

2022 Final AR Report: Developing Sixth-Grade Elementary School Students' Speaking Skills through Focus-on-Form Instruction and Communication Strategies

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1. Introduction

With English as a mandatory school subject in the elementary fifth and sixth grade level in 2020, teachers need to develop a different outlook on language teaching. Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been proven an effective approach as Brown (2007) defines it as “an approach to language teaching methodology that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task-based activities, and communication for the real world, meaningful purposes” (p. 378). This study presents the case that communication strategies (CSs) and focus-on-form instruction (FFI) aid in L2 learning with reference to speaking fluency. In Japan, few studies were carried out on CSs and FFI in the elementary grade level. This report describes the development of the teacher’s knowledge of CLT, the participants’ use of CSs, and the effects of FFI on the students’ language learning. Data collection methods were in the form of questionnaires, speaking test results, recorded and transcribed conversations, written output, student feedback and reflection. This project proposes that CSs and FFI have potential to help elementary school students make their conversations longer and more meaningful. CSs and FFI approaches can help them gain confidence in communication.

I work at a private kindergarten. Our students have 50-minute English lessons once a week. Our students clearly need to use the language as a tool to communicate and the first step would be to help them bridge the gap between what they know and what they lack. Their numerous homework helped them memorize sets of question-and-answer flashcards. When asked similar questions that were not on the list, they often get confused. It appears that they have the tools to build something but do not have the manual to start doing so. The teacher just kept supplying them more tools through drills, repeat-after-me sequence, and memorization. My goal was to change that and give them guidance on how to use all their acquired knowledge into practice and eventually communicate. I wanted to influence them where they can feel confident and empowered to express their thoughts and opinions.

2. Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Up to the late 60's, traditional approaches to language teaching gave priority to grammatical competence as the basis of language proficiency. Techniques that were often employed included memorization, question-and-answer practice, substitution drills, and others. One of the traditional methods is the audio-lingual commonly known as ALM. With this method, instructors were drill leaders with students likened to that of a parrot. ALM assumed that good habits were formed through repetition, imitation, and reinforcement by memorizing dialogs and practicing sentence patterns (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 13). Habit formation was a norm in the process of acquiring a second language, and great attention was given to avoiding mistakes in drill practices. Furthermore, "ALM instructors did not usually provide opportunities for students to use the language in a meaningful or communicative way, one involving the exchange of messages" (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, pp. 9-10). Syllabuses during this period consisted of word lists and grammar lists, graded across levels. In the 1970's, traditional methods of teaching fell out of fashion. Since it was argued that language ability involved much more than grammatical competence, the centrality of grammar in language teaching and learning was questioned. Attention shifted to communicative competence (CC): the knowledge and skills needed to use grammar and other aspects of language appropriately for different communicative purposes. These developments demonstrated the limitations of the conventional approaches to language teaching and provided alternatives. In time, CLT emerged. With the advent of CLT, the teacher's role changed.

Definition of Communicative Competence

Central to the understanding of CLT is an understanding of the term *communicative competence*. Chomsky (1965) strongly claimed that competence is to be associated exclusively with knowledge of rules of grammar (implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar). Dell Hymes criticized Chomsky's theory of competence (cited in Kamiya, 2006). He argued that Chomsky's perception of competence was insufficient to explain an individual's "language behavior as a whole" (Ohno, 2006, p. 26). Hymes (1972) and Campbell and Wales (1970) propose CC, a broader notion of competence intended to not only include grammatical competence but also contextual and sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of the use of

language use). Communicative language teaching was developed when, under the influence of Hymes's notion of communication competence, the dimension of language was extended and considered to include aspects of communication and culture. Dell Hymes coined the term in 1966 in response to the view of linguistics and educators to language as only the grammatical matter. Hymes (1972) said, "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (p. 278). Hymes (1979) stated that what language teachers should strive for is CC; knowledge of the language structure as well as social knowledge regarding these structures, and the ability to use the language appropriately in a variety of contexts. According to Canale and Swain (1980), CC describes four discrete skills; grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence (see also Canale, 1983). Richards (2006) stated that CC includes the following aspects of language knowledge: knowledge of how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions; knowledge on how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication); knowledge on how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations). Lastly, knowledge on how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies) (p. 2). All these are crucial and should be considered when teaching a language. It may be a challenge to impart such knowledge in short spans of time; thus, educators need to prioritize what to teach depending on students' needs. CC needs to be enhanced and developed over time to be proficient and effective in communicating with others. The main aim in CLT is to develop the language learner's CC.

Definition of communicative language teaching

There are many definitions and interpretations of CLT. It derives from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes, at least, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research (Savignon, 2002, p. 4). She writes that "CLT refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning" and that "the central theoretical concept in communicative language teaching is CC" (p. 1). According to Littlewood (1981), CLT pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining them into a more fully communicative view; whereas grammar translation and audio-lingual method saw language

learning as a set of rules to be learned (p. 1). Nunan (1989) supports Littlewood's view by saying that CLT pays more attention to knowing how to use the rules effectively and appropriately in communication (p. 12). It does not see language as a set of rules.

One of the most characteristic features of CLT is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view. In a CLT classroom, students strive to get their meaning across. Brown (2007) gives his definition of CLT as "an approach to language teaching methodology that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task-based activities, and communication for the real world, meaningful purposes" (p. 378).

Brown also offers four interconnected characteristics of CLT:

1. Classroom goals are focused on all the components of CC and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately must use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts. (p. 241)

Although the aim of CLT is communicative in nature, Brown emphasized that grammar and other components such as listening and reading were not neglected. This was highly considered when the activities in this research were planned at the beginning of the year.

Similarly, Nunan (1991) gave five features of CLT:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.

4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- v. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom. (p. 279)

Nunan and Brown stressed the significance of the actual language use in the classroom. For beginner learners, scaffolds like guide sheets or model dialogues can be used at the outset; however, the students should move away from these as they progress in their skills.

Berns (1990) states that "language teaching is based on a view of language as communication, that is, language is seen as a social tool which speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone for some purpose, either orally or in writing" (p. 104). This approach empowers students to acquire the skills in communicating with others using a second language.

Harmer (2001) claims that the term CLT includes a complete reexamination of what aspects of language should be taught and how languages should be taught in general (p. 84). He suggests that CLT has now become a term that describes teaching which aims to improve the learner's ability to communicate, both orally and in written form (p. 86). It needs to be clarified that CLT does not focus exclusively on oral communication. Savignon (2002) emphasized that the principles apply equally to reading and writing activities that involve readers and writers in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning (p. 22). She added that "the basic principle is that learners should engage with texts and meaning through the process of use and discovery" (p. 7). The central aspect of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication to empower them to develop their CC.

Communication Strategies

Definition of Communication Strategies (CSs)

One of the components of CC is the strategic competence. The two types of strategies are CSs and learning strategies. These strategies are interrelated, although CSs are concerned with productive skills while learning strategies deal with receptive skills. Strategic competence is the knowledge of how to use one's language to communicate intended meaning (Tarone, 1983, p. 120). To develop the overall CC at an early stage, Savignon (1997) stressed the relevance of developing strategic competence. She proposed an inverted pyramid advocating possible relationship between sociolinguistic, strategic, discourse, and grammatical competence as overall

CC increases. At the lower stage of CC, the ratio of strategic competence is larger than the other competences. It showed that language learners rely on strategic competence at the beginning of learning. An advanced learner also has the possibility to use the strategy in a communication.

