expected to infer meaning without interrupting or seeking clarification. Because misunderstanding in exams results in immediate penalties, students learn to avoid asking questions and instead attempt to interpret meaning independently, even when comprehension is incomplete.

Once students enter university, the sharp contrast between the exam-oriented high school environment and the comparatively low-pressure university setting becomes apparent. After years of sustained effort aimed at examination success, many students reduce their academic engagement, leading to perceptions of low motivation (Berwick & Ross, 1989; Landsberry, 2018). Tsuda (1986) characterizes university as a period of freedom before entry into the workforce, a view echoed by Landsberry (2018), who argues that the intense demands of entrance examination preparation contribute to motivational decline once that external pressure is removed.

The structure of university entrance examinations not only reflects but actively reinforces culturally preferred listening behaviors. Because success depends on silent comprehension, inference, and individual processing, students are systematically trained to view listening as a private cognitive activity rather than an interactive process. This exam-oriented listening mirrors the Japanese cultural expectation that listeners bear responsibility for understanding meaning without disrupting the speaker (Anderson, 1993; Takanashi, 2004). Consequently, when students later encounter communicative classrooms that require clarification requests, verbal feedback, or collaborative meaning-making, these practices conflict with deeply ingrained listening habits shaped by years of examination preparation. In this way, entrance examinations function as an institutional mechanism that sustains passive listening norms, complicating MEXT's efforts to promote communicative competence at the university level.

University represents a period of social and academic transition during which students renegotiate their learner identities. McVeigh (2002) notes that some students enter university expecting English classes to be engaging and transformative, particularly in contrast to the rigid exam-focused instruction they experienced in secondary school. However, the success of this transition depends heavily

on teaching style and classroom expectations.

Clear differences exist between the instructional practices of native Japanese-speaking (NJS) teachers and native English-speaking (NES) teachers at the university level. Classes taught by NJS teachers often replicate the teacher-centered model familiar from secondary education, where students listen quietly and speak only when directly called upon (Harumi, 2010; Schneider & Mecba, 2018). These classes are generally perceived as academically serious and content-focused (Nagatomo, 2016). Questioning or clarification typically occurs after class rather than during instruction, reflecting students' long-standing habituation to silent listening (Takanashi, 2004).

In contrast, NES teachers are frequently assigned communicative courses and are expected to employ interactive, student-centered methodologies (Bao, 2014). These classes often incorporate activities such as group work, opinion-giving, role-playing, and open-ended questioning—practices that assume learners will actively signal comprehension, request clarification, and negotiate meaning. However, many Japanese university students lack experience with these interactional demands, as their prior English education emphasized listening for accuracy rather than engagement (Bosio, 2015). Amar (2021) notes that active participation remains relatively unfamiliar to many Japanese students, and despite MEXT's promotion of active learning, only around 20% of university classes have adopted such approaches (Kariya, 2024). The differences between Japan and the West regarding learning styles reviewed so far may be summarized as in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Japanese and Western classroom differences.

Areas	Japanese	Western
View of knowledge and learning	Transferred from teacher to student	Jointly constructed between teacher and students
The teacher	Authoritarian	Liberal
The student	Silent/passive	Active
Learning style	Memory-based	Constructivist
Classroom environment	Uniformity	Variation
Teacher-students relationship	Impersonal	Personal

#### 4. Pedagogical Strategies for Promoting English Communication in Japanese University Classrooms

While policy reforms and communicative methodologies such as CLT and TBL provide an important framework for improving English communication, their effectiveness ultimately depends on how they are operationalized in classrooms. Given the cultural, educational, and institutional constraints outlined in Sections 2 and 3, communicative instruction in Japanese university contexts requires pedagogical strategies that are both culturally responsive and instructionally practical.

This section proposes several strategies that align communicative goals with Japanese students' learning histories and expectations.

