CUE CIRCULAR

News and articles from the JALT College and University Educators Special Interest Group

Kanda University of International Studies   Photo by Crystal Rose-Wainstock

Off campus, online

Welcome to the significantly-delayed tenth issue of *CUE Circular*, coming out after the most unusual semester of teaching that any of us is likely to have ever done.

I expect that in future issues we'll have articles all about online teaching but for now I feel some mixture of pride, sentimentality, and comfort in presenting three articles that largely stay focused on what we've suddenly come to think *back* to as "normal", or "the old normal"; that is, face-to-face teaching in classrooms with students. Let's all hope that the old normal becomes our "back-to-normal" before too long.

CUE SIG's own Glen Hill writes about his experience in gathering useful data across a semester with writing classes. Jamie Taylor gives us an introduction to an app she used successfully as part of an optional class project. James Porcaro powerfully defends our very profession against the criticism that the classroom and the 'real world' are at odds.

Whilst the gears and cogs of the *CUE Circular* came to something of a halt as the COVID-19 crisis hit, I'm pleased to have things back on the rails now with this issue. We plan to have another one later in the year, and submissions are always open. Please check our website for an explanation of what we're all about, or, indeed, read and enjoy this and our previous issues for an idea of what we like to publish.

Steve Paton, Editor

JALT CUE SIG Publicity Update

Hello! I have been doing the JALT CUE Publicity work since November 2019, and I wanted to give members a quick update on the kinds of events and communications that are happening within the JALT CUE SIG community.

Each month, I've put together a CUE newsletter for members that includes CUE SIG news, resources, and events that may be relevant for CUE members. The content for the newsletters mostly comes from other CUE SIG board members and the JALT Publicity communication channels. I've also been monitoring the CUE SIG Facebook page, Facebook group, and Twitter account. Please find us online to connect with CUE colleagues! Finally, I've been working on updating the JALT CUE website as events and opportunities for publishing come together throughout the year.

One way I would love to open the lines of communication among members is to invite submissions for newsletter and social media. If you have any news or information about events that might be relevant to CUE members, please feel free to send me an email (publicityjaltcue@gmail.com).

Crystal Rose-Wainstock,
CUE SIG publicity officer

Feature articles

CUE Careers column

Feature articles

Sneaking data in through the back door

Glen Hill, Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine

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Collecting data from class populations can be an ongoing or endpoint proposition. That is, we can survey students intermittently throughout the semester or sample them at the beginning and end, respectively. Such data can provide insight into students' feelings, changes in various abilities (like reading speed), expectations, reflections, and more. When we solicit facts or opinions from our students, the most direct and obvious method is to ask them to fill out a questionnaire. This article suggests an alternative method.

In my first-year reading skills course, students begin each lesson with 15-20 minutes of sustained silent reading (SSR) of graded readers (GRs). Since extensive reading (ER) is new to these students, I want to be sure they are conscious of what they read as they read it. Therefore, immediately following SSR, I give the students 3-4 minutes to record some information on the back of their name plates, which are folded A4-size paper.

The first piece of data is how many pages they read during SSR. Next, they have modified Likert rankings for how easy or difficult the book was and how great or bad they felt it was. Instead of the traditional five-point scale, I ask them to choose on a scale of one to six so that there is no wishy-washy middle ground. Then, they write the title and level of the book and a few comments about it. The heading for the comment section shows some questions I want them to address so that they tell me how the book was on that day.

- Why is it interesting, funny, scary, boring, strange, difficult, etc.?
- Why did you choose the book?
- Would you recommend it to a friend? Why or why not?

They can answer any of these, and they are not required to answer all, because some would find it hard to do so in English within the short time limit I give them. I allow dictionaries, of course, but the point is to get something on paper as soon as possible after they read the GR, and then we can proceed to a group discussion of the books.

I go over each entry to make sure they have correctly ranked books. For example, sometimes they will describe the book positively, yet give it a low ranking well below "great". I also look over the comments and patch any spelling and grammar errors. Sometimes it is necessary to leave a note asking them to

answer the questions in the header; otherwise, a few students just want to describe the events in the GR itself, which is not what I want. I may also point out a few pages that they read that day, or praise a good comment, or leave a personal remark of my own ("I really like that author!").