Selinker (1972) first proposed the notion of communication strategies (CSs) as one of the five learning processes for second language learners. In the 1980s, the interest in CSs took off (pp. 501-502). Ellis (1985) defines CSs as “psycholinguistic plans which exist as part of the language user’s CC. They are potentially conscious and serve as substitutes for production plans which the learner is unable to implement” (p. 182). Ellis (1994) also suggests that CSs be seen as a set of skills, which learners use to overcome their inadequacies in the target language. From the psycholinguistic perspective, Faerch and Kasper (1980) define CSs as “potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal” (p. 81). Tarone (1977) stated that “Conscious communication strategies are used by an individual to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual’s thought” (p. 195). Students need the skill on how to use whatever knowledge they have strategically to help convey their message to their interlocutor.

Teachability of CSs in the communicative language classroom

There has been controversy over the teachability of CSs from the 80’s into the 90’s (Dörnyei, 1995). A summary of some of the arguments follows. Bialystok (1990) views that “there is little empirical research investigating the pedagogy of CSs, so descriptions and evaluations of any procedure are somewhat speculative” (p. 149). Learners like Schmidt’s (1983) Wes have been found to develop their strategic competence at the expense of their linguistic competence (p. 137-174). Bialystok (1990) and Kellerman (1991) argue that one should teach the language itself rather than the strategies (p. 147). Kellerman (1991) believes that teachers should teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves (p. 158).

Still, many researchers maintain that strategy training is possible and desirable. “Whereas strong theoretical arguments reject the validity and usefulness of specific CSs training, practical considerations and experience appear to support the idea” (Dörnyei, 1995, p. 60). Willems (1987) writes that “A side effect of introducing a certain amount of CSs will be that weaker learners will derive some motivation for learning the L2 as they will develop a feeling of at least being able to do something with the language” (p. 352). This can aid weaker learners to

participate in speaking activities. Savignon (2002) suggests, “the effective use of coping strategies is important for communicative competence in all contexts and distinguishes highly effective communicators from those who are less so” (p. 10). It is “a spare tyre for emergencies” (Cook, 1993, p. 119). In a CLT classroom, students make every effort to get their meaning across and ensure listener comprehension. CSs are a useful way to overcome perceived barriers to achieving communication goals.

Grammar Teaching within CLT

Grammar teaching has a role in the CLT classroom. The view that “CLT means an exclusive focus on meaning” is a misconception (Spada, 2007, p. 275). CLT is an approach which offers numerous language teaching techniques and strategies for classroom teaching. Grammar can be taught within any communicative approach without interrupting the communicative mood. Although CLT syllabi are organized according to categories of meaning or functions, they still have a strong grammar basis (Thornbury, 1999, p. 23). As mentioned previously, Savignon (2018) says that communicative competence consists of four competences: discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and grammatical competence. Grammatical competence is knowledge of lexical items and linguistic code of language. To improve communicative competence, language learners need to learn grammar rules.

Brown (2002) said that the focus has shifted to align classroom activities with processes involved in second language acquisition. Some classroom activities that promote communication among learners are information gap, opinion sharing, role plays, and group work. These activities allow the teacher to be a moderator and a guide for the students. Long (1991, 1996; Long & Robinson, 1998) categorized language teaching options into focus-on-forms, focus-on-meaning, and focus-on-form. These teaching options have their own strengths and weaknesses; therefore, in consideration with the teaching goals and classroom contexts, teachers should identify the approach that best fits their students.

Focus-on-formS (FonFs), Focus-on-meaning (FonM), Focus-on-form (FFI)

The popular position has long been that the syllabus designer’s first task is to analyze the target language and or adopt an existing analysis. Wilkins (1976) termed this as a synthetic

approach. He stated that synthetic syllabi are those in which “parts of the language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up ... At any one time the learner is being exposed to a deliberately limited sample of language” (p. 2). Synthetic syllabi lead to lessons with a FonFs. Some synthetic methods include grammar translation, audio-lingual method, audiovisual method, silent way, noisy method, and total physical response. These methods ignore language learning processes. FonFs is the traditional approach to grammar teaching and is based on an artificially reproduced syllabus. Language is treated as an object to be studied and language teaching is viewed to be an activity to be practiced systematically. Learners are seen as students, rather than users of the language (Ellis, 2001). Learning a language is a cognitive process in which learners are actively involved. People learn languages best not by treating the languages as an object of study but by experiencing them as a medium of communication.

Recognition that synthetic syllabi methods were not working, led syllabus designers, teachers, and theorists to abandon FonFs in favor of FonM. Some claim that learning an L2 from exposure to target language samples is sufficient for successful second language acquisition by adolescents and adults (Corder, 1967; Krashen, 1985; Wode, 1981). Others suggested harnessing L1 learning processes is adequate and optimal as the basis for teaching a foreign language (Allwright, 1976; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Newmark, 1966, 1971). L2 acquisition is thought to be essentially similar to L1 acquisition, so that recreation of something approaching the conditions for L1 acquisition, which is widely successful, should be necessary and sufficient for L2 acquisition. Long (1997) stated that “a pure FonM is inefficient” (p. 40). He has argued for many years that comprehensible L2 input is necessary, but not sufficient. The option to shift from FonFs to FonM is a great improvement; however, Long argues that purely FonM is insufficient and there have been studies conducted that support his claim. Traditional methods and instructions on isolated grammar forms were insufficient to promote learners’ acquisition, yet purely communicative approaches had been found inadequate for developing high levels of target language accuracy (Nassaji & Fotos, 2007). Communicative approach helped learners to become fluent but was insufficient to ensure comparable levels of accuracy as well (Ellis, 2001; Swain, 1998). Hence, the FFI approach was developed.

FFI is used to describe both approaches to teaching forms based on artificial syllabi, as well as more communicative approaches, where attention to form arises out of activities that are

primarily meaning-focused (cf. Long & Robinson, 1998). According to Loewen (2011), the provision of corrective feedback in response to learners' erroneous utterances during communicative activities is a common example illustrating Long's definition of FFI (p. 577). "FFI overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991, pp. 45-46). According to Doughty and Williams (1998), "the fundamental assumption of FFI instruction is that meaning, and use must already be evident to the learner at the time that the attention is drawn to the linguistic apparatus needed to get the meaning across" (p. 3). Undeniably, learners will better focus on the linguistic elements when they are not overburdened with other issues such as understanding the meaning of their statements. Spada (1997) defined FFI as "any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners' attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly" (p. 73). Her definition of FFI includes focusing on language in either spontaneous or predetermined ways. The teaching procedure of FFI should entail both structured input (form-focused input) and structured output (form-focused output) activities (Lee & VanPatten, 1995, 2003). Structured input removes lexical redundancies and simplifies or enhances the input by the targeted structure. It raises the communicative value of a linguistic form. Swain (1995) states that output would seem to have a notable role in the development of syntax and morphology. She noted that "it is possible to comprehend input, to get the message, without a syntactic analysis of that input" (Swain, 1985, p. 249). It may motivate learners to move to the whole grammatical processing required for precise production. She stated that an important role of output is alerting learners to the gap which exists between their first language and the target language (Swain, 1995, 2005). Lee and VanPatten (1995) observed that, "learners need not only input to build a developing system but also opportunities to create output in order to work on fluency and accuracy" (p. 118). The teachers' role is to be able to create an environment where the students can have interaction through speaking tasks in pairs or in groups.

