



Voices on Language Teacher Stereotypes: Critical Cultural Competence Building as a Pedagogical Strategy

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores foreign English teachers' (FETs) personal experiences with stereotypes and their use of critical cultural competence (CCC) building activities in Japanese university English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. The data was obtained through open-ended interviews with Japanese university FETs from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed to capture the participants' lived experiences and how they made sense of their experiences in the language classroom. The findings indicated that FETs can be subject to phenotypical, gender, and personality stereotypes in Japanese educational settings. Japanese English language education, in-group's commitment to collective identity, and the mass media's reinforcement of out-group stereotypes accounted for the existence of the aforementioned stereotypes. The study concludes that integrating CCC building activities into language education can be an effective pedagogical approach to develop students' intercultural sensitivity and foster globally competent students with communicative English language skills.

KEYWORDS

Collective identity; critical cultural competence; Foreign English teacher; Japanese university students; stereotypes

Rapid globalization fueled by the ease of mobility, the spread of the internet, and new mobile technology has helped the English language establish itself as the most spoken second language in the world. English as the global lingua franca also changed the way language education was perceived. One of the implications of this global trend on English language education is an increasing number of non-native English speakers teaching English as a second language outside their native country (Treve, 2020).

However, the assumption that English has to be taught by native speakers created certain expectations about language teachers (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Foreign English teachers (FETs) who fall short of those expectations are often frowned upon or treated with skepticism. Notably, in Asia, where pronunciation and correct use of the language is heavily emphasized, native speakers of English are viewed as "the gold standard of spoken and written language" (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014, p. 1). The notion of native speakerism is particularly evident in Japanese English education programs, influenced by North American English (Lowe, 2017; Uchida & Sugimoto, 2019).

In Japan, English language conversation schools, referred to as *eikaiwa*, are a profit-driven industry that attracts teachers mainly from the English-speaking world (Appleby, 2014; Hooper, 2019; Nagatomo, 2016). This is also evident in school advertisements and the mass media, where FETs are depicted as fun and entertaining Caucasian male teachers (Egitim & Garcia, 2021; Hooper, 2019; Lowe, 2017). Since North American English is viewed as the standard English, teachers who speak English with different accents, regardless of being native speakers, are sometimes given lesser priority despite their educational credentials and experience. Particularly, non-native English teachers who wish to establish a career in Japan find themselves disadvantaged in the job market (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). On the other hand, Caucasian FETs also struggle to establish a professional career independent from the fun persona attached to them despite their privileged position (Lowe, 2017). Finally, due to social pressure resulting from the deep-rooted perceptions of fixed gender roles, female FETs are in an uphill battle with their academic career pursuits (McCandie, 2021).

The present study attempted to delve deeper into FET stereotypes in Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) setting and propose critical cultural competence (CCC) building activities as an effective pedagogical strategy through personal experiences of FETs. The research questions investigated by this study include:

1. How are FET stereotypes perceived by EFL teachers at Japanese universities?
2. What do EFL teachers perceive as effective CCC building activities to help Japanese university students overcome FET stereotypes and develop empathy and tolerance?

Stereotypes in Japanese EFL education

Due to the transformative effects of rapid globalization, Japanese higher educational institutions have reformed their language education policies with a stronger emphasis on active learning, learner autonomy, and learner engagement through English medium instruction (EMI) (Egitim, 2022a; Inaba, 2020). Thus, many universities have introduced new EMI courses into their curricula, which are primarily taught by FETs. (Rose & McKinley, 2017).

At first, this plan appeared to conform with the internationalization goals of the Ministry of Education (MEXT). However, the rapid expansion of EMI courses has brought challenges. Several research studies indicated that first-year students struggled to adapt to learner-centered pedagogy due to their long-term exposure to teacher-centered instruction in Japan's exam-driven pre-tertiary English education (MacWhinnie & Mitchell, 2017; Sato, Kawashima, Tanaka, & Yamaoto, 2019). In other words, many students arrive at universities without the necessary foundation to engage in English communication activities with FETs in EMI programs (Rose & McKinley, 2017; Steele & Zhang, 2016). Thus, students' struggles with learner-centered pedagogy warrants further discussion on how the English language is taught in pre-tertiary settings.

In public schools, compulsory English education is mandated for all students from the fourth grade until they graduate from high school. During this period, the majority of students still learn English through the grammar-translation method, which is also referred to as *Yakudoku* in the Japanese language. The grammar-translation method also goes hand-in-hand with the test-based English education referred to as *Juken eigo* (Egitim, 2022b; Thompson & Yanagita, 2015). Since active engagement is not required by *Yakudoku* and *Juken Eigo*,

students focus their time and energy on memorizing words and grammar points to score well on tests.

