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What Activities are Used to Assess Speaking in the

Japanese Classroom at CELE?

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Dedications

This work is dedicated to my family, whose constant support has been my foundation throughout my studies. Their encouragement and belief in me have given me the strength to persevere.

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Abstract

Speaking allows students to express themselves actively in a foreign language. However, in Japanese language classes at CELE, speaking appears not to be practiced for communicative purposes. This study investigates how speaking is assessed in these classes by identifying those activities practiced in the classroom, those that may not be implemented, and the speaking activities needed by students to improve their proficiency. This study used a mixed-method approach by conducting 12 surveys and 7 interviews with Japanese language students at CELE.

The study highlights three key findings: first, a lack of opportunities for spontaneous oral practice in Japanese classes; second, the role of language functions within speaking activities; and third, the influence of the program's primary material—the textbook—on speaking assessment. The results indicate a discrepancy between the activities students desire and those assessed in class. While students prefer activities focused on pragmatic knowledge, teachers primarily use activities that develop organizational knowledge.

This research aims to support students in their journey of learning to speak Japanese by incorporating diverse speaking activities and considering student feedback on classroom practices. Additionally, the findings may benefit students preparing for exchange programs in Japan by helping them communicate more effectively with native speakers. Finally, this study provides CELE Japanese teachers with valuable insights into students' perspectives, preferences, and suggestions, contributing to the enhancement of speaking assessment and instruction in Japanese language courses

Table of contents

Chapter I: Introduction

Learning a foreign language offers numerous benefits besides employment opportunities, for example, learning a language enhances adaptability to unfamiliar situations, expands career prospects, equips individuals for success in a globalized society, reduces the risk of cognitive decline, strengthens empathy, improves concentration, and fosters creativity (Middlebury Language Schools, 2021). The demand for learning a second language has increased over the years. According to New American Economy (2018), the number of jobs requiring bilingual workers in the U.S. rose to approximately 630,000 in 2015. Similarly, Blanco (2022) reported the top 10 languages studied worldwide: English, Spanish, French, German, Japanese, Italian, Korean, Chinese, Russian, and Hindi.

Although Japanese is among the most studied languages, Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig (2021) note that out of 125 million Japanese speakers, just 121,500 are second-language speakers. Even when Japanese is primarily spoken in Japan, it is also used in other regions. According to WorldData.info (2024), three countries have a significant number of speakers of Japanese: the United States occupies the second place, after Japan, with around 656,000 Japanese speakers. Brazil counts with approximately 422,000 speakers and the independent country of Guam with about 3,000 Japanese speakers.

Regardless of the foreign language one learns, what remains true is the need to formally demonstrate language proficiency. Language certifications provide reliable evidence of someone's skills. While speaking the language fluently is an alternative way to prove ability, certification serves as an objective measure, particularly for those who need verification. For instance, if a potential employer wants to confirm an applicant's fluency in French but does not speak the language themselves, they would rely on certification as proof of proficiency (The CPD Certification Service, 2024).

Well-known language certifications are available, particularly for English. The most popular English language proficiency tests include the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and Cambridge English Qualifications (Decker, 2018). These certifications assess language proficiency using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a widely recognized system for measuring language skills objectively. The CEFR evaluates language skills by using a scale of 6 levels or bands, from A1 to C2 being A1 the basic level and C2 the most advanced (Council of Europe, 2001).

For informative purposes it is important to briefly describe how Japanese proficiency is assessed to indicate the current and desired skill levels of the students, particularly those aiming for conversational fluency. Japanese language ability is commonly measured through the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), also known as Nihongo Nōryoku Shiken or Nōken. The JLPT evaluates vocabulary, grammar, reading, and listening but does not directly assess speaking or writing (Nihongo Nōryoku Shiken, 2012). The certification measures five levels: from N5 (basic) to N1 (advanced). To understand each level of the Japanese certification (Table 1), the CEFR bands can help as a guide, for example, N5 is equivalent to the A1/A2 level, N4 to the A2 level, N3 to the as B1 level, N2 to the B2 level, and N1 to the B2/C1 level (Sophia University, 2018)

Table 1

JLPT levels equivalent to the CEFR levels

JLPT	CEFR
N5	A1 – A2
N4	A2
N3	B1
N2	B2
N1	B2 – C1

1.1 Context of Research

The CELE (Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras) offers language courses available to the BUAP student community at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP). As a requirement for obtaining the diploma, graduates need to certify an extra foreign language. Also, the center of international certification of languages (CCIA) at the Faculty of Languages offers certification preparation courses and workshops and certification exams all year round. These two centers facilitate students' access to foreign languages and certifications in order to graduate and obtain their diploma.

To graduate from the major and obtain their diploma or degree, university students need to certify an A2 level of a foreign language, for example, majors such as engineering and law the level requirement is an A2 in English. In the case of Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés (LEI) students need a B2 level in English and the certification of an A2 level in a third foreign language, such language courses are offered by CELE.

CELE offers language courses all year round, being Japanese one of these, which allows students to take three levels per year (Spring, Summer and Fall). Therefore, students can finish the nine levels in three years with enough knowledge to certify the language they choose. Moreover, CELE offers workshops to practice the four skills at the CAA (Centro de Autoacceso), where students can find several materials such as books, audiobooks, and enroll in conversation workshops to practice the target language. However, the materials to practice Japanese are very limited as well as the conversation workshops.

The CELE language courses are divided into nine levels, nine is the highest. Students can start at Japanese level one or take a placement test. In the first level of Japanese, around 15 students usually enroll, but in the second level just half of them remain. Then, in the third level, around 5 students keep taking Japanese to continue to the fourth level. It is in level 4 where students have reached the necessary proficiency to take the N5 certification exam.

The highest level most of the CELE Japanese students reach is level five because the offer for Japanese courses varies depending on the demand. Although there are nine levels, a specific number of students are required to open a course, otherwise, the course is closed. As a result, after Japanese level six, the following levels may or may not be offered, sometimes level seven is set as the highest to be offered.

When the demand for the first levels of Japanese increases, the higher levels are no longer offered. This problem might be a result of the reduced number of Japanese teachers at the CELE, only three teachers for the two CELE branches in the university. Therefore, the room for advanced classes are reduced or halted for advanced students while beginner levels are given priority because of the higher demand and number of students. Despite the courses taken, students may not have the domain of the oral skill in Japanese, and they may decide to give up classes and study on their own.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on CELE students who have completed Japanese courses and hold at least an N5 certification, with some participants having studied in Japan or achieved the N4 level. Participants were selected based on three criteria: enrollment in CELE Japanese classes, possession of a JLPT certificate, and, when applicable, experience as exchange students in Japan. Because of these requirements, the sample size is necessarily small. Although these students have formal coursework and certification, many still lack strong oral skills in Japanese and may choose to discontinue classes and continue their studies independently.

1.3 Purpose

The goal of this research is to explore participants' perceptions regarding whether they had experienced speaking activities or a lack thereof during their Japanese classes at CELE as well as their opinions about how these speaking activities helped them or not in their Japanese learning. The reason

why speaking was selected as the focus point is that speaking is not commonly practiced in Japanese class. This may be explained by writing and reading being considered a priority over speaking or listening, because of their complexity and because there is no speaking evaluation in the certification test.

Besides, the textbook used from Japanese level 1 to 4, *Minna no Nihongo*, only contains reading, listening and writing exercises. This might explain why the chances to practice with speaking activities in the Japanese class are reduced. As a result, communicating in Japanese is extremely hard for students. Therefore, participants will help to identify those speaking activities which might be necessary to be included in the CELE Japanese classes. It is worth mentioning that the book's prologue indicates the content draws guidance from a Japanese business manual, which may explain the focus of most exercises on business settings rather than everyday situations.

Then, the purpose is to explore those speaking activities CELE Japanese students practice and those possible speaking activities they may need more actively in class and those suggested speaking activities students believe to be important to help them improve their Japanese learning. This will shed light on how to improve the Japanese classes at CELE, specifically focusing on the speaking skill. The methodology to collect participants' views will be through questionnaires and interviews to gather information about their opinions about Japanese classes and the speaking activities used in class.

The main purpose of the research is to explore ways that speaking is assessed as a means to improve Japanese speaking at CELE.

- ➔ To explore those speaking activities that are assessed to determine which are needed or required in the Japanese classroom at CELE.

1.4 Objectives

- ➔ To identify students' opinions about the assessment of the speaking activities in the Japanese classes at CELE.

- ➔ To describe the speaking activities used to assess speaking in the Japanese classroom at CELE.
- ➔ To analyze students' opinions about the assessment of the speaking activities in the Japanese classes at CELE.
- ➔ To compare the speaking activities used to assess speaking against those that are not used in the Japanese classroom at CELE.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are the following:

1) How is speaking assessed in the Japanese classroom at CELE?
2) What activities are not used to assess speaking in the Japanese classroom at CELE?
3) What speaking activities do CELE students require to improve their Japanese?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research will help students through the process of learning to speak Japanese using different activities and taking into account students' opinions and suggestions about the Japanese classes. This research aims to reach those CELE Japanese teachers to enhance their speaking activities as they may include new speaking activities or implement ways to have students speak in the classroom from the information gathered. It is hoped that this study will suggest different activities which the Japanese teacher will use in his/her classes to improve students' speaking.

The findings may also help those students who may wish to embark on an exchange program in Japan, they might have less difficulty at the moment of communicating with native speakers. To be accepted in an exchange program at a Japanese university, students need a N5 certification. According to the CELE program (2016), once students reach level 4, they can obtain the necessary skills in order to certificate N5 (equivalent to the A1/A2 level in the CEFR).

Moreover, the practice of speaking in the classroom would help CELE Japanese students to aim for a higher certification level by engaging them in real-time language production. This requires them to retrieve and apply vocabulary and grammar spontaneously, revealing weak areas and allowing for immediate feedback and correction. As their ability to produce the language grows, their listening and reading comprehension also improve, since strong productive abilities naturally reinforce receptive ones. As their productive skills strengthen, their listening and reading comprehension also improve, reinforcing overall proficiency, because the productive skills can also support the receptive skills. This might help students to control their nervousness by having speaking practice and increase the possibility of certifying higher levels. Also, Japanese learners will have more opportunities for engaging in conversations with exchange Japanese students who spend a semester at the Faculty of Languages on a regular basis.

The development of speaking skills in CELE Japanese classes supports the Plan de Desarrollo Institucional 2021–2025 of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (2022). This plan seeks international mobility for student and academic staff by encouraging participation in international conferences, and fostering collaboration with national and foreign institutions in cultural, academic, and scientific programs. It aims to increase the presence of national and international students, who hold proficiency in English or other foreign languages, when accepted in academic programs.

This research will help CELE Japanese teachers identify what students find most relevant in their learning with suggestions for classroom activities. These recommendations could guide instructional improvements and highlight the value of student input for professional development. This study also aims to strengthen student motivation to continue with their Japanese studies because students may often drop out as levels progress. Emphasizing speaking Japanese and making classes more interactive can boost students' engagement rather than having them focus almost exclusively on reading and writing.

Finally, the research will help CELE to improve its offer by promoting more dynamic classes and ways of teaching and, as a result, increase the Faculty of Languages' profits. The feedback gathered from

this research might be used by CELE administrators and Japanese teachers to know students' suggestions and make those changes in the program for improvement, which in turn, could bring more students to the CELE classes.

1.8 Summary

The purpose of this research is to suggest those possible effective speaking activities that may help improve the speaking skill in the Japanese classes at CELE. The findings may guide the researcher to answer the research questions and offer insights on how speaking is promoted in the CELE Japanese classroom by describing those speaking activities that need strengthening, and what speaking activities and determining which ones are most suitable for the context that can help CELE Japanese teachers select the most appropriate speaking activities for their classes. In the following chapter the theoretical framework will be presented.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Globalization offers new opportunities; however, it also asks for new abilities as communication and interest for other cultures expand with the internet. As a result, learning a foreign language has become more important over time, particularly in a world where learning a foreign language has raised the interest of all kinds of industries. Foreign languages have obtained an important role in the current business as foreign trade (Cickovska, 2015).

In addition, to increase the chances of better employment, a foreign language will help individuals to know and understand other cultures. Furthermore, knowing a foreign language has other advantages such as confidence, memory improvement, better understanding of your own native language and the opportunity to be part of a multicultural community conformed by other countries and contexts around the world (Middlebury Languages School, 2020).

2.1 Learning Foreign Languages in Mexico

Teaching and learning foreign languages is popular in Mexico, however, it is relevant to highlight that besides Spanish, there are 62 indigenous languages in Mexico (Bertely, Saraví & Abrantes, 2013), and that 81% of the indigenous population in Mexico is already bilingual (Serrano, 2019). Although the Mexican government has focused efforts on teaching and implementing indigenous languages in schools, English has been the most popular foreign language implemented at Mexicans schools instead (Acosta, 2014). Besides English, Mexican public schools offer foreign languages such as Greek, Latin, English, German, French, Italian and Spanish (Ryan & Sercu, 2003) such as the Colegio de Ciencia y Humanidades (CCH), and the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria schools (ENP) from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

For example, the Ministry of Education (SEP) and the British Council created 32 CAA (Centros de Autoacceso) in several public universities in Mexico for learning foreign languages between 1994 and 1998. Currently, there are around 145 CAA in the country (Ramirez, White, Encinas, Busseniers, Montano, & Zhizhko 2007). The first language school in Mexico was the Centro de Enseñanza para Extranjeros, founded in 1921 as part of the UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). In the 70's other language schools were open around the country and during the mid-80's language teaching majors and postgraduate courses were open in several universities (Ramirez et al., 2007).

As for private schools, according to Despagne (2010), private Mexican language schools are divided into three levels: 1) the *Elite bilingual schools* where they teach the language to fulfill the expectations of a bilingual school; 2) the *Medium bilingual schools* that attempt to create autonomous and critical students, and finally 3) the *Low level bilingual schools* whose priority is to make money, they use traditional methods and their teachers have a low English proficiency level. Both public and private schools offer a range of possibilities to those interested in learning a foreign language based on their interests and goals.

Regarding the English proficiency level Mexico holds, the Education First (2020), an organization that offers language learning courses and cultural exchanges, ranked Mexico in place 82 with a very low English level. This may be due to different problems such as the weak curriculum design, lack of electronic devices and teachers' preparation (Ramirez, Perez, & Lara, 2017) which has led private schools to focus their effort on closing this foreign language gap. Despite the resources available and the variety of methods, what remains a fact is that teaching and learning foreign languages in Mexico continues to rise as the offer for other languages (e.g. Japanese, Korean, Mandarin) is also increasing.

2.2 Japanese Teaching and Learning in Mexico

As Husain (2015) explains it, any language has the objective to convey information involving the four skills where writing and speaking help learners produce sounds, letters or symbols while receiving information (listening and reading). Moeller, Kramer, and Catalano (2015) states that "a language is considered foreign if it is learned largely in the classroom and is not spoken in the society where the teaching occurs." (p. 327). Here, the teacher-student relationship is implied, the teacher decides the activities that are suitable for students, according to their level and skills. The commercial value of a language may affect people's motivation for learning a particular language which can lead institutions to provide sources for foreign language education (Block & Cameron, 2002).

The Japanese language, for example, has become one of those Asian languages people are demanding to learn in Mexico. In the case of learning Japanese, a survey conducted in 2021 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2024), reported that there were 1,272 Japanese companies in Mexico, which could, in turn, increase the interest in learning Japanese as a foreign language. For example, in 2018 there were around 120 institutions, 483 Japanese teachers and 13,673 Japanese learners just in Mexico. These numbers have increased in 2021 with 139 institutions, 612 Japanese teachers and 14,552 Japanese learners in Mexico (Japan Foundation, 2021). The increase is evident within three years with the number of teachers growing by 26.7% and learners by 6.4%.

These numbers can be explained by the Cultural agreement between Mexico and Japan in 1954 where both countries agreed upon sending students on academic exchanges, although it was until 1971 that the proposal was accepted. As a result, 100 students from each country were eligible for academic exchange, however, nowadays the number has been reduced to only 50 students (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Japan's support of Japanese teaching in Mexico is documented during 1977 and 1978 by this cultural agreement as Japan provided UNAM with audiovisual equipment for the language laboratory for Japanese teaching. In addition, the Liceo Mexicano Japonés (LMJ) was founded with the purpose of strengthening the social and cultural ties between both countries (Yoshio, 1982). Students at this institution begin learning Japanese in the first year of elementary school as part of their academic formation, reflecting the school's commitment to fostering bilingual and bicultural education.The Liceo Mexicano Japonés is the only one of its kind operating in Mexico.

The Liceo Mexicano Japonés (2021) emerged because of the necessities of both nations for a Japanese educational system and for learning Japanese and traditions (without losing connection with Mexico). In this international school, Mexican and nikkei (Japanese children born outside Japan) are educated. Despite being a private school, it follows the study program established nationally by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). The Liceo Mexicano Japonés is an example of the learning of Japanese in Mexico besides other certificated private schools in the country recognized by the Japan Foundation.

The Japan Foundation (2017) is committed to apply cultural exchange projects all over the world, working with international organizations to implement activities in fields such as Japanese-language education overseas, art and cultural exchange and Japanese studies and scholar exchanges abroad. There is an old relationship between the two countries, even when the economical factor is a priority, Japanese language has played a role in the education of Mexico.

2.3 Japanese as a Foreign Language

In Japanese language education, language is seen as an instrument to assist learners to find their identities and shape their personality (Tohsaku, 2021). An example is Tsuchiya's (2022) application of exercises that range from script rehearsals (word substitution and phrases) to expansions (adding scripts), open conversations and contextualized drill activities to help learners develop a foundation for starting and maintaining a conversation, skills that are required for an intermediate level. Once the basis is set up, the teacher can add practice activities for learners to practice advanced-level skills.

