Reading to Learn for learning to write: Japanese EFL teachers' perceptions about Reading to Learn

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ABSTRACT

Many Japanese secondary students struggle to write in English despite goals to raise their abilities. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has set a target of 50% of students achieving at level A2 or above. However, reports show that approximately 80% are only performing at level A1. There is also evidence that writing instruction is deprioritized in favor of reading instruction. In such a context, it is critical to examine approaches to writing instruction which might lead to better outcomes. One potential approach is Reading to Learn (R2L). This paper reports on an exploratory study investigating six Japanese EFL teachers' perceptions of the suitability of R2L for the Japanese EFL context. R2L was introduced to the teachers first, and then they were asked to workshop a potential lesson plan using R2L in their own contexts. Teachers were interviewed before and after the workshop and their discussions during the lesson planning session were also recorded. Results show that teachers felt R2L would be both feasible and beneficial, suggesting further investigation into how it might be made more widespread in Japan is warranted.

Keywords: EFL; Genre-Based Pedagogy; Reading to Learn; Secondary School Literacy; writing pedagogy

INTRODUCTION
Background
Secondary school is an important educational stage that forms a foundation for English language development. Japanese secondary school students commonly struggle more to develop writing than other macro skills such as reading, listening, and speaking. According to a report on the English proficiency of secondary school students, 80.4 % of Japanese secondary school senior students were at the A1 level of the CEFR in writing, despite the goal of 50 % of students achieving A2 level or above (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2017). At the A1 level students are only able to write simple sentences, one at a time, while at the A2 level they can write simple coherent sentences connected by simple conjunctions. Osawa (2022) reported that the lack of both learners' writing skills and teachers failing to adopt more global perspectives on writing

instruction are challenges for English language education in Japan. It is vital to investigate more appropriate instruction for Japanese secondary school students to overcome their weaknesses in English language writing.

This exploratory study contributes to the dialogue around how best to teaching writing in an EFL context in Japan to overcome students' difficulties with writing. It does this by investigating six teachers' opinions on a pedagogy which has been implemented internationally in literacy education but is still novel in the Japanese context. Reading to Learn (henceforth R2L) is an approach to teaching literacy which *integrates* the teaching of reading and writing (Rose & Martin, 2012). The approach could be suitable to address the gap between students' reading and writing proficiency in Japan. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the potential for R2L to be used in Japanese secondary school EFL classes. As teachers' beliefs play an

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essential role in their effective teaching practice (Borg, 2018), analysis of their perception of R2L is an important first step to spreading this approach in the Japanese secondary school setting.

To investigate the possible potential of R2L in Japan, this study poses the following two research questions.

R.Q.1 What are the perceptions of six EFL teachers in Japanese secondary schools towards R2L?

R.Q.2 What would be some optimal ways to introduce R2L in Japanese secondary schools?

This study involves several broad intersecting fields of research. The general states of reading instruction and writing instruction in Japan were introduced before genre-based instruction was suggested as a possible approach to the integration of these in teaching. R2L is then introduced and its implementation with L2 learners internationally is examined prior to reporting on studies of teachers' perceptions of R2L.

Reading Instruction in Japanese Schools

In Japanese secondary schools, the focus of English instruction is frequently reading, while writing instruction is backgrounded. This is possibly due to the impact of university entrance examinations. A survey regarding activities in class showed that 86.5 % of Japanese Secondary School English teachers focused on reading comprehension, while only 43.0 % taught essay writing (Benesse Institute of Education, 2016). These findings resonate with Yukimori's (2018) survey of students and teachers on the balance of the four macro skills in class. Yukiomori's survey of students also showed that reading instruction is more common than writing instruction in both junior and senior secondary schools, and that writing instruction was decreasing year by year from junior secondary school to senior secondary school. Teachers reported that this is due to the impact of university entrance examinations.

University examinations in Japan do not scrutinize writing to the same degree as reading. This can be seen by the fact that in university entrance examinations, the marks allocated to writing sections are quite low. Sato (2013) reported that in the Niji test, a test created by each national university, about 70 % of the items consisted of reading questions, and only 30 % of the remaining questions were about writing. Furthermore, a writing section is not contained in the Daigaku Nyugaku Kyotsu test, which is the test for university admissions developed by the National Center for University Entrance Examination. This demonstrates the perceived lower importance of writing over reading as far as access to university is concerned. This may partially account for teachers' lack of focus in teaching writing in the Japanese EFL classroom.