Stereotypical Roles Ascribed to Teachers

During pre-tertiary English education, classes are mainly taught by Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) who are assisted by FETs, commonly referred to as assistant language teachers (Egitim & Garcia, 2021). According to a study performed by Steele and Zhang (2016), English classes taught by JTEs present significant differences from that of FETs. JTEs focus on improving students' grammar and vocabulary through the grammar-translation method, while FETs are expected to engage students in oral communication through games, songs, and other communicative activities.

JTEs also tend to use the Japanese language (L1) as the medium of instruction to help students grasp a good understanding of the contents. It is also a safe choice for those who may lack sufficient oral English language competence for EMI (Steele & Zhang, 2016). As a result, classes become lecture-oriented with heavy reliance on textbooks. Furthermore, class sizes create an extra hurdle for JTEs who desire to engage students in communicative language activities (Steele & Zhang, 2016).

Students who study English through this co-teaching model in public schools may form certain preconceptions about the teaching roles of JTEs and FETs and thus, develop stereotypical expectations of their university EFL teachers (MacWhinnie & Mitchell, 2017; Sato, Kawashima, Tanaka, & Yamaoto, 2019). Several studies, which compared students' perceptions of FETs and JTEs found that there was a tendency among Japanese university students to view FETs as more fun and animated than JTEs, while perceiving JTEs more scholarly and credible than FETs for their grammar and English language knowledge (Appleby, 2014; Egitim & Garcia, 2021; Hooper, Oka, & Yamazawa, 2020).

Evidently, school education is an integral part of students' lives. Since students are exposed to these stereotypical teaching roles, their preconceptions could have far-reaching effects on language teachers' psychology and well-being. Some teachers may fall short of meeting the expectations brought by their respective language teacher roles and develop stress and anxiety (Houghton, Furumura, & Lebedko, 2014; Lowe, 2017; Nagatomo, 2016). As a result, they may end up quitting their posts or even changing their career paths.

Previous studies indicated that FET stereotypes have been influential on Japanese universities' recruitment strategies (Appleby, 2014; Houghton, Furumura, & Lebedko, 2014; Nagatomo, 2016). Although Caucasian teachers with a fun persona appear to be an ideal hiring choice, several studies argued that the stereotype may hinder those teachers' ability to establish a professional identity independent from appearance and personality (Egitim & Garcia, 2021; Hooper, Oka, & Yamazawa, 2020; Houghton, Furumura, & Lebedko, 2014).

On the other hand, the hiring practices influenced by the Caucasian FET stereotypes can also disadvantage FETs of color who cannot meet the stereotypical expectations due to their nationality, gender, or ethnic background despite having the necessary credentials and teaching experience (Appleby, 2014). Thus, those teachers are in a constant struggle to earn new credentials to attract the attention of employers in the competitive job market (Hooper, Oka, & Yamazawa, 2020).

The Implications of Gender Stereotypes

Suzuki (2017) described gender stereotypes as the preconceived roles ascribed to males and females that contribute to gender inequality and workplace discrimination. The negative effects of gender stereotypes for women's career pursuits were further highlighted by EFL researchers (Houghton, Furumura, & Lebedko, 2014; Kobayashi, 2014; Koshino, 2019; McCandie, 2021; Nagatomo, 2016).

According to Nagatomo (2016), gender stereotypes burden female FETs with additional stress and anxiety due to the societal pressure to fulfill their stereotypical gender roles, such as wives and mothers. As a result, these teachers are often disadvantaged in the highly competitive higher education job market. One of the major implications of the societal pressure is the toll it takes on full-time female teachers with parenting and household duties. McCandie (2021) argued that the pressure on female FETs could mount to the point that some teachers may end up resigning from their tenured posts to either take a career break or seek part-time university positions with fewer administrative responsibilities so that they can keep up with their parenting and household duties.

A recent study by Nagatomo (2016) revealed that female FETs were outnumbered three to one by male FETs in Japanese EFL settings. One of the major implications of the disproportionate numbers is more students are exposed to male FETs than female FETs, which further reinforces the already existing gender stereotypes in school settings.

Gaijin Stereotypes Reinforced by the Mass Media

The word foreigner referred to as *gaijin* in the Japanese language literally means an outsider. According to Fukuda (2017), this word is specifically used for Caucasian foreigners who have distinctly different phenotypical features than the Japanese. Conversely, foreign nationals of Asian descent in Japan are included in an outer in-group category and thus, are not referred to as *gaijin*. According to Fukuda (2017), this inclusive discourse is used for Asian foreigners due to their phenotypical and cultural similarities to the Japanese. As for Caucasian foreigners, an isolating word like *gaijin* in the general discourse sets the initial boundaries and instigates the notion of othering (Fukuda (2017); Suzuki (2015)).

Such discourse is often seen in the media depicting foreigners speak unnatural Japanese in movies and animations (Suzuki, 2015). Fukuda (2017) probed into the role of the mass media in reinforcing certain *gaijin* stereotypes in Japanese TV shows where the participant was portrayed as an arrogant yet animated Caucasian male squaring his shoulders, speaking loudly, making jokes by code-switching between English accented Japanese and English. "Since the phenotypical and personality features of the participant fit the existing Caucasian male foreigner stereotype in Japanese society, the participant always received immediate acceptance from the Japanese audience without any interactional trouble" (p. 20).