Tohsaku, Nazikian and Park (2021) proposes the Social Networking Approach (SNA), a method for teaching foreign languages whose emphasis is to help learners grow as individuals and develop the skills needed to navigate today's complex societies. The philosophy behind the SNA is to "discover others, discover oneself, and realize connections between them" (Tohsaku et al., 2021 p. 7) through language learning. By studying a foreign language and its culture, we can build connections with those people and gain an understanding of others which may provide us with valuable insights. Although this methodology is primarily applied to Chinese and Korean learners in Japanese high schools, Tohsaku, Nazikian and Park note that the approach is adaptable enough to be used for learning any language, at any level of proficiency.

One of the issues when learning Japanese is the textbooks, as Kim (2014) discusses the challenges foreign learners face in many Japanese textbooks. He notes that textbooks often prioritize teaching "functional and polite" Japanese to help learners progress quickly but also avoid teaching Kanji to prevent learners from being overwhelmed with Chinese characters. Additionally, conventional textbooks often rely on translating English phrases into Japanese. However, Kim (2014) emphasizes that to truly learn Japanese, students must adopt a Japanese way of thinking, as the language is fundamentally different from romance languages like English or Spanish.

When teaching Japanese as a foreign language (JFL), a significant ideological issue arises regarding how Japanese language and culture are approached. For example, Japanese society is stereotypically portrayed as direct and group oriented. As a result, language tends to focus on formal forms. What variety of Japanese to teach and how to connect language instruction with cultural education are often treated as secondary regarding teaching methods and techniques (Matsumoto & Okamoto, 2003). Therefore, these issues deserve careful consideration to critically address them for promoting a major impact on teaching JFL.

Language textbooks tend to oversimplify the aspects reviewed above by overlooking the true linguistic diversity of the Japanese language (Matsumoto & Okamoto, 2003). Learners will inevitably encounter this diversity when interacting with native speakers in real-life situations. While the simplification in textbooks is likely intended to make the language easier for learners, it can inadvertently reinforce dominant linguistic and cultural norms, regardless of the authors' intentions. Japanese communication styles, however, are influenced by various factors, such as the type of conversation, the setting, the nature of the relationship between participants, the goals of the interaction, and the level of conflict. As a result, reducing these complexities may oversimplify the dynamic and context-dependent nature of real-world communication in Japanese.

2.4 The nature of speaking

Speaking “consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning” (Bailey & Nunan, 2004, p. 2), then, speaking can be interpreted as a communication system that helps individuals express a message. Through spoken language students can express themselves in the target language and deal with *basic interactive skills* such as the exchange of greetings, apologies, and other language needs they might have (Brown & Yule, 1983).

Goh and Burns (2012) describe speaking as a fundamental *language-communication skill* that facilitates language acquisition and academic development of foreign language learners. Then, speaking is

an ability to be practiced in the classroom because as much as learners are exposed to the language, they will exchange ideas and promote foreign language learning.

Speaking implies developing the necessary knowledge to identify why, when, and how to communicate something. As speaking is a daily activity, it is used in cultural and social contexts. Therefore, it is suggested to develop skills to produce and conduct interactions with people since the speakers adapt their language and meaning every time they talk in a determined context (Schmitt & Rogers, 2019).

As for encouraging speaking in the classroom, Luoma (2004) mentions that working in groups is an efficient method to examine students' speaking during class time. Also, by having students make self-evaluation and evaluate their classmates encourages students to support each other while the teacher monitors and takes notes that can be useful for future evaluations.

2.5 Speaking in a Foreign Language

A language is formed by four skills: speaking, writing, listening and reading. Speaking is classified as a productive skill, and it is usually said that someone has a good domain of the language if he/she speaks fluently. However, it is known that learners may have a higher level in some skills than in others, for instance, someone with a high proficiency in speaking and listening might have a low level in writing and an intermediate in reading. Even though the four skills are associated, it is not possible to measure one skill to know the level of another skill (Cambridge Assessment English, 2018).

Thornbury (2005) explains that the mental process for learning to speak a foreign language is the same as learning to speak the first language, however, there is a difference in how broad the knowledge of the speaker is regarding the foreign language. This means that the learner's language development depends on his/her knowledge of the foreign language. For a student to be a fluent speaker of a foreign language, it is necessary to pronounce words with the appropriate intonation, stress, and how to use those

words coherently in different contexts and genres (Harmer, 2007). This means that speaking significance extends beyond everyday interactions as it fosters language acquisition and supports the academic growth of many foreign language learners. Therefore, it is valuable to teach speaking by looking at these benefits by also considering factors that may influence learners' motivation to use the target language more frequently (Goh & Burns, 2012).

The main reason for people to learn a foreign language is to communicate orally, and this usually leads learners to assess their progress in language learning and language courses based on how much their speaking has improved (East, 2016).

2.6 Formative and Summative Assessment

Formative evaluation refers to the use of constant assessments given throughout the teaching and learning process to provide feedback and guidance. These assessments help both teachers and students improve learning as it happens. While they can be graded or used to rank students, formative evaluation is most effective when separated from grading and used primarily as a tool to support instruction (William, 2018). Formative assessment supports both teachers and students by showing what still needs to be learned and how to reach those goals. It tracks students' progress throughout the learning journey and helps identify areas where their understanding is lacking. This gives teachers valuable information to provide timely feedback and adjust their instruction to help students keep improving.

Formative assessment happens during the learning process constantly guiding both teaching and learning in real time (Jones, 2021). In contrast, summative evaluation is characterized by making a judgment about the performance of students, teachers, or the curriculum after instruction has taken place (Bloom, 1971). Summative assessment often leads to anxiety and defensiveness among students because it carries significant weight in grading and passing to the next level. Although final exams are the most common form of summative evaluation, such tests may also be given two or three times during a course

to assess overall progress. While formative assessment focuses on supporting learning as it happens, summative assessment is used to evaluate what has been learned to assign final grades or measure how well students meet course goals or standards (Burke, 2010). Formative assessments are more detailed and supportive while summative assessments look at broader learning outcomes and offer a general measure of performance (Bloom, Madaus, & Hastings, 1981).

Although both types of assessments, formative and summative, differ mainly in their timing, purpose, and focus, it is fair to say that formative assessment takes place during the learning process and is meant to guide and improve learning in the benefit of the students' progress. Formative assessment usually focuses on specific tasks during short periods of instruction and provides detailed feedback to help students and teachers identify areas that need improvement. On the other hand, summative evaluation occurs at the end of a course or a major section as its main purpose is to assess overall achievement and certify what has been learned. Therefore, formative assessment serves as a handy strategy for teachers to monitor students' progress without the emotional burden that summative assessment may bring about.

2.7 Assessing Speaking in a Foreign Language

The following are speaking activities frequently used by teachers to assess students' oral performance in ways that differ from traditional tests. These activities function as formative assessment as a strategy to reduce anxiety often caused by formal speaking exams. By using this approach, teachers can more effectively track students' progress, compare their development over time, and gain clearer insights into their learning journey.

As previously established, when teaching and learning a language, the term *assessment* refers to the information gathered and analyzed about the students' language knowledge and their ability to use it (Schmitt & Rogers, 2019). Assessment is a way to obtain data about learners' knowledge and abilities. Luoma (2004) describes assessing speaking as a sequence of actions with phases in which people

collaborate to create something for the next phase, this can be interpreted as a series of steps to communicate with people having in mind the next step when having a conversation.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow (2014) explain that the word *assessment* is assigned to the application of methods and tools to gather information to make an analysis about learning. This reinforces Schmitt and Rogers' (2019) description about assessment as a form of collecting information and analyzing how the learning process is working for the students. The importance of understanding students' needs to determine whether speaking should take precedence in the classroom is key because without clear assessment, it becomes challenging to prioritize and balance the importance of each skill effectively (Thornbury, 2005). The author also emphasizes that a placement test is crucial for an initial evaluation of candidates' speaking abilities, regardless of whether their needs are well-defined or not. However, paper-based tests (multiple-choice grammar exams) may be inadequate for assessing speaking skills while formal interviews may not be the best approach if the candidate's context involves informal group interactions. When needs are unclear, a brief speaking placement test should suffice for most general purposes.

Luoma (2004) explains that to assess speaking, elements such as the sound of speech, spoken grammar, spoken words, slips and errors, processing and reciprocity need to be evaluated. The *sound of the speech* involves pausing, intonation, stress, volume, pitch and speed of the speaker when talking. Unlike written grammar, *spoken grammar* consists merely in short phrases and clauses called idea units, these phrases are used when talking.

The *Spoken words* have to do with having a rich vocabulary knowledge when the speakers want to express their thoughts or being able to adapt to professional contexts. As well as, using everyday vocabulary and common phrases and expressions naturally. *Slips and errors* are a usual thing to find in the speech of a foreign language learner.

Finally, *Processing and reciprocity* where processing refers to the time difference between writing and speaking, while a writer can take more time to think about what he/she wants to express in a text, speaking and listening in a conversation are simultaneous activities. While reciprocity is about speakers taking turns during a conversation which creates a social interaction.

Brown and Yule (1983) suggest assessing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency all together as part of the students' skill to communicate effectively through speaking. In addition, they also mention that teachers tend to assess students once-a-term with a test and this activity doesn't seem appropriate to evaluate speaking and point out that teachers gather more information with constant records of students' speaking.

This type of assessment is 'formative' assessment, in contrast to the once-a-year assessment test referred to as 'summative' assessment. The following are some practical requirements proposed by Brown and Yule (1983) to reinforce the speaking assessment.

1) **Tape recording:** Tape-record students' speaking to check student's improvement over the course.
2) **Speech in different modes:** Picking the difficulty of the topics and activities, to help students in their speaking practice.
3) **Task types:** students use any grammar or vocabulary, but language must be used properly when performing the task.
4) **The information gap:** an exchange of information between the listener who receives the message and the speaker who communicates the message.
5) **Scoring procedures:** to focus on the speaker's performance and use an "error-based" checklist, to deduct points according to the speaker's errors during the performance.

Brown & Yule (1983) describe three categories for tasks used to obtain accounts of students' speaking: Static relationships, Dynamic relationships and Abstract relationships.

Static relationships are for descriptions of objects or photographs, describing how to organize objects, giving directions, instructing how to assemble a piece of equipment or to draw a diagram.

Dynamic relationships involve story-telling activities, and giving an eye-witness account, some suggested materials can be cartoon-strips, photography sequences, films or videos. Finally, Abstract relationships imply opinion-expressing, justifying an action where the student needs to know who he or she is talking to and what his/her listener knows, this way there will be a real exchange of information between the listener and the speaker.

2.8 Activities to assess speaking

The Cambridge dictionary (2022) defines activity as a group's work to reach a goal. In a teaching context, this might refer to the classroom tasks that are assigned to achieve a specific objective. Thornbury (2005) explains that activities are planned to help students fill the gaps in their knowledge and refers to these as *awareness activities* because they help students awaken their awareness to develop their knowledge.

Speaking activities create opportunities for the learners to practice and improve their fluency (Goh & Burns, 2012) and are determined by teachers who decide the appropriate learning strategy for the learners. Learning strategies are techniques that a learner uses to assimilate information (Hadley, 2001). Therefore, learning strategies can be tactics used by the learner to comprehend information or they can also be steps to enhance learning (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Learning strategies have the objective of improving individuals' learning as strategies are selected according to a methodology with those activities connected to the skill the teacher wants to work on. Some of the following are the most common speaking activities used in the classroom. These activities come from different teaching methodologies whose activities are focused on improving speaking. For example, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) mention some activities about Drills. Some examples of these are:

1) **Dialogue Memorization:** Students memorize a short dialogue; the teacher takes the role of one person and students the other role. Students can switch roles with the teacher.
2) **Role-play:** students play a character and perform in the target language.
3) **Using Commands to Direct Behavior:** the teacher introduces commands for students to imitate.
4) **Language Games:** students use language as a communication tool with three characteristics of communication: information gap, choice, and feedback.
5) **Picture Strip Story:** one student is given a strip story and asks his/her classmates to guess what the next picture would look like.
6) **Chain Drill:** the teacher asks a question, after the student responds, the same student asks the same question to his/her classmate, and so on.

Thornbury (2005) mentions drilling is a noticing technique in speaking activities because it helps students to focus their attention on the language. Drilling can be used to move information to the long-term memory and improve student's fluency. Drills create habits in the students by repetition of the language, so students detect the patterns in the language and use them without thinking in the equivalent of their native language.

Thornbury's (2005) Drill activities follow the same principles as those mentioned by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson. For example, Thornbury (2005) categorizes chants as a type of drilling since chants work better if repeated in short phrases, multi-word sequences and a consistent rhythm. He also explains that dialogues, or open pair work, where the teacher asks a volunteer to read out loud one of the roles of the dialogue while the teacher reads the other role can help as a demonstration.

Thornbury (2005) also mentions that activities such as presentations, debates and conversations lead to autonomy in speakers because as Holec (1981, as cited in Du, 2020) explains, autonomous learning is an *ability* that learners develop by working in their own learning, being the learning their own responsibility. To infer an individual's language ability from their performance on language tests,

Bachman and Palmer (1996) mention that it is necessary to define this ability with sufficient precision to distinguish it from other personal characteristics that may affect test outcomes. This framework will be described briefly in the next section.

2.9 Bachman and Palmer's Framework

Bachman and Palmer' (1996) framework (See Chart 1) considers that certain characteristics can have an important influence on language use and test performance. They explain that language ability involves *Language knowledge* and Strategic competence. *Language knowledge* can be divided into two main categories: *organizational knowledge* and *pragmatic knowledge. Organizational knowledge* refers to the formal structure of language—grammar, vocabulary, graphology, syntax, and phonology—which supports the creation and understanding of grammatically correct oral and written texts. Activities like writing, reading, presentations, and grammar exercises foster this knowledge. This includes both oral and written skills. It is divided into *Grammatical knowledge* and *Textual knowledge.* On the other hand, *Pragmatic knowledge* enables users to interpret and produce language meaningfully in different contexts and scenarios and is divided into *Sociolinguistic* and *Functional knowledge*. The following diagram illustrates the categories mentioned in the text, beginning with the two main types of language knowledge—organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge—followed by their respective subcategories, providing a visual aid to support a better understanding and interpretation of these concepts.

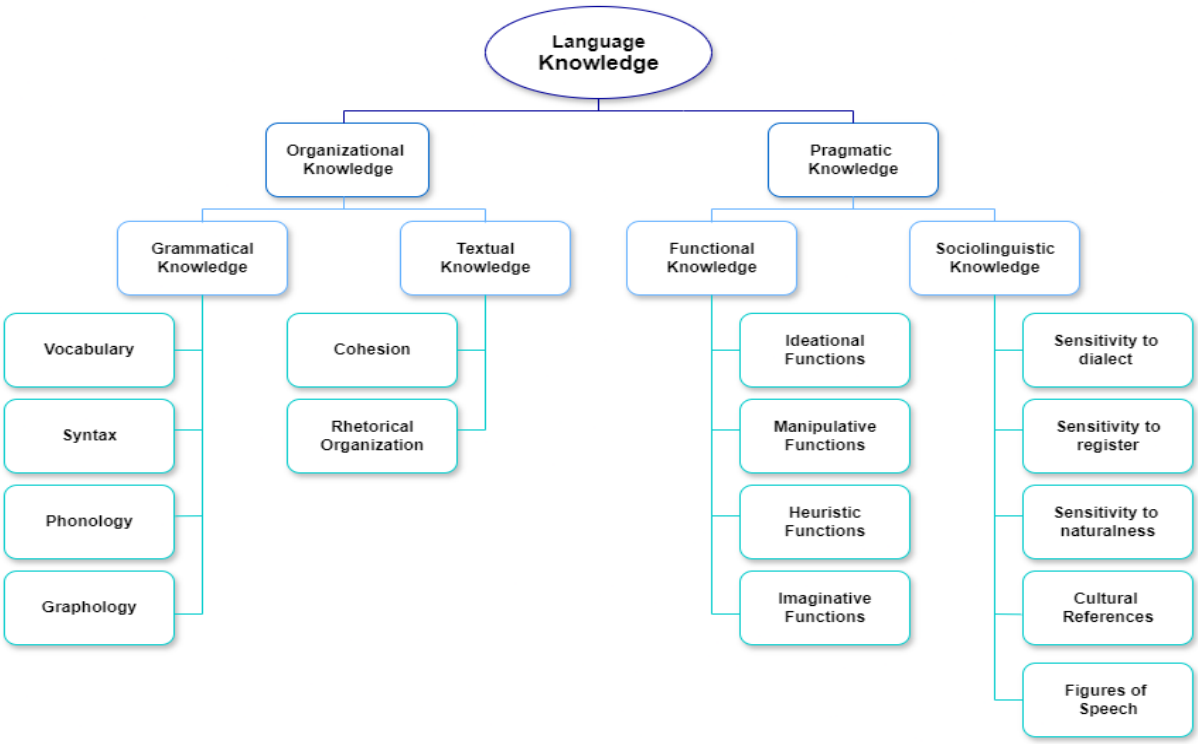

Diagram 1

Language knowledge

Taken from Bachman & Palmer's framework (1996)

Organizational knowledge involves managing the formal structure of language to produce or understand grammatically correct sentences or statements. *Grammatical knowledge* is used to produce or understand structurally correct sentences or utterances. It encompasses an understanding of vocabulary, sentence structure, sound patterns, and writing systems. In contrast, *Textual knowledge* relates to the production or understanding of texts, whether spoken or written, that consist of two or more sentences or utterances. It is divided into two key areas: *knowledge of cohesion* and Rhetorical organization. Knowledge of cohesion is used to produce or understand the clearly indicated connections between sentences in written texts or between utterances in conversations. *Knowledge of rhetorical* or conversational organization is involved in producing or understanding the structural flow of ideas in written texts or conversations.