Writing instruction in Japanese schools

English classes in Japanese secondary schools tend to emphasize grammatical accuracy (Komiyama, 2018) to the detriment of an ability to use such linguistic knowledge effectively in writing (Bazerman, 2009). For example, Narita (2018) reports that English composition instruction in Japanese secondary schools focuses on sentence-by-sentence grammatical accuracy and rarely teaches entire paragraphs. This focus on sentence-by sentence accuracy is at odds with MEXT's goal of having 50% of students at A2 level or above, where they must be able to join sentences in a coherent text. There is, therefore, an urgent need to re-examine the pedagogies used for writing instruction in Japan if MEXT's goal is to be reached and students are to gain functional control of writing in English.

Integrating reading and writing instruction

One theory of language which can systematically account for the relationship between grammar and its functional use is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). In this theory of language, grammar is taught with a focus on its meaning-making potential, that is not as a set of 'rules', but as what meanings it enables learners to make. Importantly also, in SFL approaches, grammar is taught within the context of the whole text. In other words, SFL approaches make explicit how certain types of text demand certain features of language at the clause level and beyond the clause. Such an approach is consistent with the aims of English education in Japan. The Senior Secondary School Course of Study for Foreign Languages emphasizes the importance of students being aware of the purpose, context and audience of texts (MEXT, 2018). These are all important aspects of Genre-Based Pedagogy (GBP) within SFL. As the genre approach highlights such perspectives, it could be implemented in Japanese secondary schools to improve student achievement against expected writing outcomes (Imai, 2021).

The effectiveness of the Genre-based approach in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction has been widely reported in countries as diverse as China, Taiwan, Japan, The U.S., Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Colombia (e.g., Cai, 2016; Chala Bejarano & Chapeton, 2013; Chen & Su, 2011; Cornelius & Cotsworth, 2015; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Ganapathy & Phan, 2022; Huang, 2014; Kitajroonchai et al., 2022; Mauludin, 2020; Montero-Aréval, 2019; Myskow & Gordon, 2010; Nagao, 2019; Yasuda, 2011, 2015). However, despite its high effectiveness, the study of the genre approach is limited in Japan and the approach is not widespread in Japanese secondary schools. In fact, explicit instructional sections on genre knowledge in secondary school textbooks are limited (Imai, 2021).

While the genre approach does not seem to have taken hold yet in Japan, possibly due to a misconception that it focuses on writing and Japanese EFL classes prioritise reading, an approach that builds on reading and improves writing skills with a focus on language function may have the potential to be widespread. R2L, which originated from the genre approach, therefore has the potential to be highly suitable to Japanese EFL contexts.

Reading to Learn

R2L emerged from the SFL genre-based teaching approach. In genre-based pedagogy, texts are explicitly modelled for students. The modelling involves an explicit focus on the meaning-making elements in the text and their purpose (Rose & Martin, 2012). That is to say that in this approach, teachers explicitly teach students the linguistic choices that produce well organized texts. In R2L, the teacher's explicit instruction and scaffolding is vital (Becerra et al., 2019). Another key facet of R2L is the understanding that improving reading is key to improving writing (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Steinke, 2014). The R2 L approach consists of three levels of learning cycles as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
R2L Cycle (Rose & Martin, 2012)
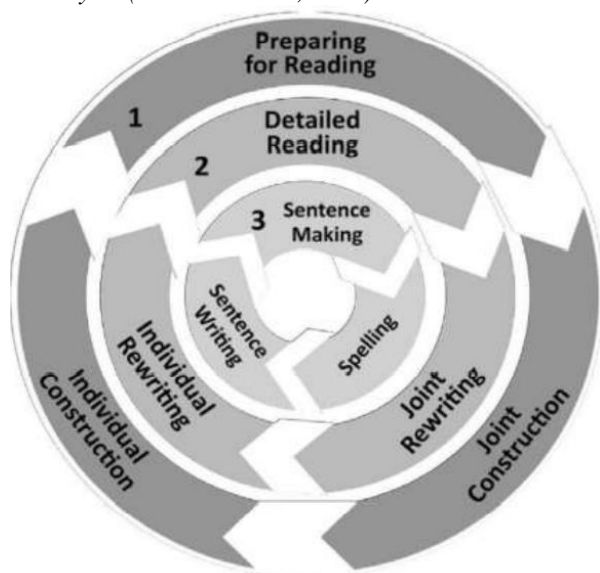
The activities in the R2L cycle can be employed flexibly depending on the teaching situation and learner needs (Rose & Martin, 2012). The level one cycle depicted on the outer ring of the diagram addresses the entire text. It involves teachers explicitly explaining content and text structure to provide students background knowledge of the genre they are dealing with (Preparing for Reading) (Herazo Rivera et al., 2021). It then moves though teacher and learner collaboration to construct a new text of the same genre (Joint Construction) and learners individually writing a new text of the same genre (Individual Construction). In the level two cycle, detailed reading focuses on a single paragraph from the text and supports learners in accessing specific wordings and meanings in the text (Rose & Martin, 2012). In Joint Rewriting, teachers and learners work together to take notes on a whiteboard based on words and phrases covered in Detailed Reading before collaborating on a teacher-guided rewriting of the text (Herazo Rivera et al., 2021). In Individual Rewriting, learners individually rewrite the text referring to the notes on the whiteboard. The level 3 cycle includes Sentence Making, Spelling, and Sentence Rewriting (Herazo Rivera et al., 2021). These can be implemented if needed between Detailed Reading and Rewriting to reinforce the basic skills of reading comprehension and writing (Rose & Martin, 2012).

