Introduction

The term fluency is commonly used when teaching L2 learners. Regarding input, we say, ‘You must become a fluent reader in order to be able to finish the test readings in time,’ and for output, we say, ‘You must work on your speaking fluency in order to be better understood by others.’ However, in the classroom, the teaching of fluency is often implicit or indirect, and even though fluency is mentioned in textbooks, fluency rarely gets the time and focus it requires for efficient learning, as described by Nation (2001).

Additionally, fluency is a primary factor in differentiating English as a second language (ESL) from English as a foreign language (EFL). In ESL, fluency is not a focus of the classroom because readily available opportunities exist naturally to develop this skill in the surrounding community. However, in EFL, access to fluent use of English is unfortunately not an attribute of the environment outside the classroom. Additionally, it is not focused on enough in the classroom, partly because fluency activities can be poorly designed and perceived by students as contrived, unreal, or meaningless. Subsequently, in EFL contexts such as Japan, we must recognize the importance of fluency and consider how to incorporate fluency-building activities into our classroom teaching. This chapter describes one such instance of a teacher examining how to implement fluency-building activities in the context of a TOEFL iBT preparation course.

In the main part of this chapter, Steven Herder, an experienced EFL teacher looking to document and assess his implementation of a fluency-based approach to preparing university students for the TOEFL iBT, describes the rationale, methods, and results of an action research study.
This project also serves as the first stage in developing a collaborative quantitative controlled study conducted by Herder and Gregory Sholdt, a researcher with interests in professional development of language teachers through collaborative classroom-based research. In the last part of the chapter, Sholdt addresses directions and considerations for a controlled quantitative study building from this project.

In the next sections of the introduction action research will be defined, then the EFL context of Japan will be described. Following this, the importance of considering fluency in EFL, particularly in Japan, will be discussed, and the action research this chapter presents will be addressed.

**Defining action research**

Action research is an approach to classroom-based research in which teachers identify issues and problems, formulate and implement new approaches and solutions, and make informed decisions for change based on observed results. Goals for teachers engaging in action research include making carefully considered improvements to their classroom learning environment, gaining new insight into their students and instructional methods, increasing opportunities to contribute to program curricula and their professional community, and improving motivation and job satisfaction through an enriched work experience (Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Burns, 1999; Nunan, 1992). Additionally, action research can be an excellent first step for teachers seeking to develop their research skills and move toward more sophisticated research designs to test theories and new instructional methods, which could ultimately lead to results that generalize beyond particular classrooms.

**EFL: the case of Japan**

One of the most compelling differences between ESL and EFL relates to the fluency component of language learning. There are many differences between ESL and EFL, including the learning context, learner motivation, and the immediacy of needs to use English. However, within the classroom, one similarity between ESL and EFL is that fluency is rarely dealt with explicitly, one of the greatest differences between them. In ESL, fluency, or fluency practice, is built into the context outside the classroom, and so teachers don’t need to address it in class to the same extent, as learners practice fluency in their everyday environment. On the other hand, in the EFL context, chances for fluent English production are relatively rare outside the classroom. Additionally, in the classroom, particularly in Japan, fluency practice is rarely incorporated