Significance of Implementing FFI Approach

There are some reasons why FFI should be utilized. First, FFI may be necessary to push learners beyond communicatively effective language toward target like second language ability (Doughty & Williams, 1998). It can speed up natural acquisition processes. The students' attention is drawn precisely to a linguistic feature as necessitated by a communicative demand. It

does not necessarily mean halting the conversation and going back to purely explicit teaching. Instead, it means to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process. Long and Robinson (1998) stated that “FFI often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features-by the teacher and/or one or more students-triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production” (p. 23). This is similar to when native speakers have to consider the appropriate format when composing a business letter or email for a job application as compared to a letter for a friend, as they are totally different.

Second, Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) assert that the occasional focus on the discrete-forms of the L2 via correction, negative feedback, direct explanations, recasts, etc., can help students become aware of, understand, and ultimately acquire difficult forms. FFI, in their view, maintains a balance by calling on teachers and learners to attend to form, when necessary, yet within a communicative classroom environment. Teachers must make sure that students do not have to deal with the meaning, use, and form all at the same time when this kind of instruction is operationalized. Second language teaching can be improved with some degree of attention to form.

Planned and Incidental FFI

According to Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2002) and Ellis (2001), FFI is divided into two types: incidental FFI and planned FFI. The former contains spontaneous attention to form which emerges during meaning focused activities and it is considered difficult to be assessed because pre-test and post-test cannot be utilized to measure individual learning (Loewen, 2005). The latter involves the use of focused communicative tasks to elicit the use of a specific linguistic form in the context of meaning-centered language use. Ellis (2016) proposes FFI “may be pre-planned and thus address a predetermined linguistic feature(s) or it can be incidental as a response to whatever communicative or linguistic problems arise while learners are primarily focused on meaning” (p. 7). Planned FFI involves targeting pre-selected linguistic items during a meaning-focused activity, either through input or output. Other linguistic elements that could emerge during conversation tasks will be discussed if needed. Planned FFI has the advantage of providing intensive coverage of one specific linguistic item, whereas incidental FFI provides extensive coverage, targeting many different linguistic items (Ellis et al., 2001a). With planned

activities, the students will have opportunities to communicate with their peers. When other unplanned linguistic elements come out, they will be dealt with accordingly. Thus, using the two types of FFI prove to be more beneficial to learners than exclusive use of just one type of FFI.

Incidental FFI involves brief and spontaneous attention to language items during communicative activities while planned FFI consists of attention to preselected language items during communicative activities. Ellis (2016) emphasizes that FFI is a procedure or task design feature (p. 19). Teachers do not necessarily have to choose one specific FFI type, but they should choose the appropriate type according to the contexts and sometimes combine more than two types in one lesson.

Corrective Feedback

Since the 1960's, there has been a huge progress to make language teaching more humanistic and less mechanistic. Instead of expecting students to produce flawless sentences in a foreign language, as ALM advocates, many of today's students are encouraged to communicate in the target language about things that matter to them. Mistakes give opportunities to learn, and students should not see errors as a source of embarrassment, stress, or even humiliation. Children around the world produce numerous errors while acquiring their first language. Parents expect and accept these errors as a natural and necessary part of child development. Teachers, likewise, should expect many errors from their students and should accept those errors as a natural phenomenon essential to the process of learning an L2. Chastain (1971) stated that "More important than error-free speech is the creation of an atmosphere in which the students want to talk" (p. 249). Students need an environment where there is tolerance to some errors and where supportive feedback is often provided. According to Ellis (2009), feedback can be positive or negative. Positive feedback is viewed as important because it provides effective support to the learner and fosters motivation to continue learning. Negative feedback is corrective in intent (p. 3). Corrective feedback constitutes one type of negative feedback. It takes the form of a response to a learner utterance containing a linguistic error. Hendrickson (1978), in his review of feedback on errors in foreign language classrooms, posed these five questions: (1) Should learners' errors be corrected? (2) When should learners' errors be corrected? (3) Which errors should be corrected? (4) How should errors be corrected?; and (5) Who should do the correcting?

(p. 389). Both positive and negative feedback were used in the classroom; however, for the purpose of this study, negative feedback was used for correcting learners' errors.

Definition of Corrective Feedback (CF)

One manifestation of focus on form is CF. Ellis and Sheen (2011) define CF as the feedback that learners receive on the linguistic errors they make in their oral or written production in a second language (p. 593). CF is an instructional reaction toward learners' problematic utterances (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). CF episodes consist of a trigger, the feedback move, and (optionally) uptake (Ellis, 2009). Lyster and Ranta (1997) classified CF into six categories: explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, and clarification request. Doughty (2001) argues that feedback needs to be attended to more or less immediately if it is to activate the cognitive mechanism responsible for L2 acquisition. Oral CF provides feedback more or less immediately following an erroneous utterance. It may also withhold feedback until the end of a communicative event the learner is participating in. Oral CF may be input-providing or output-prompting. Input providing is when the student is provided with the correct form (direct correction) while output prompting an attempt to elicit correction from the learner (indirect correction). Written CF almost always involves off-line (delayed) corrections of the errors that students have committed in a written text. CF works by causing learners to notice the errors they have committed. It provides an opportunity for them to "notice-the-gap" and compare their production with the correction they are provided. This way, it assists acquisition when they correct their initial error and may help to rehearse the correct form in their short-term memory. This is known as uptake; it constitutes one type of modified output. Some researchers suggest that uptake is beneficial, and others argue that CF promotes acquisition through the input it provides rather than through opportunities for modifying output.

Sheen and Ellis (2011) stated that a common form of CF is recast (p. 593). Lyster and Ranta (1997) define recast as "teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error" (p. 46). Recast can be conversational and implicit when they take the form of a confirmation check as a response to a failure to understand the learner's utterance or didactic and more explicit when the learner's erroneous utterance is reformulated even though it has not caused a communication problem (see Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Sheen, 2006). Long (1996, 2007) argues that recasts are especially beneficial in that they provide learners with positive evidence

of what is correct as well as negative evidence showing an error has been committed and minimally disturb the focus on communication. In previous studies, teachers frequently used recasts as CF (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Moroishi, 2001; Panova & Lyster, 2002). Sheen and Ellis (2011) concluded that CF constitutes a highly complex social activity and further elaborated that “It is important to consider various moderating factors such as CF type, error type, mode (oral/written), L2 instructional context, age, gender, proficiency, L1 transfer, schema, anxiety, and cognitive abilities when providing CF (p. 606). In this research study, a combination of explicit and implicit CF was used for erroneous utterances of learners in the classroom. The participants were given CF mostly through elicitation, recast, explicit correction (for speaking tasks) and indirect correction (for writing tasks). Recasts provide the correct form for the learners (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Loewen & Philip, 2006). Elicitations provide an opportunity for learners to self-correct, and thus are argued to be better for L2 learning (Lyster, 2004). Indirect correction refers to prompting students about the location of errors line-per-line (Hyland, 1990). Indirect error feedback is provided when the teacher indicates the location of the error on the paper by underlining, highlighting, or circling it without providing the correct form (Lee, 2004). Students in general wish to be corrected and they often expect their teachers to do the correction. This can be tricky because teachers need to have knowledge on what to correct, the most appropriate method to correct in each situation, how often, when to correct, and who else can do the correction. There are also differences in oral and written CF that teachers need to be aware of and consider.

