

Considerations for Effective Teacher Praise and Positive Feedback for EFL Classes in Japanese Elementary Schools

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要 旨

第二言語習得の分野では、教師の思いやりのある行動、教師の賞賛、教師のフィードバック、およびポジティブ心理学に関連するその他の構成要素の研究がトレンドになってきているが、さらなる研究が必要である。本稿では、4人の大学教員が日本の小学校教師を対象に効果的な「ほめ言葉」と「ポジティブ・フィードバック」の実践に関するワークショップを行った際のプロセスについて説明する。このワークショップの最終的な目標は、チーム・ティーチングを行う際に媒体としての英語を通じて、これらのフィードバック・スキルを活用するための教師の自信を構築することである。収集された調査データの定性的および定量的分析に基づいて、筆者は、参加した教師（ $n = 85$ ）によってトレーニングが有用で興味深いと認識されたと結論付けている。

Keywords: Team Teaching, Elementary School English, Teacher Professional Development, Teacher Praise, Positive Feedback

1. Introduction

As Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) continues to expand its goals and initiatives for English education at the elementary school (ES) level, professional development opportunities and trainings are necessary for ES teachers, many of whom are homeroom teachers (HRTs) who have not had formal pre-service foreign language education training. HRTs in some school districts teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes on a solo basis, others work with assistant language teachers (ALTs) from English-speaking backgrounds, and yet others work with Japanese assistant teachers (JATs) who are English specialists. In some cases, ES HRTs may teach with a variation of these patterns, thus team-teaching skills and effective communication in team-teaching situations can be of great importance. MEXT has defined teacher roles for English language classes and the HRT is designated as the lead teacher (T1), whereas the ALT is in a supporting role (T2).

As a part of an ongoing annual series of professional development (PD) workshops for ES teachers at a university in Japan, four university instructors were asked to create a workshop on team-teaching skills. In previous years, these instructors created team-teaching workshops on building rapport and effective communication practices with ALTs, and the use of rhythm chants in team-teaching situations. In 2022, the selected theme was teacher praise and positive feedback in the ES language classroom. This article aims to bridge theory into practice by providing background research findings concerning teacher praise and positive feedback, and then demonstrating how trainings can be developed to practice praising students with positive feedback in English language classes.

2. Rationale

In this section, some of the theoretical and practical considerations of designing a workshop on effective

praise and feedback practices for Japanese ES teachers will be discussed.

2.1 A Focus on Acceptability not Accuracy for ES EFL Classrooms

According to Yoshida (2022), ES instructors should not worry about the accuracy of the language ES students produce, but rather focus on acceptability. Accuracy will develop naturally with time through scaffolding, recasting, and other forms of feedback as students grow and continue their language education at higher levels of their education (please see Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013, for a detailed discussion on oral corrective feedback). Thus, fostering confidence in students and harnessing their willingness to communicate can be viewed as essential objectives of the elementary language classroom curriculum.

2.2 Positive Psychology in Second Language Acquisition

Sun (2021) relates that Positive Psychology (PP) has been emerging in the study of second language acquisition and a central concept of PP is student engagement. Student engagement has its foundations in self-determination theory (SDT), which holds that learners have three fundamental needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT has applications in educational settings (e.g., Reeve, 2002) and student engagement occurs when teachers' positive behaviors are present in the classroom. Two such positive behaviors are teacher caring and teacher praise. The latter is the focus of the current study. Sun (2021) notes that while teacher caring behavior has been linked to student engagement and academic success, there is a lack of investigations on how teachers' positive behaviors, i.e., teacher caring and teacher praise, can be effective in teacher training courses for the EFL classroom.

2.3 Effective Praise and Positive Feedback Practices

There are several types of praise that occur in classroom settings. As proposed by Brophy (1981) in his seminal research on praise and summarized more succinctly by Ferguson (2013), one of the most common types of praise is general praise (sometimes referred to as global praise). General praise in a language classroom may appear as comments like "Good job, everyone!" or "Fantastic work today class!" which may be effective in creating a positive class environment, but not in changing the behavior or learning of a student.