The effectiveness of R2L for L2 learning has been reported in countries, such as Indonesia (Damayanti, 2017; Vencesla, 2021), Colombia (Becerra et al., 2020; Herazo Rivera et al., 2021), South Africa (Millin & Millin, 2014; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Steinke, 2014) and European countries, such as Denmark, Portugal, Spain, Scotland, and Sweden (Whittaker & Acevedo, 2016; Whittaker & García Parejo, 2018). The improvement of reading comprehension (Becerra et al., 2020; Whittaker & Acevedo, 2016; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Steinke, 2014), writing (Damayanti, 2017; Millin & Millin, 2014; Vencesla, 2021; Whittaker & Acevedo, 2016; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Steinke, 2014) and speaking ability (Herazo Rivera et al., 2021) have all been reported. Specifically, for writing, Vencesla (2021) reported improvement in the purpose, structure, and evaluative meanings in students' writing. Wildsmith-Cromarty and Steinke (2014) reported

improvement in staging, referencing, involving "the use of logical connectors (p. 47)", grammar, spelling and punctuation. R2L has also been shown to work well for low proficiency learners, as scaffolding plays a key role (Millin & Millin, 2014; Whittaker & Acevedo, 2016). Based on these studies, it can be said that R2L enhances both reading comprehension and the ability to functionally use language knowledge in writing. This makes the approach potentially suitable for addressing the weakness of Japanese secondary school students' writing while also continuing to build their reading comprehension skills.

Studies using R2L vary in their use of strategies from the model. The minimum cycle design consists of Preparing for Reading, Detailed Reading, and Joint Rewriting (Becerra et al., 2020). In most cases, Preparing for Reading, Detailed Reading, Joint Rewriting, and Individual Rewriting are implemented. These could be considered central or basic elements and are also included in a simplified six-step cycle (Rose & Acevedo, 2006) shown in Figure 2, in which the steps overlap with the Genre-Based Teaching and Learning cycle of Joint Deconstruction, Joint Construction, and Individual Construction.

