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Mission Statement and Submissions

Kobe JALT Journal is dedicated to the advancement of language teaching by providing a forum for new research. current classroom practices, and book reviews. All articles are peer-reviewed by the editorial board and proofreaders to ensure the highest academic standards. Direct all inquiries and article submissions to the Kobe JALT Publications Chair at kobejaltpublications@gmail.com. Previous volumes and submission guidelines can be found at https://www.kobejalt.org/publication.

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The articles contained in each volume of *Kobe JALT Journal* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Kobe JALT, its officers, nor the editors of *Kobe JALT Journal*.

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From the Editors

This volume of Kobe JALT Journal comes at a time when great leaps in technology are being realized. If the cover art for this volume looks familiar yet machine-based, that's because it was created with an AI art generator called Art Breeder. It's a machine learning art program which generates art based on a string of keywords. In this case, the keywords "snowy mountain landscape van gogh style" produced the art for this volume's cover.

Advances in machine learning are not limited to art generators. AI text generators, such as ChatGPT, are making waves in the education field for being able to produce flawless paragraphs and essays based on a user request. For example, a prompt such as "Summarize the main themes of *Catcher in the Rye* in five paragraphs" will produce a grammatically perfect essay about that topic. From there, it's a short leap before students start using AI programs to write the entirety of their essays and speech texts. However, as educators, we have a responsibility to both learn about these emerging technologies and teach our students how to responsibly use them to achieve language learning goals. This may seem like a daunting task at first, but the times change and we must change along with them. Don't worry – this letter from the editors was written by a human! We may have outsourced our art to AI this time, but we aren't quite ready to hand over complete control just yet.

In this volume of Kobe JALT Journal, **Jackson Koon Yat Lee** provides valuable insight into how aspiring educators can break into the world of university English teaching. **Michael Lin** and **Marian Wang** present research about Microsoft Teams and its application after COVID-19. **John Rucynski** provides ideas for integrating humor into the classroom as a learning tool. **Denver Beirne** gives practical advice for using YouTube as a communicative tool. **Justin Pool** writes about writing – journal writing, and how it can help English language learners develop their own voice. **Brian Nuspliger**, **Diane Hawley Nagatomo**, and **Robert Sheridan** review a diverse collection of books.

The editors of Kobe JALT Journal wish to thank all of the authors, reviewers, and proofreaders who have made this volume possible. We hope readers will enjoy the articles in this volume of Kobe JALT Journal.

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Armando Duarte
Michael Griffiths
Kathryn Tanaka

Entering University-level English Language Teaching in Japan

Jackson Koon Yat Lee
Toyo University

University teaching in Japan may seem like an exclusive position with an intimidatingly high barrier of entry, but this elusiveness is mostly due to a conventional lack of transparency about the jobs available and the process to obtain them. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the career path of teaching English at the university level and make the information more transparent for passionate educators who are interested. It includes information about the hierarchical pyramid of university positions, different responsibilities asked of each level of position, the three areas of minimum requirements most universities ask for, as well as practical steps towards obtaining an entry-level position. Rather than promoting university teaching as better than other English teaching positions, the article aims to serve as an informative and objective resource to help readers determine whether this career path suits their professional goals before pursuing it.

大学で教えるということはハードルが高く、限られた人のみが得られる職であるというイメージを持つ人は少なくないだろう。確かに、大学教員として経歴を積んでいく過程に、他の教育機関と異なる側面も存在するのは事実である。この論文は、求人に記載される一般的な応募資格、それらの資格を満たすための過程、教員組織様態を表すピラミッド、そして職位毎に異なる職務等に触れていく中で、大学教育に関心のある、または大学教員を志す教員のために、有益かつ端的な情報を提供することを目的とする。これは大学教員がより良い職であると主張するものではなく、大学教員という道が本当に読者の求めるものであるのかを確認してもらうことをねらいとしている。

Keywords: career development; entry-level teaching; teaching in Japan; tertiary education; university teaching

In Japan, for some people, positions of English teaching at universities can appear to be an exclusive club of "elite" educators who are closely linked to education associations and already active in research and publications. It is not uncommon that some non-Japanese English teachers in Japan, particularly those working as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and at eikaiwa (English language conversation school), are deterred by this perceived wall and refrain from attempting to find university employment, despite their passion and interest in this career

path. The reality is that every university teacher starts somewhere, and many were also once ALTs or eikaiwa teachers.

The purpose of writing this is to make information about entering university teaching in Japan more widely available, and particularly to share advice with English teachers who are interested in this career direction. Pursuing a career in tertiary EFL education without a clear overview of the job or how to be a competitive candidate may result in wasted time, energy, and resources. On the other hand, passionate educators may also find the university teaching experience and working with young adults to be a highlight of their teaching career. For those reasons, the paper aims to be informative about entry-level university positions by focusing on three questions:

1. What is teaching at university like?

2. Is this a career path you want to pursue?

3. How can you prepare yourself for it?

As a contracted full-time lecturer, my job comes with a term limit, so the stressful journey of applying to university positions is not yet behind me. I have also mentored and continue to support several colleagues as they apply to university teaching. By summarizing my years of first-hand endeavors together with the experiences of those I am connected with, I share a relevant account of the process and logistics in this article.

However, it is also crucial to acknowledge that the experience required, and the experience of the job, is different for each individual and for each position. As much as I attempt to stay updated with the job market by examining new job postings on a regular basis and consulting professors who are knowledgeable about hiring processes at their universities, the insights and suggestions provided in this paper will not be applicable to all opportunities. Circumstances will change as demands in the job market continue to change and evolve. Furthermore, the article also does not suggest that university teaching is a "better" or "higher" position than other teaching jobs in the country, but it is an alternative path that requires particular preparations. The purpose of the paper is merely to make the information more accessible.
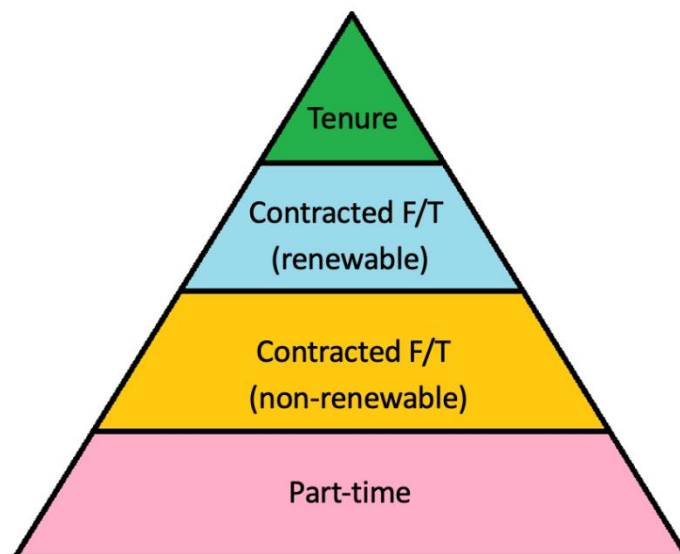
The Pyramid of University Positions