Another type of praise is specific praise, which has been found to be more effective in helping students learn or change their behaviors. Specific praise encompasses particular information that the student takes in so that they can consider their next learning action or behavior (Ferguson, 2013). Some examples of positive specific praise in an EFL classroom could be "(Name), I like your eye contact." or "(Name), you worked well with your partner."

One type of specific praise is known as behavior-specific praise (BSP) which has been widely utilized in Pre-K-12 first language (L1) classrooms and is well-researched in these contexts (Parks Ennis et al., 2020). According to Majeika (2018) of the IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University, BSP is "a positive statement directed toward a student or group of students that acknowledges a desired behavior in specific, observable, and measurable terms." Based on the research, Majeika (2018) emphasizes that BSP is a highly effective strategy to raise positive behavior, while reducing unwanted behaviors in the classroom. Majeika also gives tips for implementing the BSP approach: 1) BSP should be given as soon as possible after a desired behavior, which Ferguson (2013) calls contingent praise; 2) teachers should speak in a sincere voice and with credibility (Ferguson, 2013); and, 3) teachers should try to ensure a four to one ratio of praise comments to reprimands.

Another important consideration when praising is that the praise is age-related. Ferguson (2013) states that children at different ages respond to age differently. From a developmental perspective, younger children are more likely to take praise at face value. However, as students get older they are more conscious of the praise they receive and will assess its credibility.

Conroy et al. (2009) provide a useful synopsis as well as additional research-based recommendations on using effective praise and feedback in their article on creating a positive classroom atmosphere, a summary of which is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1 Guidelines for Effective Praise: Do's and Don'ts (Conroy et al., 2009)

Do's	
1.	take into account the cultural and individual differences of students
2.	offer specific praise about the behavior observed
3.	give specific praise as soon as possible upon seeing the desired behavior
4.	increase the amount of praise when students learn a new skill
5.	focus praise on students' efforts and accomplishments
6.	speak with sincerity and appropriately for the age level
7.	distribute some kind of praise and positive feedback to all students in the classroom
Don'ts	
8.	compare and contrast student abilities
9.	evaluate individual abilities and outcomes
10.	wait for students to point out their efforts to the teacher

Specific to the second language (L2) classroom, Dörnyei (2001) draws similar conclusions to the L1 researchers cited above.

3. The Present Study

3.1 Background & Context

Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), declared that in 2002 English could be introduced into elementary schools through the schools' comprehensive learning activities. Schools had considerable leeway in terms of what activities they implemented, but the maximum number of English lessons they could have at that time was 11 a year (Ikegashira et al., 2009). In 2008, it was announced that this number would increase and Foreign Language Activities was established as a regular lesson for 5th and 6th graders with up to 35 lessons a year. Nonetheless, it was deemed necessary to further enhance students' English studies, and in 2020 these lessons became a compulsory subject for the 5th and 6th grades, while Foreign Language Activities increased in the 3rd and 4th grades. To assist with these classes, ALTs, whose L1 is English or who have strong English language skills as an L2, have been assigned to elementary schools.

The directive that English language classes become compulsory in the 5th and 6th grades has been a challenge for some elementary classroom teachers as many of them did not train in English when they studied for their teaching licenses. Yet, they are expected to be the lead teacher in the class or T1 as opposed to the ALT, whose primary role is one of support as the T2. In recognition of the need for training for ES teachers, the Meikai Teacher-Training Support Center (METTS) received a government grant in 2020 to host a series of workshops to provide ES teachers with training in English education-related areas. These workshops were titled Meikai JOE and were hosted in conjunction with J-Shine, an NPO that promotes English language education activities and teacher training in elementary schools. In 2022, METTS held its third such set of trainings with a series of twelve workshops. The workshop that is the focus of this paper was the second workshop held and centered on teacher praise in the ES EFL classroom

particularly in the team-teaching context. For more details of previous Meikai JOE events see Rode et al., 2022.

“Positive Feedback and Team Teaching” was the title of the second workshop in the series. The purpose of the workshop was to demonstrate to ES teachers ways to provide general and, more importantly, specific praise in English to students that could be used effectively in the classrooms. Furthermore, the workshop strove to provide teachers with specific praise examples and a positive feedback assessment checklist tool that could be used to increase communication with ALTs during team-teaching situations.

