Feature Article

Comparing Student and Teacher Views on Effective Language Teaching

Ryan Richardson

Ritsumeikan University

This paper reports on an initial study comparing Japanese university language learners' and teachers' perceptions of effective language teaching practices. Building on the work of Brown (2009) this study provides a starting point towards understanding differences in student and teacher expectations for the classroom. Overall, the results find that students and teachers disagree on many often important issues, while also being more in agreement on others. The findings show that students see certain activities as more or less effective for language learning which are often different from those favored by their teachers.

本論は日本の大学における言語学習者である学生と教師間の効果的な外国語教授法についての意識を比較する初期研究である。Brown (2009)の研究を基礎とする本研究は、学生と教師それぞれが教育に期待する内容の差異を理解するための出発点を示すものである。全体として、多くの重要な論点において生徒と教師の意識間に違いがみられる一方で、他の論点においては類似性も認められた。また、学生のあいだで言語学習上比較的有効であると認識されているアクティビティは、しばしば教師によって有効と認識されているものと異なっていることが観察された。

When teachers experience difficulties in the language classroom those problems are often taken to result from a variety of issues such as a lack of student motivation, cultural differences, burnout from having studied English since junior high school, personality issues,

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motivation issues and many others. What these possibilities usually do not take into account is that students may enter a class with certain expectations only to become disillusioned by what they experience in the classroom (Brown, 2009). This disillusionment may partly be a result of disagreement over the methods used in teaching the language, although students may not be conscious of the cause of their feelings. Brosh (1996), Horwitz (1988), Kern (1995) and Schultz (1996, 2001) have argued that a mismatch between student and teacher views toward class activities or goals may result in negative feelings toward class causing students to discontinue studying or may otherwise be detrimental to the learning process.

In Japan, the teachers surveyed for this research project feel that there was a mismatch between their views and the views of their students on how language should be taught and the activities used to achieve class goals. It appears however, that they have only a vague sense of what students actually think about their language class. Different teachers also often hold views that contradict other teachers. For example, common views seem to be that students want to be entertained in class; they expect language class to be easy, difficult or impossible for them; many expect to pass without working; they like, or don't like group or pair work; they like, or don't like grammar focused lessons; they are shy; they are resigned to failure, or they are unmotivated to study the language. These ideas may be true or partly true, but they imply a cause beyond teacher or institution control and almost require a resigned acceptance. On the other hand, if some of the causes of in-class difficulties were found to result from student-teacher disagreement over teaching methodologies, actions could be taken to avoid the difficulties from the start.

Teacher and Student Beliefs

The notion that perceptions held by students of how a second language should be taught will likely affect their success and perhaps

more importantly their view of their own success in a class is hardly a new one. According to Williams and Burden (1997) for example, "learners' perceptions and interpretations...have been found to have the greatest influence on achievement" (p. 98). Brosh (1996) says that communication in the classroom may be disrupted if the students perceive their teacher to be poorly prepared, untrained or otherwise unable to teach the class (p. 126). Teachers, through their experience and training, often have strongly held views of how to best teach, facilitate or develop language learning in their students and those views strongly influence what occurs in the classroom (Borg, 2003). When teacher and student views of what should be happening in the classroom and what the goals should be for a class are not aligned, disappointment, disillusionment and a lack of compliance are likely to occur. Prior research (Brosh, 1996; Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Schultz, 1996) provides support for this view in their separate conclusions that disagreement between teacher and student expectations can negatively influence student feelings toward their studies. These studies provide strong support for the need to understand student and teacher views toward what is happening in the classroom in order to avoid, as much as possible, any disagreements.

Brown (2009) shows that in foreign language classrooms in a major university in the U.S. teachers' and students' perceptions of effective teaching are often different in areas which may most likely be translated into in-class activities. For example, the teachers in Brown's study showed a preference for communicative approaches to language teaching over 'discrete-point' grammar lessons. Responding students however, did not share this appreciation for communicative practices. Instead, their views were more positive toward the study of grammar-focused studies (pp. 53-54). Five of the 10 largest points of disagreement in Brown's study come in the area of communicative language teaching. Other points of disagreement have to do with error correction, the teaching of culture, and being assessed on group tasks

(p. 51). These main points of disagreement, combined with the findings of Brosh (1996), Horowitz (1990), Kern (1995) and Schultz (1996) mentioned above, suggest how Brown's findings of student / teacher disagreements over methodologies and practices could negatively effect the success of the students in the classes and their willingness to undertake a study of language in the future.