In the fall semester, I have the same cohort of students, but since they are already used to one style of reporting, I change the format to force them to think about something else. The back page of that name plate contains three columns. The first asks them to list the number of minutes they spent since the previous class reading the GRs. The second column is for the number of minutes they spent during that time reading anything else in English, and what it was. I provide a list of possible materials to help them recall. For comparison's sake, the third column asks for the number of minutes they spent reading anything in Japanese, and what it was. In the fall they are reading longer books which give them more details, so I want to shorten this writing section and allow the students more time to discuss their books. The few data that they have to write on the name plates in the fall, compared to the longer text they write in spring, provide that extra time for discussion after the silent reading.

The main point of the fall task is to encourage them to think about what they are reading in both languages. If they aren't reading any English at all beyond the GRs, perhaps constantly writing a zero will make them feel guilty. I will occasionally tell the class if I see a change in numbers. For example, if many people read GRs a shorter time than usual, I might ponder aloud whether there were some club activities, exams, or class reports that got in their way. It also shows students I am paying attention and not just collecting data.

Last year I began collecting data from my graduate students as well. They begin class with an online vocabulary quiz, and I give them time after that to describe what they did to improve their English since the previous class and to explain how long it took them or how many pages it was. I originally expected most students would only record reading journal articles, but to my surprise there were a variety of responses. Some stated they read the vocabulary list, watched TED talks, movies, or sports, or had conversations with foreign students. Others reported reading books, making Powerpoint slides, and so forth.

As with the undergrads, I corrected spelling and grammar and made a few remarks on their papers. In class I would sometimes break down how many students were doing each category of activity.

By describing responses to students, I can demonstrate my interest in what they are writing and also point out things they may need to improve. This may include examples such as making more time to read, choosing better study methods for English outside of class, or merely paying more attention to spelling. I am not sure how bored they get with this activity; my intention is to provide a predictable

structure to the class, which is what I think they might expect from their days in secondary school. In the future, I will try to get them to think even more about their responses by employing what is called Critical Participatory Looping (Murphey & Falout, 2010, 2012; Falout et al., 2016). This technique takes survey data and returns it to the participants for their further analysis, comment, affirmation, or reflection.

Some of the data that is collected in this way lends itself to being graphed or tabulated. In that way, it might help to guide my future in-class instruction. And, of course, it always lays the groundwork for future research papers, presentations, or posters!

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Submit an article!

What's happening in your teaching?
What obstacles have you overcome, and how?
What ideas or opinions do you have that others might be interested to read?
What have you read, heard, or seen recently that's changed your approach to teaching, either in or out of the classroom?

CUE Circular aims to publish quality, interesting, practical articles about the day-to-day nature of teaching in our sector.

www.jaltcue.org/cuecircular

Using HelloTalk to increase accuracy and willingness to participate

Jamie Taylor, Nanzan University

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My lowest-proficiency English major students, while hesitant to participate and use English in class, consistently reported on written questionnaires that they wanted more correction of their L2 mistakes. Although my primary focus was helping them feel comfortable and confident using the English they already knew, I also wanted to find a way to help them improve their accuracy without increasing their L2 anxiety.

I therefore introduced my students to HelloTalk, a language exchange mobile application (https://www.hellotalk.com/), as an optional class project. After a brief in-class training session, I interacted with each student for an hour outside of class, sending text messages back and forth and using HelloTalk's unique sentence correction feature to highlight their mistakes. The project had several positive effects, the most surprising of which was increased engagement in the classroom in subsequent lessons.

Text chat as a language learning medium

Combining aspects of both speaking and writing (Warschauer, 1995), text chat has been cited as having a number of benefits for language learners. Turns are short as in a spoken conversation, but the presence of the written record of the discourse makes the language more salient for participants (Lai & Zhao, 2006), and the pace is adjustable to the level of the learner in that they can take as much time as they need to formulate a response. While students can sometimes avoid interacting in the L2 in the classroom by using body language, speaking in the L1, or relying on a peer to communicate, learners must use language to participate during text messaging. It is also a lower-anxiety way to use the target language, and reticent learners have been found to participate up to ten times more often during text chat than face-to-face (Warschauer, 1995).