University teaching positions in Japan (and, indeed, in much of the world) can typically be grouped into four categories: part-time positions, non-renewable contracted full-time positions, renewable contracted full-time positions, and tenured positions. Together, the four categories form a pyramid, as seen in diagram 1. The shape of a pyramid effectively illustrates the hierarchy of positions, the number of positions available, and the typical career path starting from the bottom to the top.

Terms such as "lecturer", "assistant professors", "associate professors", and "professors" are generally considered ranks of the person hired instead of the position itself. For example, one renewable contracted position may seek for a "lecturer, associate professor or professor", and the successful applicant's ranking will be determined based on their qualifications, experience, and age. However, the scope of this paper focuses on entry-level applicants, which are primarily "lecturers" in part-time and non-renewable contracted full-time positions. In this article, the terms "lecturer" and "teacher" are used interchangeably. Again, the advice given below is not applicable to all positions and the language reflects the focus on entry-level university teaching positions, many of which are part-time or contracted.

Figure 1.

The Pyramid of University-Teaching Positions in Japan

The foundation of the pyramid is made up of part-time lecturers. This layer makes up the biggest pool of teachers of new and seasoned university teachers. It is how most teachers enter and gain their first experience of university teaching. Part-time lecturers typically teach at multiple universities and possibly work at other jobs to accumulate a livable income. Compensation is discussed in a later section.

The layer above part-time work consists of contracted full-time positions with a fixed term, which is conventionally three to five years, depending on the university. Some of these positions require teachers to already have advanced degrees, extensive experience, and publications, but some are entry-level positions open to those new to teaching at the tertiary level. "Non-renewable" means that by the end of the term, the university cannot offer any extensions to the contract.

Renewable contracted full-time positions are considered tenure-track positions, where the teachers would either have their contracts renewed or be promoted to a tenured position by the end of the term. Many tenured professors remain in the position until their retirement. These positions have the teachers fully integrated into the administration and organization of the university, and they are expected to do significantly more than just teaching, including administration work for their university. Given the job security and compensation of these positions, many consider these jobs to be the end goal of ascending the university position pyramid. Thus, the level of competition is typically higher than other types of university work.

While this paper focuses on the entry-level jobs of part-time and non-renewable full-time positions hired by the universities directly, it is important to include dispatch university teaching. Unlike the former positions that are direct employees of the university, dispatch university jobs are employed and managed by dispatch companies that are sometimes branches of eikaiwa businesses. Through the agreement with the university, the company assigns their teachers to fulfill the contracted classes. As the teachers are managed by the dispatch companies, the approach to teacher-training and lockstep teaching more resembles big-chain eikaiwa teaching, but in a different environment and for a different demographic. The levels of teacher agency and involvement in the university are significantly lower, and the compensation is subsequently less as well. However, the dispatch companies generally organize the schedules of the teachers for a

full-time workload and a livable income. More importantly, this is an alternative path to gaining university teaching experience, which may be hard to come by otherwise.

Minimum Requirements

An understanding of the minimum requirements is useful as it gives those who are interested a checklist to compare themselves to and to consider what they should work on next. The most common minimum requirements at the entry level fundamentally cover three areas: education, publication, and teaching experience. However, it is crucial to first keep in mind that most but not all positions share these requirements, and these "minimum requirements" are unofficially flexible from the university's side, depending on their circumstances. This point is expanded upon in a later section.

Most entry-level university positions ask for a master's degree related to the subjects being taught. For English language teaching, master's degrees in TESOL or applied linguistics are very common, but degrees such as education, literature, and cultures are likely accepted as long as the university deems them fit. While welcomed, a Ph.D. is not always expected from applicants of entry-level positions, although this will vary depending on institution. On the other hand, there are rare positions that do not require an MA. There are also cases of positions that listed an MA as a requirement that end up selecting an applicant without one, especially if they stand out in other qualities.

Applicants for entry-level and particularly full-time positions are usually requested to submit copies of their major publications. "Ideal" publications would be recent research papers published in peer-reviewed journals that are related to the subjects to be taught. Practical publications (ex. Papers on classroom practices) in formal journals are usually accepted too, regardless of whether they are printed physically or are digital only. While co-published papers are allowed, it is recommended to have at least one single-author publication. Depending on the university, they may also approve of smaller publications such as my-shares, newsletter submissions, and conference reports. Some rare positions also do not have publications as a requirement. Customarily, the minimum number of publications to fulfill this requirement is three, and while the kind of publication is flexible, the number typically is not.

The most confusing and deterring requirement for inexperienced teachers is the requirement of "minimum two years of experience teaching at a university, preferably to Japanese students". Expecting experience for an entry-level position is somewhat paradoxical. This is the reason why the first step through the door can be critical, even if it is only teaching a single part-time class for a semester. However, for those without tertiary-level teaching experiences, teaching university-age students at an eikaiwa, volunteering at a university's English club, and similar experiences working with university students should be highlighted in applications to help increase the chances.

The bar of entry may seem high or even unreachable, particularly with publications and experience. However, these requirements are essential qualities the universities ideally prefer all applicants to possess. As hinted at earlier, these "minimum requirements" could be somewhat flexible if the university strongly prefers a candidate, and more commonly, if the university is in an urgent need of a teacher. It is also important to keep in mind that candidates can never know on which points a university might be flexible, and they may be more competitive than they think. Understanding this point, interested educators should be encouraged to apply even if they do not meet all requirements. Rather than self-rejecting, try first, and let the university be the ones to make the rejections, as there could be the possibility that they are willing to overlook certain requirements due to circumstances. With that said, the three requirements above can still serve as guidelines on what teachers can prepare as they aim for this career path.