Method

The comparison of teacher and student views of effective language teaching in Japan began with three basic research questions. The first research question (RQ1), as with Brown's (2009) study, was "Based on a 24-item Likert-scale questionnaire, how do students' beliefs about effective teacher practices compare to teachers' beliefs overall?" (p. 49). The second research question (RQ2) for this project was "How do the views of students in different classes compare to those of their teachers?" Finally, research question three (RQ3), asked "How do the findings compare with those achieved by Brown (2009)?"

The research instrument for this study was a 24-question Likert-scale questionnaire taken from Brown (2009) and translated into Japanese. The Japanese translation was used to allow direct comparison to Brown's study where the respondents were native English speakers answering English questionnaires. Participating teachers responded via e-mail or a paper-based version in either English or Japanese according to their preference. The answers were chosen from *a* indicating strong agreement, *b* indicating agreement, *c* indicating disagreement or *d* indicating strong disagreement. The answers were then converted into numerical scores for calculating purposes with a being converted to 4, b to 3, c to 2 and d to 1.

The questions in the survey can be broken into seven areas; grammar teaching, error correction, target language use, culture, computer-based technology, Communicative Language Teaching Strategies (CLTS), and

assessment (Brown, 2009, p. 60). This distribution of topics was one reasons for the direct use of the Brown survey. The questions cover issues related to the foreign language classroom while also looking more carefully at how teachers and students view the use of CLTS. This was desirable due to the prevalence of teachers who at least include some activities in their classroom based on this approach to language teaching (Harmer, 2003).

The Brown (2009) survey was also chosen here because it provided an opportunity to examine teacher and students views at a variety of levels. First, as in Brown's own study, directly comparing the views of students to those of teachers, both in specific classes and generally, was one of the goals of this study (p. 50). Using Brown's survey also allowed a comparison of the feelings of Japanese students and their teachers to those of similar groups in U. S. where many might expect students to have very different views toward the activities they expect to take part in and how they should learn their particular target language.

Participants

The study included over 400 students from three universities and various backgrounds studying foreign languages, with 341 usable responses returned. The bulk of the students were studying English, with a small number of students studying German and Chinese taking part. Slightly more than half of the respondents were female with most students between the ages of 18-20. Nineteen teachers from various universities responded to the questionnaires. Five of the responding teachers were female, 2 were Japanese, 1 Chinese, 1 Spanish and the remaining 15 were from various countries where English is the primary mother language. All 341 student surveys were in Japanese, and three of the teachers chose to respond in Japanese. The surveys were administered in the second semester of the 2009-2010 school year.

Table 1. Overall Comparison of Student and Teacher Means by Questionnaire Item

	Effective Foreign Language Teachers Should:	Mean Difference (Ss-Ts)	Teachers' Mean[a] (*n=19*)	Students' Mean (*n=346*)
Q14	Require students to speak L2 first day of class	-0.89	3.47	2.58
Q24	Engage students in information gap type activities	-0.81	3.53	2.72
Q16	Use activities that practice grammar points rather than information exchange	0.76	1.79	2.55
Q13	Address errors with immediate explanation	0.73	2.16	2.89
Q2	Assess group tasks	-0.73	3.95	3.22
Q23	Base part of the students' grades on interaction with other students in L2	-0.68	3.37	2.69
Q12	Have students respond physically to commands in L2	-0.65	3.11	2.46
Q22	<u>Not</u> simplify or alter their L2 use so that students can understand <u>every</u> word	-0.63	2.58	1.95
Q5	Not correct immediately	-0.60	3.00	2.40
Q6	Allow students to answer test questions in L1	0.56	1.50	2.06
Q1	Use computer-based technologies	-0.54	2.89	2.35
Q15	Not use small group or pair work	0.37	1.58	1.95

[a]Strongly disagree = 1; strongly agree = 4; Q = question item; Based on Brown (2009, p. 51)

Results
Research Question 1

"Based on a 24-item Likert-scale questionnaire, how do students' beliefs about effective teacher practices compare to teachers' beliefs overall?" (Brown, 2009, p. 50)

Overall, the teachers had a wider range in mean scores on the different questions. The high mean for teachers was 3.95 out of 4 showing very strong agreement on question 2 (Q2) about effective language teachers assessing group tasks (see Appendix A). The lowest teacher mean was 1.5 out of 4, showing fairly strong disagreement on question 6 (Q6) which suggests that effective teachers allow students to respond to test questions in Japanese. The student respondents were more stable with mean scores ranging from a low of 1.95 on questions 15 (Q15) and 22 (Q22) to a high mean of 3.22 on (Q2).