Figure 2
The Learning to Read: Reading to Learn program (LRRL) cycle (Rose & Acevedo, 2006)
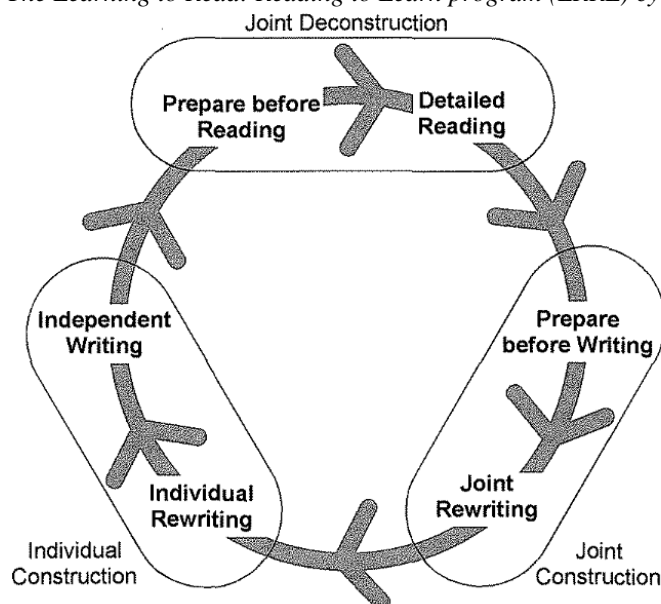
Studies of teachers' perceptions of R2L are very limited. One study which does focus on teacher perceptions is the Teacher Learning for European Literacy Education (TeL4ELE) project. In TeL4ELE, teachers from five countries (Denmark, Portugal, Spain, Scotland, and Sweden) attended a workshop on R2L and introduced it to their classes (Whittaker & Acevedo, 2016; Whittaker & García Parejo, 2018). In this project, 98 teachers from different countries had never used a functional approach previously, however more than 90 % changed the way they taught after the workshop (Whittaker & Acevedo, 2016). Teachers who incorporated R2L into Content and Language Integrated Learning-based classes in Spain noted the importance of teaching in a way that provides step-by-step guidance in accomplishing the writing task and explaining the task explicitly, and they stressed the attractiveness of this approach as being kind to students with delays in literacy skills (Whittaker, 2018; Whittaker & García Parejo, 2018). However, this study encompassed a large variety of learners and learning situations and included first language,

foreign language, second language and bilingual education. It is difficult therefore to generalize teachers' perspectives on the utility of R2L across the wide range of learning situations included.

Even when expanding to the genre approach more generally, the study of teachers' perceptions is still quite limited. In Shi et al.'s (2019) study on the genre approach with six university EFL teachers in China, teachers favorably evaluated the effectiveness of Modelling and Joint Construction stages. However, the actual incorporation of genre-based pedagogy into their daily teaching was found to be constrained by environmental factors such as "class size, curriculum, and assessment (p. 326)". These environmental factors are similar for Japanese secondary schools, and it was hoped for the present study that an R2L approach would be less constrained than genre-based pedagogy by such factors.

The above literature suggests that although R2L might be beneficial in the Japanese EFL context, there is still a gap in our understanding of how teachers might view it. Teacher perceptions are

important because they can influence the uptake of new pedagogical approaches (Borg, 2018). This study therefore aims to contribute to this gap by investigating what a group of Japanese teachers perceive about the potential of R2L in Japan and their thoughts about the best ways of implementing it in the Japanese EFL context.

METHOD
Participants
Six teachers were invited to participate in the study. They were all secondary school English teachers in Japan from different schools in the same prefecture. Participant characteristics in terms of experience and teaching focus gained from a pre-interview are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Participants

	Teacher 1	**Teacher 2**	**Teacher 3**	**Teacher 4**	**Teacher 5**	**Teacher 6**
Teacher experience	10 years	20 years	13 years	5 years	5 years	12 years
Academic level of school	Middle-level	High-level	High-level	Middle-level	Low-level	Low-level
Class	GT and TBLT with other speaking and writing activities.	GT with listening comprehension.	GT and TBLT with other speaking and writing activities.	Various activities (listening comprehension, site translation, repeat, reading aloud, and summary)	GT with reading aloud	Various activities (conversation activity, watching movies, and text reading)
Focused skill	reading	reading	reading	reading	reading	reading, speaking and listening
Skills s/he wants to focus on	speaking	speaking	speaking	reading	listening	speaking
Philosophy of class	having students do many activities	Having students use academic vocabulary and expression	Motivating students, student-centered, and removing student anxiety.	Increase the chances to use English.	Focus on the low-proficiency student	motivate students

GT=Grammar Translation Method, TBLT=Task-based Language Teaching

Procedure
A four-hour workshop introducing the six teachers to R2L was conducted by Author 1 in Japanese in a centralized location. At the beginning of the workshop, a 20-minute semi-structured group interview was conducted to ascertain participants' experience and teaching focus. Following this interview, a 60-minute explanation of R2L and a 60-minute demonstration of R2L in practice were given to the teachers. In the second half of the workshop, after a break for lunch, the participants were asked to discuss a 3-hour lesson plan for implementing one cycle of R2L in their classes using an exposition genre text as the teaching material. They were given 40 minutes to discuss details of a suitable lesson including a consideration of which combinations among the nine techniques of R2L they thought might be most suitable for Japanese secondary school settings. This was followed by a 20-minute semi-structured group interview focusing on the teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of R2L for teaching writing in the Japanese EFL context. Both interviews and the 40-minute workshop discussion on the R2L lesson plan were audio-recorded as data.