One final point to discuss is language ability. While universities are fundamentally looking for proficient English users to teach English courses, it is unfortunate that some universities, both private and public institutions, continue to list the discriminatory requirement of "native speakers only." This situation will hopefully improve as efforts of raising awareness about the marginalizing nature of native-speakerism continues in Japan. As for Japanese ability, it is strongly preferred if the applicant has at a minimum a conversational level of Japanese. This is to ensure they can function independently to a certain degree when interacting with administrative staff, as well as to be able to respond to Japanese students in serious or emergency situations. In fact, interviews usually include questions to review the applicants' Japanese conversational ability. Therefore, while it is not given as a requirement, it may be an area some would want to improve upon.

Job Responsibilities

To discuss the job responsibilities of a university lecturer, it is best to begin by examining what part-time teachers do before exploring the additional tasks full-time teachers have. Unsurprisingly, a university teacher's main job is to teach. The main difference for new teachers from an ALT background could be how independent the teaching is, both in the classroom and in the program overall. Former eikaiwa teachers may find the need to mark, grade, and even fail students the bigger shock. Overall, the teachers are responsible for their classes throughout the 13 to 16 weeks semester, from the orientation class to the final exam.

Most universities' language programs and language courses within a department are either non-integrated or semi-integrated. The former requires the lecturers to select the class's textbook, write the course syllabus, create the teaching material, and prepare tests and exams. Semi-integrated programs have textbooks and curricula pre-determined for everyone teaching the same courses, but the teachers have a degree of agency over how they approach each lesson and possibly even the final exams. On the other hand, some universities have fully-integrated programs where every teacher essentially approaches each lesson the same way and the individual teacher's material preparation is minimal.

In semi or fully integrated programs, the syllabi-writing and material-preparation responsibilities typically fall on the full-time lecturers working alongside program supervisors and directors. In contrast to part-time lecturers who are expected to contribute only to the teaching aspects of a program, full-time lecturers are also involved with the planning and administration aspects as well. Full-time teachers regularly participate in faculty and administrative meetings that discuss the overview and day-to-day implementation of the program. In addition, full-time teachers often are required to contribute to special programs of the department or university, such as intensive courses, open campus events, English camps, and self-access learning centers.

Typically, entry-level positions are teaching positions and not research positions, so while conducting research and publishing are highly encouraged for the teacher's own future prospects, they are not required. University committee involvements usually include only tenured faculty as well, but that may depend on the size and number of faculty members of the university. In general, while entry-level positions focus primarily on teaching, higher positions

tend to teach less and take on more responsibilities related to administration, research, and other services for the benefit of the university.

Logistics

As with any career, financial compensation is an important element for anyone to determine whether the time, energy, and financial investment needed to pursue it is worth the outcome. Part-time teachers are paid by the number of koma they teach in a semester. One koma refers to a 90-to-100-minute class taught throughout the 13-to-16-week semester, and the compensation per koma is usually around 22,000 to 25,000 yen per month. Some universities pay throughout the months when no classes are conducted (i.e. Spring, summer, and winter vacations), while others might pay more per month but only during months when classes take place. Therefore, it is important to read the fine print carefully and ask questions.

In comparison, entry-level full-time positions offer 350,000 to 400,000 yen per month before taxes with no bonuses. Some lower-paying jobs offer around 300,000 yen per month, which is lower than some experienced eikaiwa teachers and JET ALTs positions. However, this compensation will improve as the teacher advances in their career. Most universities also allow educators to take on two to four koma as part-time lecturers at other institutions, which contributes to the teacher's income.

Regarding time commitment, part-time teachers are paid for their teaching time, but they are expected to be doing lesson planning and grading outside of classroom hours. The exact hours vary depending on how many courses and the number of different courses the teacher is responsible for. Full-time lecturers generally teach eight to ten koma per semester. This equates to around 12 to 15 teaching hours per week. However, the faculty meetings, office hours for student visits, as well as the prepping and marking of lesson material typically comprise a standard full-time schedule.

One crucial challenge certain applicants will face is their visa status. University teaching is covered under the professor visa, which is different from the visa issued for ALTs and eikaiwa teaching. While full-time positions sponsor a visa, part-time positions do not. Permanent residents and holders of non-work-dependent visas such as spouse visas are not affected. On the other hand, those starting as part-timers often start with one to four koma from one university to

teach, which is not enough income and working hours to sponsor their own professor visa. This paper cannot serve as legal advice regarding visa status. However, it is possible to work full-time at a place (ex. Eikaiwa school), and with a contract from a university plus a letter from the main employer, to receive special permission on the visa from the immigration office to teach at the university during pre-determined hours. With enough part-time classes to reach a certain income, sponsoring one's own visa becomes possible. It is best to visit the local immigration office to discuss the circumstances with them.

Who the Employers Look For

From the perspective of the hiring committee, they are most often looking for people who meet the three aforementioned minimum requirements. An applicant who meets the stated requirements helps avoid needing to justify their hiring decisions or any issues that might arise. Therefore, it is beneficial for any interested educators to prioritize fulfilling the requirements while they apply to positions. Meanwhile, please remember that the minimum requirements are somewhat flexible depending on the university's urgency in finding a suitable hire, so interested educators who do not meet every criterion should still be encouraged to try if they believe they have a reasonable chance.

The next quality they look for from potential candidates is whether they are safe choices or not. This refers to whether the new hire would cause issues in the program or directly challenge the status quo. Since these entry-level hires are term-limited, employers would often prefer a teacher who can follow and contribute to the current program as is over someone who has strong suggestions that may conflict with how the program currently runs. This is an underrated quality, but it is a crucial aspect when the hiring committee decides to give a new teacher a spot at their institution. Some applicants may attend the interview and offer how they could revolutionize the university's program, but they would likely be seen as people rocking the boat rather than individuals offering solid suggestions, especially if they are unproven at the tertiary level.