Othering can also be a positive manifestation of stereotyping through uncritical admiration and esteem toward Caucasians. This was also evident in the make-up and clothing items during the Meiji era, which promoted the notion of whiteness as the standard of beauty in Japanese society (Russell, 2017). The frequent portrayal of Caucasian people in the mass media further reinforced Western-centric beauty standards, leading to the Caucasian stereotype as the idealized other (Torigoe, 2012). Contrarily, Brewer (2011) argued that the mass media may also use "non-recognition, ridicule, and regulation" strategies to construct a

lesser image of people of color in Japan by depicting foreign nationals of Asian descent as less educated, Africans as poor, and Muslims as the dangerous other in society.

The misrepresentation of these minority groups in the mass media also continues to reinforce the existing FET stereotypes (Appleby, 2014; Kobayashi, 2014; Lowe, 2017). Popular English language TV programs such as “Can you speak English?” and “Let’s play English” both featured white American hosts, who are also famous TV personalities in Japan. Students who grow up watching these TV programs are likely to develop a preconception about what FETs look like and how they behave in the language classroom. The Caucasian English teacher stereotype is also reinforced through school advertisements which often feature white, blonde male teachers to fulfill the stereotypical expectations (Houghton, Furumura, & Lebedko, 2014; Lowe, 2017; Nagatomo, 2016).

Furthermore, Sherlock (2016) argued that “many English language textbooks taught in Japanese EFL settings are dominated by English-speaking countries and seldom feature African and Asian cultures” (p. 80). The underrepresentation of these countries in English education textbooks appears to be contradictory with the perception of English as a global language and further reinforces the existing stereotypes.

As Japan continues to embrace globalization and English is viewed as the gateway to advancement at the international stage, eliminating these preconceived notions and fostering interculturally competent students has become a critical mission for all language educators. Fortunately, EFL classrooms provide teachers with an ideal platform to help students develop their intercultural sensitivity through English language education.

Critical cultural competence (CCC) is defined as the ability to show acceptance, tolerance, and respect for differences through one’s commitment to continuous self-assessment (Puckett & Lind, 2020). Increasing global mobility fueled by rapid globalization stimulated intercultural interactions between people from different parts of the world. In particular, academic institutions have been striving to promote diversity as part of their internationalization mission (Egitim, 2022b). Japanese universities have also followed suit by aiming to foster globally competent students with communicative English language skills. This mission was also emphasized through the MEXT’s English education reforms (Nemoto, 2018; Rose & McKinley, 2017).

More diversity means increased intercultural interactions, which may result in a diversity of knowledge and experience brought by individual differences. However, conflict can also arise from intercultural interactions due to individual differences in interests, objectives, and values (Busch, 2019). The complexity of conflicting cultural interests, objectives, and values requires a high degree of cultural competence. Especially in Japanese university EFL classes, where English and culture are taught together, CCC building activities can foster language development while enhancing students’ intercultural competence.

The first step towards developing CCC involves enhancing cultural knowledge, skills, and understanding (Campinha-Bacote, 2011). For instance, students who watched a documentary about the sights of Iran and Iranian hospitality towards tourists can share what they have learned with their Iranian teacher. These knowledge exchanges can fuel intercultural interactions and hence, give students an opportunity to examine their cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions which then, leads to enhanced critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2008). When a person develops critical cultural awareness, they develop the habit of performing

critical and reflective evaluations on their own. As a result, individuals can learn to confront their biases and develop a perspective beyond static preconceived notions (Egitim, 2021).

According to Moncada Linares (2016), language teachers can implement reflective classroom practices to promote CCC as an integral part of intercultural communication in language classes. One of the effective exercises is to have learners reflect on literary and non-literary cultural products such as critical incidents to foster critical self-reflection and self-consciousness (Nugent & Catalano, 2015). Reflective practice allows learners to pause and withhold judgment when learning about, analyzing, and interpreting cultural products, practices, and perspectives. Performing critical discourse analysis and inciting discussions on topics such as identity, privilege, and stereotypes can give learners opportunities to self-reflect and raise their intercultural awareness (Moncada Linares, 2016). In addition, collaborative qualitative research assignments based on intercultural issues are considered beneficial for learners to raise their intercultural sensitivity while prompting them to generate solutions (Egitim, 2021).

Koch and Takashima (2021) incorporated several intercultural activities in their lesson plans to raise their students' intercultural sensitivity as part of a research project. Fifty-eight students participated in the activities. Students were placed in situations where they would need to interact with people from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds in English. After engaging in a series of intercultural activities, students were asked to reflect on themselves and identify their misconceptions and biases when interacting with out-group members. This activity was followed by a feedback session where students shared different misconceptions and biases with each other. The post-lesson questionnaire revealed that students appeared to judge instances through their own cultural lens, and thus, gaining that awareness helped them become more culturally sensitive.