Data analysis
The post-workshop interview data on the teachers' perceptions of R2L and the optimal way to implement it in a Japanese secondary school setting data were analyzed by Author 1 using thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). Following familiarization with the data, coding was conducted looking for themes and sub-themes. Data from the post-interview were used to directly explore the research questions, while data from the pre-interview and the workshop were used to support the analysis of the post-interview. Workshop data were also used to explore which combinations among the nine techniques are perceived by the teachers as being most suitable for Japanese secondary school settings, specifically addressing research question two.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
This section begins with a summary of the observations gathered in the teachers' workshop discussion. This summary orients the reader to the

teachers' general perspectives on the R2L approach, and whether it would be useful in a Japanese EFL setting answering research question one about teacher perceptions. A summary of the particular techniques they chose as most useful in their context is also provided, answering research question two about optimal ways of introducing R2L. Following this, the results of the thematic analysis of the post-interview, which form the main basis of the analysis are presented.

Observation of the discussion
The lesson plan produced by the teachers is presented in Table 2. The teachers selected six techniques out of nine, that is, Preparing for Reading, Wording, Detailed Reading, Sentence Making, Joint Rewriting and Pair Rewriting. From these strategies, there was consensus that Sentence Making would be appropriate for students with low academic achievement and therefore would only be employed based on student need. There was a great deal of discussion about which technique should be the end goal. Ideally, teachers agreed that Individual Rewriting would be an ideal end point, however, as

the teachers believed that many Japanese students lacked confidence, they set a technique called "Pair Rewriting," an adaptation of Individual Rewriting as a goal. One teacher with a low-achieving class preferred Joint Rewriting as the end goal because he felt even Pair Rewriting would be too challenging for his students.

It was also suggested that in schools with high academic achievement, it would be better to introduce different topics for Joint Rewriting and Pair Rewriting, but in schools with low academic achievement, students could write on the same topic to reduce the burden on the students. Some teachers also suggested using the same topic when introducing Joint Rewriting and Pair Rewriting for the first time to reduce the load on the students as they become accustomed to the pedagogy. While Rose and Martin (2012) suggest flexible combinations of the nine techniques depending on students' needs, the flexibility in topics that the teachers in this study suggested is a possible innovative adaption of the R2L pedagogy for EFL learners with low levels of English.

Table 2
Lesson Plan Developed by Teachers

Hour 1	1. Prepare for Reading
	The teacher encourages the students to understand the background knowledge of the text theme, discuss the theme, and think about who the reader is.
	2. Wording
	The teacher asks students to check new words or wordings.
Hour 2	3. Detailed Reading
	The teacher explicitly explains each move of one selected paragraph of the text and asks them to rearrange the sentences into the correct order.
	(4. Sentence making*)
	1. Joint Rewriting
Hour 3	2. Pair Rewriting

*Sentence Making is used for the schools with low academic achievement.

The post-interview
As a result of the thematic analysis, two overarching themes emerged: The benefits of R2L and the feasibility of introducing R2L. Several sub-themes could be identified in each overarching theme. When speaking about the benefits of R2L, all the teachers were positive about the approach and expressed a preference for Joint and Pair Rewriting amongst the techniques. They found the benefits of R2L overall to lie in the flexibility of its techniques and adaptability for different learner groups. They also commented on the benefits of increased learner confidence, improved coherence in student writing and a closer link between the macro skills of reading and writing. Importantly, teachers also perceived a benefit of R2L beyond the English classroom and into students' career paths and general civic lives.

When they spoke about feasibility, teachers focused on the challenges in introducing R2L and the measures they could take for adapting R2L for implementation in their particular context. All of the participants in the post-interviews took the position

that it was feasible to introduce this approach into secondary school English education in Japan, and they would like to do so. They felt the challenges consisted of the need for multiple teachers in the one year to teach in the same way, the time cost in learning to implement a new approach and the unsuitability of the texts in the textbooks. However, they felt most of these challenges could be overcome with the help of Assistant Language Teachers and forward planning. Each theme is discussed in more detail below.