### **Cultural Considerations for Japanese Students**

Because willingness to speak is strongly influenced by *uchi-soto* dynamics, instructors should prioritize the early formation of stable classroom groups. Rather than frequently rotating partners—a common practice in Western communicative classrooms—keeping students in consistent small groups allows relationships of trust to develop over time. Once students perceive their peers as members of their *uchi*, they are more likely to participate verbally without fear of social risk or disruption of harmony. This approach supports communicative interaction while respecting culturally grounded preferences for relational stability.

Given students' limited experience with spontaneous verbal interaction, participation should be carefully scaffolded. Initial tasks can emphasize low-risk output, such as controlled pair discussions, rehearsed responses, or written planning prior to speaking. Gradually increasing the level of spontaneity helps students transition from passive listening to active participation without overwhelming them. This incremental approach aligns with Japanese educational norms that value preparation and accuracy, while still fostering communicative competence.

Silence in Japanese classrooms should not be immediately interpreted as disengagement. Instructors can explicitly acknowledge silence as a legitimate form of processing while simultaneously modeling interactional listening behaviors, such as clarification requests and confirmation checks. By demonstrating that asking questions signals engagement rather than incompetence, teachers can help students reconceptualize listening as an interactive rather than purely inferential activity. This reframing is particularly important in EMI and TBL contexts, where interaction is essential to task success.

Due to hierarchical expectations and students' reliance on teacher authority, early communicative activities may benefit from strong teacher mediation. Rather than positioning the teacher solely as a facilitator from the outset, instructors can initially take on a more directive role by modeling target language use, structuring turn-taking, and explicitly assigning speaking roles within groups. As students gain confidence, the teacher can gradually reduce intervention, allowing learners to assume greater ownership of interaction.

Many communicative difficulties arise not from linguistic deficiency but from unfamiliarity with interactional norms such as turn-taking, expressing disagreement, or requesting clarification. Providing explicit instruction and practice in these skills—through role-plays, discourse models, and reflective activities—can demystify communicative expectations. This approach aligns with Japanese students' preference for clear guidance and reduces the ambiguity often associated with Western-style communicative tasks.

To counteract the washback effects of entrance examinations, communicative

activities should be meaningfully linked to assessment. When participation, interactional competence, and communicative effort are explicitly evaluated—using rubrics or self-assessment tools such as those proposed by Stone and Kershaw (2021)—students are more likely to view communicative engagement as legitimate academic work rather than optional performance. This alignment helps reconcile students' exam-oriented learning histories with communicative instructional goals.

## 5. Conclusion

In EFL classrooms in Japan, student silence is a multifaceted, culturally embedded phenomenon that reflects attentiveness, respect, and adherence to social and educational norms rather than disengagement or lack of ability. Rooted in high-context communication, collectivist values, and hierarchical awareness, Japanese students often prioritize group harmony, careful consideration, and respect for authority over individual verbal expression. Classroom practices such as turn-taking, listening attentively, and employing nonverbal cues serve as communicative tools that align with cultural expectations, challenging Western assumptions that equate silence with passivity. Furthermore, traditional teacher-centered pedagogy, exam-oriented pressures, and the hierarchical *sempai-kohai* system reinforce these behaviors, demonstrating that silence is a strategic and meaningful component of Japanese students' classroom participation.

Recognizing silence as a purposeful, culturally informed practice has important implications for both educational policy and teaching strategies. While recent reforms in Japan, including the promotion of CLT and EMI, aim to encourage oral participation, these initiatives must account for deeply ingrained cultural and social practices to be fully effective. Educators, particularly native English-speaking instructors, can enhance intercultural understanding and foster engagement by interpreting silence not as a deficit, but as an active, contextually appropriate form of participation. Aligning classroom policies and instructional strategies with cultural realities can support the development of communicative competence while respecting the social norms that shape Japanese learners' behavior, ultimately bridging the gap between policy objectives and classroom realities.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- Akiyama, Y. (2017). Vicious Vs. Virtuous Cycles of Turn Negotiation in American-Japanese Telecollaboration: Is Silence a Virtue? *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 17, 190-209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2016.1277231>
- Amar, C. (2021). Exploring EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Active and Passive Learning in Japanese Universities. *Journal of School of Languages and Communication, Kobe University*, 17, 15-30.
- Anderson, F. E. (1993). The Enigma of the College Classroom: Nails That Don't Stick up.