As Japanese universities are going through rapid internationalization, CCC has become an invaluable asset for both students and teachers. Therefore, integrating CCC building activities into the foreign language education curriculum at universities would not only help learners develop a more accepting attitude but also it would bring universities one step closer to fulfilling their ultimate goal of fostering globally competent Japanese citizens.

Methodology

The present study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and focused on uncovering the essence of FETs lived experiences and how they made sense of those experiences in and outside of the language classroom (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The pedagogical strategies developed by the participants aimed to raise students' CCC. Therefore, the activities highlighted in the findings section were gathered under the emergent theme of "critical cultural competence building as a pedagogical strategy."

Participants

IPA is performed based on a detailed analysis of information produced by a small sample size between six and nine participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Eight Japanese university EFL teachers were selected from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to understand diverse participant perspectives of FET stereotypes and offer insights into the

pedagogical strategies to develop students' CCC. At the time of this study, the participants were long-term residents in Japan and teaching English and intercultural communication courses at Japanese universities (Table 1).

The researcher employed a purposive sampling strategy and relied on his own judgment when selecting participants for the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). He chose participants who were of interest, have knowledge and experience of teaching intercultural communication and the English language. The researcher is a multilingual speaker, who was born in a non-native English-speaking country, and has been teaching English in Japan since 2006. Thus, he understands and acknowledges his biases, and he is aware that his preconceived ideas were influential on his interest in language teacher stereotypes within the Japanese context. His prior knowledge and experiences as a language teacher also played a role in determining the research question, the data collection, and the analysis process.

Interview Protocol

The data was collected through qualitative interviews with FETs from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol with open-ended questions. This strategy allowed the participants opportunities to elaborate on their experiences and personal stories (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Each interview lasted approximately an hour. As part of the human subject protection protocol, the interviewees were allowed to withdraw at any time without reason and use pseudonyms to protect their identity. The interviews were recorded on video through an online video conference platform Zoom due to the global pandemic. Prior to each interview, the participants were provided with the background and the objectives of the study. Each interview started with an open-ended question, and participants were given ample time to elaborate on their personal stories, followed by follow-up questions and prods by the researcher. As a result, both the researcher and the participants were able to engage in meaningful conversations based on the participants' personal experiences.

Data analysis

Smith et al.'s (2009) six-step approach was employed for the data analysis. First, the recorded data was transcribed and reviewed by the researcher. Then, each transcript was sent to their respective participant to confirm the accuracy of the text. The researcher reread the transcript and took initial notes with constant referral back to the original text. The next step involved in-vivo coding which the repeated patterns were identified through the participants' own words. The in-vivo coding was helpful to attain a deeper understanding of the personal accounts, perspectives, and meanings expressed by the participants (Manning, 2017). During the analysis, the researcher looked for patterns and repetitions through the pattern codes, which helped identify the emergent themes. Finally, the conclusions were shared with participants for their validation and contributions.

Table 1. List of participants.

NAME	NATIONALITY	AGE	GENDER	RESIDENCY IN JAPAN	POSITION	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND
Raj	Indian	Early 30s	Male	7 years	Adjunct Lecturer	MA
Mary	Filipino	Early 50s	Female	18 years	Adjunct Lecturer	PHD
Reuben	British	Late 30s	Male	16 years	Full-time Lecturer	MA
Tracy	American	Mid 40s	Female	16 years	Adjunct Lecturer	MA
AP	Cameroonian	Late 40s	Male	20 years	Assistant Professor	MA
Marie	Korean	Early 50s	Female	Since birth	Associate Professor	MA
Pat	German	Early 50s	Male	16 years	Adjunct Lecturer	PHD
Zahra	Iranian	Early 40s	Female	15 years	Adjunct Lecturer	PHD

Note. The demographic data were gathered through the participants’ own description of their background through introductory interview questions.

Findings

Upon the interpretative phenomenological analysis, the following six themes were identified as the emergent themes, which reflected the participants’ experiences and how they made sense of those experiences through their own words.

- Phenotypical stereotypes associated with FETs
- Gender stereotypes
- FETs as fun and entertaining teachers
- Student acceptance
- The mass media’s role in reinforcing stereotypes
- Critical cultural competence building as a pedagogical strategy

Phenotypical Stereotypes Associated with FETs

The first theme emerged as phenotypical FET stereotypes through the participants’ description of the common phenotypical features of FETs in Japanese EFL settings. All participants indicated that FETs are commonly Caucasian males from one of the major English-speaking countries particularly, from the U.S. Several participants mentioned “blond hair” and “blue eyes” as the common features of idealized FETs. The expectation for an American teacher may be due to the influence of North American English on the education system (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2019; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). On the other hand, the perception of viewing Caucasian teachers as the idealized FETs may also be linked to the positive image of whiteness in Japanese society. Several participants also noted that the words “native” and “Caucasian” are “synonymous” with one another. According to Reuben:

Blond, blue-eyed heterosexual, upper-middle class male teacher. I’ve heard students saying that, you know, they had longing for it like they were quite open about saying yeah, I wanted to talk to a blond teacher.