On the other hand, *Pragmatic knowledge* allows individuals to generate or interpret discourse by linking utterances or written texts to their meanings, the intentions of the speakers or writers, and the pertinent aspects of the communicative context. This knowledge is divided into two key domains: functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. *Functional knowledge*, also known as "Illocutionary competence", facilitates the interpretation of the connections between utterances, sentences, and texts, and the intentions of those using the language. Correct interpretation often requires considering the language users' prior understanding of the communicative context. In other words, it involves using vocabulary in context to comprehend the meaning of a question or sentence. Functional knowledge encompasses an understanding of four categories of language functions: *ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative.*

Ideational functions allow the user to convey or interpret meaning based on their experiences of the real world. This includes using language to share or exchange information about knowledge, ideas, or emotions. Examples of ideational functions include utterances that provide descriptions, explanations, classifications, or expressing feelings, commonly practiced through debates, presentations, and role-plays.

Manipulative functions allow individuals to use language to influence their surroundings, often through requests or commands. Activities like games, discussions, and workshops help activate and strengthen these pragmatic skills, promoting contextual and functional use of language. This encompasses knowledge of instrumental functions, regulatory functions, and interpersonal functions.

- Instrumental functions involve using language to have others perform actions on our behalf, such as making requests, offering suggestions, issuing commands, or giving warnings.
- Regulatory functions are employed to direct or control the behavior of others, including rules, regulations, and laws.
- Interpersonal functions are used to create, sustain, and alter social relationships, with examples including greetings and farewells, compliments, insults, and apologies.

Heuristic functions allow individuals to use language to enhance their knowledge of the world, such as through teaching and learning, problem-solving, and retaining information. Finally, Imaginative

functions, on the other hand, enable individuals to use language to create an imaginary realm or enrich the real world for humorous or aesthetic purposes, including jokes, figurative language, and poetry. Although these functions are categorized into four general types, they are not mutually exclusive. Additionally, functions typically do not occur in isolation but are often integrated into connected discourse, where multiple functions are performed simultaneously.

The other main category of pragmatic knowledge is **Sociolinguistic knowledge***,* which allows individuals to produce or interpret language that is suitable for a specific context. This includes understanding the conventions governing the use of different dialects or dialect varieties, registers, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and figures of speech in conversations, debates, and role-plays. Therefore, sociolinguistic knowledge has to do with adapting speech depending on the social context and understanding the social purposes language serves. Besides this knowledge not only helps to know how language functions but also how it reflects social connections and helps individuals express their social identity. For example, speech styles or registers are influenced by the functional demands of specific situations, roles, or relationships. More formal and standard forms tend to be used with unfamiliar individuals, while informal or vernacular language is often reserved for close acquaintances.

Furthermore, distinct registers emerge in specialized fields such as science, law, finance, or music, where language is shaped by contextual and occupational requirements. *Register* refers to the variety of language typically used by individuals who share a common profession, interest, or social activity, as well as the linguistic features characteristic of situations linked to those groups. These stylistic patterns are characterized by their functional association with particular domains. Specialized registers can become highly complex and inaccessible to those outside the group. As for dialects, they are distinct forms of a language characterized by differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. These variations can arise from regional differences or social group distinctions. For example, Standard English functions as a prestige dialect as it is the form of English typically used by educated speakers across the globe (Holmes & Wilson, 2017).

2.10 Summary

As discussed previously, learning Japanese in Mexico has become a necessity in the context of globalization, international trade and the relocation of companies worldwide. This interest in learning Japanese can be attributed to the presence of Japanese companies and educational exchange agreements with Japan. Programs offered by the Japan Foundation aim to promote the Japanese language and provide resources to support foreign students.

However, Japanese textbooks remain a challenge as they focus solely on formal Japanese and lack emphasis on contextual language use, cultural understanding, and the Japanese mindset—key elements for mastering the language. Speaking Japanese plays a critical role in communication; therefore, effective speaking assessment is vital for identifying students' needs and areas for reinforcement. Activities such as role-playing and dialogue memorization are recommended for daily practice. These activities should also integrate organizational and pragmatic knowledge, prioritizing language functions that help interpret the intent behind sentences in specific contexts. Emphasizing language functions may help students develop language for communicating within particular situations, ultimately enhancing their proficiency.

The next chapter will present the research design, the context of participants, the data collection and data analysis procedure of this research conducted with CELE students from the faculty of languages, focusing on exploring ways to improve their Japanese speaking.

Chapter III: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Mixed methods research integrates elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In mixed-methods research, researchers may simultaneously test and develop theories. Additionally, such research may incorporate a theoretical framework that informs the entire study (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). A mixed methods approach involves compiling, interpreting and unifying quantitative (e.g., experiments, surveys) and qualitative (e.g., focus groups, interviews) data. Therefore, the mixed methods research allows the use of instruments such as surveys and interviews to obtain feedback from participants and for reliable support of the final obtained results.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential design, which involves two distinct but connected phases. The process began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data through a survey. In the second phase, qualitative data were collected through interviews to further explain, elaborate on, or expand the survey findings. The design of the qualitative phase was therefore guided by the results of the quantitative phase, ensuring that the two stages were meaningfully integrated (Cresswell & Plano, 2018).

Survey research is a methodological tool designed to identify and describe patterns, attitudes, or opinions within a population by examining a sample of that group. By using structured questionnaires, surveys allow researchers to gather standardized information that can be quantified and statistically analyzed, providing a broad overview of general trends (Fowler, 2014). The value of this quantitative approach lies in its ability to establish measurable relationships between variables and to generate findings that can be generalized to a wider population. In the present study, the survey was essential for capturing an initial picture of participants' experiences and perceptions, offering a foundation of statistical evidence upon which further analysis could be built.

Interviews, by contrast, are a qualitative method aimed at exploring participants' perspectives in depth and capturing the meanings they attribute to their experiences. Conducted in a semi-structured format, interviews allow for flexibility in probing responses while maintaining consistency across core questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The strength of this method lies in its ability to provide rich, detailed data that goes beyond numerical patterns, uncovering the context, motivations, and personal interpretations underlying participants' answers. In this study, interviews complemented the survey

findings by elaborating on and contextualizing the quantitative results, thereby adding nuance and depth to the overall analysis.

3.2 Context and Participants

The present research was conducted at the Faculty of Languages (Facultad de Lenguas) of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP). In addition to its undergraduate program in English Language Teaching (ELT), the Faculty houses the Foreign Language Center (Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras, CELE). The CELE provides a variety of language courses—including Japanese, Italian, French, Portuguese, German, and English—to the university community.

These courses are offered three times per year in 15-week semesters (Spring, Summer, and Fall). The program is structured across nine levels, allowing a student to complete the sequence and pursue a language certification within three years. The only requirement for enrollment is to be a current student or employee of the university (Facultad de Lenguas, n.d.).

The study participants consisted of twelve individuals (6 female, 6 male), aged 23 to 33, including both current students and graduates from various majors, though a majority were from the Faculty of Languages. Participants represented a broad spectrum of Japanese language proficiency. Their experience was demonstrated through the completion of CELE Japanese courses, ranging from levels 2 to 9. Furthermore, their formal certifications varied: nine held JLPT N5 (A1-A2), one held N4 (A2), and two were uncertified. Finally, five participants had study abroad experience in Japan—four for a full year and one for a half-year. Table 3 shows participants' age, gender, Japanese level at CELE, certification level and if they had participated in an exchange program, its duration as well.

Table 3

Participants' background

Participant	Age	Gender	Japanese Level at CELE	Certification Level	Exchange program in Japan
Alan	25	Male	Japanese 5	N5	Not applicable
Amanda	23	Female	Japanese 7	N5	Not applicable
Andrés	23	Male	Japanese 5	N5	Half year
Carolina	24	Female	Japanese 5	N5	Not applicable
Diego	30	Male	Japanese 2	N5	Not applicable
Fernando	30	Male	Japanese 9	N4	One year
Frida	23	Female	Japanese 8	N5	Not applicable
Hugo	25	Male	Japanese 3	N5	Not applicable
Isabela	25	Female	Japanese 4	Not certificated	Not applicable
Janet	24	Female	Japanese 5	Not certificated	Not applicable
Michell	33	Male	Japanese 9	N5	One year
Padme	25	Female	Japanese 8	N5	One year

Column 1 presents participants' age. The participants' age ranges from 23 to 33 years old. Column 2 presents the gender of the 12 participants, 50% are male and the other 50% are female. Column 3 illustrates the Japanese courses that participants had previously taken at CELE. It can be seen that the highest level of Japanese was 9 with 16.7%, while Japanese 8 was 16.7% and Japanese 7 was 8.3%. While 33.3% of the participants took Japanese 5. Finally, Japanese 2, 3 and 4 had the same percentage: 8.3% each one. As it can be seen in the table, none of the participants took Japanese 1 nor Japanese 6.

Column 4 shows the quantity of participants with a Japanese certification, 83% of the participants certificated a level, while 17% of the participants do not have a Japanese certification. This column also presents participants' certification level, 90% of the participants certified N5 level (A1), while only 10% of the participants certified N4 level (A2). As can be interpreted from the table, none of the highest levels such as N3, N2 and N1 were certified. Column 5 shows those participants who have been exchange students in Japan. 66.67% of the participants have not been on an exchange program, while 33.33% had participated in an exchange program. Column 5 also illustrates how long participants stayed in Japan. 75% of the participants stayed for one year in Japan, while only 25% stayed half a year.

3.3 Instruments

To investigate the development of speaking skills, this study employed a mixed-methods approach using a sequentially designed survey and follow-up interviews.

3.3.1 Survey

An online survey (37 questions) was administered to gather comprehensive data on participants' experiences with speaking activities in the Japanese classroom (see Appendix A for the full instrument). It was structured into three thematic sections:

Section 1: Demographic Profile & Activity Recognition. This section collected personal data (e.g., age, courses taken) and asked participants to identify which speaking activities (e.g., role-play, dialogues, games) they had experienced and which they desired from a predefined list.

Section 2: Frequency & Perceived Efficacy. Using a 5-point Likert scale (Always to Never), this section measured how frequently participants practiced specific speaking activities. It also included multiple-choice questions to identify which activities participants believed were most and least effective for improving their speaking skills.

Section 3: Importance & Barriers. This section used a 5-point Likert scale (Very Important to Not Important) to gauge the perceived importance of the same speaking activities, allowing for a cross-analysis with frequency data. It also featured a question on potential barriers to speaking development (e.g., lack of conversation workshops, focus on grammar) and concluded with three open-ended questions for qualitative insights into their suggestions and perspectives on promoting speaking.

At the survey's conclusion, participants were invited to volunteer for a follow-up interview. Nine respondents agreed, providing their contact information.

3.3.2 Interviews

Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the eight volunteers to gather in-depth qualitative data. These interviews were designed to elaborate on the survey findings by exploring participants' prioritization of language skills, their personal strategies for improving oral proficiency, and their views on the importance of structured speaking practice. Participants were also asked to evaluate the effectiveness of speaking activities used in their CELE courses and to suggest alternative methods for promoting speaking skills in the classroom. Follow-up questions were employed to probe deeper into their responses. Follow-up questions were included to gather additional information based on participants' responses. The full set of interview questions is included in Appendix B.

3.4 Data Collection

Once the survey had been revised and corrected, it was ready to be applied. Participants who met the specific requirement for the study were contacted to answer the survey. The requirement for the sample group was that all participants selected had been either Japanese students or had taken a few Japanese language courses at the Faculty of Languages. They were reached through WhatsApp and Facebook, and some were contacted via Messenger to ask if they would like to fill out the survey. Once they had accepted, they were sent a link for the survey, via Google forms. All participants were contacted online because the lockdown for the pandemic was still active. Despite contacting a lot of participants, it was difficult to reach a large number for the sample, so the researcher asked some participants to help reach out to some of their CELE Japanese classmates to answer the survey.

In the survey, there was a question where participants were asked to take part in an interview as a follow up on their answers. The question invited participants to volunteer so if they accepted the invitation they had to write their contact information. After collecting the surveys, the next step was to tally how many volunteers for the interview had signed in. Of the 12 participants who did the survey, 9 agreed to participate, but only 8 provided their contact information. These 8 participants were contacted

via email to arrange a time and day for the interview. The participants were informed about a letter of consent and that interviews will be recorded via Zoom. Some participants preferred to be interviewed in pairs so the interviews would feel more comfortable. This paired interview was conducted with classmates from the same Japanese class at CELE. This allowed participants to recall more accurate information from a similar experience: their Japanese classes. Only one interview was conducted in pairs, while the other six were individual, resulting in a total of seven interviews.

Once each interview was scheduled, each participant was informed about the recording of the interview and that if there was any question or doubt, they could ask the researcher for clarification. During each interview, participants were asked five major questions with supplementary questions to gather more information. The semi-structured interview questions were designed and revised previously with the thesis director to avoid confusion, bias or misunderstandings with the participants. After all the interviews were recorded and collected the next step was to do the transcription.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Quantitative data analysis

First the survey responses were compiled and the data were analyzed. The data were transformed into a quantifiable format to enable graphics to effectively represent the results. Second, captured in Excel, these graphics provided a clear perspective on the information gathered. Each survey question has a corresponding graphic, designed for easy comprehension. This analysis revealed several patterns and highlighted connections among students who shared similar thoughts about the assessment of speaking activities in their Japanese class.

3.5.2 Qualitative data analysis

After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed individually. The gathered data was analyzed, revealing some keywords and recurring ideas shared among the participants. This

indicated that participants had similar opinions about the topic being researched. These ideas and opinions were compiled and coded first to be categorized later, revealing a subject matter that coincided with the students' views. Later, these categories were reviewed and read several times to identify recurrent themes that reinforced participants' comments and explanations about the speaking activities and techniques applied in the classroom. And finally arduous search was conducted to find coincidences between the collected data and the selected theoretical framework, identifying the participants' ideas that fit into the same categories. The following table (table 2) shows the final categories:

Table 2

Final categories

How is speaking assessed in the Japanese classroom at CELE?	What activities are not used to assess speaking in the Japanese classroom at CELE?	What speaking activities do CELE students require to improve their Japanese?
Type of knowledge	**Type of knowledge**	**Type of knowledge**
1. Organizational knowledge 1.1 Grammatical knowledge	1. Pragmatic Knowledge 1.1 Sociolinguistic knowledge 1.2 Functional knowledge	1. Pragmatic Knowledge 1.1 Sociolinguistic knowledge 1.2 Functional knowledge
Activities	**Activities**	**Activities**
Repetition drills Textbook Reading out loud Grammar Commands Role-play Presentations Picture Strip Story (Descriptions) Audio recordings	Conversations Language games Videos/films Debates Workshops	Conversations Workshops Language games Videos/films Debates Listening Role-play Presentations Repetition drills Songs

Chapter IV: Results

The objective of this chapter is to present the results of the two instruments used for the validation of this research. The first instrument was a questionnaire, and the second one was an interview, both were applied to the students of Japanese classes at CELE and applied through with the help of online services. As the study explores students' perceptions of speaking skills, it also considers the role of formative assessment in supporting language development during the learning process.

For the best organization, the quantitative results from the questionnaire are presented first in two sections: (1) participants' characteristics and (2) perceptions about speaking skills. In this section, Bachman and Palmer's framework is reintroduced briefly to provide conceptual clarity and to establish a clear connection between the data and the theoretical lens. After that, the qualitative results are presented, first, a section of the questionnaire with some qualitative data yielded from the three open-ended questions, and second, the interviews' results will be presented in accordance to the research questions guiding this study along the two major categories that emerged: 1) Organizational knowledge with the subcategories of grammatical knowledge, 2) Pragmatic knowledge with the subcategories of sociolinguistic knowledge and functional knowledge. These findings further illustrate how formative strategies, such as student reflection and teacher feedback during class, play a role in developing these dimensions of communicative competence. To provide a clearer overview of these results, the following section presents the quantitative findings.

4.1 Quantitative Results

In this section, the second section of the questionnaire will be presented. The first section, which contains the personal information of the participants, can be referred to in Appendix C for better understanding about students' background. The questionnaire collected the answers of 12 students from different majors that had previously taken Japanese courses at CELE. The second section presented here examines students' perceptions of speaking activities in Japanese classes at the CELE. These activities are

designed to serve as a method for instructors to formatively assess students' speaking proficiency. Only the most relevant charts are presented in this section for descriptive purposes; the remaining figures can also be found in Appendix C for further reference.

4.1.1 Students Perceptions About Japanese Speaking Activities

For a more detailed visualization of the speaking activities that participants perceived to be more practiced or not in the Japanese classroom, the following ten figures will report the frequency by presenting each speaking activity individually.