The text chat function in HelloTalk is especially useful for language learning. Unlike other messaging platforms such as LINE or WhatsApp, it includes a sentence correction feature. Teachers or more advanced learners can cross out a learner's mistake with a red strikethrough and mark the corrected grammatical feature in green, making the correct form even more salient than a typical written correction.

Conducting the project

I took a small part of one lesson to introduce this project to my students. With my guidance, fourteen interested students downloaded the app onto their

smartphones and created accounts. Training consisted of sending me an English sentence with an error that I corrected. Once they received the correction, the students responded by retyping the corrected sentence. I instructed them to respond to all corrections in this way, as a study by Loewen (2005) showed that learners who acknowledged feedback performed better on post-tests than learners who did not acknowledge corrections.

We then scheduled times for each of the students to spend one hour texting with me on the app for homework, usually during my train commute home. At the prearranged time, I chatted with each student, usually several chats occurring at the same time, discussing their hobbies, part-time jobs, or anything they were interested in. Although the chat content did not center on form, I made a point to correct them each time they made grammatical mistakes, reminding them if they forgot to retype the correction. I spent a total of five hours of my train commute texting for this project.

Outcome

Later, I interviewed and surveyed each of the students about the experience. I also gave them each a short, individualized post-test that showed they retained most of the corrections they received during our chat on HelloTalk. Except for one advanced student, who didn't produce any mistakes during the chat, all students stated that they felt it was useful for language learning. They reported enjoying the app and feeling eager to use it to communicate with other English
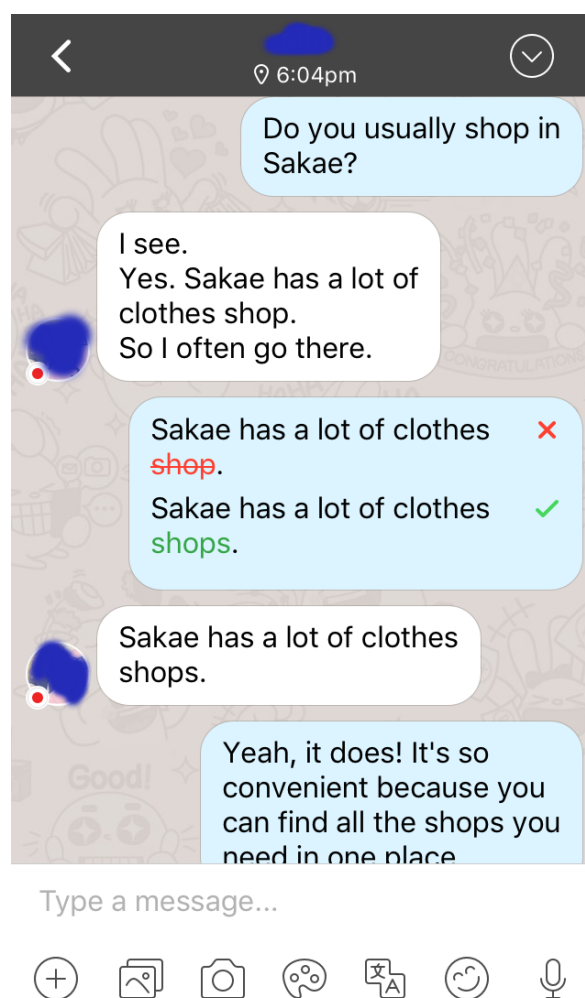
SCREENSHOT: Notice the error correction functionality.

speakers. A few minor technical issues arose, but overall the students were easily able to use the app on their smartphones. I was pleased to hear that several students had used HelloTalk to establish regular language exchanges with English speakers who were learning Japanese.

The biggest benefit to using this app for a homework assignment was one that I did not expect. After this project, the participants were much more likely to initiate a conversation in person. They asked more questions and volunteered more answers, and they visited my office more often when they needed extra help

or just wanted to practice using English. I also enjoyed this project because the students and I learned things about each other that I wouldn't have otherwise. One student and I, for example, learned that we both love the same little-known rock band.