Finally, employers are looking for passionate educators. It may sound contradictory to the previous point, but employers are indeed seeking teachers who are ready to contribute to the educational missions of the university over people applying merely for the financial prospect of this new career path. In fact, teaching at this level is not a relaxing task. Those entering without

the passion to accommodate to the changes and new challenges would probably find the job exhausting and demotivating. Finding the balance to demonstrate passion without coming off as a potential troublemaker is crucial for entry-level interviews. This passion is best exhibited through continuous effort towards qualifications, publications, presentations, and association involvements on the resume.

Preparing Yourself

For educators interested in making the jump to the university teaching career path, they can build on three areas: resume, teacher identity, and network.

To build up the resume, the first and most essential step is to meet the aforementioned requirements that most entry-level positions consider fundamental. The candidate selection process begins by screening every application document that was received. This is when the hiring committee chooses a handful of applicants to interview based on the qualities shown on their resumes. Thus, by meeting the minimum requirements, it keeps the entry in consideration, and building it up further helps the applicant stand out over the competition.

Building up a teacher identity is to understand one's own qualities and characteristics so that they can be highlighted in the cover letter of a resume and at interviews. In addition, discovering one or several research interests can provide directions for publications and presentations. Being able to demonstrate a deeper internal understanding of who one is as a teacher can demonstrate a passion for teaching and the motivation and willingness to contribute to the job and the university.

Finally, building up a strong network, both through professional organizations and other public forums, in addition to their personal one, is vital for teachers interested in entering university teaching for several reasons. One reason is to be informed of employment opportunities that may have been overlooked or are not publicized. If a teacher has demonstrated to be a trustworthy and passionate teacher, those around who have noticed would want to give them an opportunity. Another reason is to be notified about events, as well as presentation and publication opportunities. For those not yet in the loop of university teaching, chances to present or publish might initially appear distant, making the three-publication requirement particularly challenging to fulfill. However, many education associations have multiple professional outlets

for their members and non-members to contribute to, and the information is often shared by members among their public and private networks. Connecting and collaborating with a university teacher could also help getting published in a university's journal as a co-writer.

One more benefit of having a network is the peer support throughout the process of applying to university positions, both practically and mentally. Writing resumes for Japanese universities and attending interviews can be challenging and grueling. Receiving advice from peers with relevant experience can make a tremendous difference in the efficiency and quality. Just as importantly, the high level of competition means an applicant will likely receive many rejections before obtaining their first position. Having people who have walked the same path or are currently going through a similar experience can help maintain motivation and mutual encouragement along the way.

Where to Look

Recruitment information for university positions is shared in places that differ from where ALT and eikaiwa jobs are found. Job posts come out as early as May, but as teachers move from one institution to another, openings continue to be released throughout the year even as late as February. Here are a few useful resources.

JREC-IN Portal is the website where most institutions in Japan looking for researchers and university teachers post their recruitment information. There are job postings written in Japanese and English. The advanced search function allows users to filter postings based on criteria such as keywords, institution type, work locations, and research fields. It is also helpful in sorting through the constantly updated database. This website is the most extensive and centralized starting point when looking for university jobs in Japan.

Teacher associations are excellent resources for recruitment information as well. One free way to access such information is through JALT's multiple networks, particularly Facebook pages managed by individual JALT chapters. The pages are full of relevant information about professional development events for JALT members, but some members would also share information on job opportunities in the region. JALT's website also has a corner for job postings of all levels, including but not limited to university positions (JALT, 2022). Another association, one that tends to target more Japanese speakers, JACET, also has a webpage dedicated to job

postings (JACET, 2022). Most postings there are for university English teaching positions, but some are seeking Japanese applicants only.

In addition, if an applicant has certain universities in mind, visiting those universities' websites directly can be rewarding. Typically, every institution has a corner dedicated to recruitment. Bookmarking and checking their pages regularly would be the most direct way to be updated on opportunities they offer.

Finally, personal networks can be helpful as well. For some job positions, some administrators may begin by searching for trustworthy teachers they know personally or ask around their networks for personal recommendations on potential candidates to invite to apply for a position. Additionally, urgent hires right before the beginning of a new semester often have time limitations on preparing and publicizing for the position, and it could result in a round of urgent recruitment first made among personal circles. As discussed before, if a teacher has presented themselves to be a passionate and dedicated educator, people around will reach out with opportunities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to make the elusive positions of university teaching more transparent. By helping passionate educators sustain and grow their careers in teaching, it ultimately results in a stronger education system, improving the quality of education and benefiting our current and future students. I hope that teachers interested in entering this career path have sufficient information to decide whether this is a path that matches their professional goals. This article aims to help with the decision-making process and serve as a source of encouragement. I also hope to somewhat alleviate the feeling of being lost by providing suggestions about where such opportunities could be found and what could be the first steps to begin preparing. The wall may seem a high one to climb, but knowing the information is already half of the battle. Take steps actively, avoid self-rejections, and this career path may just be the next adventure some need to let their passion for teaching continue to flourish.

Jackson Koon Yat Lee is a specially-appointed lecturer in the Center for Global Education and Exchange at Toyo University. His research interests include intercultural communication, diversity in ELT, and the Japanese English education system.

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Student Perceptions on the Use of Microsoft Teams at a Japanese University in a Post COVID-19 World

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In a post COVID-19 world the delivery of English education in Japan has transformed significantly. Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Japan have been adopting various online tools and learning management systems (LMSs) to help facilitate English language learning. Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) is one of the many technologies utilized to help facilitate English language acquisition of L2 university students. The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate student perceptions using MS Teams in a post COVID-19 environment. An anonymous Google Forms survey was conducted with 59 university students at a Japanese University in Hyogo at the end of the Spring 2022 semester. It was found that students viewed the software as slightly difficult at the start of the term but quickly gained confidence and attained positive perceptions of the platform towards the end of the semester.