The question on which there was the largest disagreement between teachers and students was question 14 (Q14) asking if the students should be required to speak the target language on the first day (see Table 1). The teacher mean was 3.47 out of 4 showing strong agreement. The student mean, was 2.43 out of 4, showing some agreement, but significantly less than that of the teachers surveyed. Other significant differences showed that students were much less positive about such activities as finding unknown information from other students (Q24) teacher mean 3.53 to student mean 2.72. The respondents were also less positive about having grades based on completion of assigned tasks (Q2) teacher mean 3.95 to student mean 3.22. Finally students were also less positive about being graded on their ability to interact with others (Q23) with teacher mean 3.37 to student mean 2.69.

Significantly, students agreed more strongly than teachers with the idea that practices should work on activities with specific grammar points rather than information exchange activities (Q16) student mean 2.55 to teacher mean 1.79. Students also showed higher agreement on

Q13 which suggests that effective teachers address errors immediately and provide answers as to why student production was incorrect, student mean 2.89 to teacher mean 2.16.

Though these initial results show significant student-teacher disagreement toward effective language teaching practices, there was also agreement in some important areas. For example, Q21 regarding the use of real life materials showed that both students and teachers agreed differing only by .07 points with student mean at 3.09 to teacher mean 3.16. Question 20, regarding grammar (see Appendix B) showed that both students and teachers support the teacher giving examples of grammatical structures before explaining the rules with the student mean at 3.03 and the teacher mean at 2.95. Question 19 suggesting that an effective language teacher should have native-like control of both grammar and accent, teacher mean 2.95 to student mean 3.03. Another culture focused question showing agreement was Q3 on which both teachers and students agree that teachers should spend as much time teaching culture as they do language, teacher mean 2.84 to student mean 2.99.

Research Question 2

"How do the views of students in different classes compare to those of their teachers?"

In comparing teachers to their classes, five teachers surveyed one of their classes, and three surveyed two or more for a total of 13 classes. In this comparison the difference between teachers was quite large. Among the top 6 questions, the top 25%, on which the individual teachers and their students disagree, 23 of the 24 questions were in the top 6 for at least one of the 10 classes. The variation in the differences between teachers and their students is also important here. The largest difference on any one point between students and their teachers was 2.14 on Q 19 with the teacher choosing "1" showing strong disagreement with

Table 2. Comparison of questions of disagreement between teacher's classes

	Teacher 1				Teacher 2		Teacher 3	
	Class 1 (*n*=31)	Class 2 (*n*=31)	Class 3 (*n*=22)	Class 4 (*n*=33)	Class 1 (*n*=17)	Class 2 (*n*=20)	Class 1 (*n*=22)	Class 2 (*n*=23)
1	Q 16	Q16	Q16	Q16	Q 24	Q 16	Q 20	Q 24
2	Q 22	Q15	Q 10	Q22	Q 16	Q 6	Q 19	Q 20
3	Q 19	Q11, Q10	Q11	Q15	Q 11	Q 3	Q 16	Q 14
4	Q 15		Q4, Q15	Q 19	Q 3, Q 22	Q 22	Q 8	Q 19
5	Q 13	Q 4		Q13		Q 11	Q 23	Q 6, Q 12
6	Q 18	Q13	Q13, Q22	Q11	Q 19	Q 24	Q 1, Q 6	

aStrongly disagree = 1; strongly agree = 4; Q = question item; Based on Brown (2009, p. 51)

student mean 3.14 showing strong agreement in the class. The smallest difference on the highest ranked question showing disagreement was 1.19 (2.81-4).