Recommendations

Overall, HelloTalk is a useful supplement to classes to help students begin to improve their accuracy, build rapport between students and their teacher, and increase students' willingness to initiate conversation in person in the L2. One caveat is that interacting with students on the application takes time outside of class hours. Fortunately, I had a small number of students in this class, and I was able to interact with up to three learners at once. For smaller classes or as an occasional supplement to classroom lessons, this is a very useful tool.

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Dimensions of the real world of the classroom

James W. Porcaro, Toyama Kokusai Gakuen

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When the late, great actor Jack Lemmon received the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award in 1988, he said in his acceptance speech with a fervent appeal, "If once, twice in your life an actor can get a part with some kind of depth, he can go beyond entertaining and he can touch people and he can move them; and he can make them think and he can thereby enlighten them; and I think that is one precious gift that is given to very, very few mortals even once in their lives." (AFI, 2009) Though Mr. Lemmon suggested it is an uncommon experience for an actor to get such a part, when I heard that remark in the live TV broadcast more than three decades ago my reaction was to notice: "I can do that every day that I step into my classroom!" That is still true to this day.

Yet, there is a repeated refrain both within and outside the education field that the classroom is a fabricated environment that is artificial and inauthentic, different and apart from "the real world". It is a view that would deny the efficacy of the teaching that I and others do which we

know in fact reaches the scale of importance that Mr. Lemmon set for an actor's role. It is a view that would also deny the validity of the substantive learning that we know students achieve in our classrooms. In this regard, I affirm that the classroom is inherently a vital and purposeful part of the real world, an authentic and integral part of the social environment wherein teachers and students have the precious opportunity and responsibility to engage with one another to learn and grow and find meaning.

The classroom is a vital and meaningful part of the real world. It is as authentic an environment as any other venue in society. In the English language learning classroom in particular, the human relations and the communication that takes place in that context are as genuine as any outside its walls. Indeed, the relations between teacher and students and among students themselves are often more significant than those that many people experience outside the classroom.

We must never demean the culture of the classroom as something other than "the real world". It is not a stage for a dress rehearsal for a later performance in a "real world" somewhere beyond. It is the real world, with close and personal interactions, relationships, commitments, responsibilities, and purposes. It is a place where students learn the critical value of respect, authority, discipline, morality, responsibility, integrity, and character and their existential application toward others. It is a place where there are rules, consequences, challenges, expectations,

disappointments, and achievements. When the content and the conduct of our English lessons are relevant and meaningful for students' lives, as Betty Azar (2007) remarks, communicative language practice takes account of the reality that students are in a classroom trying to learn English and it "means that real people are communicating in real time about real things in a real place for a real purpose." (p.7)

When the purpose of our English language instruction follows the humanistic proposition expressed so well by Jim Cummins (2003) in his essay "Language and the Human Spirit", we teachers engage with students in the most real and personal pursuit of fulfilment in life. "There is an inseparable linkage between the conceptions of language and human identity that we infuse in our classroom instruction." In the context of the instructional choices we make, he notes that we must examine "the extent to which the classroom interactions we orchestrate build on and affirm the cultural, linguistic, intellectual and personal identities that students bring to our classrooms."

Task-based language teaching is one means to achieve that purpose. An indispensable element of this instructional mode is pair or group work which promotes responsible and autonomous practice on the part of students who thereby can achieve the principal aims of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). They can readily perceive that they are positively interdependent with their partner(s) for

the accomplishment of assigned tasks. At the same time, they recognize that the teacher holds each one individually accountable for the performance of the tasks. The face-to-face interaction among students in their cooperative effort addresses the development of personal relationships and social skills essential for their mutual success in the completion of the tasks.

"The real world" can be defined as "the world as it exists, as opposed to one that is theoretical or imaginary" (*Collins Dictionary Online*); or, additionally, "the set of situations most humans have to deal with in their lives" (*Cambridge Dictionary Online*). How can the existential encounter among students and teachers in the learning environment of the classroom be thought of as anything other than "the real world"? Indeed, the "12 rules of life" developed by clinical psychologist Dr. Jordan Peterson (2018) remarkably and intrinsically apply to the lives of both students and teachers in the real world of the classroom. Following are a few cogent examples.