The notion of whiteness was key to fulfilling the expectations born from the FET stereotype. Tracy’s story about her Russian colleague provides a detailed illustration of how stereotypes could affect the employment of FETs of color. Tracy noted:

I recommended a Russian friend of mine to a kindergarten. They were looking for an English teacher, and I used to teach for them. They said the person didn’t have to be a native English speaker, so I introduced my Russian friend, but she was Korean Russian so she physically looked Korean and as soon as they saw her, they didn’t even give her an interview. They said, no, you don’t fit our image of what we want as an English teacher.

The story above may also be interpreted as people of Asian descent not being viewed as part of the core out-group of gaijin (Fukuda, 2017) due to their ethnic similarities to the Japanese. Due to this stereotypical categorization, those teachers' ability to present themselves as FETs is compromised despite having the necessary credentials and teaching experience.

Gender Stereotypes

Male sex was emphasized as a stereotypical feature of an ideal FET by the participants. Thus, male FETs were preferred over female FETs. Pat made a reference to Japan's "male-dominated corporate environment" and the expectations it created within the Japanese education system. In this regard, the influence of male privilege in society was also noted by several other participants. In particular, Tracy pointed out that certain questions were only asked female candidates in job interviews. Tracy said:

I was always asked whether I had a child and had to take care of her. After getting rejected several times, in my recent job interview, I had to explain to them my daughter has two parents. We both play an equal role in raising her, and so please, keep that in mind when you make a decision, and they eventually hired me.

Zahra also emphasized certain socio-cultural factors work in favor of males such as, the ease of "finding secure employment," "finding a partner," "getting married," and "staying in Japan." Both participants made references to the deep-rooted stereotypical gender roles in Japanese society and their impact on female FETs during their search for employment (Appleby, 2014; Egitim & Garcia, 2021a; Kobayashi, 2014; Nagatomo, 2016). These gender stereotypes may also influence students' perception of FETs. Seeing more male teachers during their pre-tertiary and tertiary education could create the false assumption of gender as a determining factor in the quality of education.

Mary highlighted the unfair competition between female FETs of color and Caucasian male FETs. She noted that female FETs of color not only have to overcome deep-rooted gender stereotypes in Japan but also, they would have to compensate for their ethnic background. Mary said:

I work with many Caucasian male teachers, and most of them do not have a PhD but for Asians like me, to compete with these teachers, I thought I needed to have the highest degree. Luckily, I have a PhD.

FETs as Fun and Entertaining Teachers

The third theme emerged from the participants' perspectives of common personality stereotypes associated with FETs. The responses indicated that FETs were expected to be "outgoing," "fun," and "entertaining." AP from Cameroon used several positive adjectives such as "good looking, cool, friendly, and gentle" to refer to certain personality stereotypes associated with FETs. According to AP:

Those very positive adjectives go with the white man because of this idea of the native speakers of English being the good teachers. There's this stereotype, and students grow up knowing that.

These expectations stem from the *eikaiwa* representation of FETs as conversation teachers and the stereotypical class teaching roles attached to JTEs and FETs within the Japanese school system. Tracy offered a vivid illustration of how the personality stereotypes affected her students' perception of English language classes and the resulting pressure to meet such stereotypical roles:

When I was working at a private junior high school, the principal would stand outside my classroom at the end of class and ask students, "Did you have fun today?" and that used to make me so angry because the purpose in his mind of English class was fun. Instead, I wanted him to say, "What did you learn today?" So, in my opinion, they're looking for a very energetic, bubbly type person.

Some participants also emphasized the negative effects of the personality stereotypes of FETs on Caucasian teachers. Consistent with the literature, these teachers feel pressured to act differently to fulfill the expectations born from the personality stereotypes. Reuben noted, "These personality stereotypes also put pressure on Caucasian teachers to be x y z and their response about pressure by being x y z."

Student Acceptance

The student acceptance theme emerged from the participants' self-reflection on their identity as FETs and their personal experiences with Japanese university students. In particular, the participants emphasized that FETs of American/European heritage are likely to gain immediate acceptance from students, while it may take time for FETs of color to earn their approval. Especially, female non-native English-speaking participants emphasized their struggle due to their gender and ethnic background. Mary noted:

I need to explain everything, where I come from, what is my educational background, what is my professional background, what is my experience in teaching and tell them I have a PhD and have worked at reputable Japanese universities. That is the only time they will realize she's maybe qualified.