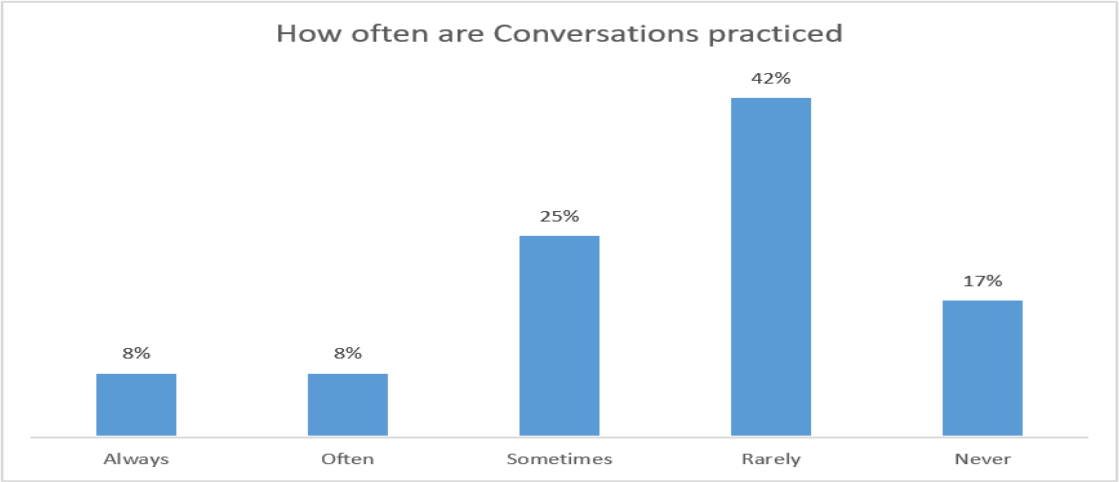

Figure 1

How Often are Conversations Practiced

Figure 1 shows the frequency that participants practiced Conversations in Japanese classes at CELE. 42% of the participants selected that Conversations were *rarely* practiced in the classroom, while 25% of the participants reported that Conversations were practiced *sometimes*. On the other hand, only 17% of the participants selected Conversations as *never* practiced. Participants chose that Conversations were *often* practiced with 8%. Finally, another 8% of the participants chose that Conversations were *always* practiced in the Japanese classes. It can be inferred that conversations are barely practiced in the

Japanese classroom as just some participants recall practicing with such activities. This could be a sign that Japanese students are lacking oral spontaneous practice.

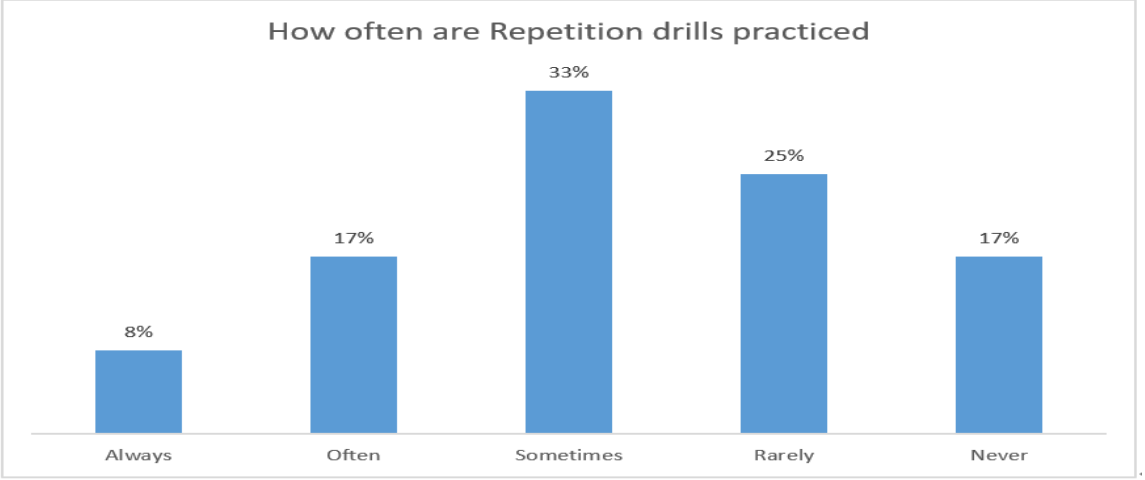

Figure 2

How Often are Repetition Drills Practiced

Figure 2, 33% of the participants selected Repetition drills as practiced *sometimes*, followed by 25% who chose Repetition drills that were *rarely* practiced in class. Then, 17% of the participants decided Repetition drills were *never* practiced while another 17% chose that Repetition drills were *often* practiced. Only 8% of the participants selected that Repetition drills were *always* practiced.

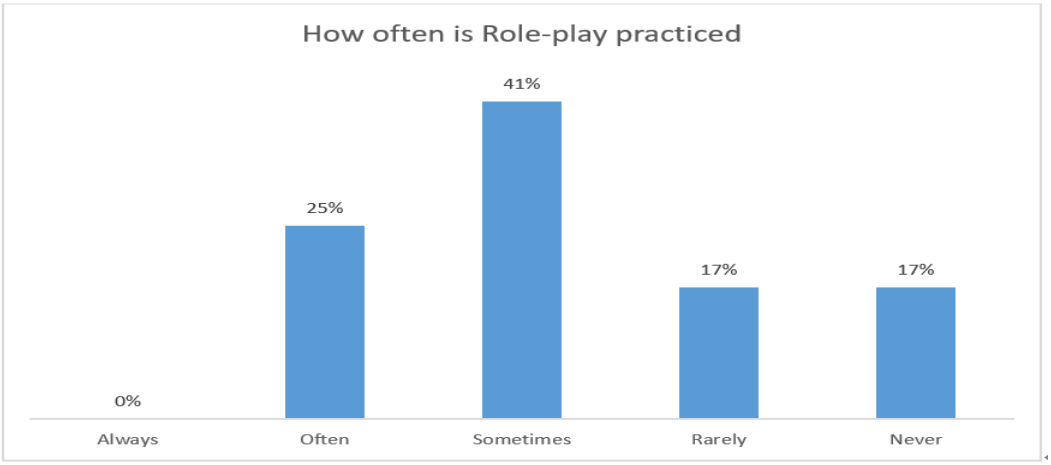

Figure 3

How Often is Role-play Practiced

Figure 3, 41% of the participants selected that Role-play was practiced *sometimes* while 25% of the participants chose Role-play as an activity that was *often* practiced. On the other hand, 17% of the participants chose that Role-play was *never* practiced and another 17% selected that Role-play was *rarely* practiced in class. Finally, none of the participants chose that Role-play was *always* practiced.

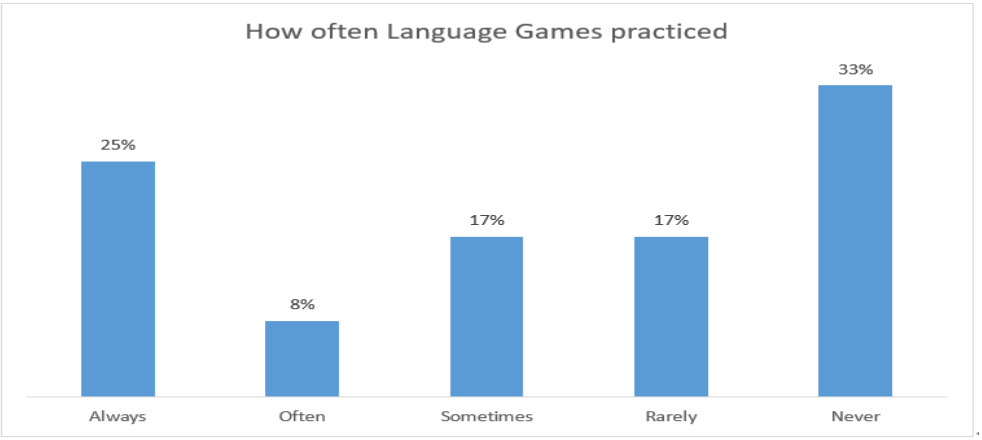

Figure 4

How Often are Language Games Practiced

Figure 4, 33% of the participants selected that Language Games were *never* practiced, followed by 25% of the participants who chose Language Games were *always* practiced. 17% of the participants selected that Language Games were *sometimes* practiced while another 17% chose that Language Games were *rarely* practiced. Finally, only 8% of the participants chose Language Games that were *often* practiced in class.

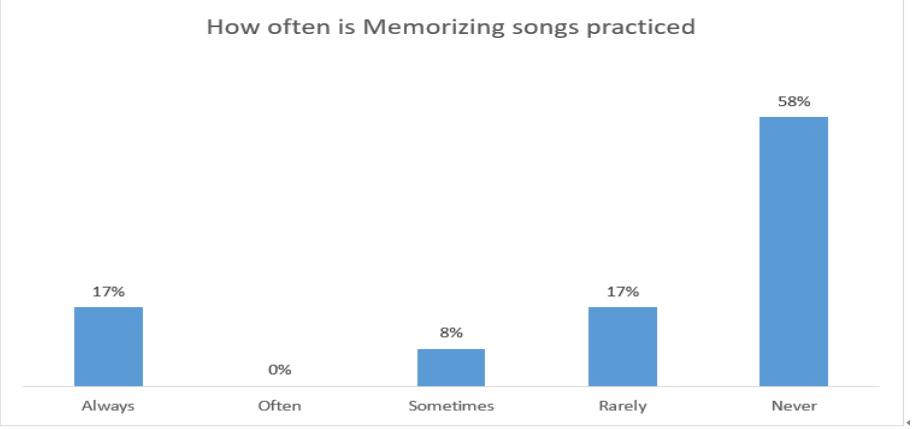

Figure 5

How Often is Memorizing Songs Practiced

Figure 5, 58% of the participants chose that Memorizing songs was *never* practiced, while 17% of the participants selected that Memorizing songs was *rarely* practiced. Another 17% of the participants selected that Memorizing songs was *always* practiced while only 8% of the participants selected that Memorizing songs was *sometimes* practiced. None of the participants chose that Memorizing songs was *often* practiced in class.

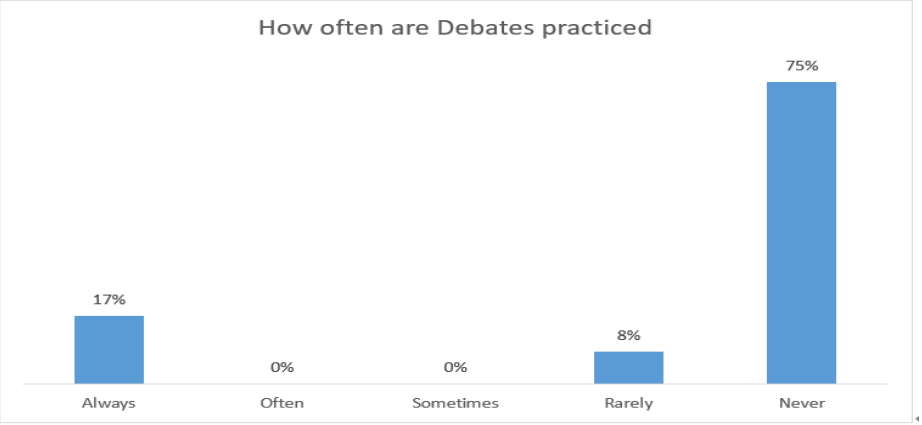

Figure 6

How Often are Debates Practiced

Figure 6, 75% of the participants selected that Debates were *never* practiced, in contrast, 17% of the participants chose that Debates were *always* practiced. 8% of the participants chose that Debates were *rarely* practiced. Finally, none of the participants chose that Debates were *sometimes* practiced or *often* practiced.

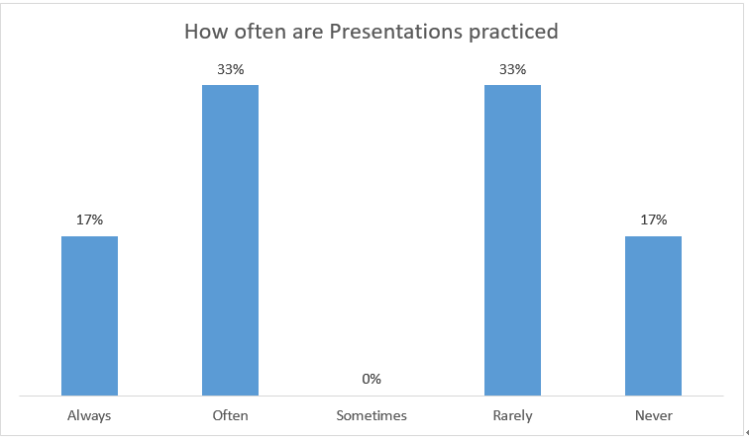

Figure 7

How Often are Presentations Practiced

Figure 7, 33% of the participants selected that Presentations were *rarely* practiced, contrasting with another 33% of the participants who selected that Presentations were *often* practiced in class. Likewise, 17% of the participants selected that Presentations were *never* practiced just like another 17% of the participants who chose that Presentations were *always* practiced. Finally, none of the participants selected that Presentations were practiced *sometimes* in class.

The following 12 figures, eleven to twenty-two, will show the participants' perceptions about the importance of the speaking activities by presenting each speaking activity individually.

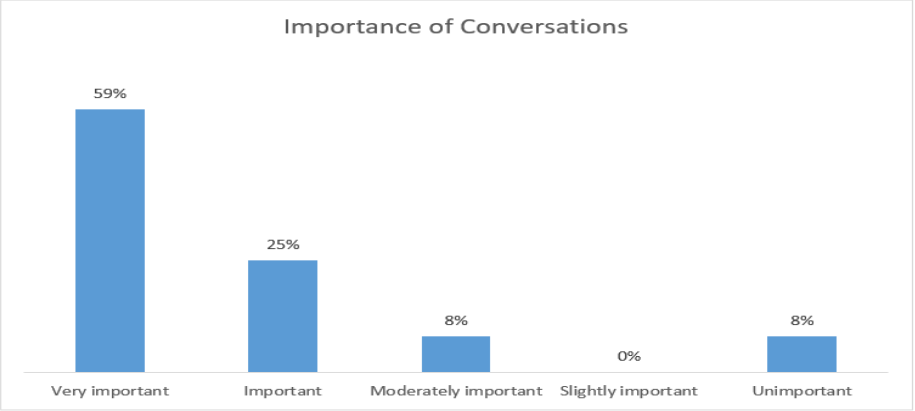

Figure 8

Importance of Conversations

Figure 8, 59% of the participants selected that Conversations were *very important*. Following 25% who chose that Conversations were *important*. Similarly, 8% of the participants marked Conversations as moderately important and *unimportant*. None of the participants selected the practice of Conversations as *slightly important* in Japanese classes.

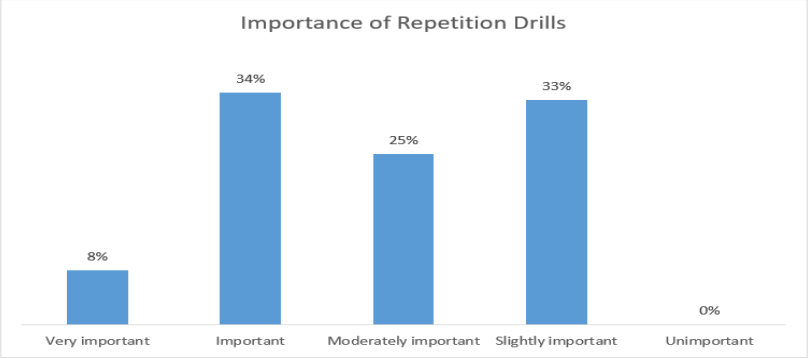

Figure 9

Importance of Repetition Drills

Figure 9, 34% of the participants selected that Repetition Drills are *important*. Then, 33% selected that Repetition Drills are *slightly important*. It was followed by 25% who chose that Repetition Drills are *moderately important* and only 8% of the participants selected that Repetition Drills are *very important*. Finally, none of the participants chose Repetition Drills as *unimportant*.

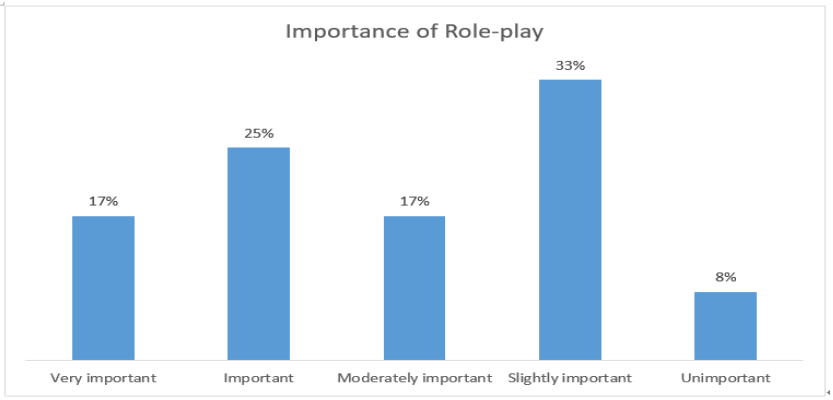

Figure 10

Importance of Role-play

Figure 10, 33% of the participants chose that the practice of Role-play is *slightly important*, followed by 25% of the participants who chose that Role-play is *important*. Then, 17% of the participants selected that Role-play was *moderately important,* and another 17% of the participants selected that Role-

play is *very important*. Only 8% of the participants chose that Role-play is *unimportant* at Japanese classes.