Focus Students

Three students were chosen, one male and two females on the following criteria: (1) Character and enthusiasm, (2) Regularity of attendance, and (3) Reasons for studying English. According to Dörnyei (2007), “the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation to maximize what we can learn” (p. 126). Three students were selected to make the data collection manageable. The students were chosen based on the case study method where the ‘case’ can be an event or entity other than a single individual (Yin, 2009, p. 30). A case study is a research method used in many situations. According to Yin (2009), “...the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 4). He gave his definition of case studies as

“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). This action research aimed to understand the meaningful characteristics of students’ behavior and performance in learning an L2. The research questions were focused on how the students learn and will there be any significant changes in their skill development, with the use of CSs and FFI approach. By studying and collecting data of focus students, I planned to obtain valid results and findings that will help answer the research questions. The case study, according to Yin, “is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated.” He further explained that the unique strength of case study is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence. There were previous studies of CSs and FFI in Japan, although a few studies in the elementary level, making this research more explanatory in nature, and therefore, a case study method may be added in the research methods. A literature review of previous research about CSs and FFI were done to understand how the methods applied to other learners of a second language in Japan and in other countries

3. Research issues and research questions

As mentioned, CLT is an effective approach to help students develop their CC. It highlights the significance of meaningful communication to enhance learners’ CC. Teachers who advocate CLT have various options to implement CLT depending on their contexts. FFI and direct teaching of CSs certainly have been proven to be instrumental in developing learners’ CC. CLT that gives emphasis only to meaning with little to no attention to forms cannot be enough for the language learners to achieve the expected native-like fluency and accuracy (Pica, 2000). Sato et al. (2019, 2012) studies show that FFI is more effective as a way for students to learn grammar for communication than the traditional explanation-drill method. Meanwhile, Tarone (1977) stated that “Conscious CSs are used by an individual to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual’s thought” (p. 195). Learners at the beginning stage can use CSs and manipulate set phrases or sentences to aid in their limited L2 knowledge (Sato, 2005). In addition to implementing FFI and CSs in the classroom, students need to receive feedback from the teachers and from their peers to be able to notice what to improve and how to self-repair. Sato, et al. (2009) stated that “the teacher can notice learners’ common errors and learners may notice their errors through the teacher’s CF” (see also Ellis,

Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001). In Japan, few studies have been done to determine the effect of teaching CSs and FFI to sixth grade elementary school students.

Year 2 Research Questions (2021-2022)

1. How do six graders learn to use communication strategies?
2. How do six graders perceive and participate in focus-on-form activities?
3. How do six graders benefit from corrective feedback?
4. How do six graders improve their speaking skills through focus-on-form instruction and communication strategies?

4. Method

Participants:

- Level: 6th-grade elementary school students.
- Class size: 5 students (1 male and 4 females)
- Time: 50-minute English lesson once a week (45 weeks in total)
- Book: Very Easy True Stories
- Of the five students, two students passed the EIKEN 5 examination. None of the students took other English cram lessons apart from our program. Like year 1 students, most of the students' English level fell between elementary and pre intermediate. I chose three focus students: a highly motivated and strong student, an average student, and a passive and not-so-motivated student.

Year 2 continued to focus on explicit teaching of CSs and the use of FFI. Recursive practice on student conversations and grammar focus was also highlighted. Some changes made from year 1 were the use of conversation analysis through transcription, improved survey questionnaires and more organized lesson plans. Tables 2 and 3 below summarize the CSs introduced and the small talk topics. Table 3 shows the grammar focus each month. We spent a huge amount of time on the simple past tense because the students needed more opportunities to use the past form of the verb. The timed conversation continuously increased from 1 minute to 3 minutes.

Table 1*April to July Weekly Small Talk Topics*

Week	Small talk questions	Strategies	Data Collection
1	Self-introduction	Openers	Teacher Journal
2	What sports do you like?	(Rejoinders) good, nice	
3	What school subjects do you enjoy?	(Rejoinders) really?	Teacher Journal
4	What's your best friend's name? What does he/she like?	That's awesome, cool, how about you?	Questionnaire
5	What sports do you play? What sports does your mom play?	closer	
6	What color does your mother like? What sports does she like?	(Rejoinders) Great! I see. Me, too.	
7	How do you go to school?	(Rejoinders) Cool, that's cute, that's good	Video recording
8	What do you usually do on Sundays?	Follow-up questions	Focus group interview
9	What do you usually eat for breakfast?	Follow-up questions	Student Assessment
10	What do you do on Monday mornings?	Follow-up questions	
11	How long do you walk to school? What school subjects do you learn?	(Rejoinders) Me, too/me, neither	Teacher Journal
12	Speaking test preparation		Video recording
13	Where do you want to go? What do you want to do?	(Rejoinders) really, that's good, and I see. Pardon? Once more, please.	
14	Speaking test 2		Video recording
15	What country do you want to visit? What do you want to do?	(Rejoinders) That's nice	

Table 2*Monthly Main Activities*

Month	Main Activities
April	<p>Topic: Nice to Meet you.</p> <p>Small talk: Self-introduction</p> <p>Grammar: First person simple present tense</p> <p>Activities: self-introduction (Talk to three people)</p>
May	<p>Small talk: My Best friend</p> <p>Grammar: Third person singular verb</p> <p>Activities: Gap filling activity</p> <p>Writing their own schedule</p> <p>Peer dialogue: talk about own mother</p> <p>Topic: School Life.</p> <p>Grammar: Present progressive tense</p>
June	<p>Adverb of frequency: usually, always, sometimes, seldom, never.</p> <p>Vocabulary: hard, easy, interesting, fun, funny.</p> <p>Activities: Mind map</p> <p>Comparison task (Finding similarities and differences of their school life)</p> <p>Topic: Let's Travel!</p> <p>Grammar: Present Progressive Tense</p>
July	<p>Prepositions: in, at, on</p> <p>Activities: Objects on a tray (Simple present tense; fact)</p> <p>Speaking test</p>

Table 3*August to December Weekly Small Talk Topics*

Week	Small talk questions	CSs	Data
Collection			
1	How was your summer vacation?		Rejoinder: Teacher Journal

		I thought so.	
2	What did you do in summer?		
3	Did you play any computer games on Saturday?	Unbelievable, uh-huh	Teacher Journal
4	Did you sleep at 10:00 p.m. last night?	pre: by the way... (Longer answers)	Video recording
5	How was your weekend? What did you do?		
6	How was your weekend? What did you do?	(review)	
7	How was school today? Did you practice for sports day?	Follow-up questions	
8	Speaking test		Video recording transcription
9	What did you do at school today?	Follow-up questions	
10	What food do you like best? What food do you dislike?	Follow-up questions	Self-evaluation
11	How was your day?	Partial shadowing	Teacher Journal
12	How was your day?	What else?	Video recording
13	My Day	Review CSs	
14	How was your day? What did you do?		
15	Speaking test		Video

Table 4

Month	Main Activities
April	Topic: Nice to Meet you. Small talk: Self-introduction Grammar: First person simple present tense Activities: self-introduction (Talk to three people)
May	Small talk: My Best friend Grammar: Third person singular verb Activities: Gap filling activity (Very Easy True Stories) Writing their own schedule Peer dialogue: talk about own mother
June	Topic: School Life. Grammar: Present progressive tense Adverb of frequency: usually, always, sometimes, seldom, never. Vocabulary to introduce: hard, easy, interesting, fun, funny. Activities: Mind map Comparison task (Finding similarities and differences of their school life)
July	Topic: Let's Travel! Grammar: Present Progressive Tense Prepositions: in, at, on Activities: Objects on a tray (Simple present tense; fact) Speaking test
August	Topic: Summer Break Grammar: Simple Past Tense Fun Essay (My Summer Vacation)
September	Topic: My Summer Break Grammar: Simple Past Tense Activity: Sharing how they spent their summer break. FFI worksheet
October	Topic: My Weekend