The useful techniques of R2L
The most popular technique among the teachers was Joint Rewriting. They appreciated the support that teacher scaffolding provided so that even students with a low proficiency level could write sentences. Furthermore, they referred to its uniqueness. It is rare in Japanese secondary school English for students to work as a collective on writing first and then to write individually. Rather, the general pattern is that students write individually and then

the teacher corrects their writing or shares common errors in the class. One teacher said that Joint Rewriting allows common errors to be shared in advance and supports the individual writing that follows. Their preference for the technique resonates with research by Shi et al. (2019) on teachers' perceptions of the genre approach in China. Shi shows that all the teachers support Joint Construction stage, which is similar to Joint Rewriting in that the teacher leads the whole class to develop the students' ideas and create a text.

As noted above, the teachers also created a new technique called "Pair Rewriting" instead of Individual Rewriting because of the teachers' perception that some Japanese secondary school students have low self-esteem and self-confidence. This perception of students is supported by the National Institution for Youth Education survey (2015) showing that Japanese secondary school students have a lower percentage of positive self-perceptions than students in the United States, China and South Korea. Teacher 2 also commented that classmates could scaffold each other, providing missing pieces in each other's writing. Such flexibility in applying R2L to the culture and characteristics of the students is important to increase effectiveness and uptake, as the relationship between cultural background and teaching methods cannot be separated (Kung, 2017). Pair Rewriting could be a culturally sensitive and suitable technique for Japanese students who lack confidence.

The effects of R2L
Teachers 2 and 3 worked in schools with high academic achievement. They predicted that the structure of R2L, which progresses from initial scaffolded explicit instruction to progressively more independent work, would give students a sense of achievement and confidence with regard to writing. Teacher 2 commented:

> By taking steps to help each other, there will be fewer students who cannot write at all, and students will have a sense of accomplishment. I think students will gain confidence when they feel a sense of accomplishment from realizing that they have written something of this quality…

This prediction is supported by the existing research literature, in which student feedback reported an increase in confidence (Damayanti, 2017; Whittaker, 2018).

In addition to predicting increased confidence, teachers in schools with low academic achievement expected that learning specific expressions common to particular genres, such as "according to" and "however" for argument texts, for example, would have the effect of supporting students to write coherent texts rather than just a set of unconnected sentences.

While it could be argued that teachers would be less likely in interview to be critical of R2L in front of the person facilitating the workshop, the teachers interview responses can be related to their philosophy of teaching stated in their pre-interviews and the group discussion while developing the lesson plan. For example, in the pre-interview, Teacher 3 said that her teaching philosophy was to eliminate students' anxiety. Teachers 2 and 3, from schools with high academic achievement, mentioned affective aspects such as students' confidence and sense of achievement in the post-interview, and also paid attention to affective aspects in the discussion of the lesson design. They were concerned with providing adequate scaffolding to prevent student anxiety about the task. For example, Teacher 2 stated that in Prepare for Reading, she would ask students to talk about the theme in Japanese first, not English. Teacher 3 suggested Pair Rewriting as scaffolding before Individual Reading. Teacher 5, from a school with low academic level, expressed a teaching philosophy to focus on students with low academic skills in the pre-interview. In the post-interview this teacher anticipated that the benefits of R2L would be increased coherence in sentence writing and in the discussion on the lesson plan the teacher mentions the need for Sentence Making for basic skills learning. In other words, all the teachers in the study could see the relevance of R2L for their own learners, could see their teaching philosophies reflected in it, and could choose techniques from R2L's toolkit which they thought would be appropriate and effective for their learning and teaching environments. This suggests that uptake of R2L could be high in Japanese EFL teaching context, should teachers be able to be trained in it in the future.

Another benefit teachers perceived from R2L was its designed-in interaction between writing and reading, resulting in synergies which would not be achieved by focusing on writing or reading alone. This effect has been shown in previous studies. Becerra et al. (2020) suggest that rewriting steps help students acquire the linguistic characteristics of a genre and improve their ability to read texts of the same genre. Meanwhile, Wildsmith-Cromarty and Steinke (2014) state that input through reading is the key to writing improvement. The fact that teachers perceived the reading-writing connection in R2L is significant. In the pre-interview, most teachers expressed reading-centered perspectives, devoting little time to writing because the entrance examinations emphasize reading (Yukimori, 2018). However, if the reading-writing connection is recognized by teachers, there is a possibility that they will change their mindset from "we have to reduce writing to improve reading" to "we have to teach writing to improve reading."