Zahra, who also has a PhD provided a detailed explanation of her preparation for first classes to win her students' approval.

In my very first class, I write everything about myself on the chalkboard and put little hearts around them. I put a photo of myself and my husband and my hometown Tehran in snow. I really personalize things, so they know that I'm a human being.

The common point between the two non-native female FETs is that they both have a PhD, yet they had to go to great lengths to explain their background so that they can earn students' approval. AP from Cameroon also offered insights into delayed student acceptance when FETs fall short of the expectations. According to AP, some students may show disappointment if the FET does not match the image students projected in their minds. However, he also emphasized that FETs from his background can eventually prove themselves with "hard work" and "creative activities."

On the other hand, Reuben, who described himself as a FET from a "privileged background," also offered a native speaker perspective into student acceptance and "the hard work" aspect other participants emphasized. Just as Mary, Reuben also emphasized the need for non-native

FETs to go the extra mile to earn more educational credentials while their native peers take advantage of their privileged status. Reuben shared a personal story of his:

When I was doing my second TESOL qualification in Kansai, what I was seeing was a classroom with me, and maybe one other native speaker teacher from a privileged background, and then the rest were non-native teachers giving up their weekends for how to study to teach better, but these guys are treated second best. On the other hand, the native speakers, because of where they were born and how they look, they just have this sense of entitlement and slip right in, and hence, the educational content and professional legitimacy are sidelined.

Pat from Germany offered his insights as a non-native speaker of European heritage by suggesting that being from a developed European nation often helps him gain immediate approval from his students even though most of them are aware his first language is German. Pat's experience suggests that being a male Caucasian FET from a developed country brings him an advantage in student approval regardless of being a non-native speaker.

Based on the experiences of the participants, both immediate and delayed student acceptance points to the existence of the FET stereotypes. However, as both Pat and Mary noted, being Caucasian alone was also effective in gaining immediate approval from students. Tracy's story about her Russian colleague of Korean descent also supports the notion that minorities of Asian descent may be viewed closer to the in-group and thus, disadvantaging them in their quest for employment as FETs.

Several other participants suggested that sufficient Japanese language ability and understanding of the local culture could influence students' perception and help speed up the acceptance process. Raj noted, "When I switched to speaking Japanese, I feel like my personality changes. That shows them I can adjust to their culture, and it helps me gradually gain their acceptance." Raj's demonstration of his intercultural awareness combined with his language ability was effective to connect with his students on a deeper level and thus, help gain their acceptance.

The Mass Media's Role in Reinforcing Stereotypes

Although various studies highlighted the influence of the mass media on reinforcing stereotypes (Fukuda, 2017; Torigoe, 2012), research concerning FET stereotypes in Japan is still limited. The participants suggested they often saw the negative portrayal of foreign nationals on TV such as, "the Vietnamese, Iranians, and Africans." Pat offered an example of a news story he had seen recently:

I watched a TV show recently, and there was this stereotype of criminal Vietnamese people. That was something I was quite shocked by. Obviously, if students saw that, they might start thinking people from Vietnam are often involved in crimes.

AP also emphasized the media's negative portrayal of Africa and its influence on his students. According to him, when Africa is featured on TV, students are likely to see the news about "poverty, famine, and war." As a result, they may associate African people with negative concepts. This misrepresentation may give FETs from those countries unnecessary stress and anxiety and, in some cases (Treve, 2020), affect their motivation about teaching English. AP continued:

When I ask my students to tell me one thing about Africa, they often say poverty, famine, or war because those are the things they see on TV or on the news about Africa. Why not show some positive things, too? Why not mention people like Nelson Mandela, Trevor Noah, Wangari Maathai?

Participants also emphasized positive and negative stereotypes ascribed to Caucasian people in the media. Tracy gave an example of a female Japanese tennis player of color being portrayed as having pale skin, brown hair, and Caucasian features in a Japanese TV commercial. Such media representation of celebrities in the Japanese media further enunciates their perception of whiteness as the standard of beauty. On the other hand, Reuben described an educational show on national TV that reinforced certain stereotypes about Americans.

I watched a kids' education show on NHK. People in the role-play were saying you're going to have to be really *genki* (the Japanese word for fun), outgoing, and wacky because you'll meet an American. There are American people with all different personality types, but no. The message, in the end, was the American I met was just like that. He was really wacky.

Although it may sound positive at first, the personality stereotypes ascribed to Caucasian Americans in the media also create expectations from them to act “funny, outgoing, and wacky” in front of their students. As a result, they may struggle to establish a professional identity independent of appearance and personality. When media uses the kind of rhetoric and discourse targeting minorities, it helps to solidify the majority's collective identity and thus, gain their approval. These stereotypes may also give students a false impression of their FETs and create unnecessary expectations and challenges in their interactions with them.