Rule 1: Stand up straight with your shoulders back.

Peterson (p. 27) explains that "to stand up straight with your shoulders back is to accept the terrible responsibility of life, with eyes wide open. It means deciding to voluntarily transform the chaos of potential into the realities of habitable order. It means adopting the burden of self-conscious vulnerability, and accepting the end of the unconscious paradise of childhood, where finitude and mortality are only dimly comprehended.

It means willingly undertaking the sacrifices necessary to generate a productive and meaningful reality."

This powerful injunction should enjoin students and teachers to recognize what is at stake as they engage together in an educational enterprise in their college and university classrooms and pursue the fulfillment of this rule.

Rule 2: Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping.

Peterson offers the reasoned advice that to improve and strengthen ourselves, as we find the courage to move from the potential that inheres in chaos, "all those things and situations we neither know nor understand" (p. 36), into unexplored territory, with all its challenges and risks, and toward order, where meaning is to be found, "you need to place one foot in what you have mastered and understood and the other in what you are currently exploring and mastering" (p. 44).

This approach is a reflection of Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" and his views on the nature of human development and the interrelation between learning and development, which we teachers are wise to apply in the real world of our classrooms.

Rule 9: Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't.

Peterson states that genuine conversation, whether it is talking to ourselves or with others, is an exploration that is complex and demanding. It is mostly paying attention and listening, which takes

courage because it can be transformative. He notes that if a conversation is boring for someone, that person probably is not listening. He concludes: "So, listen, to yourself and to those with whom you are speaking. Your wisdom then consists not of the knowledge you already have, but the continual search for knowledge, which is the highest form of wisdom" (pp. 255-256).

For both students and teachers, this search, indeed, goes to the heart of the responsibility we bear, the effort we make, and the meaning we seek for our lives within the very real world of our classrooms.

Jack Lemmon concluded his remarks at the AFI ceremony saying that acting "is a noble profession and I am damn proud to be part of it". Well, after more than 50 years at the chalkface, I have accepted the privileged gift to touch and move students and make them think, though with a degree of success that always remains uncertain for us teachers. And I, too, can say that I am damn proud to be part of my profession of teaching.

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CUE Careers

Research grants and career development

A common stumbling block for university teachers at all levels is the increasing demand to research and publish in order to secure employment or to earn a promotion within their current institutions. The most common requirement is having a record of academic research and publication, however, the catch-22 is that it can be difficult for academics on the lower rungs of the ladder to find sufficient resources for conducting research, writing it up, and publishing it. Although this can be challenging, especially for people just starting out, persistence pays off. This article will suggest ways to find both the time and the money to start doing research.

The first step is to develop the habit of writing regularly. Don't wait until you "feel" like writing. Silvia (2008) suggests that writers or researchers who cannot find the time to write should regularly allocate specific blocks of time (daily or weekly) solely for writing activities in order to become a more prolific writer. Within that scheduled time block, one can pursue various types of activities in addition to actually writing a manuscript; other activities might include writing research grant proposals and abstracts, editing and reviewing relevant research literature, or even just brainstorming possible topics for future research.

In this regular column, Michael Parrish and Richard Miller offer insights on the employment market for college and university language teachers in Japan, as well as general career guidance, advice, and strategies.
Contributions from readers with specific areas of expertise, or regarding specific issues or changes in the job market, are encouraged.

Michael Parrish and Richard Miller are the current co-coordinators of the Job Information Center at the JALT National Conference, and are former editors of the Career Development column in The Language Teacher.

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Staunchly committing to this writing time will foster a productive writing routine and put you on the road to success.

The second hurdle for academic research is funding. While research in some fields, like literature, may require very little in terms of financial inputs, other research projects can be very costly. At the very least, researchers need computers and programs to write and do statistical analysis, and access to a good library. In classroom action research or linguistic research, one needs audio- or video-recording equipment. Survey research requires either copying or the costs of online survey services. Sometimes researchers are able to access institutional resources where they work (though excessive copying and printing for personal research may be seen as abuse of institutional resources). Some full-time

faculty are fortunate enough to receive yearly fixed research budgets to cover supplies and conference travel expenses. Unfortunately, many receive nothing or just a nominal amount. So, how do researchers access financial support to fund the projects that are essential to their professional survival? They seek out and apply for research grants. Thus, grants and grant writing are a large part of academic discourse in western countries.