The use of R2L to achieve social purposes
The teachers also found R2L beneficial for teaching students how to write for social purposes in their

broader lives outside the English classroom, such as important career-path texts like university applications and resumes. Teacher 6, at a school with low academic achievement, even stated that this approach can also positively affect literacy in students' mother tongue. He gave the following example of how exposition genre knowledge was used to help students explain what they wanted to do at a school festival.

> *...some of them said, "I wanted to perform on stage," and they said like, "I have three reasons," or something like that. It's affecting their Japanese. It is interesting. "First, Second, Third…" If it is affecting them, it is going to come back to their mother tongue.*

Teachers believed that connecting various social purposes for language use from students' daily lives to the classroom would be a great motivator for their students. This perspective reflects the essence of genre-based instruction, resonating with Myskow and Gordon's (2010) assertion that the genre approach, which is the basis of R2L, highlights how language can be used to achieve social goals, which are related "not just to academic and professional genres, but to common interactional genres (p. 291)", such as spoken interaction with friends. They also stress the importance of the interaction between social contexts and genres in the classroom. From the interviews, the teachers seemed to value how R2L focuses on weaving language to achieve a text's social purpose rather than just writing according to a template as in the product approach. It is vital to highlight this meaning-based approach (Myskow & Gordon, 2010) but it can be difficult to connect social contexts and genres to the classroom and teachers' awareness of genres and their purposes can remain limited (Shi et al., 2019). The teachers in the present study realized the potential benefits of R2L for career path education and for situations where students assert their opinions in everyday conversations indicating an emerging awareness that R2L can provide more than just a useful template for writing. This indicates a potential for wider uptake of R2L in Japanese EFL contexts, however teachers would need ongoing support in broadening their understandings of the genres and associated language features most relevant to their learners.

The challenges in introducing R2L

When discussion turned to the feasibility of implementing R2L, teachers cited three challenges: the need for alignment in teaching programs with colleagues, the time-consuming preparation that can be involved in R2L and the question of suitable genres and themes in the textbook.

The biggest challenge for teachers seemed to be the requirement to teach the same way as other teachers based on a common understanding. All the teachers were unanimous on this point. In Japanese secondary schools, a grade level is usually taught by several teachers, and any difference in teaching style among teachers is perceived as unequal for the students. According to the participants, the teacher in charge of a grade is crucial for determining whether new teaching methods can be smoothly introduced.

The second challenge, time-consuming preparation, also includes early stages of trial and error as the new pedagogy is introduced and adapted. Teacher 3 describes this as an "initial investment," necessary to gain the benefits. The teachers do not see this investment as an obstacle to implementing R2L, but rather as something that comes with the introduction of any educational method, as Teacher 3 states:

> *I think it will take a lot of time to prepare at first because I have to do trial and error to introduce it. I would fail at first. I would still like to do it, though. I think that initial investment is necessary as it is the same as any new thing.*

The third challenge was the issue of the themes and genres contained in the mandated textbooks in Japan. The exposition genre was adopted for this workshop, which was relatively easy for teachers, however the teachers felt that the themes or genres in the textbooks are not always suitable for R2L. Imai (2021) argues that as most Japanese secondary school textbooks are dominated by the report genre, with few genres related to narrative or argument and there are also few textbooks that explicitly indicate the type of text, it can be difficult for teachers to conduct genre-based instruction.

These perspectives take a slightly different angle on the challenges of implementing Genre-based approaches than is reported in other contexts. For example, Shi et al.'s (2019) study of the genre approach in China found that despite teachers' positive attitudes, implementation was primarily constrained by curricular and assessment issues. This is echoed in Damayanti's statement (2017) that the lack of class time (curriculum related), test-oriented class (assessment related) and student negative attitudes towards communicative activities are commonly reported as challenges when implementing English teaching methodology. In the present study, on the other hand, there was no suggestion from the teachers that factors such as class time and test-orientation would inhibit the implementation of R2L. This may be because incorporating R2L already has a high affinity with the reading-based Japanese secondary school classes indicating a good fit with the Japanese EFL context.

Measures for introducing R2L

Although teachers felt there were challenges to implementing R2L, they referred to three main measures for overcoming them: help from assistant language teachers (ALT), consideration of the ways textbooks are used, and training for the English

teachers. Of these, help from assistant language teachers (ALT) and textbook usage are readily feasible, while training in R2L for teachers is not currently easily feasible because it would need to be systematic and large scale.