COVID-19 の影響で日本における英語教育は大きく変化している。日本の高等教育機関（HEP）では、外国語としての英語（EFL）の授業の多くが英語学習を促進するためにさまざまなオンラインツールや学習管理システム（LMS）を導入している。Microsoft Teams（MS Teams）は、L2 大学生の英語習得を促進するために使用される多くのソフトウェアの一つである。この研究の目的は、COVID-19 後の環境における MS Teams を使用した学生の認識を調査することである。2022 年春学期末に、兵庫県にある大学の学生 59 名を対象に、匿名の Google フォームによる調査を実施した。その結果学生は学期開始時には MS Teams の使用に多少困難を覚えていたが、学期末には慣れにより問題は解消され、MS Teams に対して肯定的な認識を持っていることがわかった。

Keywords: EFL learners; higher education; learner perceptions; learning management systems; CALL

Until the present time, the COVID-19 outbreak and pandemic has prompted changes

implemented by higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world. Temporary physical closures

have affected approximately 220 million students globally with many policymakers, administrators,

and educators confronted with unprecedented challenges of how to continue university level education safely while minimizing learning losses (Farnell et al., 2021). In Japan, universities have pivoted towards some form of distance learning with 16% of all schools doing in-person classes, 60% undertaking a combination of in-person and distance learning classes, and 24% engaging in distance learning (MEXT, 2020). The ongoing uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic have led many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to continue to support English education with various technological tools such as Zoom, Google Classroom (GC), Google Meet, Moodle, Microsoft Teams (MS Teams), Blackboard, Manaba, Edmodo, Schoology, Line, Slack, and so on (Kanno, 2020).

Background

For the past couple years, the authors of this study have been using MS Teams to support English education at a Japanese University in Hyogo. MS Teams, according to Microsoft (Microsoft, n.d.), is "the ultimate messaging app" that functions as "a workspace for real-time collaboration and communication, meetings, file, and app sharing … all in one place, all in the open, all accessible to everyone." Originally designed as a workplace app for companies in November 2016 as a part of Office 365, now Microsoft 365, Microsoft has adapted its software to meet educational needs by adding and customizing features to become more of a LMS (The Sherweb Team, 2021). The researchers define MS Teams as a software or application interchangeably. It is a software with communication capabilities and an application that could run other applications such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft OneNote, YouTube, Adobe Acrobat, Flipgrid, etc. MS Teams has the functions of a LMS with its ability to facilitate announcements, distribute class materials, assign assignments, give feedback, distribute tests, and track grading and progress. Therefore, MS Teams could be referred to as

not only a software or application, but also an LMS. Third, because MS Teams could be accessed through several ways: A web app through a browser, a mobile app for usage on the mobile device, and a desktop app for the PC or laptop, MS Teams is often referred to as an "app" by Microsoft (Microsoft, n.d.). The researchers define app as short for application and can refer to any version of MS Teams. Regarding computer platforms or operating systems (OSs), MS Teams could be downloaded and accessed on Windows, macOS, iOS, and Android. Students in the researchers' study mainly used the Windows, macOS, and iOS versions of MS Teams.

The researchers' university has offered support for several tools besides MS Teams, but the researchers' have found MS Teams to be especially attractive. MS Teams could support multiple delivery modes in English education: Face-to-face, online in real-time, on-demand, and hybrid. MS Teams could support online in real-time and on-demand classes without the need of another software application. MS Teams' communication system was adept at facilitating a social presence and building trust with Japanese university students. The researchers' positive experiences with MS Teams led to the formulation of a research study to find out what other educators were researching on this topic and discover how students at our university perceived the MS Teams software.

Literature Review

Previous studies on student perceptions of MS Teams were positive, but some drawbacks were noted by some students and educators. Rojabi (2020) explored EFL student perceptions of online learning via MS teams at a university in Indonesia and conveyed that MS Teams was something new for students and motivating to participate in online learning. However, Rojabi (2020) also explained that it could be debated whether the online learning environment through MS Teams was truly

supportive of student learning. Wea and Kuki (2020) at another university in Indonesia reported that students' perceptions using MS Teams was positive including feelings of enthusiasm, being grateful, useful, and helpful. However, students also pointed out that the teaching method using MS Teams could benefit from more variety and creativity. Nguyen and Duong's (2021) study at a university in Vietnam asked students their challenges of using MS Teams and students emphasized external factors such as an unstable internet, computer failure, and power failure, but they did not mention negative feelings towards the software itself. Alabay (2021) solicited university student views on learning French online with MS Teams during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that students felt that MS Teams software was user-friendly, well designed, and made it easy to communicate with friends in the classroom and lecturer. Student concerns were about the problems of distance learning and learning a foreign language online. Fuaddah and Maharani's (2021) research at a school in Indonesia asked 120 students their perspectives using MS Teams and found that most students felt MS Teams was simple to use, motivating for online learning, saved time and effort in student education, and improved learning effectiveness. Conversely, the researchers suggested that more attention could be given towards students' impediments to accessing MS Teams and teachers ought to give more consideration to leveraging the full capabilities of MS Teams with their students. Wichanpricha (2021) did a study at a university in Thailand on synchronous online learning of an academic English course through MS Teams and found that students felt the MS Teams software was useful and convenient. However, the synchronous function of MS Teams caused some participants to become drowsy and apathetic, while internet signal strength was a problem. Regarding the functionality of MS Teams, Sobaih et al. (2021) did a study with 387 bachelor students in public institutions in Egypt and found that students liked how MS Teams gave appropriate assessments and feedback on their academic performance. On the other

hand, students did not believe they had sufficient support with online activities using MS Teams.

There were studies on student perceptions of MS Teams that were overwhelmingly positive. Faisal et al. (2021) completed a qualitative study on students' perceptions using MS Teams in English online learning at a high school in Indonesia and students described MS Teams as interesting and complete, motivating to improve and study English, easy to communicate directly with teachers and friends during the pandemic, provided good features, and had easy access. Most notably, students highlighted that MS Teams was more effective than other applications. Rachelinda et al. (2021) in a study at a university in Indonesia discovered that English Department students felt that MS Teams had a positive effect in supporting students' speaking performances. Students asserted that because MS Teams had many useful features such as being able to share content or video, having an assignment function, capability in allowing instructors to give feedback, and provided better data storage, these functions were advantageous towards facilitating improvement in English speaking. The researchers' data validated that pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension all improved with students using MS Teams. Most recently, Nawi and Hamidaton (2022) explored student readiness and behaviors towards virtual learning through MS Teams with 312 undergraduate students at a university in Malaysia. The researchers found that the majority of students showed significant acceptance, readiness, and positive behavior towards the use of MS Teams as a virtual learning platform. Student feedback corroborated that using MS Teams created an optimal learning environment. More significantly, MS Teams was the preferred and main platform used for online classes with many students. Altogether, the current research suggests that student perceptions of MS Teams were mainly positive, but the reasons could be further studied due to the variety of contexts and ways MS Teams could be applied, especially in foreign language education and EFL education.