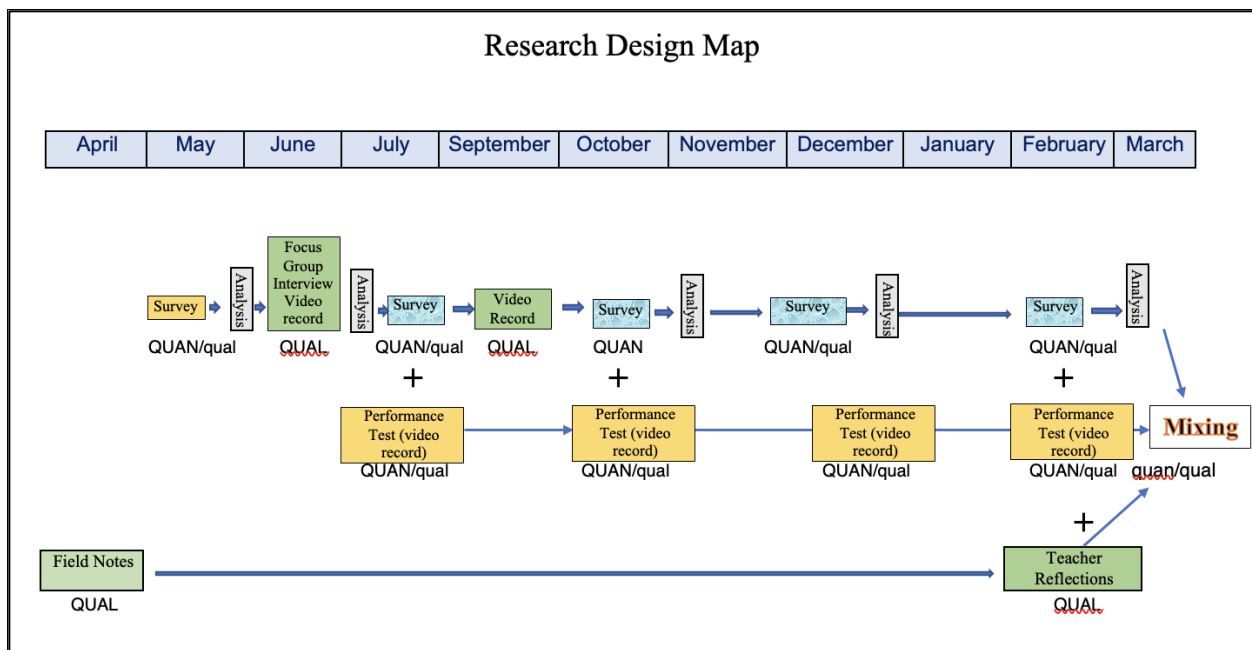
	Grammar point: Simple Past tense
	Activities: Speaking Test
	Fun essay (My Weekend)
	Matching the verbs from present to past tense
November	Topic: Food I like and dislike
	Activities: Peer correction. Common errors
	Self-evaluation
December	Topic: My Day
	Activities: Interview and reporting about someone's day
	Fun essay (My Day)
January	Topic: Winter Break
	Activities: Small talk
	Grammar point: Simple Past tense
February	Topic: Plans
	Grammar point: Simple Future tense
	Activities: Common errors, mind map on weekly plans, opinion sharing
March	Topic: Junior High School
	Grammar point: Simple Future tense
	Speaking test

The year 2 survey was designed to combine the numerical clarity of quantitative data with some open-response items. The questionnaire data was calculated and tabulated after each sampling. The relative shifts over the length of the study indicate changes in student beliefs over the course of the treatment. The qualitative data sources were from transcribed conversations, speaking tests, open-ended questions in the survey, and class reflections from the participants. Data on three focus students; one highly motivated, an average student, and a not-so-motivated student were collected and analyzed. The core motivation of this decision was to make the data volume more manageable. Wong and Waring (2010) stated that “conversation analysis (CA) is a unique way of analyzing language and social interaction” (p. 5). CA requires naturally occurring data that has been recorded and transcribed (p. 4). With the transcribed data, I was able to observe pauses, silences, and repair. All these showed me a glimpse of students’ cognitive processes, as

well as their fluency and accuracy development. The transcription convention employed is a simple format based on Gail Jefferson's 2004 system influenced by the Wong and Waring model (2010, p. 5), with the inclusion of timestamp and length of pauses.

Figure 1

Triangulated, explanatory, sequential mixed method design.



The principal function of the transcriptions in this study is to help indicate how CSs support fluency, instances of peer teaching, repair, and correct grammar usage. Pauses were examined as they may indicate students' thinking process and indicated how students utilize pauses and silence for thinking. Student fluency developments were measured by number of words and words per minute. This was further investigated with the consideration of their general attitude, i.e., who their partners were, what the topic was, and the like.

With monthly AR presentation and advises received from Dr. Sato and other professors, I was able to make some more changes in the fall semester:

- I included self-reflection for the first time. FFI questions were included in the fall survey, too.
- The students were given autonomy to choose topics to talk and write about.

- Worksheet on common errors where the students figure out their errors and self-correct as necessary. They were allowed to help their peers, as well.
- They had a variety of task-based activities like interviews, mind maps, matching activities, etc. that facilitated easier student-student interaction and student-centered activities.
- I made recursive, face-to-face pair conversation, giving them more opportunities to interact with each other.
- In September, the classes were online. Dr. Sato suggested utilizing breakout rooms. I asked another teacher to help with the breakout rooms since the students were not quite familiar with zoom yet. It was an opportunity for me to show them example video dialogues before they did peer talks. There was some pressure from the students to speak more in front of the computer because writing was only possible as homework and their family members could listen to them at home.
- CF was more frequent as students needed more feedback from their errors. Self-repairs were praised and supported.
- The students were shown how giving more information about their answers or a topic would make the conversation more meaningful and would not appear like an interview.
- I used a variety of materials such as printed handouts, pictures, illustrations, and sample essays from previous students.