- In P. Wadden (Ed.), *A Handbook for Teaching English at Japanese Colleges and Universities* (pp. 101-110). Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, F. E. (2018). Nails That Don't Stick up: Revisiting the Enigma of the Japanese College Classroom. In P. Wadden, & C. C. Hale (Eds.), *Teaching English at Japanese Colleges and Universities: A New Handbook* (pp. 125-136). Routledge.
- Banks, S. (2016). Behind Japanese Students' Silence in English Classrooms. *Accents Asia*, 8, 54-75.
- Bao, D. (2014). *Understanding Silence and Reticence*. Bloomsbury.
- Bao, D. (2023). *Silence in Second Language Pedagogy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Barraja-Rohan, A. (1997). Teaching Conversation and Sociocultural Norms with Conversation Analysis. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics. Series S*, 14, 71-88. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aralss.14.04bar>
- Bennett, M. J. (2013). *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication* (2nd ed.). Intercultural Press.
- Berwick, R., & Ross, S. (1989). Motivation after Matriculation: Are Japanese Learners of English Still Alive after Exam Hell? *JALT Journal*, 11, 193-210.
- Bosio, E. (2015). Intercultural Communication in Japanese Learners of English across Learning Contexts. *Journal of Soka University Graduate School*, 37, 211-236.
- Bowers, J. (1988). Japan-U.S. Relationships from an Intercultural Communication Point of View. *The Language Teacher*, 12, 17-20.
- Brown, A. H., Cervero, R. M., & Johnson-Bailey, J. (2000). Making the Invisible Visible: Race, Gender, and Teaching in Adult Education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50, 273-288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171360005000402>
- Burrows, C. (2008). Socio-Cultural Barriers Facing TBL in Japan. *The Language Teacher*, 32, 15-19.
- Cogan, D. (1995). Classroom Cultures: East Meets West. In G. van Troyer, S. Cornwell, & H. Morikawa (Eds.), *Proceedings of the JALT '95 International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 104-107). JALT.
- Doi, T. (2001). *The Anatomy of Dependence*. Kodansha International.
- Egitim, S. (2021). Collaborative Leadership in English Language Classrooms: Engaging Learners in Leaderful Classroom Practices and Strategies. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 28, 32-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.1990413>
- Egitim, S. (2024). Does Language Teachers' Intercultural Competence Influence Oral Participation in EFL Classrooms? Unveiling Learner Perspectives through a Mixed Methods Inquiry. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 46, 2778-2793. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2306169>
- Egitim, S., & Garcia, T. (2021). Japanese University Students' Perceptions of Foreign English Teachers. *English Language Teaching*, 14, 13-22. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v14n5p13>
- Ellwood, C., & Nakane, I. (2009). Privileging of Speech in EAP and Mainstream University Classrooms: A Critical Evaluation of Participation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43, 203-230. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00165.x>
- Furo, H. (2001). *Turn-Taking in English and Japanese*. Routledge.
- Gorsuch, G. (1998). Yakudoku EFL Instruction in Two Japanese High School Classrooms: An Exploratory Study. *JALT Journal*, 20, 6-32.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1988). *Theories in Intercultural Communication*. Sage.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. Doubleday.