Theoretical Framework

The researchers' study on student perceptions of MS Teams at a Japanese university draws from Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory of learning which argues that learning is a profoundly social process that leads to the development of cognitive growth. Also influential was Dewey's (1938) idea on the importance of active learning and engagement in education. Because students in the researchers' study were actively using MS Teams software to learn English in a uniquely post COVID-19 learning environment, the researchers felt incentivized to inquire in more detail how students felt about learning with MS Teams.

The following research questions guided our study:

RQ 1. What were student perceptions using MS Teams?

RQ 2. How did student perceptions coincide with their experience of using MS Teams developed over the course of a semester?

Participants and Implementation

This exploratory study was conducted at a Japanese university in Hyogo during the Spring 2022 academic year. Participants were university students majoring in law, literature, arts and letters, social sciences, English, Japanese literature, economics, and science and engineering who were enrolled in a first year English speaking or second year English speaking course.

For first-year English speaking courses, undergraduates studied English in a blended class environment, meaning 10 classes online, and five classes face-to-face with all classes using MS Teams as support. Students in the second year English speaking course studied English face-to-face over 15

classes. All students had their own Microsoft 365 license provided by the school and access to MS Teams. Teachers were also given a Microsoft 365 license and could utilize MS Teams. There was not a uniform policy that all instructors and students had to use MS Teams, but MS Teams was backed by the university and university's IT staff.

The researchers introduced MS Teams at the beginning of the semester and gave students instructions how to download the software and use some of its features. Students were directed to download MS Teams on all their devices.

Students were guided over several weeks that they would learn how to use MS Teams to communicate with their instructor and each other, receive announcements and class materials, do in-class communication activities, e-learning tasks, be able to do their homework and receive feedback, learn how to do word processing, record, edit, save, and attach audio and video clips, as well as take online tests and receive results.

Students were also instructed that in the 14th week of classes, they would be invited to fill out a Google Forms questionnaire that would solicit their perceptions of MS Teams. The voluntary questionnaire was written in English and Japanese and had a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. The Google Forms questionnaire was administered in July 2022. A total of 59 students across four classes participated in the study.

Methodology

This exploratory study used a cross-sectional mixed method approach and convenience sampling to collect participant data.

Instrument

Two questionnaires previously developed by Hulse (2019) and Gamble and Bailey (2022) that measured students' beliefs and perceptions of Google Classroom (GC) at two Japanese universities were applied to this study. Hulse's (2019) study concluded that for 70 female Japanese university students, GC was well received and useful for communicating and sharing information, but there was disagreement how GC should be viewed or utilized in the classroom. Gamble and Bailey's (2022) study revealed that 10 students at their Japanese university reported positive benefits using GC to improve English writing and some students preferred the online delivery format of the class. Because Hulse's (2019) and Gamble and Bailey's (2022) questionnaires had been evaluated and tested in a Japanese setting, the researchers felt comfortable adopting and modifying their questionnaires to help gain insight on student perceptions with MS Teams.

A Google Forms questionnaire was created with instructions and questions written in both English and Japanese. A yes / no consent and disclosure of voluntary participation and anonymity was presented at the beginning of the form. Eighteen subsequent questions were registered with one yes / no question, one multiple-choice question, 12 Likert questions, and four open-ended written-response questions. The yes / no question sought to elicit students' prior experience or exposure to the MS Teams software. The multiple-choice question was written to ascertain what device(s) students used when completing MS Teams assignments. The 12 Likert questions, a 6-point scale was used to inquire student perceptions of MS Teams features and feelings over the semester (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Slightly disagree*, 4 = *Slightly agree*, 5 = *Agree*, 6 = *Strongly agree*) (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). Four open-ended written-response questions were included at the end of the questionnaire to

gain more direct and nuanced answers from students concerning MS Teams perceptions.

Validity and Reliability

To enhance the validity and reliability of the Google Forms questionnaire, the questions were translated into Japanese and proofread by four native Japanese instructors, three female, one male, two of whom held doctorate degrees in the field. Differences in translations were reviewed by one of the instructors so the Japanese language questions would sound more natural to students. The feedback from the native Japanese instructors was that the questionnaire was easy to understand, interesting, and had an attractive design.

Between the researchers and four native Japanese instructors, there was debate whether the questionnaire would be better delivered in Japanese and English or in Japanese only, the participants' native language. The researchers decided to deliver the questionnaire in Japanese and English after piloting the Google Forms questionnaire with over 30 Japanese university students using MS Teams at another local Japanese university.

The Google Forms questionnaire was piloted by Japanese university students who were familiar with the functions of MS Teams and had been using the MS Teams application for at least a semester. The group of students in the pilot study were taught how to use MS Teams by one of the researchers in this study. The questionnaire was tested for understanding and length, and students confirmed that the questionnaire was comprehensible and straightforward. Most students completed the Google Forms questionnaire in less than 10 minutes. From the student responses, the bilingual format appeared to encourage English and Japanese responses, which influenced the researchers' final decision to choose a bilingual format in the actual launch of the research study.

Concerning the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure its reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.89 indicating high reliability (Cohen, 2007).

Findings

The results of the questionnaire are presented through questions and answers derived from the research questions.

Did students have prior experience or training using MS Teams?

The participants responses were yes and no (See Table 1). Thirty-five respondents (59%) reported receiving instructions from the university how to use MS Teams before taking the course. Twenty-four (41%) indicated they had not received instructions. It was likely that for many first-year students, instructions were given primarily by their instructor. One student's response was, 正直最初に説明が少なすぎたので使いづらい印象です。[Frankly I had the impression that it is difficult to use because there was too little explanation at the beginning.] Another student shared, 初めは少し難しかった。[At first it was a little difficult.] A third student expressed, "It was difficult." For students without prior experience, the transition to using MS Teams would have been a challenge. On the other hand, one student articulated that he or she had already used the MS Teams application in high school. 高校の頃も teams を使っていたので使いやすかった。[I used Teams in high school, therefore it was easy to use.] For this student, the use of MS Teams in a university setting may have been more seamless.