3.2 Workshop Design

As participants joined in from various school districts in Japan, the workshops were held in a live webinar format. The workshops lasted 60 minutes with time at the end for Q&A. The “Positive Feedback and Team Teaching” workshop was the second in the series and held in June in the mid afternoon, after teachers had finished teaching their classes. The lecture was held in Japanese with example situations role-played in English. Examples of specific praise were taught and teachers were given the opportunity to practice these various phrases on site with their colleagues. A volunteer from each school district that participated in the workshop completed a role play with one of the English instructors who played the role of an ALT.

In the design of the workshop, the authors wanted to include a variety of situational patterns for praise and positive feedback that would reflect the reality of the ES English language classroom. The three situations that were selected were the following. First, an example of using specific praise during a class activity was demonstrated as represented in Figure 1.

The second situation focused on positive feedback in the case where a student misunderstands the question. In those circumstances, the teacher can rephrase the question to match that answer. In this way, the student feels a sense of accomplishment in answering the questions (see Figure 2).

The third situation reflected a common challenge in the ES language classroom when a student appears not to participate. Some students when asked a question will say “No,” as if to indicate they want to close

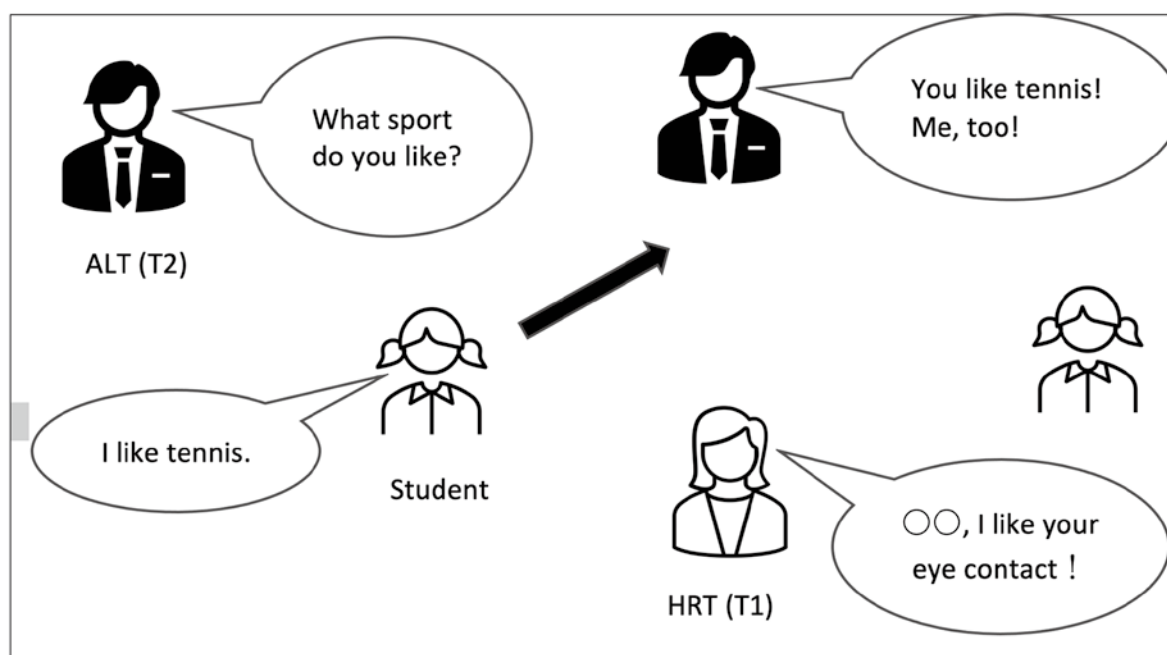


Figure 1 Specific Praise during an ES EFL Class Activity

down further communication with a partner. To engage and elicit responses from such students, the knowledge that the T1 carries of each student is important. By knowing what interests and abilities students have, the T1 can rephrase the question to better fit the student's background. Through this type of positive feedback, it is hoped that the students will gradually develop the motivation to participate actively in the ES EFL classroom (see Figure 3).