5. Results

(1) Survey Questionnaires

Chart 1. Openers and closers

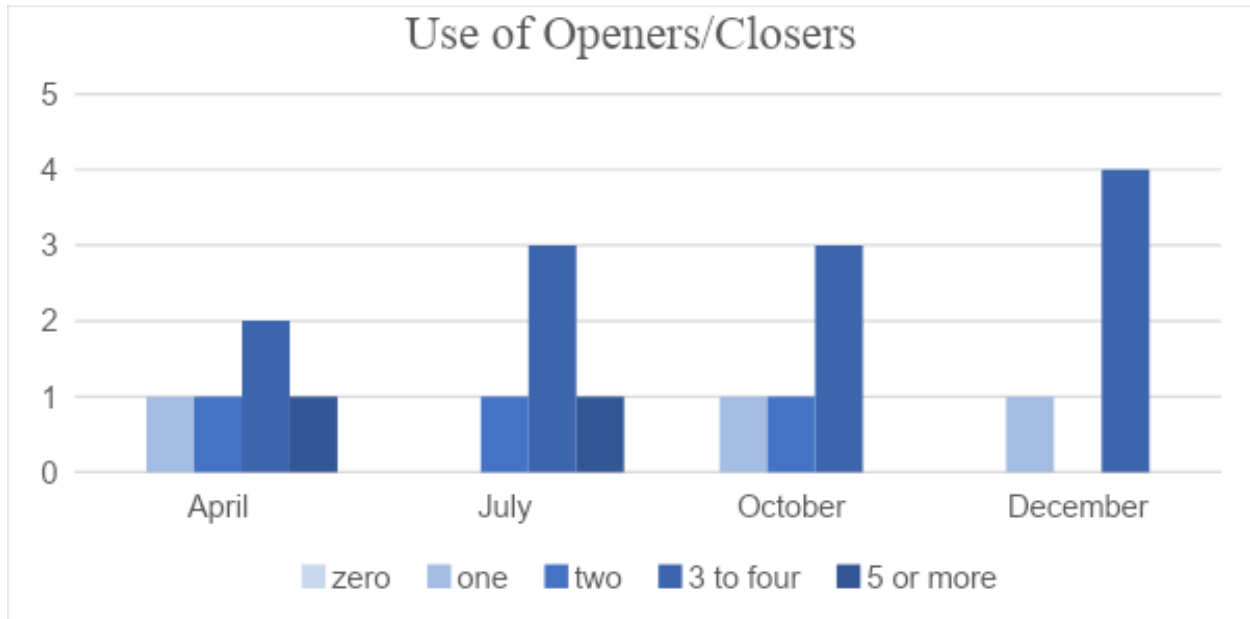


Table 5

Use of openers and closers in April, July, October, December

Openers/Closers	zero	one	two	3 to four	5 or more
April	0	1	1	2	1
July	0	0	1	3	1
October	0	1	1	3	0
December	0	1	0	4	0

The students were taught at least three openers to start a conversation. The use of the greeting sequence *hello-hello* can be evident in almost all their conversations and is the most common way for the students to open small talks. Closers like “see you” and “nice talking with you” were used exclusively to end conversations. Chart 2 shows how the students progressed from using only 1-2 opener/closer in April, to almost all the students claiming to use three to four openers and closers in December.

Chart 2. Rejoinders

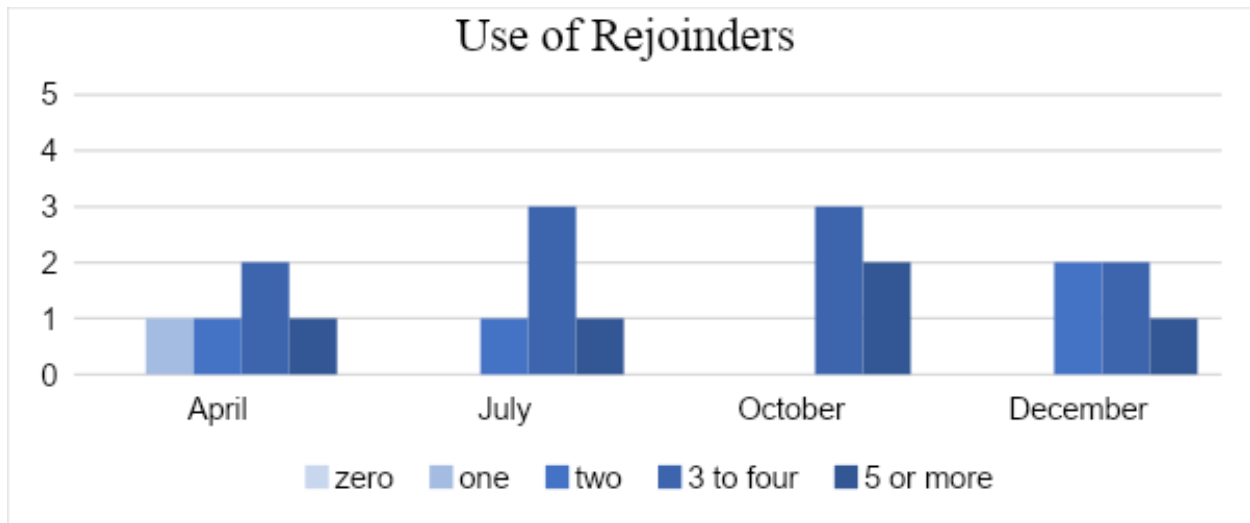


Table 6

Use of rejoinders in April, July, October, December

	zero	one	two	3 to four	5 or more
April	0	1	1	2	1
July	0	0	1	3	1
October	0	0	0	3	2
December	0	0	2	2	1

In chart 2, the students answered that they used at least two or more rejoinders in December. The chart clearly shows that the number of students who think that they used rejoinders gradually increased from April to December. In their transcribed conversations, some students use rejoinders often while some try to provide longer answers or ask questions instead.

Chart 3. Follow-up questions

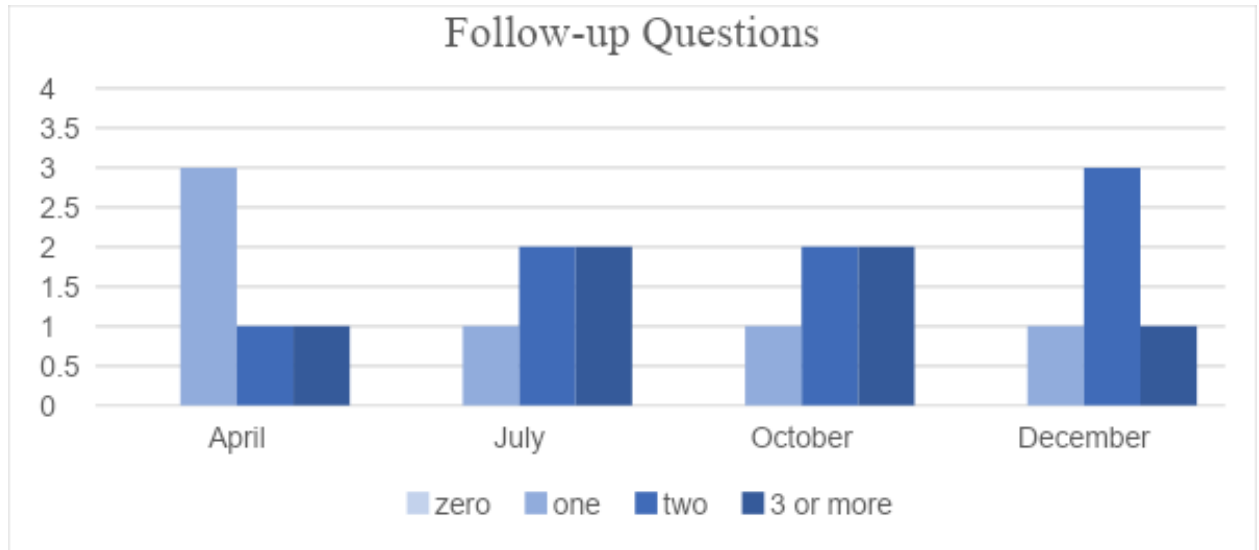


Table 7

Use of follow-up questions in April, July, October, December

Follow-up Questions	zero	one	two	3 or more
April	0	3	1	1
July	0	1	2	2
October	0	1	2	2
December	0	1	3	1

In chart 3, the number of students who thought they could ask questions increased. In April, three students thought they could only ask one question, there were slight changes in July and October wherein only one student thought he/she can ask one follow-up question. In December, almost all students thought that they could ask two or more questions. In early December, they were encouraged to provide longer answers and some attempted to develop topics through giving more information and only asking questions to help with topic maintenance.