In comparing the scores of classes sharing the same teacher,

the differences between individual teachers' classes do not appear significant. As can be seen from Table 2, questions where teachers disagree with their students tend to repeat from class to class though frequently in a different rank. For example, teacher 1 has three questions that are in the top 6 questions of disagreement in each of the four classes examined here. Another two questions rank highly in three of the classes, and three in two of the classes. For teacher 2 only one question in each class was different (Q19, class one and Q24 in class two). For the third teacher, three questions appear in the top 6 for both classes while seven questions appear in one class only (two questions were equal for teacher 3, class 1 resulting in total of 13).

In terms of agreement, the teachers and their students also showed a wide range of variation. In four of the classes teachers and their students agreed perfectly on at least one question with many classes having 4-10 questions where the disagreement between teacher answers and student means were .20 or less showing more or less complete agreement. In only one class was the nearest point of agreement above .20 and then the nearest was .23.

Research Question 3

"How do the findings compare with those achieved by Brown (2009)?"

Of the top 12 questions for overall disagreement Brown found in his study (See appendix C), eight questions (Q5, Q16, Q14, Q15, Q2, Q24, Q13, Q1) show significance in our study as well (See Table 1). The questions rank differently overall and the mean scores in this smaller study differ substantially. The most important point of comparison was the similarity in the two studies regarding the use of Communicative Language Teaching Strategies (CLTS). In both studies, five questions related to CLT were in the top 12 points of disagreement. In Brown's study Q11, Q15, Q2, Q4, and Q24. In our study Q24, Q2, Q23, Q12,

and Q15. Though specific questions (11, 23 and 12) place highly in one study but not the other, and the remaining questions have different ranks, it appears significant that teachers surveyed in both countries favor CLTS while it is also their main point of disagreement with students.

The points on which the two studies disagree most are related to the study of culture. Question 3 for example was ranked 5th on Brown's study but 21st on our study. In Q3 the students ranked the importance of culture slightly higher than the American students (2.99/2.74) while the teachers differed more strongly with the surveyed American teachers (2.84/3.24) resulting in a different importance ranking despite a relative similarity in scores. Question 9 was ranked 12th on Brown's study but was ranked 16th in this study. In this question, Japanese students ranked knowledge of culture almost identically to their American counterparts (3.09/3.10) while teachers in Japan found it slightly less important than the Americans (3.26/3.49).

Discussion and Implications for Teaching

Though this research is in the initial stages, the data it presents has strong implications for the classroom. First, from the findings on RQ1 it can be seen that teachers and students generally hold very different views about what actions and decisions effective language teachers make and support. Brosh (1996), Horwitz (1995), Kern (1995) and Schultz (1996, 2001) all have argued that the differences in views, when teachers make decisions in line with their beliefs (see Borg, 2003), may lead to dissatisfied students. Although this is likely not the only cause of in-class dissatisfaction among the students, it is a source of potential problem that may not often be considered. Though this research should be best viewed as an initial step in this area, it suggests that teachers and all others involved with providing second / foreign language education should take steps to counteract these differences in views and beliefs. This may take the form of educating students

about findings showing more effective language teaching practices and how they relate to the activities undertaken in class. Other steps might include teachers showing how the activities they have chosen may be related to or similar to the beliefs of the students on effective teaching. This may be done for example, in the use of certain communication activities that are targeted at the use of certain grammar forms. Finally, in some classes teaching of specific grammar points or vocabulary might not be seen as effective by teachers but if the students feel it is important, finding some ways (and time) to incorporate the students' views of effective language teaching perhaps making them view class as more effective, thereby making their expectations of success more likely to be positive (Brosh, 1996; Brown, 2009; Williams & Burden, 1997).

Teachers learning about the views of their individual classes is also an important lesson to be taken from RQ2. The varying levels of agreement and disagreement in classes suggests that different combinations of teachers and students may require various actions be taken to alleviate mis-matches in expectations. Some teachers might be more concerned with explicit teaching of grammar points to which their students may be more or less positive. Others may be less positive toward this kind of teaching but may find that it is beneficial to spend a small period of time showing how activities are designed to use the different grammar points being studied when the students may not otherwise recognize this aspect of the activity. Whatever the case, understanding teacher and student views as well as how they compare, will be helpful in many ways.