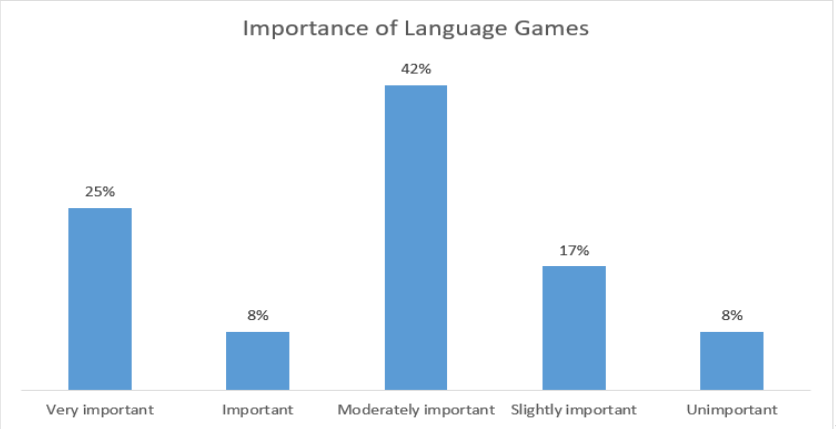

Figure 11

Importance of Language Games

Figure 11, 42% of the participants selected that practicing with Language Games was *moderately important*, followed by 25% of the participants who selected it *very important* and 17% chose the practice of Language Games as *slightly important*. Finally, only 8% of the participants selected the practice of Language Games as *important* and another 8% chose the practice of Language Games as *unimportant*.

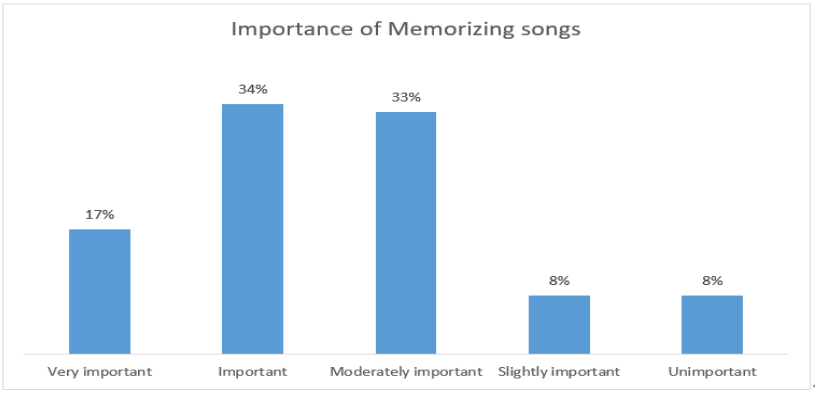

Figure 12

Importance of Memorizing Songs

Figure 12, 34% participants chose that Memorizing songs is *important* and 33% chose that Memorizing songs is *moderately important*. 17% of the participants selected that Memorizing songs is *very important.* On the other hand, 8% of the participants selected that Memorizing songs is *unimportant* while a similar 8% selected that Memorizing songs is *slightly important.*

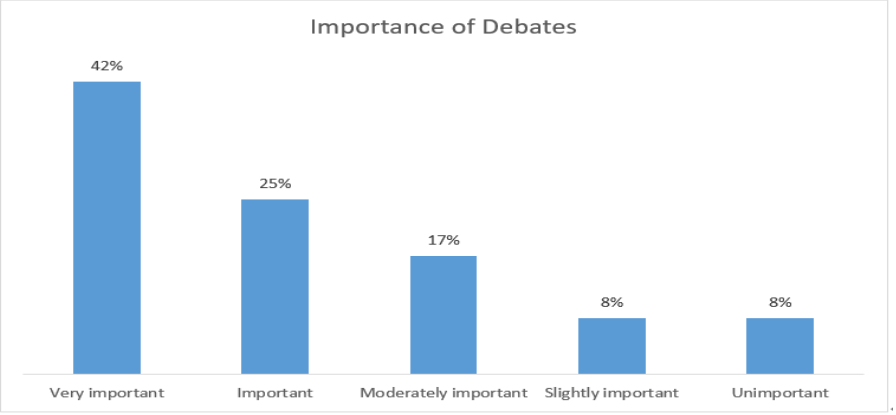

Figure 13

Importance of Debates

Figure 13, 42% of the participants chose that the practice of Debates is *very important*, followed by 25% of the participants who selected that the practice of Debates is *important*. Then, 17% of the participants selected that the practice of Debates is *moderately important*, and only 8% of the participants selected that the practice of Debates is *slightly important*. Just 8% of the participants chose the practice of Debates as *unimportant.*

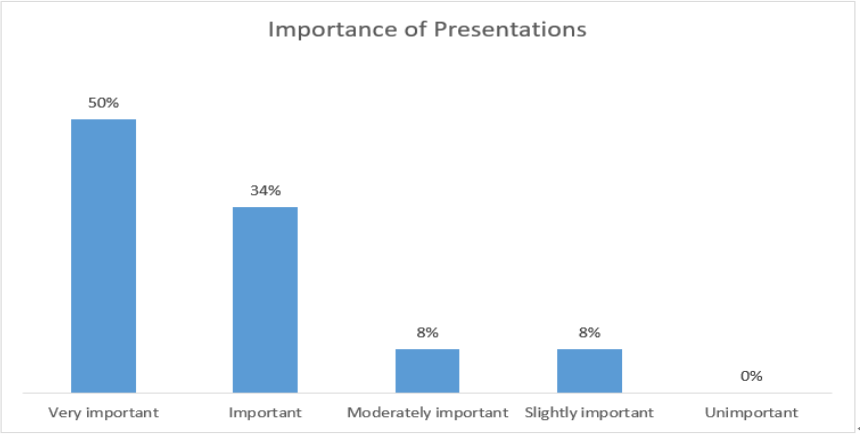

Figure 14

Importance of Presentations

Figure 14, 50% of the participants chose that the practice of Presentations is *very important*, followed by 34% of the participants who chose that the practice of Presentations is *important*. Next, 8% of the participants selected that the practice of Presentations is *slightly important* and another 8% of the participants selected that the practice of Presentations is *moderately important*. Finally, none of the participants chose the practice of Presentations as *unimportant.*

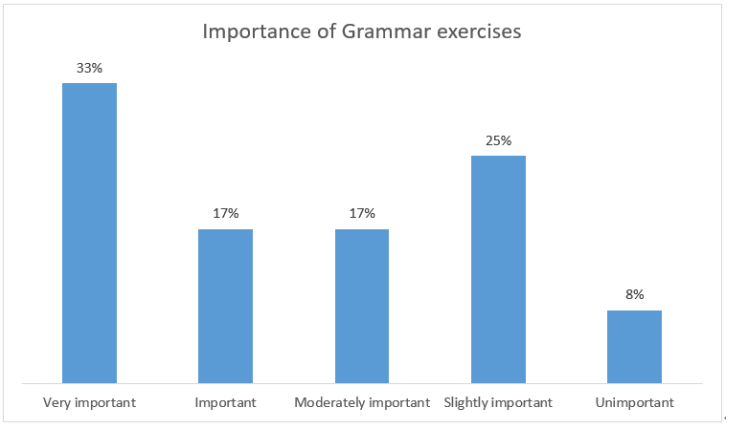

Figure 15

Importance of Grammar Exercises

Figure 15, 33% of the participants chose the practice of Grammar exercises as *very important* in contrast with 25% of the participants who selected the practice of Grammar exercises as *slightly important*. 17% of the participants chose the practice of Grammar exercises as *moderately important* similarly to another 17% of the participants who selected the practice of Grammar exercises as *important*. Only 8% of the participants chose the practice of Grammar exercises as *unimportant*.

In the last five figures, twenty-three to twenty-seven, participants could select more than one option in these questions. This is the reason for the different percentages as they represent the most higher ranked activities by the participants.

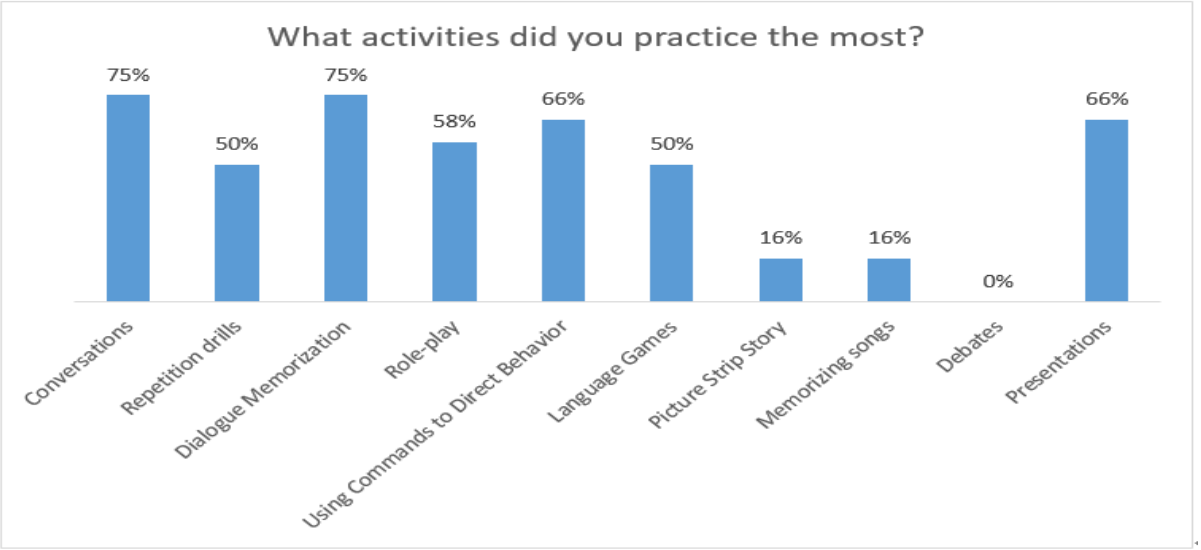

Figure 16

Activities That Were Practiced the Most.

Figure 16, both *Conversations* and *Dialogue Memorization* were the most practiced with 75%. Then, *Presentations* and *Using Commands to Direct Behavior* come as the second most practiced activities with 66%. *Role-plays* are the third most practiced activity with 58%. While, both *Language*

Games and *Repetition Drills* appear in the fourth position with 50%. Then, participants selected in fifth place *Memorizing songs* and *Picture Strip Story* with 16%. Finally, *Debates* was not selected by any of the participants.

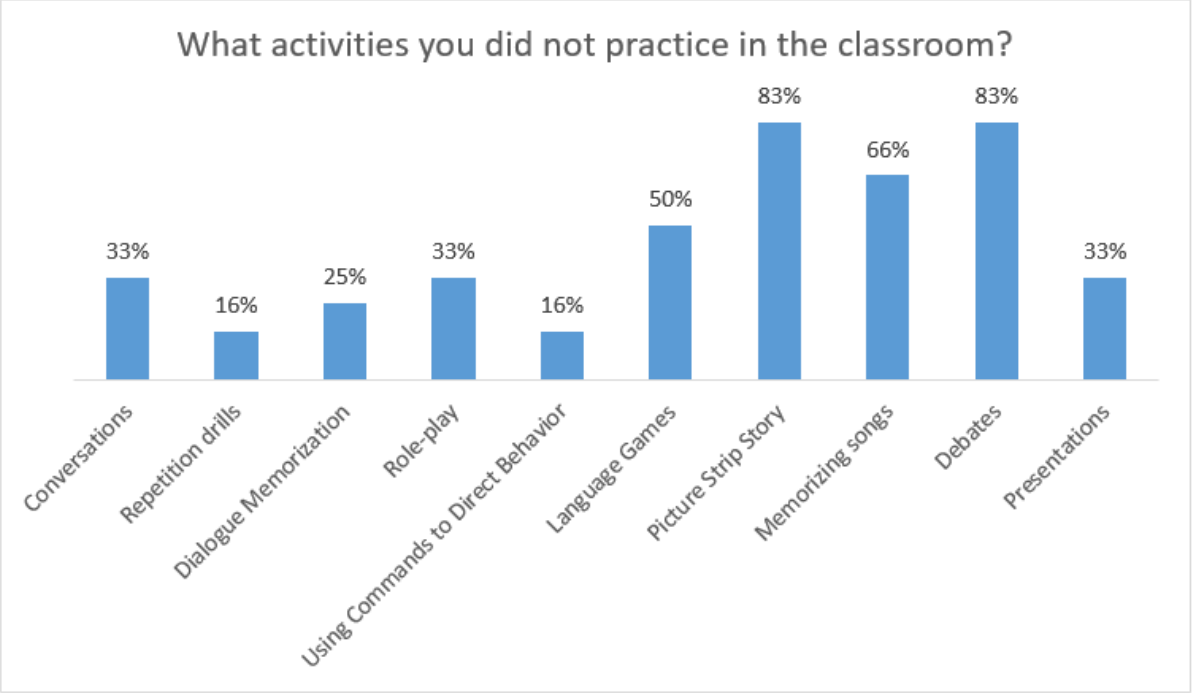

Figure 17

Activities That Were Not Practiced in the Classroom

Figure 17, both *Debates* and *Picture Strip Story* were chosen as the least practiced activities with 83%. Then, *memorizing songs* came as the second least practiced activity with 66%. *Language Games* occupies the third place as the least practiced activity with 50%. Next, *Presentations, Role-play* and *Conversations* are the fourth least practiced activities with 33%. *Dialogue memorization* is placed as the fifth least practiced with 25%. Finally, *Using Commands to Direct Behavior* and *Repetition Drills* were selected as the sixth activity least practiced with 16%.

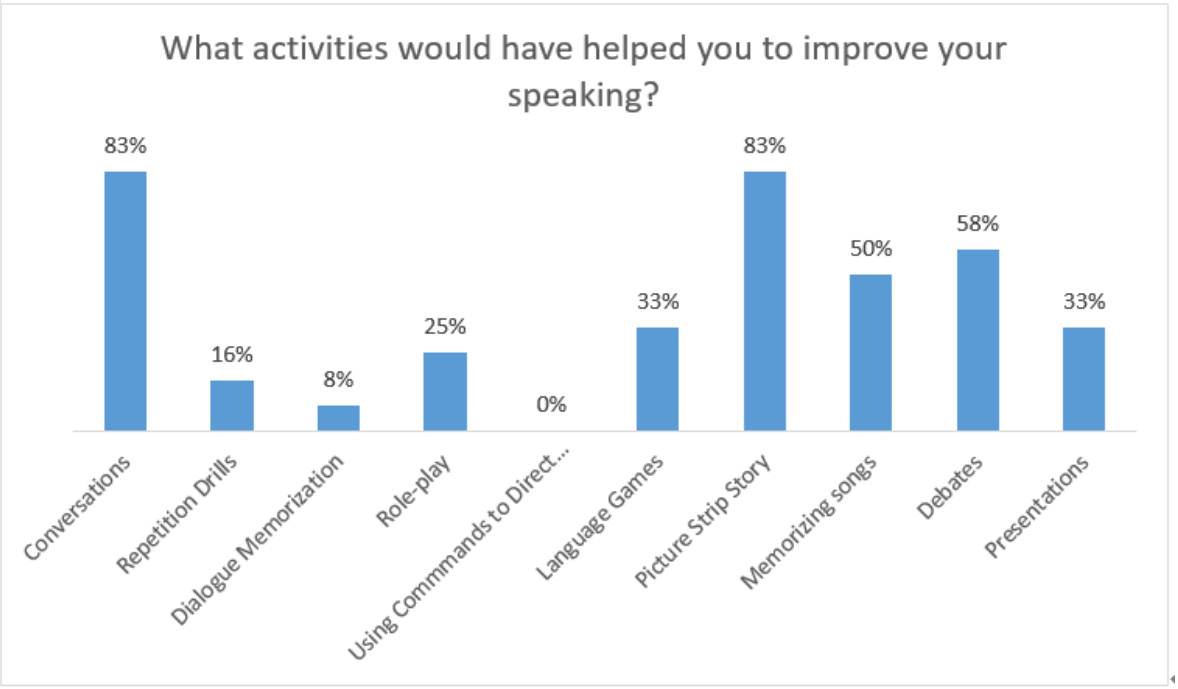

Figure 18

Activities That Would Have Helped to Improve Participants' Speaking

Figure 18, both *Picture Strip Story* and *Conversations* were selected as the activities that would have helped participants with 83%. Then, *Debates* were second as an activity that would have helped with 58%. Next, *Memorizing songs* occupies third place with 50%. Hereunder, *Presentations* and *Language Games* are placed as fourth with 33%. *Role-play* was selected as the fifth activity that would have helped with 25%. Participants placed *Repetition Drills* as the sixth activity with 16%. Finally, only 8% of the

participants selected *Dialogue Memorization* as the activity that would have helped them improve their speaking. *Using Commands to Direct Behavior* was not selected by any of the participants.