- Hall, E. T. (1981). *Beyond Culture*. Doubleday.
- Hall, E. T., & Hall, M. R. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences*. Intercultural Press.
- Hammond, C. (2007). Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Japanese Classroom: A Comparative Analysis of Cultural Teaching and Learning Styles in Japan and the United States. *Journal of the Faculty of Economics, Kyoto Gakuen University*, 17, 41-50.
- Harumi, S. (2010). Classroom Silence: Voices from Japanese EFL Learners. *ELT Journal*, 65, 260-269. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq046>
- Harumi, S. (2023). The Mediative Role of Learning Materials: Raising L2 Learners' Awareness of Silence and Conversational Repair during L2 Interaction. *Journal of Silence Studies in Education*, 2, 145-162. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jsse.v2i2.79>
- Harumi, S., & King, J. (2020). East Asian Perspectives on Silence in English Language Education: An Introduction. In J. King, & S. Harumi (Eds.), *East Asian Perspectives on Silence in English Language Education* (pp. 1-16). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.22730507.8>
- Hashimoto, N., & Fukuda, S. (2011). Reaching for Their Own Goals: A More Democratic Classroom. *The Language Teacher*, 35, 17-22. <https://doi.org/10.37546/jalttl35.1-6>
- Hato, Y. (2005). Problems in Top-Down Goal Setting in Second Language Education: A Case Study of the "Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'". *JALT Journal*, 27, 33-51. <https://doi.org/10.37546/jaltjj27.1-2>
- Hazel, M. T., & Ayres, J. (1998). Conversational Turn-Taking Behaviors of Japanese and Americans in Small Groups. *JALT Journal*, 20, 91-99.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (Rev. 3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Holliday, A. (1999). Small Cultures. *Applied Linguistics*, 20, 237-264. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/20.2.237>
- Horwitz, E. K. (2008). *Becoming a Language Teacher: A Practical Guide to Second Language Learning and Teaching*. Pearson Education.
- Humphries, S. (2014). Factors Influencing Japanese Teachers' Adoption of Communication-Oriented Textbooks. In S. Garton, & K. Graves (Eds.), *International Perspectives on Materials in ELT* (pp. 253-269). Palgrave Macmillan UK. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023315\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023315_15)
- Humphries, S., & Burns, A. (2015). "In Reality It's Almost Impossible": CLT-Oriented Curriculum Change. *ELT Journal*, 69, 239-248. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccu081>
- Inomori, T. (2012). A Starting Point to Conduct English Language Class in English. *The English Teachers' Magazine*, 61, 31-33.
- Ishii, S., & Bruneau, T. (1994). Silence and Silences in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Japan and the United States. In L. Samovar, & R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (pp. 246-251). Wadsworth.
- Ito, T. (2021). Effects of General Trust as a Personality Trait on Willingness to Communicate in a Second Language. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 185, Article ID: 111286. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111286>
- Karas, M., & Uchihara, T. (2021). Silence: A Duoethnography. *Journal of Silence Studies in Education*, 1, 64-75. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jsse.v1i1.5>
- Kariya, T. (2024). A Long & Wrong Road to Globalization: Why Have Japanese Universities Failed in "Catching Up" in the Twenty-First Century? *Daedalus*, 153, 120-135. [https://doi.org/10.1162/daed\\_a\\_02069](https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_02069)
- Kato, M. (2010). Silence as Participation: The Case of Japanese Students. *Journal of Multi-*

*culturalism in Education*, 6, 1-18.