In addition to the role play models, a praise and positive feedback assessment checklist was distributed to workshop participants. Its purpose was to aid teachers to focus on students' efforts and accomplishments and not individual abilities and outcomes, as well as to give them example expressions of how to give

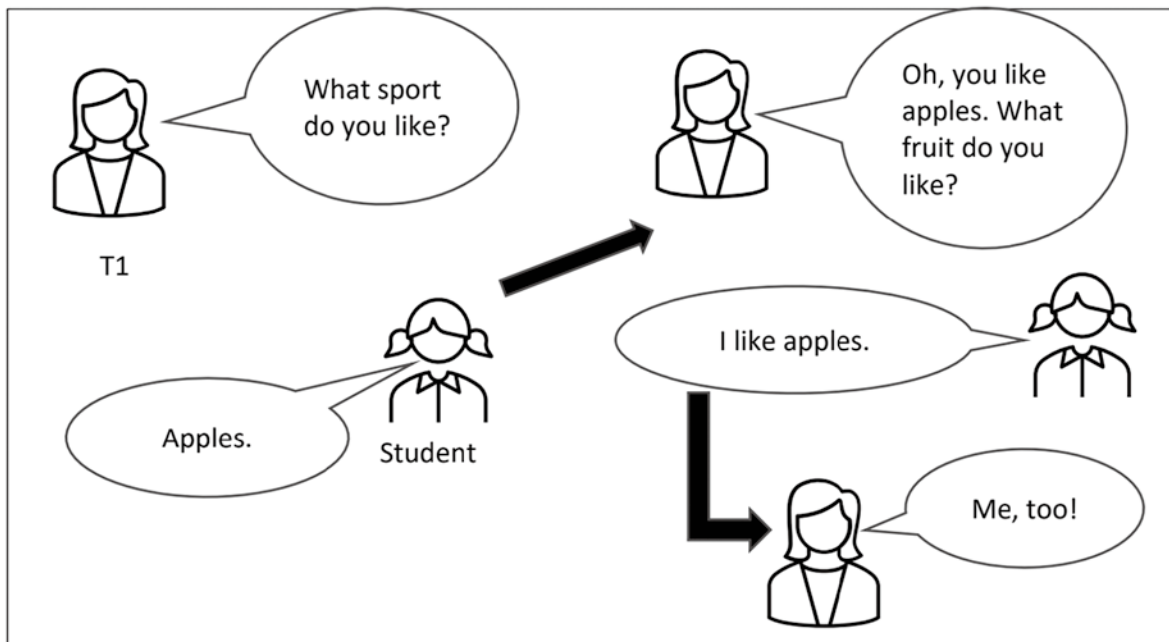


Figure 2 Positive Feedback After a Student Misunderstands a Question

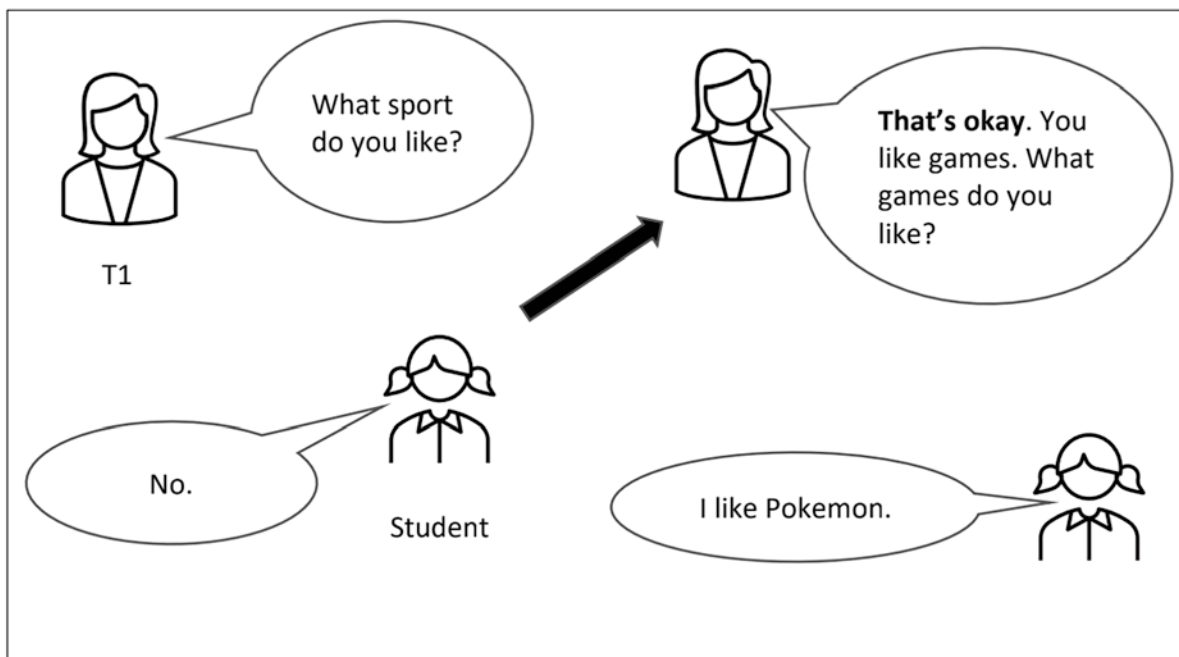


Figure 3 Positive Feedback through Personalization

specific praise for language skills at the ES level. Please see Appendix A.

As a follow-up to the workshop, two schools from school districts in Chiba prefecture and Akita prefecture videotaped one of their English lessons demonstrating their use of behavior specific praise. Prior to the follow-up workshop, the authors viewed these videos and offered feedback and recommendations in the seventh and 10th webinars of the Meikai JOE Plus series. Workshop participants also watched the videos during the workshop and through a representative for each school commented or asked questions about the lesson. For the purposes of this paper, data collected from the first workshop on “Positive Feedback and Team Teaching” will be the central focus of the research.

3.3 Research Question

The main research question of this project was:

What is the perceived usefulness of praise training in English for ES EFL teachers?

4. Method

4.1 Participants

Six Boards of Education were invited to participate in this 12-session workshop program. The elementary schools were located in the following prefectures: Tokyo (2), Chiba, Akita, Fukushima, and Niigata. In total 85 participants took part in the “Positive Feedback and Team Teaching” workshop. They were a mix of ES classroom teachers (first through sixth grades), a few English specialists (teachers specifically trained in ES EFL), administrators and junior high school teachers.

4.2 Instruments

At the end of each workshop, participants were asked to complete a post-workshop survey and reflection sheet. This survey was created by the organizers of the Meikai JOE and has been utilized across the three years of this professional development workshop series. Please examine the survey in Table 2 below.

Moreover, participants were also asked to respond to six questions on a reflection sheet. The six questions were: 1) Name; 2) Affiliation; 3) School; 4) What did you learn or realize from the course?; 5) How do you want to use what you learned?; and, 6) A designated question. A consolidation of selected comments in Japanese with English translations can be found in Table 3.