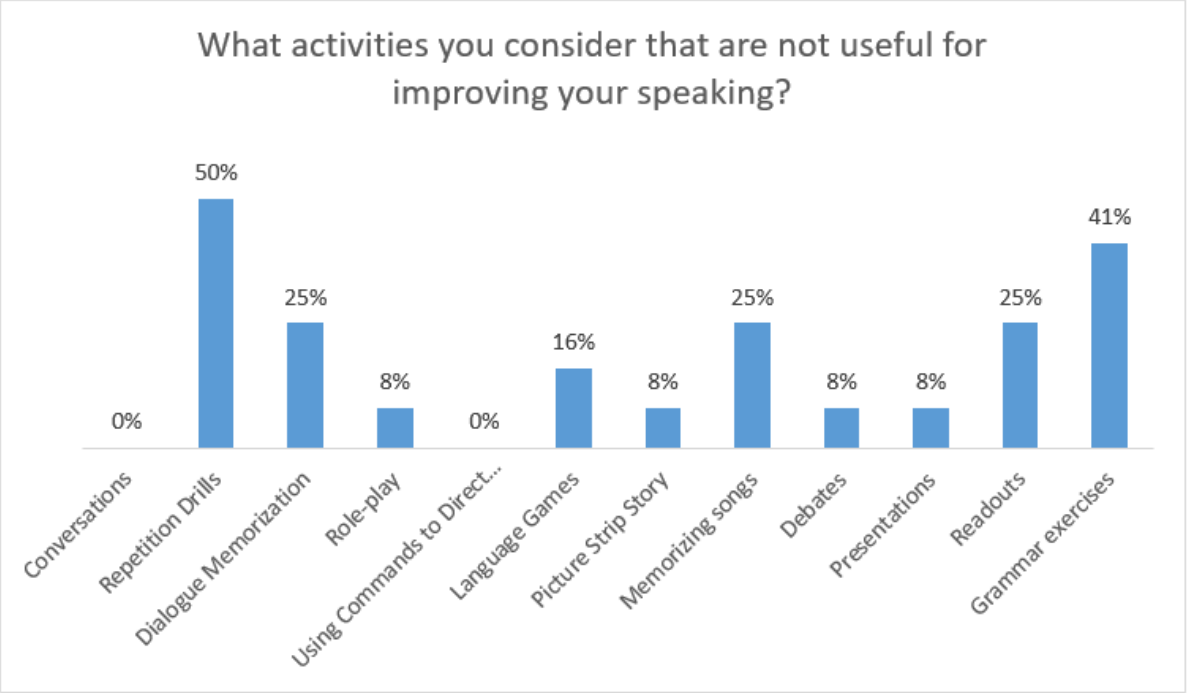

Figure 19

Activities That Participants Do Not Consider Useful to Improve Their Speaking

Figure 19, *Repetition Drills* occupy the first place as the least useful activity with 50%. *Grammar exercises* were placed as the second least useful with 41%. Then, participants selected *Memorizing songs* and *Dialogue Memorization* as the third least useful with 25%. Next, *Language Games* appear in the fourth position with 16%. *Presentations, Debates, Picture Strip Story* and *Role-play* were positioned as the fifth least useful activities with 8%. Finally, *Using Commands to Direct Behavior* and *Conversations* were not chosen by any of the participants.

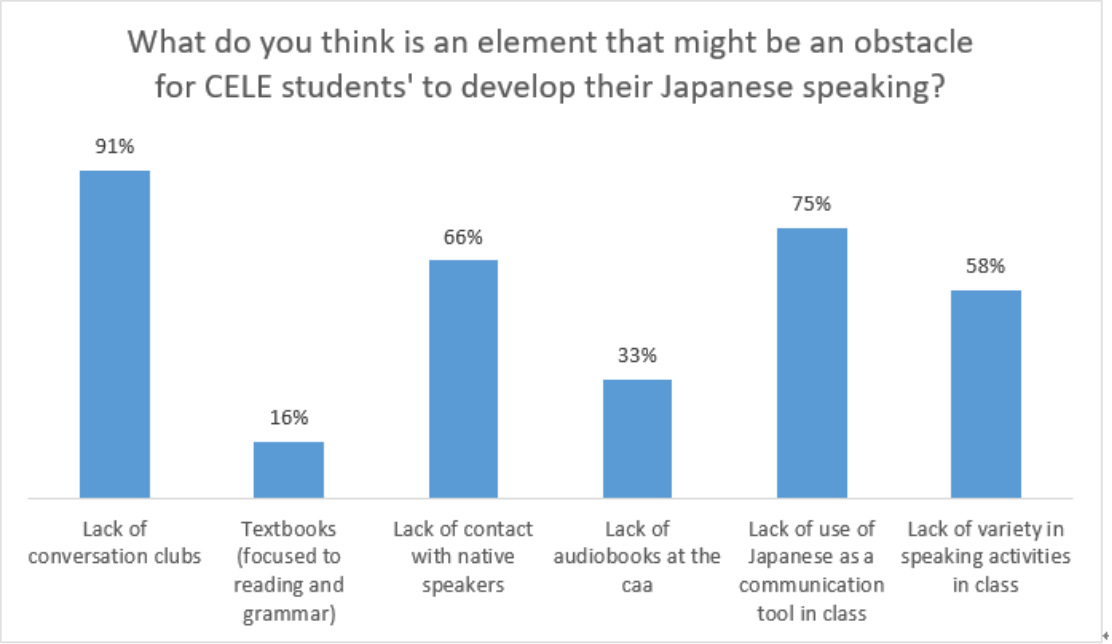

Figure 20

Elements That Might Be an Obstacle to Develop Participants' Japanese Speaking

Figure 20, *Lack of conversations clubs* is positioned as the first obstacle for improving speaking with 91%. At the same time, *Lack of use of Japanese as a communication tool in class* is another obstacle in second place with 75%. Participants placed *Lack of contact with native speakers* in third place with 66%. Then, *Lack of variety in speaking activities in class* is the fourth activity selected with 58%. *Lack of audiobooks at the CAA occupies* the fifth position with 33%. Finally, 16% of the participants chose *Textbooks* as an obstacle for developing their speaking skills.

4.2 Qualitative Results

In this section the qualitative results will be described. As mentioned before, the first section will present the results from the last part of the questionnaire that consisted of three open-ended questions. These three open-ended questions were added to complement participants' previous answers in the questionnaire. This is the reason for including these results in the qualitative section. The second section will present the results from the interviews.

4.2.1 Survey's Open-ended Questions

The three open-ended questions in the questionnaire inquired about participants' perception about 1) factors that might be obstacles in their learning process, 2) how speaking is promoted in the Japanese classes, and 3) what activities they may suggest promoting speaking in their Japanese classes. The replies that presented the most common opinions among the participants are summarized for better visualization. This will help triangulate the information with the responses from participants during the interviews.

The first open-ended question attempted to expand on those elements that might be an obstacle to developing participants' speaking and they had to explain their choice. Some of the participants' most common answers are summed up with the following answers:

> *"[...] there is a lack of exercises to speak in real situations and not just prefabricated dialogues." (Andres)*
>
> *"Classes are focused on grammar and readings and the books and materials are old." (Amanda)*
>
> *"Throughout the Japanese classes there was a lack of practice in the oral communication part." (Janet).*

Andres perceives that an obstacle to improving his speaking in Japanese class is the absence of exercises to force him to speak as it would be expected in real-life situations. The use of made-up

dialogues may not be very motivating as they do not resemble spontaneous conversation. Meanwhile, Amanda and Janet mention the lack of speaking since classes are heavily focused on grammar and reading than speaking practice plus the fact that books and materials are outdated. This is also a factor that may reduce their interest and learning since outdated material may not reflect current real-life topics or trends.

The second open-ended question focuses on participants' opinion about how they think speaking is promoted in the Japanese classes at CELE:

"It is promoted through structured conversations or presentations, but not frequently." (Frida)

"In my opinion, I think that [speaking] is promoted only with the oral exercises provided by the textbook." (Isabela)

Frida answers that speaking is promoted through structured conversations and presentations but not frequently. While Isabela mentions that speaking is not promoted really but simply by the speaking exercises from the textbook. Both participants express that speaking practice is overly structured and perhaps unauthentic because they may not be able to feel free when speaking plus the fact that such practice is not so common to take place in class.

The third open-ended question is about the activities that the participants suggest developing the speaking skill in the classroom at Japanese classes:

"Obligatory use of Japanese in the classroom, debates, role-plays and authentic readings in the context of Japanese life." (Alan)

"Conversation clubs with native speakers, oral presentations every week about a topic the students' like or related to something they like, debates." (Janet)

Both Alan and Janet suggest the inclusion of speaking activities that may seem more dynamic and spontaneous in terms of using the Japanese language. For example, they mention debates, role-plays, conversation clubs, oral presentations and authentic readings to be contextualized in Japanese scenarios. All the above are activities that can help students develop their speaking ability in Japanese.

Generally speaking, these quantitative results reveal those classroom activities commonly used by Japanese teachers to assess students' speaking skills. These activities seem to be part of formative assessment since dialogue memorization, for example, is frequently implemented in the classroom but not in formal oral exams. A variety of activities are used as ongoing strategies to observe and support students' oral language development rather than for assigning a grade. This suggests that Japanese teachers may prioritize formative assessment and some of the speaking tasks they implement are to monitor students' performance in spoken language in a more continuous and contextualized manner.

4.2.2 Interviews

In this section, the results from the interviews will be presented. The objective was to obtain participants' opinions and suggestions to triangulate the results previously collected in the questionnaire. 9 participants willingly accepted to volunteer. Interviews were conducted through Zoom and WhatsApp video calls. Interviews were scheduled according to participants' availability. They provided their consent to be recorded. Their names were replaced to keep their anonymity. The following data helps triangulate the information obtained in the quantitative results where activities used to formatively assess speaking had been already mentioned.

After analyzing the interviews' data, it was noticed that there was a match between the participants' responses from the questionnaire with the interviews. However, during the interview' data analysis, salient elements emerged regarding types of knowledge participants reported as necessary for their speaking activities in the Japanese classroom. Therefore, it was decided to use Bachman and

Palmer's framework (1996) to categorize and identify these types of knowledge and answer the research questions (RQ) of this study.

The results will be presented in terms of the research questions of this study. The first RQ is responded with the first major category identified: Organizational knowledge with the subcategory of grammatical knowledge, and the second and third RQ will be responded with the second major category that emerged during analysis: Pragmatic knowledge with the subcategories of sociolinguistic knowledge and functional knowledge.

The next diagram (Diagram 2), based on Bachman and Palmer's (1996) framework, illustrates the category and subcategories discussed in the following two sections (4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2). The items highlighted in blue represent the types of speaking activities students reported are assessed in their Japanese classes. The green highlights show the activities students would like to be assessed in class.

These activities are explained in more detail throughout the coming sections.

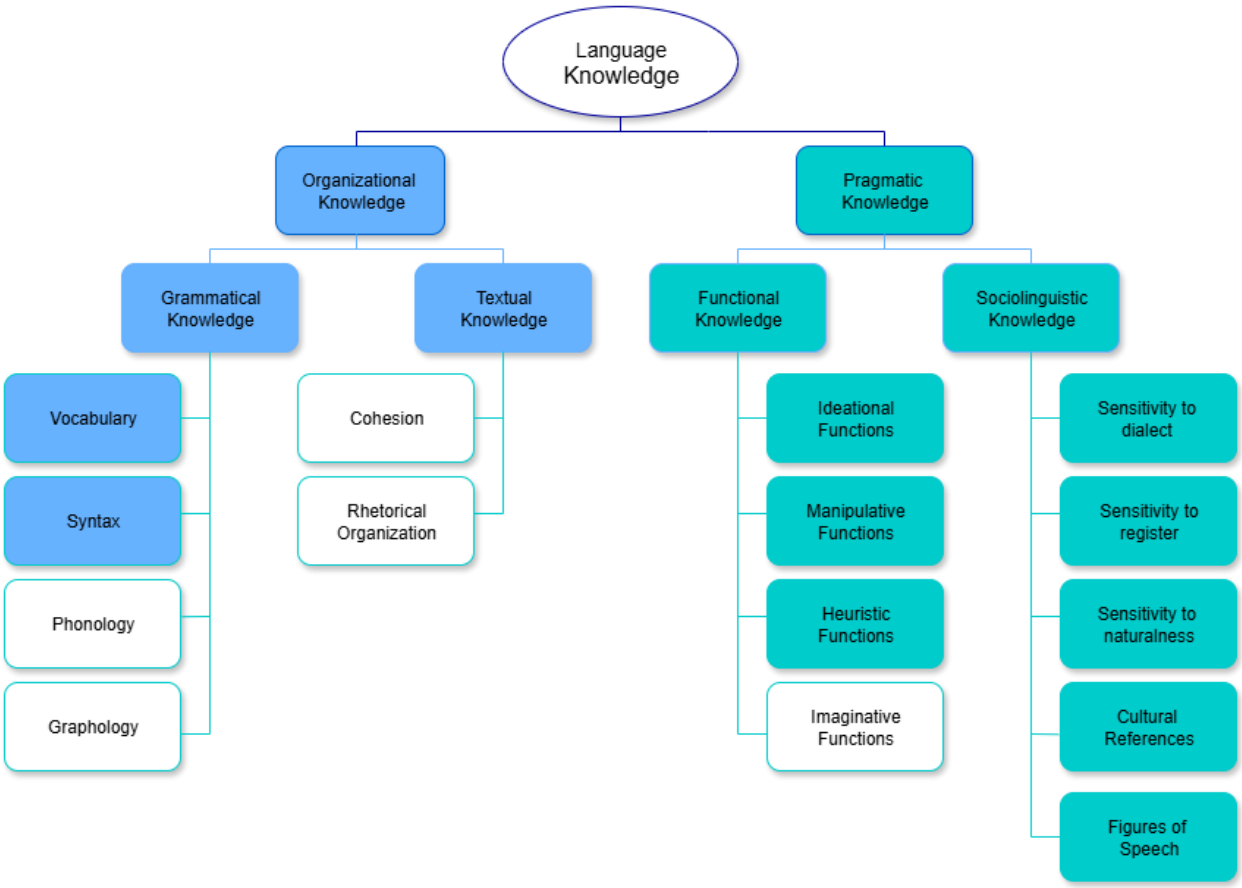

Diagram 2

Bachman & Palmer's Language knowledge framework (1996)

4.2.2.1 How Speaking is Assessed in the Japanese Classroom at CELE.

In this section, the first major category and subcategories that emerged during analysis are described. The first major category is *organizational knowledge* which includes two subcategories: *grammatical knowledge* and *Textual knowledge* in relation to those speaking activities assessed in the Japanese classroom. The *organizational knowledge* category refers to the knowledge one has about the formal structure of a language to produce grammatically correct sentences in writing or in speech. However, during analysis just the *grammatical knowledge* subcategory emerged as the most salient since

it involves the understanding of morphology and syntax, this means, how words are formed and how sentences are correctly structured.

The first theme that emerged was organizational knowledge which focuses on formal structure to produce or assimilate sentences grammatically accepted to construct oral and written texts through these sentences. Grammatical knowledge (vocabulary, graphology, syntax and phonology) is then practiced and assessed through writing, reading, presentations, and grammar exercises involving the use of this organizational knowledge. For example, participants mentioned that regular activities in the Japanese classroom had to do with the use of the textbook, grammar exercises, repetition drills, reading, reading out loud, presentations, descriptions, roleplay, conversations, and writing. These activities emphasize the mastery of grammar points, the structuring of coherent content, and the application of formal language, fostering a comprehensive approach to language use.

The following quotes are examples of this type of knowledge within those activities:

> *"[...] we only had Minna no Nihongo and the reading book, right? [...] Hmm… I think that didn't help us much—or well, I mean the methodology, since we only focused on the book, the audio materials, and the readings, and the book was more grammar-focused. [...] we read the exercises or the answers, [...] there was another teacher who gave us little stories, and we would read them out loud." (Amanda)*

> *"Usually, one is always working with the book [...] [the class] was more about… vocabulary [...] I liked it, but was about… hmm… structures… and kanjis and remembering this verb and stuff like that" (Padme)*

> "C*ommunication doesn't really take place, it's more reading, but not speaking. [...] [we had activities] such as… I mean repeating phrases and… like patterns of… of sentences, right? but,*

freely like that… no. [..] It was just about going in and saying, "Okay, open your book to page [whatever]." (Andres)

Amanda explains that there were only few materials available for language practice, being the Japanese textbook the primary resource. She notes that the methodology -a stronger focus on grammar- heavily emphasized textbook exercises, audio materials, and readings. Similarly, Padme recalls that classes revolved around the textbook, structured exercises, vocabulary drills, and memorization. Although she enjoyed studying grammar structures, kanji, and verbs, she points out that speaking was rarely practiced, as the lessons were more centered on writing and vocabulary acquisition. Andres points out that Japanese classroom activities focused on reading and repeating phrases and sentences rather than allowing him to freely create his own speech. Classes were about working on the textbook mostly.

It can be assumed through participants' responses that grammatical knowledge was the prioritized area in Japanese classes rather than the other skills. Participants mention the mere focus on the textbook and express their wish to have more speaking activities. A possible addition to these structured grammar activities could be implementing alternative exercises such as role-plays, presentations, and dialogues. These activities may incorporate formal structures and grammatically correct sentences while promoting oral interaction, enabling students to practice grammar in a more engaging and communicative way.

4.2.2.2 Activities Not Used to Assess Speaking in the Japanese Classroom at CELE and The Activities Required to Improve Speaking in Japanese.

In this section, the second major category and subcategories that emerged during analysis are described (see diagram 2 for visual reference). The second major category is *pragmatic knowledge* which includes two subcategories: *sociolinguistic knowledge* and *functional knowledge* in relation to those speaking activities assessed in the Japanese classroom. The *pragmatic knowledge* category refers to the knowledge one holds to interpret discourse and understand the speaker's intentions within a communicative context. The *sociolinguistic knowledge* subcategory refers to the use and interpretation of

language appropriately in specific social and cultural contexts. And the *functional knowledge* subcategory refers to the interpretation of sentences, texts, and speakers' intentions based on prior context.

It was decided to cluster research questions 2 and 3 because the pragmatic knowledge category, including subcategories (sociolinguistic and functional), helps to respond to both RQ's in terms of the speaking activities (and knowledge) not assessed and the counterpart which is those speaking activities (and knowledge) needed to be assessed in the Japanese classroom at CELE.

The first subcategory**,** Sociolinguistic knowledge, enables the speaker to construct and interpret language in context and use figures of speech, expressions, cultural references, range of voice and dialects (e.g. conversations, debates, role-play, videos/films and workshops). Therefore, Conversations with classmates, for example, allow students to use expressions and cultural references under a more casual context. In contrast, having debates requires more formal communication resources. Moreover, the role-play is a flexible activity to use figures of speech according to the context and practice more dynamic ranges of voice. The use of authentic materials such as videos/films would be a simple way to introduce cultural references and expressions in class. Workshops, for instance, could allow casual interactions among students to express themselves more freely inside the classroom. According to the gathered data, the aforementioned speaking activities are reported by participants as those tasks they would have liked their Japanese classes had included to learn this sociolinguistic knowledge. The following instances are shown in the next quotes.

