

Strategies for Enhancing Interaction in Speaking and Writing Courses

Stachus Peter Tu Carmella Lieske

要旨

本稿は、大学 EFL のスピーキングおよびライティング授業における相互作用を高めるための、準備負担の少ない実践的方略を検討する。特に、対人関係上の障壁を低減するアイスブレイク活動と、学習者の動機づけやピア・フィードバックを支える情意面に配慮した教師フィードバックの重要性を示す。

Abstract

This paper explores simple, low-preparation strategies for increasing interaction in university EFL speaking and writing courses. It highlights the role of accessible icebreakers in reducing social barriers and the importance of emotionally sensitive teacher feedback in supporting motivation and peer interaction.

Icebreakers

Barriers to interaction are commonplace in university classrooms, where lecture-style teaching is not only common but remains the default format for the majority of students and instructors. This is also true in Japan, where lecture-based classrooms continue to make up the majority of university courses in 2026. Although there has been a strong push to encourage greater interaction in EFL classrooms, these language-focused classes still represent only a small minority of the courses students are required to take during their university years.

Icebreakers are among the most effective methods for encouraging interaction in the language classroom, as they target the underlying reasons students hesitate to engage with one another. One of the key tenets of icebreakers is relationship building, which helps reduce the discomfort students often feel when speaking with unfamiliar peers. University language classrooms typically consist of students from a wide range of departments, leading many learners to sit near the few people they already know. Without appropriate scaffolding from the teacher, students often struggle to initiate interaction on their own.

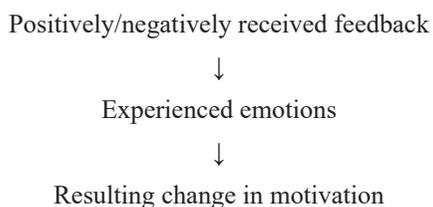
There is a wide range of icebreaker activities available; however, certain characteristics make them easier or more difficult to implement in practice. One factor that cannot be ignored is the amount of preparation time required. For university instructors responsible for multiple courses each week, sometimes as many as 15, it is not feasible to prepare elaborate icebreakers for every class. For this reason, icebreakers should prioritize ease of execution rather than effectiveness alone. Even if an activity is highly effective for a broad range of students, it loses practical value if it cannot be widely implemented. Accessibility, therefore, is critical when selecting icebreakers. If an activity can be

used by any teacher, it can be considered especially valuable.

Reflections/Teacher feedback on writing

Teacher feedback provided to students is one of the most complex topics in EFL theory. When delivered appropriately, feedback can contribute to positive motivational loops that help learners accomplish highly challenging tasks. Conversely, feedback delivered in an “improper” manner may produce the opposite effect. The term “improper,” however, should be interpreted with caution, as feedback that is effective for some students may negatively affect others. A clear example of this can be found in the writing classroom. The emotions students experience when receiving feedback are likely to act as a moderating factor in the relationship between feedback and motivation. Figure 1 presents a simplified model of this relationship.

Figure 1. The influence of teacher feedback on motivation via experienced emotions.



Separately, but importantly, students who have positive experiences with teacher feedback are often more inclined to provide feedback to their peers during peer feedback activities. Peer feedback frequently forms the core of classroom interaction in writing-focused courses. However, significant barriers exist within peer feedback structures, particularly those related to the level of closeness between students. This suggests that the icebreakers discussed in the previous section may also play an important role in supporting interaction in the writing classroom.

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