Table 1

Students' Prior Experience with MS Teams Software

	Yes はい	No いいえ
1. Before this course, I had received instructions from my school how to use Microsoft Teams. この講義を受講する前に、学校からMicrosoft Teamsの使い方の説明を受けていました。	59%	41%

Note. N = 59

With second-year students in the study, a few might have had exposure how to use MS Teams during their first year at the university. Some took the researchers' first year English speaking class. Others may have used MS Teams in their other classes, but their instructors could have elected to use a different LMS or chosen to avoid technology altogether (Sayeh & Razkane, 2021). Overall, students were likely to have differing starting points and experiences using MS Teams before taking their English speaking course.

How did students use the MS Teams software?

The participants in the study specified that they used MS Teams with their PCs and smartphones to complete MS Teams assignments. Assignments was a function in MS Teams where the teacher could create an assignment, give a title, instructions, and assign points and a due date. Students could then complete tasks by a deadline to receive points. It was expected that students used both the PC and the mobile option depending on tasks and convenience. Table 2 shows that thirty-nine students (66%) mainly used a PC to complete assignments. Nineteen students (32%) used their smartphone primarily. One student (2%) used a tablet.

Table 2

Primary Device Used to Access MS Teams

	PC パソコン	Smartphone スマートフォン	Tablet タブレット	Other その他
1. What device did you use primarily to complete Microsoft Teams assignments? Microsoft Teamsの課題のために主にどのようなデバイスを使用しましたか？	66%	32%	2%	0%

Note. N = 59

      The data highlights that students could complete their MS Teams assignments with whatever device that was convenient for them. They could finalize their assignment on a PC with a desktop version of MS Teams, or finish on a smartphone or tablet with a mobile version of MS Teams. The desktop and mobile versions of MS Teams possessed different strengths and weaknesses with the desktop version being easier to do word processing while the mobile version being more user friendly in recording and sending short voice and video messages. Having options and accessibility improved student perceptions of the MS Teams software. A student commented on the ease of submitting assignments. 課題の提出が簡単になり、授業資料が見やすくなった。[Submitting assignments is now easier and class materials are more accessible.] Another student favorably stressed the accessibility of assignments and class instructions through MS Teams. 課題や授業の指示が全て Microsoft Teams でなされたので、楽だと思った。[I thought it was easy because all the assignments and class instructions were done through Microsoft Teams.] A third student remarked on the ease of completing tests and assignments through MS Teams. テストや課題が簡単に提出できる

ので、とても楽になりました。[It made it so much easier to submit tests and assignments.] In summary, students could use a variety of devices to access MS Teams which greatly aided convenience, but they mainly used the PC to complete MS Teams assignments.

What were students' perceptions using MS Teams at the beginning of the course?

Students' perceptions using MS Teams at the beginning of the course varied, but the data confirmed that most participants slightly agreed that the MS Teams software / app was difficult to use. The descriptive statistics data for Likert scale question #1 (See Table 3) had a parabolic shape highest at four on the Likert scale (M=3.42, SD=1.35). The highest percentage of responses was slightly agreed at twenty-one responses (36%). Thirty-three (56%) in total agreed that in the beginning of the course, the MS Teams software / app was difficult to use. Twenty-six participants (44%) disagreed to varying degrees.

Likert scale question #2 addressed the issue of student confidence. After expressing some difficulty using MS Teams at the beginning of the course, students mostly answered that they quickly gained confidence using the software (See Table 3). The descriptive statistics data divulged that participant answers concentrated at four and five on the Likert scale with the highest point at five (m = 4.42, SD = 1.21). Forty-five participants (76%) collectively agreed with the statement, "I quickly felt confident using Microsoft Teams." Fourteen participants (24%) generally disagreed. No students replied strongly disagree. In short, many students expressed being able to quickly gain confidence using the application.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Student Reactions using MS Teams (April)

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
1. In the beginning of the course, I thought that the Microsoft Teams software / app was difficult to use. 受講当初はMicrosoft Teamsのソフト/アプリは使いにくいと思っていた。	59	1.00	6.00	3.42	1.35
2. I quickly felt confident using Microsoft Teams. すぐにMicrosoft Teamsを使うことに慣れた。	59	2.00	6.00	4.42	1.21

Note. 6-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree

What were students' perceptions using MS Teams at the end of the course?

Participants in the study revealed that by the end of the course, the vast majority agreed that they liked the speed and reliability of MS Teams and were satisfied with MS Teams (See Table 4). Likert scale question #11 addressed the technical responsiveness of MS Teams and students responded by concentrating their answers at four, five, and six of the Likert scale with few responses in the disagree categories (m = 4.58, SD = 1.13). Fifty-one participants (86%) agreed, "I liked the overall speed and reliability of the Microsoft Teams app." Eight respondents (14%) disagreed.

Likert scale question #12 dealt with student satisfaction and students answered similarly but with more strongly agree and agree responses (m = 4.73, SD = 1.11). Fifty participants (85%) overall

agreed with the statement, "I was satisfied with MS Teams." Nine (15%) altogether disagreed.

Comparing the descriptive statistics data of Likert scale questions #11 and #12 with Likert scale

question #1, the data confirmed statistical improvement of student perceptions of MS Teams.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Student Reactions using MS Teams (July)

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
11. I liked the overall speed and reliability of the Microsoft Teams app. Microsoft Teamsアプリの全体的なスピードと信頼性が気に入った。	59	2.00	6.00	4.58	1.13
12. I was satisfied with Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teamsに全体的に満足している。	59	2.00	6.00	4.73	1.11

Note. 6-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree

Did using MS Teams make learning English easier or harder or made no difference?