5. Results

The Post-Workshop Survey questions yielded the following results as answered by the n=85 workshop participants.

In addition, participants were able to offer comments that reflected on their experience in the workshops. Below is a consolidation of comments to question five: How do you want to use what you learned?

6. Discussion

The results below in Table 2 show that 90% of the participants in question 2) considered the course materials to meet the needs of their school situation. Furthermore, 90% of respondents to question 5) stated that they believe they will be able to use the materials presented in the course in the future. According to the responses to question 10), 85% of the workshop participants found the workshop task in which they practiced the English praise words and then performed a model role play with the English instructor was

Table 2 Results from Post-Workshop Survey on “Positive Feedback and Team Teaching”

Question N = 85	I really think so	I think so	I can't say either way	I don't think so	I really don't think so
1) Were you able to understand the course contents?	59%	40%	1%	0%	0%
2) Did the course contents meet the needs of your school situation?	49%	41%	7%	2%	1%
4) Were the course contents appropriate for you?	0% (too difficult)	15% (a little difficult)	67% (appropriate)	13% (a little easy)	5% (too easy)
5) Do you feel that you can make use of the designated course materials later?	42%	48%	10%	0%	0%
7) Were the course instructors' explanations easy to understand?	55%	41%	2%	2%	0%
8) Were the pre-task lessons useful?	30%	44%	15%	3%	8%
10) Was the workshop task useful?	50%	35%	11%	2%	2%
12) In general, were you satisfied by this workshop?	42%	42%	11%	5%	0%
14) If a course such as this one were offered again, would you take it?	40%	35%	16%	7%	2%

Note. *Questions 3), 6), 9), 11) and 13) asked respondents to expand on the previous question if they answered I don't think so or I really don't think so.

useful. As a result, in question 12) 84% indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the course workshop and 75% indicated in question 14) that they would take a similar course if it were offered again. These response rates suggest that ES teachers and others who are now being tasked with leading or administering EFL lessons are interested in professional development training that will enable them to successfully take on these new responsibilities.