Critical Cultural Competence Building as a Pedagogical Strategy

As one of the objectives of this paper was to understand how the participants used CCC building activities, each participant was asked to reflect on their classroom practices. Pat from Germany emphasized the importance of developing empathy towards people from other cultures. He used a CCC building activity with his students from a women's college to prepare them for a six-month study abroad trip in Saudi Arabia. Students first researched Saudi Arabia, learned about the challenges of living there, and developed strategies to assimilate themselves into the local culture. The final stage involved reflecting on their pretended study abroad experiences through oral presentations. According to Pat:

This activity teaches them how it feels to be a foreigner in a foreign culture. That way, they can start to empathize with international students as well as teachers from different backgrounds.

Reuben showed his students a video clip called “but we are speaking Japanese” to attack certain “essentialist notions” such as “race, nationhood, and speakerhood.” The video features a Japanese waitress ignoring a group of non-Asian customers who speak fluent Japanese while paying attention to the only Asian member of the group who does not speak Japanese. Reuben noted:

I would show them the video and then ask them what they thought the message was that they would write about it, and we would have a discussion based on what they

write. The aim of this activity is to place students in the position of people who are subject to stereotypes, raise their awareness, and help them develop empathy for people facing similar challenges.

The only African participant in this study, AP believed that CCC building activities provide opportunities for students to learn about “the true colors of Africa.” He reiterated the negative concepts associated with Africa by making an indirect reference to the mass media’s influence of reinforcing the stereotypes about Africa. In his classes, AP focused on having his students research and present information they didn’t know about Africa. AP said:

I discuss African people in my classes, not only animals, because students want to talk about animals. When you talk about a country, you don’t only talk about animals. You also talk about people. We talk about people who’ve made significant contributions to the continent. For example, I have them research some of the true colors of Africa. Because what people know about Africa is hunger, poverty, disease so I ask them to look up some of the true colors of Africa in the area of sports, education, human rights, and environmental protection, and they prepare presentations in their groups and discuss them. I go around and serve as a member of each group, and then, each group presents their findings to the whole class, and finally, we choose the winner.

AP believes that these activities give students opportunities to reflect on themselves and learn to appreciate the cultural, social, and educational significance of Africa in the world. Zahra uses art to help students overcome stereotypes about the Middle East and Iran. According to Zahra:

I have my students make little posters on famous Iranian female photographers and artists. They research them and introduce them to class. There is very little information about Iranian artists in Japanese. So students need to find the information in English, and I have them present. You know, introduce the artists and their works. They really enjoy it and never forget it because art is really powerful. At the end of the semester, students write a message to me saying they now care about the Middle East, and when they hear about Iran, they want to fact check and do more research.

Tracy uses a handout named *Being Japanese* and has her students reflect on how they perceive certain Japanese minority groups such as, the Ainu, second-generation Koreans, first-generation overseas citizens, who gave up their Japanese citizenship, returnee children, children of multi-cultural marriages, and naturalized Japanese citizens. Her goal is to challenge certain essentialist notions about race and stereotypes.

They first use a Likert scale and circle their answers to determine how Japanese each group is. Then, I have them discuss and reflect on their answers. My goal is to have them confront their own biases and develop a more accepting attitude.

Marie uses an activity to eliminate national stereotypes. She divides her students into small groups and gives them a country flashcard with a questionnaire based on the ethnic and cultural features of the country. Then, students answer the questions and pass the information to the next group. In the end, each group checks the accuracy of the answers on the web and reflects on them during the post-discussion activities. Marie said, “Once students check the

information on the web, they realize stereotypes are not always accurate. There are white people in Zimbabwe and many Americans don't own a gun.”

Mary also has her students' research and present intercultural issues in Japan, such as LGBTQ, ethnic minorities, expats, and mixed-race children. Mary believes intercultural topics are mentally stimulating and allow both teachers and students an opportunity to examine their deep-rooted beliefs and assumptions about gender, race, and ethnicity. The participants also noted that CCC building activities help with language acquisition and retention. Since students are likely to encounter new vocabulary and phrases during those activities, they can give themselves opportunities to use them in writing, presentations, and discussions.

Discussion

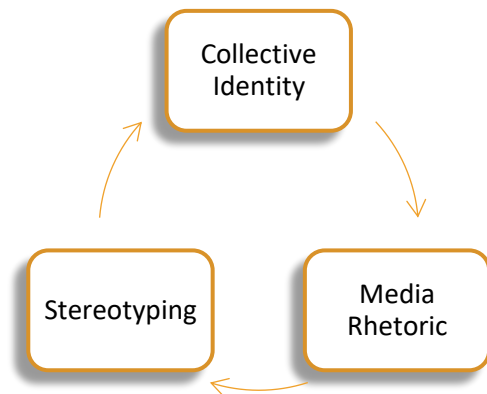
Although previous studies alluded to the existence of FET stereotypes (Appleby, 2014; Kobayashi, 2014), the present study offered comprehensive insights into why these stereotypes existed and how they affected student-teacher interactions in Japanese university EFL classes. One of the implications of phenotypical FET stereotypes was delayed student acceptance for FETs from non-American/European heritage. As a result, those teachers felt pressured to elaborate on their family and educational background and obtain additional teaching qualifications to earn students' acceptance. On the other hand, certain stereotypical roles ascribed to FETs of American/European heritage appear to put unnecessary pressure on those teachers despite being from privileged backgrounds. Several participants mentioned that they felt pressured to fulfill students' and school administrators' expectations (Appleby, 2014; Hooper, 2019).