- Kawabata, S., & Barling, G. (2020). Hierarchy, Collectivism, and Group Identity: An Analysis of the Potential Effect of Cultural Values on ELT in a Japanese High School. *Bulletin of Shikoku University*, 48, 43-48.
- Kikuchi, K. (2009). Listening to Our Learners' Voices: What Demotivates Japanese High School Students? *Language Teaching Research*, 13, 453-471.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168809341520>
- Kim, S., Ates, B., Grigsby, Y., Kraker, S., & Micek, T. A. (2016). Ways to Promote the Classroom Participation of International Students by Understanding the Silence of Japanese University Students. *Journal of International Students*, 6, 431-450.  
<https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i2.365>
- Kimura, Y., Nakata, Y., & Okumura, T. (2001). Language Learning Motivation of EFL Learners in Japan. *JALT Journal*, 23, 47-68.
- King, J. (2013). *Silence in the Second Language Classroom*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Klopf, D. W. (1991). Japanese Communication Practices: Recent Comparative Research. *Communication Quarterly*, 39, 130-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379109369791>
- Koike, I., & Tanaka, H. (1995). English Language Policy in Japan. *World Englishes*, 14, 13-25.
- Kumagai, Y. (1994). *The Effects of Culture on Language Learning (Master's Capstone Project, No. 80)*.
- Landsberry, L. (2018). Japanese University Students' Study Habits. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & P. Bennett (Eds.), *Diversity and Inclusion* (pp. 153-160). JALT.
- Lebra, T. S. (1987). The Cultural Significance of Silence in Japanese Communication. *Multi-Lingua*, 6, 343-358. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1987.6.4.343>
- Maftoon, P., & Ziafar, M. (2013). Effective Factors in Interactions within Japanese EFL Classrooms. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 86, 74-79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2012.748641>
- Maher, K., & King, J. (2022). "The Silence Kills Me": "Silence" as a Trigger of Speaking-Related Anxiety in the English-Medium Classroom. *English Teaching & Learning*, 46, 213-234. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-022-00119-4>
- Matsumoto, D., & Ekman, P. (1989). American-Japanese Cultural Differences in Intensity Ratings of Facial Expressions of Emotion. *Motivation and Emotion*, 13, 143-157.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00992959>
- McVeigh, B. J. (2002). *Japanese Higher Education as Myth*. M. E. Sharpe.
- Miller, T. (1995). Japanese Learners' Reactions to Communicative English Lessons. *JALT Journal*, 17, 31-52.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2003). *Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities*.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2008). *English Translation of the Guide to Course of Study: Foreign Language*. <https://www.mext.go.jp/>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2009). *English Language Education Reform Plan*.  
[https://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/hyouka/kekka/08100105/022.htm](https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/hyouka/kekka/08100105/022.htm)
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2011). *Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication*.  
[https://www.mext.go.jp/component/english/\\_icsFiles/afield-file/2012/07/09/1319707\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/component/english/_icsFiles/afield-file/2012/07/09/1319707_1.pdf)

- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2013). *Gurōbaruka ni taishita eigo kyōiku kaikaku jissshi keikaku ni tsuite* [The Plan for Implementing an English Education Reform in Response to Globalization].
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2021). *Curriculum Guideline*. <https://www.mext.go.jp/en/>
- Mitchell, C. (2017). Language Education Pressures in Japanese High Schools. *Shiken*, 21, 1-11.
- Nagatomo, D. (2016). *Identity, Gender and Teaching English in Japan*. Multilingual Matters.
- Nakane, I. (2005). Negotiating Silence and Speech in the Classroom. *Multilingua-Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 24, 75-100. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.24.1-2.75>
- Nakane, I. (2006). Silence and Politeness in Intercultural Communication in University Seminars. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38, 1811-1835. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.01.005>
- Nakane, I. (2007). *Silence in Intercultural Communication: Perceptions and Performance*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.166>
- Nakata, Y. (2006). *Motivation and Experience in Foreign Language Learning*. Peter Lang.
- Nguyen, P., Terlouw, C., & Pilot, A. (2006). Culturally Appropriate Pedagogy: The Case of Group Learning in a Confucian Heritage Culture Context. *Intercultural Education*, 17, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980500502172>
- Nozaki, K. N. (1993). The Japanese Student and the Foreign Teacher. In P. Wadden (Ed.), *Teaching English at Japanese Colleges and Universities* (pp. 101-110). Oxford University Press.
- Ohashi, L. (2015). Enhancing EFL Writing Courses with the Online Student Response System Socrative. *Cross-Cultural Business and Cultural Studies*, 19, 135-145.
- Ono, Y., & Shoji, I. (2015). Senior-Junior (Senpai-Kohai) Relationships in Secondary School Activities. *The Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, 63, 438-452. <https://doi.org/10.5926/jjep.63.438>
- Osterman, G. L. (2014). Japanese University Students' Willingness to Speak English. *Sage Open*, 1-14.
- Park, C. C. (2002). Crosscultural Differences in Learning Styles of Secondary English Learners. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 26, 443-459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2002.10668720>
- Parrish, T. B., Merickel, A., Pérez, M. E., Linquanti, R., Socías, M., Spain, A. K., Speroni, C., Esra, P., Brock, L., & Delancey, D. (2006). *Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12: Findings from a Five-Year Evaluation (Final Report for AB 56 and AB 1116)*. American Institutes for Research.
- Peng, J. E. (2020). Willing Silence and Silent Willingness to Communicate. In J. King, & S. Harumi (Eds.), *East Asian Perspectives on Silence* (pp. 143-166). Multilingual Matters.
- Rohlen, T. P. (1983). *Japan's High Schools*. University of California Press.
- Sakamoto, F. (2023). *Global Competence and Foreign-Language Learning in Japan*. Ph.D. Thesis, Macquarie University.
- Sakamoto, N., & Naotsuka, R. (1982). *Polite Fictions: Why Japanese and Americans Seem Rude to Each Other*. Kinseido.
- Sasaki, Y., & Ortlieb, E. (2017). Investigating Why Japanese Students Remain Silent in Australian University Classrooms. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 27, 85-98.