> *"[...] to teach [the students] a lot of vocabulary suitable to the situation, like, to add something extra inside the classroom or simply… uh, to just tell students in what situations vocabulary is applied. And to be very careful with formality, of course." (Fernando)*

> "*A good activity to encourage [speaking] would be, well, this kind of workshops… something that generates conversation, right? Like, maybe not so formal, but focusing a little more on the informal side because... well, you all know that Japanese changes a lot, and then there's the tone,*

the speed, all that. [...] this kind of talk cycle, a conversation cycle. I would suggest giving an actual use [to the language] like… expressions and all that stuff… I would have liked to develop the communication part because when it comes to a real conversation, I mean, people don't speak like in a book" (Diego)

"Maybe movies to get us immersed in the culture and also listening, maybe... or easy tv programs, like for kids" (Padme)

Fernando and Diego report the need to use vocabulary for particular contexts as necessary. This is related to sociolinguistic knowledge especially when Fernando mentions that it is important to develop speaking to use in real life contexts and the need for appropriate vocabulary for every social situation. Diego also agrees with Fernando about focusing on informal language and later on formal conversations. He emphasizes the dynamic nature of spoken discourse and that elements such as tone and speed vary significantly depending on the communicative intention and context. Diego would have liked enough practice to develop communication skills in his Japanese class. He highlighted the fact that in a real life conversation people do not express themselves as it is shown in a textbook. As he expresses his need for speaking practice by using language expressions in more informal settings.

For instance, to understand the meaning of the phrase "a piece of cake" when something is easy to do requires sociolinguistic knowledge to understand its figurative meaning. This is why Diego mentions that he would have liked to have workshops or conversation clubs to develop his social language skills. As for cultural notions, the need to develop Sociolinguistic knowledge is expressed in Padme's quote when she reports that she would have liked to watch kids' movies or series to be introduced to Japanese culture and have the opportunity to learn about certain language expressions as a way to understand cultural references in the target language.

As for the second subcategory, Functional knowledge, this helps the listener to decipher the connection between the discourse and the intention of the speaker to communicate. Functional knowledge

includes four language functions: ideational, manipulative, heuristic and imaginative. However, during analysis, just the first three language functions emerged: ideational, manipulative and heuristic.

Ideational functions are used to exchange information such as descriptions, explanations or categorizations and speaking activities such as role-plays, debates, language games, workshops, conversations, and presentations are good examples where this type of knowledge is required. For instance, in role-plays, students describe or categorize something for someone. During debates, students can counterargue to establish a standpoint or simply to agree or disagree about a topic. Some language games require students to describe images to their classmates, reinforcing their ability to explain concepts. Workshops and conversations can also serve as opportunities for discussing events and situations in the world. Presentations are another valuable activity, ideal for practicing descriptions, explanations, and categorizations of different subjects. These activities may help students enhance their language skills and socially learn how language works depending on the context.

In the following quotes, participants report their wish to have been able to express their ideas in a more expected way in regard to a given situation and the need for more speaking activities in their Japanese classroom to develop this type of ideational knowledge. The following extracts are illustrative of this:

> *“ I would have liked something like… like tell me what did you do? or tell me something, right? something that doesn’t come from a book [...] I want you to tell me something, anything you want or what you did yesterday, or… tell me what’s your favorite song, some band, I don’t know. Conversations that you can call normal among friends or anything, but in Japanese…” (Andrés)*

> *"[I would improve my Japanese] with role plays. Debates would have been cool. I’ll suggest more games like the caricatura game or 'basta,' but in Japanese." (Janet)*

Both Andrés and Janet report that expressing ideas in Japanese classes is relevant. For example, Andrés expresses his desire to talk about everyday topics, as he would have liked to practice casual conversation more freely. Andrés suggests Japanese classes to be less based on the textbook and more open to topics for informal conversations such as describing what students do on a regular day or exchanging personal information. On the other hand, Janet mentions that she would have liked to incorporate role-plays and debates in class, as well as games, like those they played as children, but adapted to Japanese. These activities are suitable suggestions to practice speaking in a more dynamic way but within the use of functional knowledge through the ideational function.

Manipulative functions are used to change individuals' surroundings, for example, to ask or command people to do things for the speaker such as giving instructions, receiving orders, suggestions or asking for things. Manipulative functions can be instrumental, regulatory and interpersonal. Nonetheless, the emerging function during the analysis was just the instrumental one. Instrumental functions prompt others to act on behalf of the speaker. This includes commands, suggestions, requests, and warnings.

Speaking activities that can help students exercise these functions could be role-plays, language games, conversations, workshops. During role-plays, students pretend to have real conversations to exchange information in everyday situations such as asking about prices or getting to know someone. Language games, conversations and workshops involve giving and receiving commands, providing instructions, and following orders which can resemble real life situations and make learning more interactive and engaging. These activities might help students to work with manipulative functions to change their current situation or surroundings. The following quotes exemplify this:

> *"[...] to share real-life contexts like tasks that actually someone does in daily life, maybe to go shopping or to get on the train or something like that. I think that would have helped a lot." (Amanda)*

> *"[...] events that are present in our daily lives, for example, to introduce someone, to go to a store, to ask about the cost of something, to ask about the menu in a restaurant, like… to ask for directions, streets… stuff like that, ordinary stuff" (Fernando)*

Both Amanda and Fernando agree that the introduction of daily life activities might have helped to improve their speaking in Japanese classes. Situations such as asking for information or requesting objects or products involve the use of instrumental functions. Amanda mentions that shopping at a store or getting train tickets requires exchanging information between the speaker and the receptor to accomplish a goal.

As for Fernando, he suggests daily life events and environments as topics to be used in a conversation at Japanese classes. Fernando and Amanda's perceptions may suggest that role-plays or simulations about real life scenarios will be highly motivating and appealing for students as it would be easier to remember language from the experience as they would also use manipulative functions at the same time.

Heuristic functions are for solving problems and involve the use of language for giving directions to someone, teaching or learning, and absorbing information. Some of the speaking activities that put such language functions into action may be conversations, language games, role-plays, debates, presentations, workshops. In these activities, the use of structured sentences helps students find the composition of a sentence inductively through repetition and word substitution.

Conversations involve the exchange of information and often require speaking to solve problems, whether in a company, on the street, or at school while working on a project. Language games encourage students to work in teams and solve problems as quickly as possible such as a word puzzle. The role-play, once again, is another option for its flexibility to establish situations within different contexts, such as giving or asking for directions. Debates, presentations and workshops involve teaching and learning about a topic which involves not only absorbing information but also solving an issue or simply considering a possible solution. The following segments exemplify this:

"[...] when a situation, related to the [foreign] language, shows up umm… students should know how to solve the problem [...] for example, suddenly they see a Japanese person is lost, they have the tools to tell him/her hey… are you alright? … Do you need something? Do you need help? that will be very useful" (Fernando)

"First of all, role plays, because there you're applying the language, supposedly in real contexts, right? Another thing is debates because you don't have time to think, and you must pay attention to understand what your partner said so you can respond. Maybe conversations like practicing a topic and... maybe presentations, but where the teacher would ask questions at the end so that... it's not just about saying what I memorized or what I know, but actually using the language" (Amanda)

Fernando expresses that it is important to develop speaking as this skill is needed for real life contexts. He even suggests problem-solving activities with daily life problems to use language intentionally. For example, when helping someone who may be lost in the city. While Amanda mentions that role-plays can be adapted to represent real-life situations, she also highlights the value of debates, where students must actively listen to receive information and respond appropriately. Additionally, she emphasizes conversations for practicing varied topics and presentations, noting that teachers should include questions at the end to ensure the exchange is genuine and spontaneous rather than purely memorized. Perhaps practicing more with these types of activities during the course could have helped her expand her functional knowledge. The above-mentioned speaking activities require the exercising of the functional knowledge- heuristic-.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative results were presented. Overall, the results

revealed that activities such as conversations, debates, and the use of roleplays are rarely practiced in the classroom which contrasts with students' views that these activities are essential for their Japanese learning. Participants express a strong preference for exercises to practice speaking in real-life situations, rather than concentrating solely on grammar and reading. This highlights the importance of integrating the different types of knowledge. Types of knowledge help speakers construct and interpret meanings within a given context. For example: to offer descriptions and explanations; suggestions and requests for creative and expressive uses of language, or for discovering or inquiring. Another result revealed other types of knowledge related to cultural references and dialects for understanding the nuances of a language. Similarly, grammatical knowledge for effective communication. In the next chapter, the summary of key findings will be presented as well as the limitations and directions for further research along with a final reflection.

Chapter V: Conclusions

This chapter will present the key findings including participants' opinions on the teaching methodology, their preferred classroom activities, and the specific skills they wish to focus on in their Japanese language classes. The chapter will also present insights into the students' feedback and its implications for teaching practices. Additionally, it will address the limitations encountered during the research, such as challenges in gathering information or contacting students. Finally, this chapter will provide directions for further research and a final reflection.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of this study highlight the speaking-related activities reported by students during interviews and surveys. These include activities that are employed by Japanese language instructors as a means of carrying formative assessment of speaking. Additionally, students identified those speaking

activities that were not implemented, as well as those they would have liked to experience in their Japanese language classes.

The first key finding is related to the lack of opportunities for spontaneous oral practice in Japanese classes. Although speaking activities are incorporated, the activities chosen by teachers do not fully align with students' desire to engage in tasks that could allow them to express their own ideas, thoughts, and opinions. The limited range of speaking activities that involve real-life situations, most of the activities include a great emphasis on grammar and reading. This may have to do with the teaching method used in the Japanese classroom that rely mostly on grammar which, in turn, impacts students' motivation to speak in Japanese as this explains why they express a desire for classes to incorporate more dynamic activities to practice their speaking. These speaking activities should include real-life scenarios that provide students with opportunities to share their opinions, making the learning experience more engaging and meaningful. Some suggested activities to promote speaking Japanese in the classroom may be the use of presentations, role-plays, and debates, which could give students an opportunity to express their opinions and practice more spontaneous, and less controlled speech.

The above connects with the second finding which is the application of types of knowledge within speaking activities. Types of knowledge had to do with specific language knowledge students need to successfully produce oral language in each context. For Japanese students, this specific language knowledge could help them develop the ability to perform language beyond those speaking activities focused on language structures to create or interpret grammatically accurate sentences as well as producing and understanding texts, categorized as *organizational knowledge* activities. Japanese students require speaking activities that demand they practice their *functional knowledge* to understand speakers' intentions and produce discourse to influence one's surroundings. Also, they need more speaking activities that involve *sociolinguistic knowledge* so they can interpret language in specific conversation contexts to speak freely about personally relevant topics.

Speaking is a productive skill that allows students to construct discourse and express themselves, however, it is often overlooked. Promoting speaking from the early stages can strengthen students' knowledge of their learning and boost their confidence, especially when interacting with native (and non-native speakers) of Japanese in real-life situations. The lack of spontaneous practice may hinder the development of students' speaking and communication skills in Japanese which prompts students to demand more interactive oral activities that include language functions.

The third key finding is related to the Japanese program's material, the textbook. The Japanese textbook is outdated and primarily focuses on business-related contexts rather than offering a variety of everyday situations. The textbook, ***Minna no Nihongo*****,** is based on the business textbook ***Shin Nihongo no Kiso***, which was originally designed for foreign people working in Japan. This emphasis contrasts with the type of Japanese that students want to learn—a more casual and natural way of communicating in general settings rather than strictly business environments. Therefore, a curriculum review at the CELE is recommended because analysing current students' needs could offer new insights on students' language requirements and consider a change in the textbook and materials since the current ones are insufficient and limit students' ability to develop practical communication skills.

5.2 Some reflections regarding key findings

As a final reflection on the findings, it is worth addressing the gap between the topics and vocabulary outlined in the program and those that students request by integrating practical, conversation-based activities into the curriculum could substantially enhance students' language proficiency. The absence of authentic speaking opportunities leaves many students feeling that, despite their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, they are not adequately equipped for real-world communication outside the classroom. This concern has also to do with students questioning the usefulness of the speaking activities practiced in class in terms of their effectiveness in developing practical communication skills. This

suggests a potential gap between classroom activities and students' expectations or real-life language needs, indicating that further investigation and curriculum adjustments may be necessary.

A textbook revision is advisable to reconsider the purpose of the Japanese class and the interests and goals of students. The fact that the Japanese classes are mostly based on a textbook, a business textbook could explain this mismatch since the communicative goal of the students to learn the language may not be aligned with business interests, but to be able to make friends and communicate in a normal way with native speakers. Also, the low offer of additional activities that encourage students to practice the language outside the classroom such as conversational workshops is not a regular practice in the Japanese language department. A space where students could freely practice the language would promote oral practice and this would also mean an opportunity to teach them in terms of the types of knowledge they probably require. Applying this language knowledge in the activities would offer students the chance to express themselves with fluency when talking about everyday activities and common topics such as routines and opinions, reducing the learning gap mentioned before.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

A key limitation of this study was the small sample size. It was essential that participants had taken the Japanese course at CELE. Therefore, the eligibility criterion restricted participation to only those BUAP students who had taken Japanese courses at CELE. This limited the pool of potential participants and somewhat affected having a wider range of students' opinions. The number of participants was also due to the low demand for Japanese language courses within the Faculty of Languages. Moreover, participation in the questionnaire and interviews was voluntary, and the respondents who agreed to be interviewed reduced even more the sample.

Another limitation was the number of interviews. The pandemic limited face to face contact with participants, which is why interviews had to be conducted via Zoom. This virtual format may have

influenced students' responses, potentially affected their confidence and altered the interaction dynamics with the interviewer. While face-to-face interviews might have made students feel more at ease and fostered a more natural, conversational tone, and more elaborate responses, the virtual setting perhaps not just limited access to verbal responses but also to non-verbal cues, such as body language and gestures, to fully understand the context of overall participants' responses.

In addition, another limitation of this study was focusing just on speaking. Focusing solely on speaking activities without addressing the other language skills (listening, writing, reading) may have provided a limited perspective on students' overall language development. This limited perspective did not allow participants to offer insights regarding their views about how their language development was assessed. This could have been particularly important because the four skills are often interconnected when communicating. For instance, speaking and listening frequently occur together in conversations, making it difficult to isolate one skill from the other.

A very important limitation of this study was that it did not explore Japanese teachers' perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding their methodologies, views on developing speaking skills, and insights into which language skills are most beneficial for Japanese students. Classroom observation was not feasible during the pandemic. Consequently, this research's findings rely solely on students' opinions, which may not provide a complete picture of classroom practices or teaching approaches in the Japanese classroom.

5.4 Directions for Further Research

For a study in the future, a larger number of participants might be necessary because a larger sample would potentially contribute with diverse opinions and varied suggestions for additional activities to enrich the research findings. This adjustment could provide this study with a more comprehensive view

of the challenges and possible opportunities in the Japanese language classroom for teaching and learning speaking skills.

Since the pandemic is no longer an obstacle, interviews could be conducted face-to-face, allowing participants, without the limitations imposed by a virtual mode, to express their opinions about their classes in more detail and perhaps with greater confidence. Additionally, in-person interviews may provide a more comprehensive data-gathering experience by capturing non-verbal cues and other contextual details besides the chance to reformulate questions or ask for more elaborate responses.

Future research could explore a broader range of speaking techniques and activities used in language classes at CELE, particularly those that integrate other language skills and functions. Since language skills are interconnected and complement each other, it would be valuable to examine how activities such as listening exercises can enhance speaking abilities by improving intonation and pronunciation through imitation.

If conducted under different circumstances, such as onsite research, classroom observations could be carried out, providing a source of data that would help to reach a more ample understanding of the results. This approach may offer valuable insights into how teachers practice speaking and how they assess it in the Japanese classroom at CELE. This would allow for a broader perspective beyond students' opinions, helping to verify whether the collected data aligns with the actual classroom activities and their implementation.

Additionally, a more tailored observational tool could be designed and in combination with teachers' interviews this might offer more detailed information about classroom activities to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' methodologies, approaches, and objectives set by the program. This might also reveal what language skills are prioritized in the language classroom and the extent to which they align with the program's main goals.

5.5 Reflection

Conducting this research was a long and challenging journey, especially given the constraints imposed by the pandemic, which prevented face-to-face interactions and onsite classroom observations. Initially, I feared these limitations would make the project even more difficult, or that I would have to settle for a purely theoretical study. Finding a solid foundation to begin with was particularly daunting, as I aimed to explore learning aspects about Japanese that could genuinely improve the Japanese courses at CELE.

As a student who struggled with speaking Japanese when interacting with native speakers during an exchange program in Japan, I knew this was probably the same challenge my classmates experienced. In my Japanese classes, striking out a balance between speaking activities with practical, real-world applications felt like a significant hurdle, especially given the limited opportunities to engage with the language outside the CELE classroom. Therefore, I wanted to analyze and explore which activities my classmates would find genuinely helpful, going beyond the notion of simply “jumping into the real world” unprepared.