Chart 4. Clarification

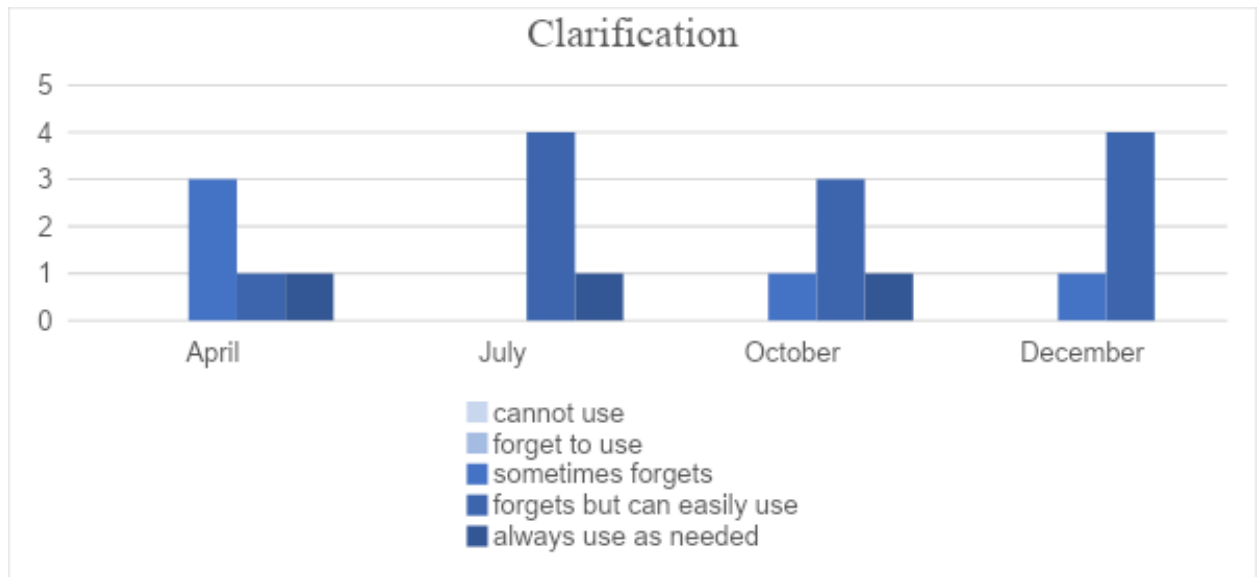


Table 8

Use of clarification questions in April, July, October, December

	cannot use	forget to use	sometimes forgets	forgets but can easily use	always use as needed
April	0	0	3	1	1
July	0	0	0	4	1
October	0	0	1	3	1
December	0	0	1	4	0

Clarification questions such as “pardon” or “once more, please” were used only when students could not hear their interlocutors. They often tried to ask for clarification in Japanese and then continue the conversation in English. Thus, their use of clarification changed in December where they answered that they know the CSs but forgot to use them.

Chart 5. Timed Conversation

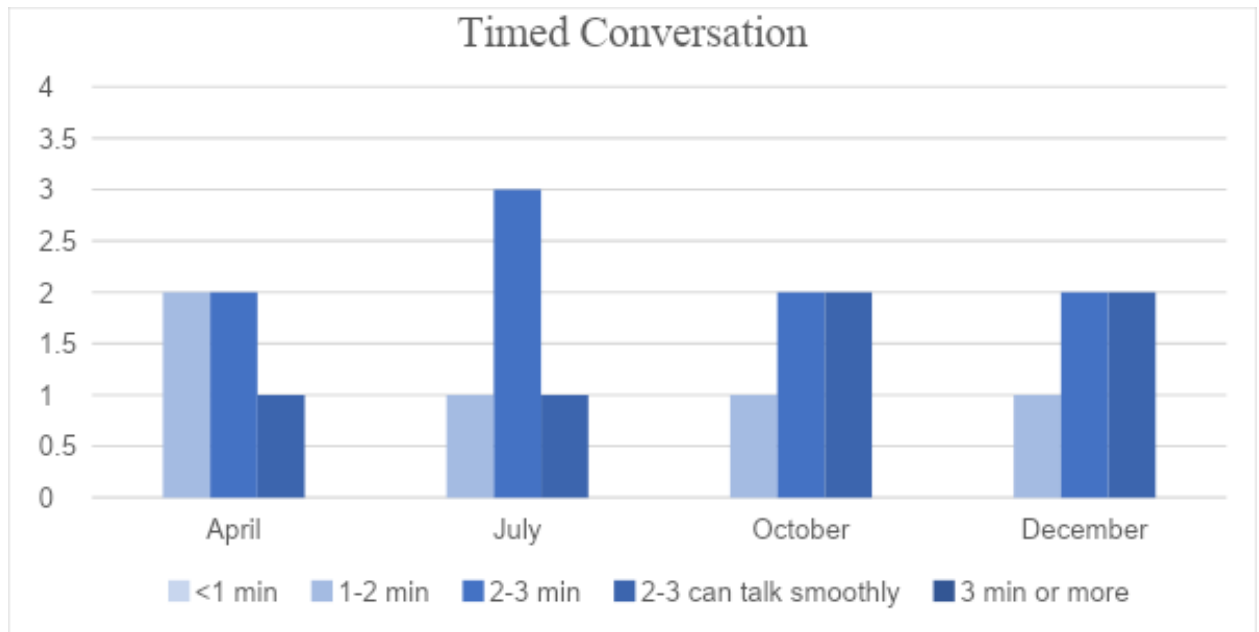


Table 9

Timed Conversation

Timed Conversation	<1 min	1-2 mins	2-3 min	2-3 can talk smoothly	3 mins or more
April	0	2	2	1	0
July	0	1	3	1	0
October	0	1	2	2	0
December	0	1	2	2	0

In April, the two students wrote they could converse for 1-2 minutes, another two wrote they could probably do 2-3 minutes, and only one student wrote he/she could talk smoothly for 2-3 minutes. In July, the number of students who can talk for 2-3 minutes increased. Their October and December results were the same wherein the number of students who claim they can talk smoothly increased to two students from only one in April.

Table 10*Questions about grammar*

Grammar speaking task	Cannot talk using grammar	Makes 7-8 grammar errors	Makes 5-6 grammar errors	Makes 3-4 grammar errors	Makes 1-2 grammar errors
October	0	0	1	4	0
December	0	0	0	5	0

In Table 10, they were asked to write what they thought about their grammar use. In October, one student wrote he/she made 5-6 errors while the rest wrote they made 3-4 mistakes. In December, all the participants assumed that they made three to four grammar errors in their speaking tasks. Questions on grammar were included in the October and December surveys. There were various factors that affected the performance of each focus student, overall, the students showed fluency as illustrated in the tables and in the transcriptions. It was observed from their July and October tests that they shifted from topics instead of trying to pursue one topic by providing more information, thus, in December, they were taught how to provide at least two to three answers to one question and comment as necessary. Another factor was their partner's dialogue. When only one person shows willingness to pursue a topic, the conversation eventually dies. In the same sense, when two people try to develop the topic, the conversation carries on. I tried to change their partners during small talks including their speaking tests to observe changes in their interaction with other students who may be stronger or weaker than them. The quantified data presented is supported by the qualitative data drawn from the participants' comments and speaking tests. Mixing these data strengthened the answers to my research questions for Year 2. The topics in the tests were pre-selected and were presented to the students weeks prior to their tests. They were given chances to speak with different pairs in preparation for their tests. Summary of speaking test data as well as the full transcription are available upon request (rokusane@hotmail.ph). In their March speaking test (see Appendix A), the students were able to talk for 2.5 minutes to more than four minutes. They displayed their improved ability to communicate using CSs. They still used follow-up questions to maintain their topics and there were instances where they showed they could provide more information as shown in excerpt 1 below.