Assistant Language Teachers were perceived as being able to support Japanese teachers wanting to implement R2L in several ways. Most secondary schools in the prefecture where the participants work currently have ALTs who support English teachers in terms of teaching materials, correcting students' reports and teaching classes. ALT's could therefore help with the preparation of material to use, including sourcing texts and annotating them for the Prepare for Reading stage. They could also help with the correction of student work. This would help mitigate one of the major challenges of implementing R2L, the problem of initial preparation time.

In addition, the previously mentioned challenge of genre bias and incompatible themes in textbooks could be immediately solved by deciding in advance which lessons in the textbook to use with R2L. Specifically, as Teacher 3 mentions in the excerpt below, if teachers decide on a target activity for each lesson, such as a discussion activity for one lesson and a writing task for another lesson, they can use R2L in lessons suitable for this approach.

> If we decide the different goal for each lesson, such as the goal of this lesson is writing and the goal of this lesson is discussion, we can have several lessons a year that use this approach focusing on writing.

The final measure the teachers identified for supporting the introduction of R2L, training for English teachers, is not a support that can be immediately addressed at present. One of the reasons cited by the teachers for the need for teacher training was to create a common understanding among teachers about the purposes and methods involved in R2L. They commented that without training to understand the R2L approach, including some pedagogical content knowledge of SFL, they themselves would not be able to convey its advantages even if they took the workshop. They suggested that direct training of teachers by an expert in R2L would be necessary. At the very least, R2L training for all English teachers in a grade level at a school would be needed to solve the problem of common understanding among teachers and enable its implementation. In addition, Teacher 4 mentioned that he would like a book on this approach, but to our knowledge, there is no book on this approach in Japanese. It seems that for English teachers in Japan, there are extremely limited opportunities to learn R2L. None of the teachers in this study knew this approach. Since all the six participants found this approach attractive and said they would like to introduce it in their classes, a system of R2L training, such as teacher training

offered by the prefecture, could be effective. Such a system would be a major driving force in spreading R2L throughout Japanese secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study investigated six Japanese secondary school teacher's perceptions of R2L and their thoughts about the optimal way to implement it in the Japanese EFL context. The results showed that the teachers expected not only immediately observable benefits of R2L in the English classroom, such as improving students' reading and writing skills, but also more widespread benefits of the approach, such as students being able to use language to achieve social goals. All six participants said they would be interested in introducing this approach to their classes. There appears to be a strong possibility of affinity between R2L and the Japanese secondary school context. The approach aligned with the teachers' teaching philosophy and goals as stated prior to the workshop, and the teachers were able to select from, and modify R2L techniques to suit their contexts. In addition, common issues reported in implementing English teaching methods in other countries (the lack of class time, test-oriented class and student negative attitudes towards communicative activities) were not raised by the teachers in this study. The most significant issue to be resolved in introducing this approach in Japanese secondary schools proved to be the problem of common understanding about this approach among teachers. Teacher training in R2L will be essential to solving this challenge. Other issues, such as time-consuming preparation and the genres and topics of textbooks, could be easily solved with the support of ALTs and effective, planned use of the textbooks.

The teachers identified the following sequence of activities as the most suitable for their contexts: Prepare for Reading, Spelling, Sentence Making (depending on the students' needs), Detailed Reading, Joint Rewriting, and then Pair Rewriting. In addition, teachers can be flexible in deciding whether to set the goal activity as Joint Rewriting or Pair Rewriting, and whether to use the same or different themes for each activity, depending on the reality of the students in the secondary school.

As with previous studies (e.g. Whittaker & Acevedo, 2016; Whittaker & García Parejo, 2018), it seems that this approach was viewed positively by the teachers in this R2L workshop, attracting them and motivating them to incorporate this approach in their classes. Nevertheless, because the number of participants is small in this exploratory study, these results cannot be generalized. This study's aim was to begin a broader discussion about R2L in Japan and to uncover some of the contextual issues which might affect its implementation. It would therefore be useful to employ a questionnaire in order survey

to survey more teachers in future studies. This study could serve as a departure point for further developmental research in this area, including informing the design of a more comprehensive survey instrument which could gather quantitative data, and as a pilot for a larger training program and intervention project on the implementation of R2L in one or several Japanese schools.

While the scope of this study was essentially small and localized, it also has potential application outside of Japan. In countries where similar issues exist in terms of students' writing abilities, exam-driven curricula and an imbalance between students' proficiencies with productive and receptive skills, for example, this study could indicate a way forward to investigating how R2L could be adapted to suit local contexts.

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