Finally, RQ3 shows similar results in the different cultures studied suggesting that culture overall might be a less important problem area than many teachers feel. Instead the difference between how language is taught in high schools and universities might be at least one of the causes. Whether or not students' previous schooling should be considered part of Japanese culture, attributing problems simply to

"culture" removes from the teacher the responsibility or power to effect change. Understanding where some differences exist however, suggest possible means by which one might begin to combat problems in the classroom before they break out, or if they do, what steps might be helpful. Though this might seem like a difficult task or a waste of time initially, making the class a more positive environment for students will also likely make it more positive for their teachers.

It should be remembered that neither the findings of Brown (2009) nor the findings of the study discussed here are intended to suggest what methodologies should or should not be used in the classroom. Instead, what is being suggested is that teachers can use an understanding of similarities and differences in views toward effective language teaching to create a better learning environment. In many cases it is possible that the differences of opinion on some issues might be counteracted by discussing how the activities favored by the teacher's theoretical background actually relate to the views of language learning held by the students in the class as discussed above. The connection between activities and specific grammar points for example might not always be clear to students. Teachers may also use the differences to their advantage, if time permits, by allowing activities that the students view as more conducive to language learning following the completion of teacher preferred activities so long as those activities are not detrimental to the actual learning goals of the class such as in the use of word lists or other explicit forms of study that their students might view as helpful.

Suggestions for future research

Though this research provides data with important implications for the classroom, because it is an initial study, it leaves many questions unanswered. Replicating this study and broadening it to a wider range of teachers, students, institutions and languages will help make the research and its findings applicable to more learning situations. A movement away from Brown's study as the model to one more appropriate for

Japanese classes, with their different range of language experience and their different reasons for being in language classes, will also be helpful. Following the broadening and replication of the study, it will be helpful to investigate if higher levels of agreement or disagreement between teachers and students effect student performance, motivation, teacher reports of difficulties in class such as student resistance or other negative effects as suggested by Brown (2009), Kern (1995), Schultz (1996), Brosh (1996), and Horwitz (1988).

As mentioned above, many teachers suspect that mismatches in views toward the language class result from cultural differences. The similarities in findings between the U.S. classes discussed in Brown (2009) and the study outlined here suggest that this is not the case. This point should be investigated more directly however, in perhaps longitudinal studies in different countries for example, to establish the level of cultural influence on classroom expectations. Both studies discussed here looked at first and second year students which may be comparable, but Japanese students may be influenced by the learning styles in their previous schools or cultural views toward learning more passively or other issues. A longitudinal study and other studies designed to make the groups more closely comparable may help clarify what the similarities and differences are more concretely, as well as what influences are culturally specific.

Perhaps the most important point to come out of this research is the difference of opinion regarding the use of Communicative Language Teaching Strategies. Brown obviously saw CLTS as an important area to study since 1/3 of the questions were directly related to views on the use of this particular teaching strategy. Despite this emphasis, which may cause the issue to appear bigger than it is, the results suggest that this is a serious point of disagreement as five of the top 12 points of disagreement in both studies focused on CLTS. In the future, due in part to the current popularity of this strategy among teachers, research into the depth of this mismatch, its causes and the overall effects on student

performance will be an important direction for future research to take.

Conclusion

When difficulties arise in the language classroom in Japan, many reasons are given by students, teachers, planners, parents and media. One of the potential causes of difficulty that is rarely cited is the disagreement about what teachers and students see as effective language teaching practices. The works of Brown (2009), Brosh (1996), Williams and Burden (1997), Horwitz (1988), and Schultz (1996), suggest that if there is a difference of expectation regarding the most effective way to learn the target language, there is likely to be a lowered student expectation of success and a less positive view taken toward the class overall. Our study found that the most significant differences occurred on issues related to Communicative Language Teaching. Though the results varied by teacher and class, the activities which many teachers believe are most important and most useful, using the language to communicate, may be activities that students are less likely to view as effective. This disagreement may result in students reacting in ways that are less positive than all involved might hope for. As a result, rather than assume that the problems are a result of 'culture', teachers, in their individual classes, should work to understand what they and their students think about effective language learning, and take steps to reduce differences in that thinking to improve the learning environment for all.