Table 3 is an interesting mix of reflections on what was learned in the training. In comment one, the respondent makes reference to the desire to communicate with the ALT before class which points they wish to evaluate during the lesson. This is a common issue for busy ES teachers who may only see the ALT a few minutes before the class begins. In such situations common tools like the Positive Feedback Assessment Checklist can assist teacher communication. The fact that the fifth comment declares their wish to adapt to their own school's context underscores the perceived usefulness of such a tool. The sincerity with which many of the respondents addressed the application of praise in the classroom illuminated the willingness of Japanese ES teachers to implement English-style praise as a means of enhancing English language communication between students and teachers and reducing the fear of making mistakes. Nonetheless, it is advisable when working in a foreign language to be mindful of the

Table 3 Selected Responses to Question 5 from the Post-Survey Reflection Sheet on “Positive Feedback and Team Teaching” (Translated by DeepL.com)

Original Response in Japanese	English Translation
1. ALT と授業を進めていく場合、本時での評価ポイントも事前に打ち合わせてから行いたい。	1. When conducting a class with an ALT, we would like to discuss the points to be evaluated in this class in advance.
2. 外国語の授業内だけではなく、子どもをほめる場面で活用したい。	2. We would like to use the sheets not only in the foreign language class, but also when praising children.
3. 全体をほめたり、個別に褒めたりできるようなほめ方のバリエーションが増えたので、活用していきたい。子供の頑張りやチャレンジしようとする気持ちをたくさん褒めて、外国語活動への意欲を高めてあげたい。	3. I would like to utilize a greater variety of praise methods that allow me to praise them as a whole or individually. I would like to praise children's efforts and willingness to take on challenges, and motivate them to participate in foreign language activities.
4. ほめ言葉を外国語ルームに掲示し、誰でも褒め言葉を使える環境を整えていきたい。	4. We would like to post words of praise in the foreign language room and create an environment where anyone can use them.
5. Good, Nice などのほめ言葉だけでなく、子どもの具体的な姿をほめていくことで、より意識をして取り組めるようにしていきたい。また評価チェックリストを自校化し他の先生方と共有して活用したい。	5. We would like to praise not only with words of praise such as “Good,” “Nice,” etc., but also by praising the children's specific behavior, so that they will be more aware of the importance of the activity. We would also like to incorporate the evaluation checklist into our school's original checklist and share with other teachers.
6. 「コミュニケーションの素地」を育てる以上、やはり、「失敗して話したくない」という後ろ向きな気持ちにさせず、「もっと話したい」「話すのが楽しい」という状態につなげていくために非常に有効な手段を学べたと思う。受け止め方、励まし方は他教科でも生かせる部分が多いので、さまざまな場面で生かしたい。	6. In order to nurture the “foundation of communication,” we would like to encourage students to “want to talk more” and “enjoy talking” instead of making them feel “reluctant to talk because of failure.” As we can use how to listen to students' talk and how to encourage them in other subjects, I would like to make use of this method in various situations.
7. これまでの授業では、児童にわかりやすく伝えることばかり優先し、日本語で説明することが多かったが、簡単な言葉でも英語をたくさん伝えることが大切だと改めて感じた。また、児童がミスをした時に、受け止めて会話をしながら、本時の内容に戻すことで、理解していない児童もスムーズに正しい会話に戻ることができるので、今後は、児童の考えや言葉を受け止めながら、児童の「学びたい」という気持ちを育める指導をしていきたい。	7. In the past, I have often explained things in Japanese, giving priority to making things easy for the students to understand. However, I felt again that it is important to use many English words, even if they are simple words. I also realized that by accepting the children's mistakes and returning to the content of the lesson while having a conversation with them, even those who do not understand can smoothly return to the correct conversation. From now on, we would like to give guidance that nurtures the children's desire to learn while listening to their thoughts and words.

cultural norms of the target language being studied as well as those of the L1.