<https://doi.org/10.1075/japc.27.1.05sas>

- Sato, K., & Kleinsasser, R. C. (2004). Beliefs, Practices, and Interactions of Teachers in a Japanese High School English Department. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 797-816. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.09.004>
- Schneider, A., & Mecba, J. (2018). A Job Interview Task-Based Unit Using the PACE Approach. *CUE Journal*, 11, 51-67.
- Stone, P., & Kershaw, M. (2021). Developing Practices for Opening Classroom Discussion. *Language, Culture and Society*, 19, 1-32.
- Su, F., Wood, M., & Tribe, R. (2023). "Dare to Be Silent": Re-Conceptualising Silence as a Positive Pedagogical Approach in Schools. *Research in Education*, 116, 29-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00345237231152604>
- Suemith, M. E. (2011). The Communicative Language Teaching Approach. *Magister Scientiae*, 30, 1-9.
- Sugimura, K., & Mizokami, S. (2012). Personal Identity in Japan. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2012, 123-143. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20025>
- Takanashi, Y. (2004). TEFL and Communication Styles in Japanese Culture. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 17, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310408666678>
- Talandis, G., & Stout, M. (2014). Getting EFL Students to Speak: An Action Research Approach. *ELT Journal*, 69, 11-25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccu037>
- Toyoda, J., Yashima, T., & Aubrey, S. (2021). Enhancing Situational Willingness to Communicate in Novice EFL Learners through Task-Based Learning. *JALT Journal*, 43, 185-214. <https://doi.org/10.37546/jaltj43.2-3>
- Tsuda, Y. (1986). *Language Inequality and Distortion in Intercultural Communication*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pb.vii.7>
- Wen, W. P., & Clément, R. (2003). A Chinese Conceptualisation of Willingness to Communicate in ESL. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 16, 18-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310308666654>
- Wong, J., & Waring, H. Z. (2010). *Conversation Analysis and Second Language Pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Woods, D. (2006). The Social Construction of Beliefs in the Language Classroom. In P. Kalaja, & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA* (pp. 201-229). Springer.
- Yamagishi, T. (1998). *The Structure of Trust*. University of Tokyo Press.
- Yashima, T., & Zenuk-Nishide, L. (2008). The Impact of Learning Contexts on Proficiency, Attitudes, and L2 Communication: Creating an Imagined International Community. *System*, 36, 566-585. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.03.006>