Grant seekers range from students who are just starting their careers in academia all the way through to Nobel Prize winners who are at the pinnacle of their professional field. Grants, therefore, have as much range as those who seek them. They may be quite small, perhaps as little as 30,000 to 50,000 yen, or much larger, running into the tens of millions of yen.

For career development, research grants offer many benefits to academics. First, they provide financial support to conduct research that leads to publications required for advancement in the field. Second, they show a commitment to professional development. Finally, as the grants are competitive and vetted, they provide objective external validation and recognition of the researcher's contribution to the field through independent peer review by academic committees.

Receiving a grant is a valuable highlight on the CVs of all academics. There are several reasons that grants are so important to both hiring committees and universities. Successful research grants can raise the profile (i.e., rank) of both the awardee and their institution. The profile is raised because the institutions are graded on the grants. Those universities with more grant-receiving faculty on staff are judged to have better research faculties and better potential for more advancement of knowledge and innovation.

Research grants can increase the research and publication output. Academics, particularly in STEM fields, are expected to self-fund projects and even their own positions, thus research-project grants can possibly become a profit centre for schools, both through reducing operating expenses and monetizing any marketable research developments or products. In Japan, at least, even unsuccessful applications for prestigious national-level grants such as the *kakenhi* grants are beneficial as they show that faculty members are actively trying to undertake research projects.

Nothing comes free, particularly research grant funding. The application process can be long, complex, and highly competitive (a 10% to 25% acceptance rate depending on the number of applications and the amount of funding available). Therefore, particular attention must be paid to writing a compelling grant proposal. This is an essential writing skill for aspiring academics. It should be included as part of one's scheduled writing time. Grant proposals are really research prospectuses that you need to put together in order to apply for a research grant. In writing your prospectus, identify the area that you are

investigating, clearly indicating what is unique, novel, or important about your particular study. Carefully follow the instructions of the call for grant submissions, as they are often quite different. Always stick with the guidelines that have been laid out, including word counts, citation style, and other relative criteria. For more detailed tips, The *Chronicle of Higher Education* often has sections dedicated to grants, how to get them and examples of previously successful submissions.

Japan-based academics have several options, the most widespread being *kakenhi* grants sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) under the auspices of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. One requirement for JSPS *kakenhi* is having a national researcher number, usually issued by your home institution to full-time faculty. On a smaller scale, JALT CUE (and other SIGs) offer several grants that assist academics, or even students and part-timers, who have little or no institutional research funding in having a chance to participate more fully in the academic community by attending conferences, conducting research, and ultimately presenting and publishing research. Many institutions offer internal grants for small projects, particularly related to improving teaching practice; they can be from 50,000 to 100,000 yen.

Remember that as a grant recipient you are making a commitment to the organization to follow through with what you have agreed to do in your accepted prospectus. The granting organization is making an "investment" in you and your research. Organization committees usually need to report back to other stakeholders regarding how successful past decisions and investments have been. If the grant recipient does not follow through, then it potentially makes things more difficult for others later. In addition, you risk earning a bad reputation—the opposite effect of what you want.

We hope this article will encourage you to take a chance on winning the research lottery by applying for a grant, large or small, and reaching your academic potential.

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Useful Links for Grants for Research in Japan
Database of Grants, Scholarships, and Contests in Japan:
www.science-community.org/en/grant/by-country/japan

Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT):
jalt.org/main/research

JALT CUE SIG:
https://jaltcue.org/content/cue-grants-and-awards
The Japan Foundation Center:
www.jfc.or.jp

Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Grants in aid for scientific research (KAKENHI):
www.jsps.go.jp/english/e-grants/index.html

Japan Student Services Organization:
www.jasso.go.jp/en/index.html or www.studyinjapan.go.jp

Mitsubishi Foundation:
www.mitsubishi-zaidan.jp

Suntory Foundation:
www.suntory.com/sfnd/research/

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