To my surprise, while doing this research, I discovered studies that highlighted a disparity between theory and practice in language instruction. Although speaking is theoretically emphasized, its actual implementation in the Japanese classroom often lacks genuine communicative activities. Instead, students are exposed to repetitive drills and textbook-based exercises that fail to provide them with the necessary context, clarity, and depth for real-world comprehension. Also, having to define fundamental concepts such as speaking, the relevance of Japanese, and the cultural and linguistic connections between Japan and Mexico, all proved challenging for me to write about. This research process allowed me to be aware of the diverse linguistic landscape in my own country, the innovative techniques for evaluating speaking -methods far beyond the traditional- and the prevailing high-pressure behind language exams.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this journey was witnessing my classmates' enthusiasm and

initiative to improve their Japanese learning. Their willingness to participate in this study's surveys and interviews demonstrated a shared desire to grow and overcome the challenges of mastering Japanese. This collective effort reassured me that this research has the potential to not only benefit me, but also my peers and future students interested in sharing this unique language journey. I hope some of the results of this study serve as a resource for those seeking to improve their language skills, offering them tools and insights to enhance their learning experience. More importantly, I hope it helps my fellow classmates feel supported and less alone as they navigate the challenges of learning a language as distinct and complex as Japanese.

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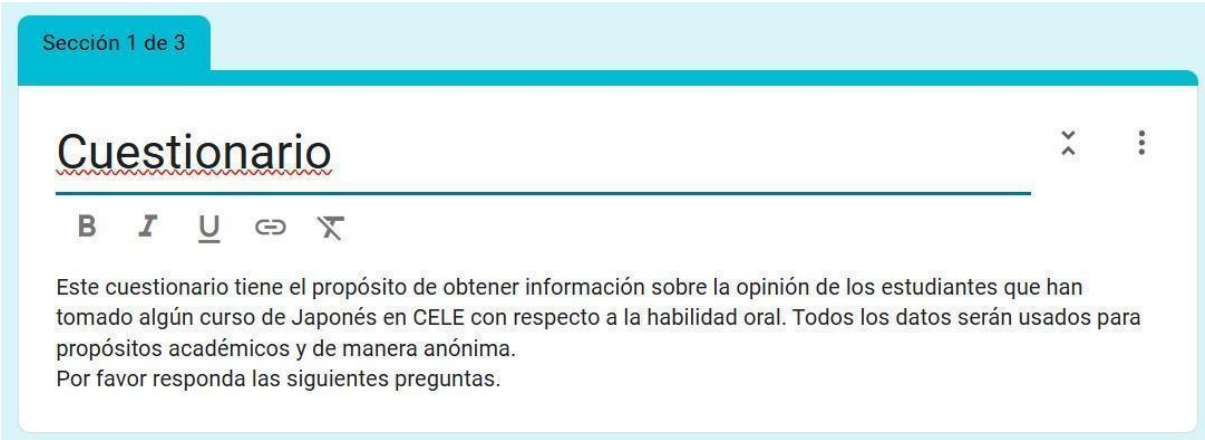
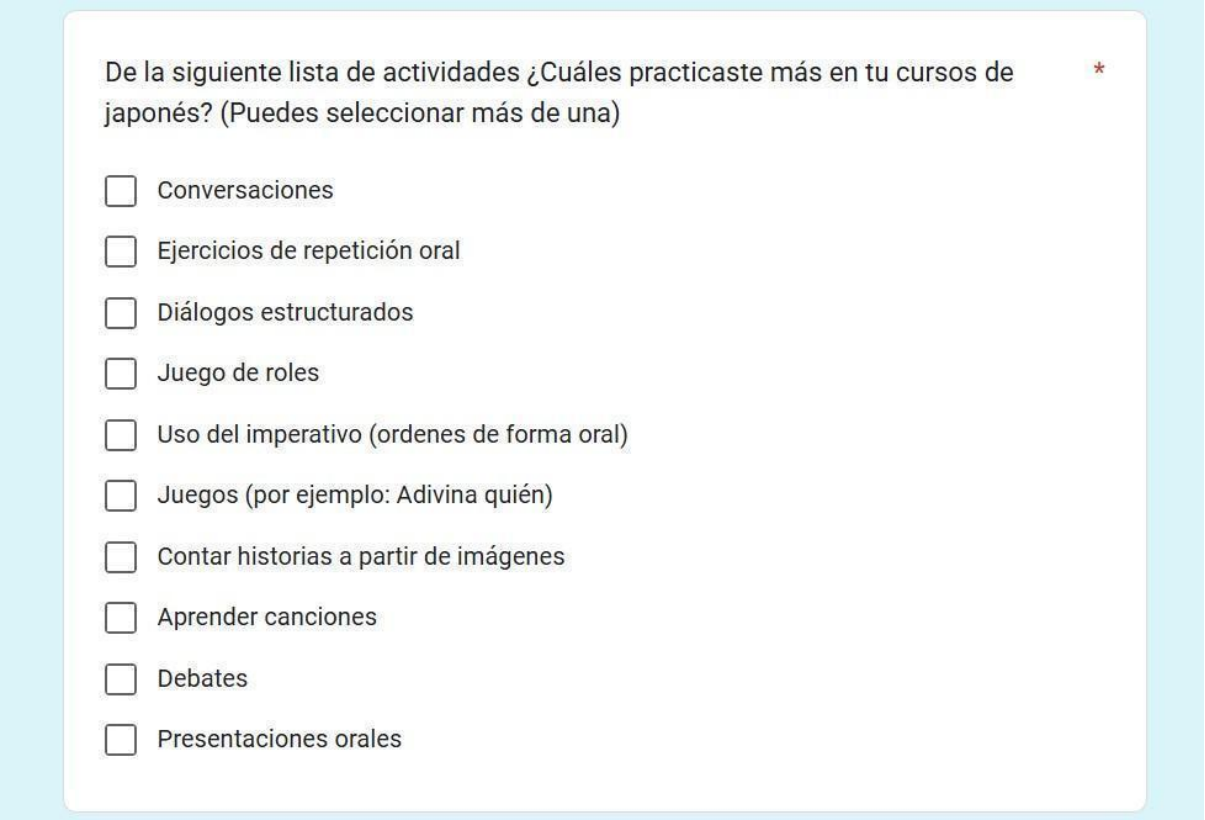
Appendix A

Survey's open-ended questions





De las siguientes actividades selecciona cuales NO practicabas frecuentemente en el salón de clase. (Puedes seleccionar más de una) *

- [ ] Conversaciones
- [ ] Ejercicios de repetición oral
- [ ] Diálogos estructurados
- [ ] Juego de roles
- [ ] Uso de imperativo (ordenes de forma oral)
- [ ] Juegos (por ejemplo: Adivina quién)
- [ ] Contar historias a partir de imágenes
- [ ] Aprender canciones
- [ ] Debates
- [ ] Presentaciones orales

Sección 2 de 3

Preguntas de frecuencia

Selecciona un número del 1 al 5 dependiendo de la frecuencia con la que realizabas la actividad mencionada.

Conversaciones *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Ejercicios de repetición oral *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Diálogos estructurados *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Juego de roles *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Uso del imperativo (ordenes de forma oral) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Juegos (por ejemplo: Adivina quién) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Contar historias a partir de imágenes *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Aprender canciones *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Debates *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

Presentaciones orales *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Siempre	○	○	○	○	○	Nunca

¿Qué actividades podrían haberte ayudado a mejorar tu habilidad oral en Japonés? *

- [ ] Conversaciones
- [ ] Ejercicios de repetición oral
- [ ] Diálogos estructurados
- [ ] Juego de roles
- [ ] Uso del imperativo (ordenes en japonés)
- [ ] Juegos (por ejemplo: Adivina quién)
- [ ] Contar historias a partir de imágenes
- [ ] Aprender canciones
- [ ] Debates
- [ ] Presentaciones orales

¿Qué actividades NO crees que sean necesarias para promover la habilidad oral en salón de clases en CELE? *

- [ ] Conversaciones
- [ ] Ejercicios de repetición oral
- [ ] Diálogos estructurados
- [ ] Juego de roles
- [ ] Uso del imperativo (ordenes en japonés)
- [ ] Juegos (por ejemplo: Adivina quién)
- [ ] Contar historias a partir de imágenes
- [ ] Aprender canciones
- [ ] Debates

- [ ] Presentaciones orales
- [ ] Lecturas
- [ ] Ejercicios gramaticales

Sección 3 de 3

Relevancia de actividades

Selecciona un número del 1 al 5 dependiendo del nivel de relevancia que tiene cada actividad según tu criterio.

Conversaciones *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Muy importante	○	○	○	○	○	No importante

¿Cuál crees que sea un posible factor que impida que los alumnos de CELE de japonés desarrollen su habilidad oral? (puedes marcar más de una) *

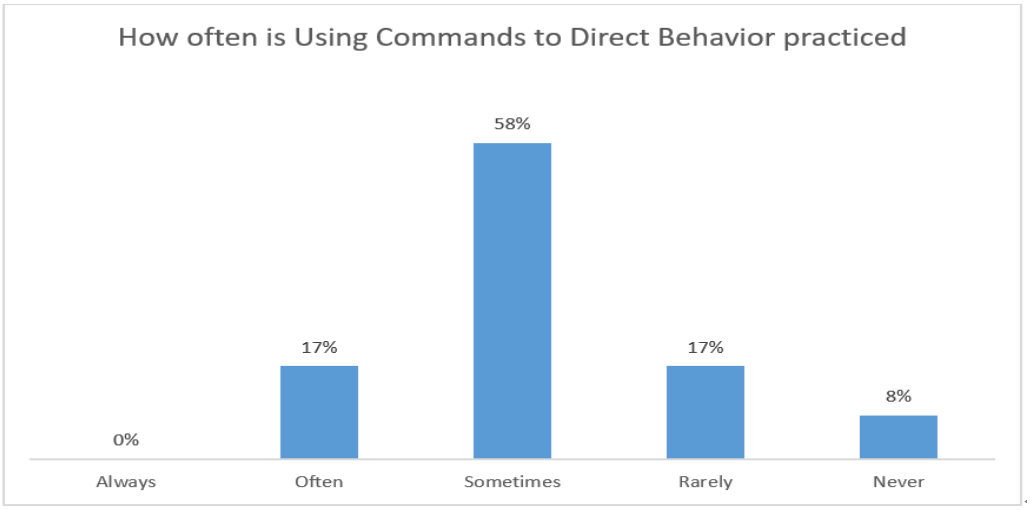
- [ ] Falta de talleres de conversación
- [ ] Libros de texto enfocados a lectura y gramática
- [ ] Falta de contacto con hablantes nativos
- [ ] Falta de audiolibros en el centro de autoacceso
- [ ] Ausencia del japonés como medio de comunicación en clase
- [ ] Falta de variedad en las actividades orales en el salón
- [ ] Otra...

Appendix B

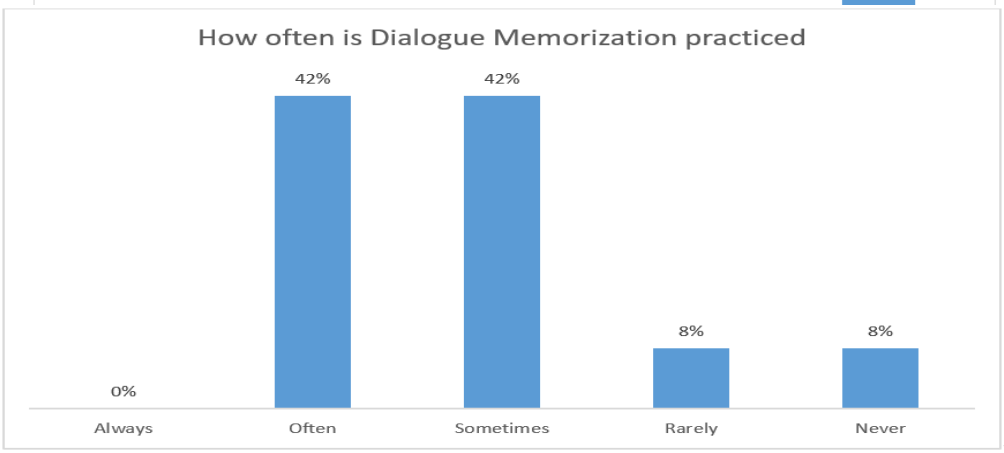
Semi-structured interview

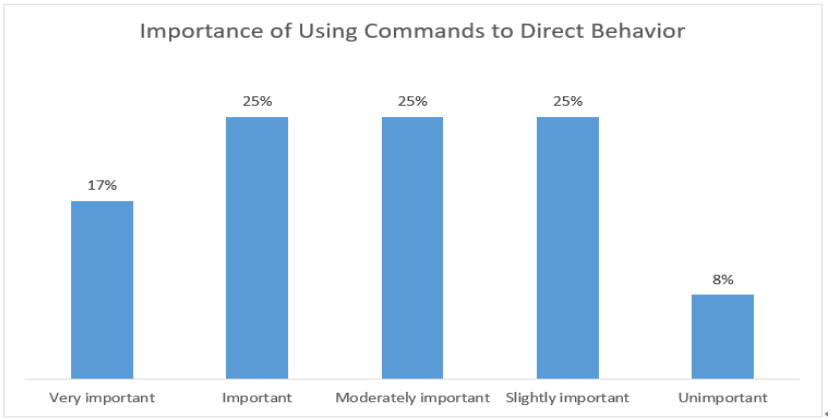
1. ¿Qué habilidad te hubiera gustado desarrollar más sobre todas las demás? ¿Podrías explicar por qué?
2. En clase de japonés ¿Cómo crees que podrías mejorar tu habilidad oral?
3. ¿Por qué consideran que es importante trabajar la habilidad oral en el salón de clases? ¿Qué beneficios crees que tenga?
4. ¿Qué opinas sobre las actividades para trabajar la habilidad oral en las clases de CELE?
5. ¿Qué sugerirías para mejorar las clases?

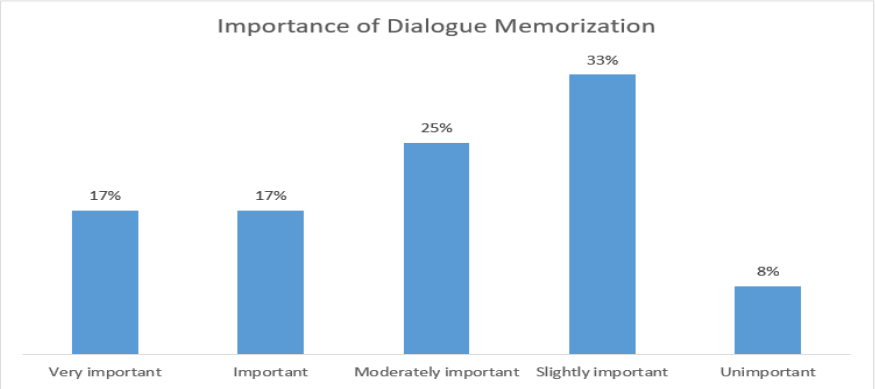
Appendix C

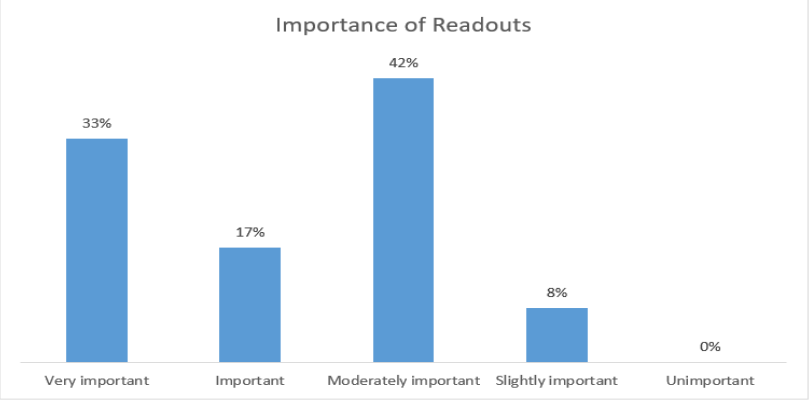

How often is Using Commands to Direct Behavior practiced
58%
17%
17%
8%
0%
Always
Often
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

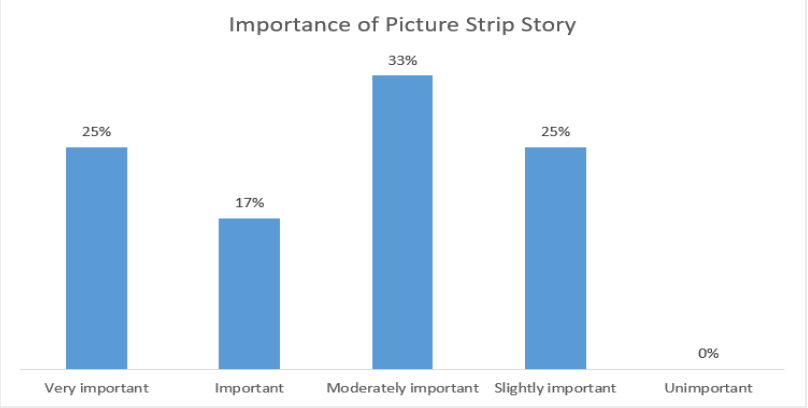

How often is Picture Strip Story practiced
67%


How often is Dialogue Memorization practiced
42%
42%
8%
8%
0%
Always
Often
Sometimes
Rarely
Never


Importance of Using Commands to Direct Behavior
17%
25%
25%
25%
8%
Very important
Important
Moderately important
Slightly important
Unimportant


Importance of Dialogue Memorization
17%
17%
25%
33%
8%
Very important
Important
Moderately important
Slightly important
Unimportant


Importance of Readouts
33%
17%
42%
8%
0%
Very important
Important
Moderately important
Slightly important
Unimportant


Importance of Picture Strip Story
25%
17%
33%
25%
0%
Very important
Important
Moderately important
Slightly important
Unimportant