Consistent with the literature on the gender gap in Japanese work environments, the participants also indicated that male FETs are placed in an advantageous position both in their career pursuits and classroom interactions (Appleby, 2014; Kobayashi, 2014; Nagatomo, 2016). Female participants of this study emphasized the stress and difficulty involved in their search for employment due to the stereotypical gender roles in society.

The participants also suggested that the notion of othering was reinforced through certain rhetoric and discourse on TV, school advertisements, and other media channels (Egitim & Garcia, 2021; Fukuda, 2017). The mass media's efforts in othering nourish the in-group's collective identity which provides a shared form of belonging and distinctiveness to in-group members. Through their commitment to collective identity, in-group members could inadvertently approve the media's misrepresentation of minorities. Figure 1 illustrates the cyclic relationship between collective identity, media rhetoric, and stereotyping.

Figure 1

Cyclic Relationship of Collective Identity, Media Rhetoric, and Stereotyping



Note. Figure 1 illustrates the cyclic relationship between collective identity, media rhetoric, and stereotyping.

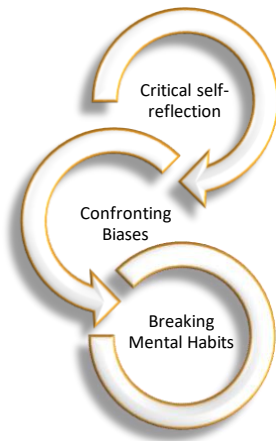
This cycle can endure until in-group members’ mental habits are addressed through critical self-examination and critical self-reflection. Unfortunately, no empirical research has been published on how the media rhetoric and discourse influence Japanese university students’ perception of their FETs. In this regard, the participants’ perspectives offer valuable insights into the FET stereotypes and the challenges facing those FETs.

All participants in this study were asked to perform critical self-reflection by putting themselves in their students’ positions. When reflecting on their ideal FET, they also reflected on their teacher identity. The responses indicated that the participants were tolerant and accepting individuals, and their attitude towards diversity stemmed from their critical self-reflection. Through reflective practice, the participants were able to regularly examine their personal beliefs and assumptions and create opportunities to improve their classroom practices.

The participants also emphasized their perception of English as a global language, and none of them viewed race, gender, or nationality as a factor in language education. Their introspective attitude is echoed in their classroom practices through CCC building activities with their students. As Figure 2 illustrated, students were placed in positions to confront their own biases through critical self-reflection (Moncada Linares, 2016). This chain reflection process was used to help break students’ mental habits. As students continued to gain new cultural knowledge and skills through the CCC building activities, they were also given the opportunity to examine their own beliefs, values, and assumptions about race, gender, and nationality and develop an accepting attitude.

Figure 2

Chain Reflection Process for Students



Note. Figure 2 presents the chain reflection process when students are engaged in CCC building activities.

Pedagogical Implications

This study emphasized CCC building activities as a pedagogical strategy to eliminate race, gender, and nationality stereotypes from language classrooms. While these activities are aimed at developing both intercultural and linguistic competence of students, they may also serve as a base point for language teachers to develop their own CCC building activities. As more varied CCC building activities are designed and performed by language teachers, more awareness can be raised on the benefits of CCC, and hopefully, they are given more attention to in-school curricula and teacher training programs.

The MEXT has a long-term educational goal of fostering globally competent Japanese citizens. Therefore, in recent years, major reforms have been introduced to improve English education (Inaba, 2020; Rose & McKinley, 2017). Currently, compulsory English education starts from the third grade in elementary school. However, recent studies indicated a lack of practical guidelines to promote intercultural education in foreign language classrooms (Fritz & Sandu, 2020). This results in a gap between policy and practice, and hence, the objectives set to foster globally competent students are not reflected in actual classroom practices.

Shaules (2019) argued that there is a tendency among scholars and practitioners to separate intercultural communication from English language education even though most intercultural interactions tend to take place in English within the Japanese context. The perspective of viewing language and culture as a “single, interrelated” process should lead to an “integrated, embodied, experiential, and transformational” learning experience for students (p. 132). In this regard, CCC building activities can serve as a valuable pedagogical guide to bridge the gap. In order to become a global citizen, one needs to have adequate cultural flexibility to

interact with people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Such cultural flexibility comes with CCC. If the goal is to foster globally competent Japanese citizens, CCC must be recognized as an essential part of English language education.

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