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Ryan Richardson *is a PhD candidate in psychology at Kansai University and a teacher at Ritsumeikan University. He has been teaching in Japan for 16 years. His main research interests are in cultural adjustment and identity, learner/teacher cognition include socio-linguistics and reading. He is currently Chair of the USQ Alumni Association Kansai Chapter and incoming JALT CUE treasurer.*

Appendix A: Effective Teacher Questionnaire (Brown 2009, p. 59)

The Effective Foreign Language Teachers

Instructions: Please reflect on your personal beliefs regarding what characterizes effective foreign language teaching. Carefully read each statement and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree by circling the statement that best fits your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers, just those that are right for you. Your sincere, personal responses will guarantee the success of this study. Thank you.

Effective foreign language teachers should:

1. frequently use computer-based technologies (Internet, CD-Rom, email, etc.) in teaching the language.
   a. Strongly Agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree
2. base at least some part of students' grades on completion of assigned tasks.
3. devote as much time to the teaching of culture as to the teaching of language.
4. require students to use the language outside of class with other speakers of the language (e.g. internet, email, clubs, community events, etc.)
5. not correct students immediately after they make a mistake in speaking.
6. allow students to respond to test questions via Japanese rather than the foreign language.
7. not use Japanese in the foreign language classroom.
8. only correct students indirectly when they produce oral errors instead of directly (e.g., correctly repeating back to them rather than directly stating that they are incorrect.
9. be as knowledgeable about the culture(s) of those who speak the language as the language itself.

10. <u>not</u> grade language production (i.e., speaking and writing) primarily for grammatical accuracy.

11. teach the language primarily by having students complete specific tasks (e.g., finding out prices of rooms and rates at a hotel) rather than grammar-focused exercises.

12. have students respond to commands physically in the foreign language (e.g., "stand up," "pick up your book," etc.)

13. address errors by immediately providing explanations as to why students' responses are incorrect.

14. require students to speak in the foreign language beginning from the first day of class.

15. <u>not</u> use predominantly small groups or pair work to complete activities in class.

16. mostly use activities that practice specific grammar points rather than activities whose goal is merely to exchange information.

17. ask students to begin speaking the foreign language only when they feel they are ready to.

18. <u>not</u> present a particular grammar point without illustrating how the structure is used in a specific, real-world context.

19. speak the foreign language with a native-like control of both grammar and accent.

20. teach grammar by giving examples of grammatical structures <u>before</u> explaining the grammar rules.

21. use predominantly real-life materials (e.g., music, pictures, foods, clothing) in teaching both the language and the culture rather than the textbook.

22. <u>not</u> simplify or alter how they speak so that the students can understand <u>every</u> word being said.

23. base at least some part of the student's grades on their ability to interact with classmates successfully in the foreign language.

24. use activities where students have to find out unknown information from classmates using the foreign language.

Appendix B: General Categories of Questionnaire Items (Brown, 2009, p. 60)

Category	Effective Teacher Questionnaire Item Number
Grammar Teaching	10, 16, 18, 20
Error Correction	5, 8, 13
Target Language Use	7, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23
Culture	3, 9, 21
Computer-Based Technology	1
Communicative Language Teaching Strategies	11, 12, 2, 4, 15, 21, 23, 24
Assessment	2, 6,10, 23

Appendix C: Overall Comparison of Student and Teacher Means by Questionnaire Item (Brown, 2009, p. 51)

Effective Foreign Language Teachers Should:		Mean Difference (Ss-Ts)	Teachers' Means[a] (*n*=49)	Students' Means[a] (*n*=1409)
Q5	Not correct immediately	-0.90	3.02	2.12
Q16	Use activities that practice grammar points rather than information exchange	0.64	2.08	2.72
Q14	Require students to speak L2 first day of class	-0.59	3.14	2.55
Q11	Have Students complete specific tasks rather than grammar	-0.54	3.00	2.46
Q3	Devote time to culture	-0.50	3.24	2.74
Q15	Not use small group or pair work	0.49	1.63	2.12
Q2	Assess group tasks	-0.48	3.45	2.97
Q4	Have students use language outside of class	-0.46	3.15	2.69
Q24	Engage students in information gap type activities	-0.46	3.51	3.05
Q13	Address errors with immediate explanation	0.42	2.71	3.13
Q1	Use computer-based technologies	-0.41	2.94	2.53
Q9	Be as knowledgeable about culture as language	-0.39	3.49	3.10

[a]Strongly disagree = 1; strongly agree = 4; Q = question item.