Based on the post-survey and reflection sheet comments, it is apparent that workshop participants perceive praise training in English to be effective, answering the research question.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

There are two main limitations that can be identified in this study. The first is that the post-workshop survey was created by the event organizers, which meant that the authors had less ability to shape the nature of the post-survey questions than might have been the case had they designed their own survey. A second, and perhaps more important, limitation was the inability of the authors to follow up over the long term with the participants at their schools to see how effectively the use of praise and positive feedback, along with the Positive Feedback Assessment Checklist were being implemented. A longitudinal study would reveal more precise conclusions and pinpoint further areas of need.

With respect to future directions, it is clear that ES teachers are motivated to develop themselves professionally and are dedicated to offering engaging and positive English lessons for their students. Team teaching with an ALT continues to generate interest as do tools and activities that support classroom teaching. A survey to the various Boards of Education and ES teachers would likely generate future topics of interest.

8. Conclusion

Since 2020, ES teachers in Japan have had to teach EFL as a compulsory subject in the 5th and 6th grade, with English activities increasing in the lower grades. Responsibility for this new course subject has been challenging. The need to support and train teachers for the English language classroom led to the creation of the Meikai JOE program that offers a set of lectures and workshops for ES teachers. The authors of this paper presented a workshop on “Positive Feedback and Team Teaching,” which was not only well received, but also provided ES EFL teachers with concrete tools that could be immediately implemented into their lessons. As greater emphasis is placed on English education at the primary school level, it will be necessary for a diverse array of training and professional development to be made available for the ES teacher tasked with English language education.

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Appendix A: Praise and Positive Feedback Assessment Checklist For Elementary Communication Skills

評価する コミュニケーション・スキル	活動に特化したほめる表現例 (Name), : 呼びかける児童名は省略しました	メモ (児童名など)
1. アクティブ・リスニング	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your question! いい質問です。 ● (Name), excellent active listening! 相手の話しに興味を示しながら聴くことができました。 ● (Name), you listened well! よく／熱心に聴くことができました。 	
2. アイ・コンタクト	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your eye contact! 相手の目を見て話すことが／聞くことができました。 ● (Name), great eye contact! ● (Name), super eye contact! <p>すばらしいアイ・コンタクトでした。</p>	
3. 声の大きさ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your speaking voice! ● (Name), nice, clear voice! (ちょうど) よい声の大きさでした。 ● (Name), you spoke with a large, clear voice! 大きな声ではっきりと話しました。 	
4. ジェスチャー	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your gestures! よいジェスチャーでした。 ● (Name), excellent gestures! すばらしいジェスチャーでした。 ● (Name), you used nice gestures! うまい／よいジェスチャーを使いました。 	
5. 挨拶等の態度	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your greetings/manners! ● (Name), nice greetings/manners! ● (Name), you have great greetings/manners! <p>きちんと挨拶ができました。／きちんとした態度でした。</p>	
6. 絵を描く	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I like (d) your picture! よい絵です。 ● (Name), awesome picture! 素晴らしい絵です。 ● (Name), your picture is super! とても素晴らしい絵です。 	
7. 協力・チームワーク	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your teamwork! よいチームワークでした。 ● (Name), great teamwork! 素晴らしいチームワークでした。 ● (Name), you worked well with your group! グループ／班のメンバーとよく協力できました。 	
8. 自分自身の考えを表す	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your idea(s)! いい考えでした。 ● (Name), excellent ideas! 素晴らしい考えでした。 ● (Name), you spoke from the heart! 自分の考えを話しました。／心がこもった考えでした。 	
9. 発表	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your presentation! よい発表でした。 ● (Name), super presentation! 素晴らしい発表でした。 ● (Name), your presentation was very interesting! とても興味深い発表でした。 	
10. 自信・自己肯定	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), I liked your confidence! ● (Name), excellent confidence! <p>堂々としていました。</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Name), you showed great confidence! Well done! <p>堂々と (発表) できました。いいですね。</p>	