Excerpt 1

Miori and Sota

05 Miori what will you do on tomorrow
06 Sota I study japanese because tomorrow the japanese test
07 Miori do you like japanese
08 Sota hmm I don't like japanese
09 Miori I see but I like study I like japanese
10 Sota oh that's nice

In Sota's speaking test in December, he started to give longer answers and provided more information. They were encouraged not to rely too much on follow-up questions in early December. Excerpt 1 shows how he tried to continue doing that. Compared to his July and October performance tests where he simply answered questions thrown at him with mostly two or three words, his December and March tests showed his interaction and fluency development. He actively responded with appropriate CSs, gave more information, and asked at least three follow-up questions to his interlocutor.

The students used Japanese (their L1) in their word search and in asking for help from their peers. They tried to maintain their conversations and switched back to English after. This can be seen in excerpt 2 below.

Excerpt 2

Miori and Sota

21 Miori what time is your baseball
22 Sota eh gogo kara te nanteiu ((how do you say afternoon in japanese))
23 Miori gogo kara ((afternoon in japanese)) nanji kara nanji made((from
24 what time in japanese))
25 Sota ah twenty kara ((from in japanese)) nanjimade goro ((about what
26 time in japanese)) sixteen made
27 Miori that's long etto ((uhm in japanese))

Miori tried to help Sota with word search but could not come up with the vocabulary. She suggested to Sota to state the start time of the game and the time it normally finishes. In Line 25, Sota tried to combine his L1 with English to provide the information and Miori acknowledged it in line 27, where she responded in English. As a result, they were able to avoid communication breakdown and went on to talk for more than four minutes. After the test, I praised them on how they tried to come up with something to save the conversation. I explained that the use of L1 to ask help from a more knowledgeable peer and or the use of other words (circumlocution) to

describe something can help with expressing themselves to others. Sota actively asked for help and decided not to abandon the topic regardless of his lack of vocabulary.

Students' Feedback.

a. What has changed in your English ability?

July 2021

Student 1: I can talk using difficult words in English.
Student 2: I can speak a lot in English.
Student 3: I was able to perfect our school English test.
Student 4: The percentage of comment sentences I use increased.
Student 5: Nothing much has changed

**Comments were translated from Japanese by the author.*

October 2021

Student 1: I was able to use questions that start with how (how, how many, how long, etc.)
Student 2: I am glad I said what I wanted to say. I was able to speak a lot in English.
Student 3: I can even remember some difficult words and a few sentences.
Student 4: I can say my thoughts.
Student 5: I used to avoid questions I did not understand, but somehow, I was able to say it, although there were times when I was confused by the word arrangement.

December 2021

Student 1: I was able to react (use CSs) since April.
Student 2: I can say a lot of words.
Student 3: Somehow, I became able to read and listen.
Student 4: I was able to ask many questions.
Student 5: There were not many changes.

**Comments were translated from Japanese by the author.*

6. Discussion

In Japan, English became an official school subject in 2020 in the elementary grade level. The new guidelines from the government included an increase in study hours and development of all four skills. It would be intriguing to compare how my teaching context would compare to

the situation in public schools. My students sometimes share how they find their English lessons at their schools unchallenging. Even with the government effort to improve the school curriculum, I think periodic teacher-training and support are essential, considering that teachers are expected to be responsible in implementing these new plans. Conducting a study in elementary public schools would be interesting as research in this area is scarce. With the new curriculum recently implemented in Japanese elementary schools, it would be interesting to study how these changes benefit students and teachers alike.

7. Conclusion

My results were relatively limited; however, it gave me evidence that FFI along with CSs, were responsible for scaffolding 6th grade elementary school students' fluency development in English, and potentially developing their CC. This claim was backed by the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the students' performance tests and feedback. The most significant observation was the individual students' choice of CSs use; each student had their own CSs preference. In addition, they all seemed to rely on follow-up questions to prolong their conversations. Follow-up questions, along with other CSs, helped the learners sustain their interaction and overcome the inevitable difficulties that arose. Corrective feedback supported their fluency development as they showed self-repair instances during their dialogues, signaling their conscious awareness of errors, and trying to self-correct through using their declarative knowledge. In analyzing students' conversation, I was able to notice minor but important changes in their interaction, leading me to modify and improve my lesson plans and influenced me to believe that the students were showing progress. The meaning of and changes in their pauses was interesting as it showed how students pause to think, to signal an end on their turn, or to display lack of skills to navigate the conversation. My improved questionnaire gave me a glimpse of students' thought processes and their opinion of their progress, which in turn, validated my observations during their tests. Overall, the students showed improvements in their fluency through recursive peer dialogues, teacher and peer CF, FFI-based activities, and their use of CSs.

Appendix A

Ayano and Koko (Speaking test in March)

[00:00.00]

01 Ayano what will you do tomorrow (2)
02 Koko I will do tomorrow etto ((uhm in japanese)) get science test (3)
03 Ayano oh I see what will you do on saturday
04 Koko on saturday will do school homework and English homework
05 Ayano what homework (2) nandakke ((what was that in japanese)) what
06 what homework kyouka (2)((school subject in japanese)) uh
07 subject?
08 Koko etto ((uhm in japanese)) math and japanese
09 Ayano oh that's nice what will you do on sunday
10 Koko on sunday will do stay home (2)
11 Ayano I see (3)
12 Koko etto ((uhm in japanese)) may I ask question
13 Ayano okay
14 Koko etto ((uhm in japanese)) what will you do tomorrow
15 Ayano I will play play with my friend (2)
16 Koko I see how many friend
17 Ayano hmm five (2)
18 Koko oh that's nice what will you do on saturday
19 Ayano I will dance (2)
20 Koko I see etto ((uhm in japanese)) what will you do on sunday
21 Ayano I will watch watch tv
22 Koko what what show
23 Ayano variety
24 Koko that's nice I like I like variety nice talking with you
25 Ayano see you

[02:44.00]

Miori and Sota (Speaking test in March)

[00:00.00]

01 Miori how are you
02 Sota I'm hungry and you
03 Miori I'm fine by the way may I ask any question
04 Sota yes
05 Miori what will you do on tomorrow
06 Sota I study japanese because tomorrow the japanese test
07 Miori do you like japanese
08 Sota hmm I don't like japanese
09 Miori I see but I like study I like japanese
10 Sota oh that's nice
11 Miori what will you do on saturday
12 Sota saturday is baseball
13 Miori what do on baseball
14 Sota etto ((uhm in japanese)) batting eh one more
15 Miori eh what
16 Sota etto ((uhm in japanese)) batting and defense
17 Miori eh batting and defense which one do you like
18 Sota I like defense
19 Miori I see what will you do on sunday
20 Sota sunday is baseball
21 Miori what time is your baseball

22 Sota eh gogo kara te nanteiu ((how do you say afternoon in japanese))
23 Miori gogo kara ((afternoon in japanese)) nanji kara nanji made((from
24 what time in japanese))
25 Sota ah twenty kara ((from in japanese)) nanjimade goro ((about what
26 time in japanese)) sixteen made
27 Miori that's long etto ((uhm in japanese))
28 Sota uh etto ((uhm in japanese)) what etto nanjyatakke ((what was
29 that again? in japanese)) what's tomorrow
30 Miori I will go to school
31 Sota eh me too etto ((uhm in japanese)) what etto ((uhm in japanese))
32 on the saturday
33 Miori I will homework
34 Sota oh nice etto ((uhm in japanese)) what's on sunday
35 Miori I will read the book
36 Sota uh book nice uh machigaita ((that was a mistake in japanese))
37 etto book hmm what book title
38 Miori title I read jikan wari daishi
39 Sota oh: nice
40 Miori thank you nice talking with you
41 Sota nice talking with you
[04:25.02]