

Gestures in Second Language Acquisition: Unlocking Potential for Students' Comprehension of English Language Classes in English

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This paper aims to explore the potential advantages of research regarding the use of gestures by English language teachers in Japanese junior high schools (JHS) to facilitate English language teaching through English. In 2017, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) introduced the latest Course of Study, and one of the new initiatives is that “lessons, in principle, should be conducted in English” (MEXT, 2022, p. 9). Leveraging teachers’ multimodality, particularly gestures, is one approach to enhancing students’ comprehension of English instruction through English. In the field of embodiment in the learning sciences, gestures and bodily actions play a crucial role in students’ conceptual development (Abrahamson & Lindgren, 2014). Flood (in press) asserts that some teachers employ strategies to engage with students by integrating gestures with oral explanations and interpreting students’ nonverbal responses, consequently providing personalized and contextualized feedback. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), furthermore, Gullberg (2006) highlights the significance of gestures for the production of L2 learners, and both teachers’ and learners’ gestures can be significant input for L2 learners’ comprehension. Despite some efforts to examine the role of teachers’ gestures in SLA (e.g., Sime, 2008), there appears to be limited research on the specific types of gestures employed by JHS English teachers to facilitate students’ understanding of English language classes conducted through English. Therefore, this paper proposes the following research questions to guide future studies: (1) What gestures do JHS teachers utilize to enhance students’ comprehension of English language classes in English? (2) What is the interplay between verbal instructions and gestures in effectively implementing English teaching through English? (3) What are the perceptions of JHS teachers regarding the use of gestures to support students’ comprehension of English language classes?

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