A significant majority of students expressed that MS Teams made learning English easier in

their English speaking class. The above question was an open-ended question for students to expand

their ideas. Thirty-eight participants (64%) responded that MS Teams made learning English easier in

the class, 10 students (17%) suggested MS Teams made no difference, three responses (5%) described

that MS Teams made learning English harder, and eight (14%) provided answers that were outside the

scope of the question. Students commonly said, 楽になりました。 [Easier.] One student substantiated

that it was easier, because MS Teams' LMS functions was faster than the school's LMS. School LMS

を使うよりは、スピードが早かったため使いやすかった。[It was easier to use than using the school LMS because it was faster.] Another student observed that when the school's LMS was down, MS Teams could still be used. School LMS のサーバーが途切れている時でも teams はしっかり動いていたのでよかった。[I was glad to see that Teams was working well even when the school LMS server was interrupted.] A third student highlighted favorably the all-in-one aspect of MS Teams. 一括に管理されていたため便利だった。[It was convenient because it was managed in one place.] (See Appendix A for other student responses). After using MS Teams software for a semester, most students were able to develop positive feelings towards MS Teams.

What did students like or dislike about MS Teams?

Likert scale questions #3 to #10 of the Google Forms questionnaire provided several statements covering various features of MS Teams. Most participant answers were under slight agree, agree, or strongly agree categories (See Table 5). Forty-four respondents (75%) agreed that MS Teams was useful for getting announcements and knowing what to do each week. Forty-six students (78%) agreed overall that MS Teams was useful for accessing class materials. Fifty-one learners (86%) agreed mostly that MS Teams was useful for accessing instructions about assignments. Forty-seven (80%) agreed collectively that MS Teams enhanced efficiency and made doing homework easier.

The four features that students liked the most were in questions #7 to #10 of the Likert scale questions (See Table 6). Students answered agree or strongly agree frequently and gave few responses in the disagree categories. Fifty-four participants (92%) in all agreed, "I like having my grades sent to me through MS Teams." Fifty-three students (90%) mainly agreed, "MS Teams was useful for accessing and taking online tests." Fifty-three of all participants (90%) also agreed, "I liked how I

could access MS Teams through an app on my mobile device." Fifty-six learners (95%) commonly

agreed, "I liked being able to contact my teacher through MS Teams." The researchers conclude that

students showed nearly unequivocal reactions to items #7 to #10 of the Likert scale questions and

especially favored the MS Teams functions that offered expeditious responses to students.

Table 5

Student Reactions to Using Microsoft Teams

	Strongly disagree 全くそう思わない	Disagree そう思わない	Slightly disagree あまりそう思わない	Slightly agree 少しそう思う	Agree そう思う	Strongly agree 強くそう思う
3. Microsoft Teams was useful for getting announcements and knowing what to do each week. Microsoft Teamsは、お知らせが届いたり毎週何をすればいいのかがわかるので便利だった。	3%	8%	14%	26%	34%	15%
4. Microsoft Teams was useful for accessing class materials. Microsoft Teamsは、授業の教材にアクセスするのに便利だった。	0%	8%	14%	30%	31%	17%
5. Microsoft Teams was useful for accessing instructions about assignments. Microsoft Teamsは、「課題」についての指示にアクセスするのに便利だった。	3%	4%	7%	29%	34%	23%
6. Microsoft Teams enhanced my efficiency and made doing homework easier. Microsoft Teamsを使うことにより学習効率を高め、課題に取り組むことを容易にしてくれた。	2%	3%	15%	39%	29%	12%

Note. N = 59

Table 6

Student Reactions to Using Microsoft Teams

	Strongly disagree 全くそう思わない	Disagree そう思わない	Slightly disagree あまりそう思わない	Slightly agree 少しそう思う	Agree そう思う	Strongly agree 強くそう思う
7. I liked having my grades sent to me through Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teamsで成績が送られてくるのがよかった。	0%	3%	5%	29%	29%	34%
8. Microsoft Teams was useful for accessing and taking online tests. Microsoft Teamsは、オンラインテストへのアクセスや受験に便利だった。	3%	2%	5%	24%	41%	25%
9. I liked how I could access Microsoft Teams through an app on my mobile device. モバイル端末のアプリからMicrosoft Teamsにアクセスできるのがよかった。	0%	3%	7%	19%	37%	34%
10. I liked being able to contact my teacher through Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teamsを通じて先生と連絡を取ることができたのがよかった。	2%	0%	3%	27%	27%	41%

Note. N = 59

Was using a LMS like MS Teams helpful for learning at this university?

From the student perspective, using a LMS like MS Teams was helpful. Students often wrote that it was better to use MS Teams, or it was more helpful. を使った方がいい。[It's better to use Teams.] Teams を使う方が役に立った。[Using Teams was more helpful.] Students also connected using MS Teams with the benefits of learning. Teams を使うことで学習に役立った [Using Teams helped me learn.] 学習にとても役に立った。[Very useful for learning.] A student exhibited high self-efficacy in being able to manage MS Teams. 自分で管理しやすいのでとてもよかったと思います。[I think it was very good because it was easy to manage by myself.] MS Teams was additionally described as being helpful in the way students desired. すぐに連絡が取れることと、質問しやすいところがよかったです！[I liked that I could reach the instructor right away and that the instructor made it easy for me to ask questions!] One student however had some difficulty and proposed that MS Teams could be better by integrating with the School's LMS. システムを使うことには賛成だが、School LMS との使い分けが大変でした。できるならひとつにまとめて欲しいです。[I agree with using the system, but it was difficult to use it with my school's LMS. I would like to see them combined into one if possible.] (See Appendix B for other student responses). Everything considered, MS Teams was accommodating to nearly all student needs and helpful for learning.

Was it preferable to have class handouts distributed by paper or electronically through MS Teams?

Many of the participants preferred to have class handouts distributed electronically with one student sharing their preference for printed handouts. The response in favor of printed handouts was, 学校側で印刷してもらえると助かります。[It would be helpful if the school could print the materials.] In contrast, students illustrated several reasons why they preferred electronic distribution

over paper class handouts. They affirmed it was helpful and easier. 役に立ちました。プリントより やりやすかったです。 [It was helpful. It was easier to do than using printouts.] They stressed how printed handouts could be lost. 印刷されたプリントは無くしてしまうから、このようなシステムを使っていく方が良いと思う。 [I think it is better to use such a system because printouts could be lost.] They justified the convenience of not misplacing printed handouts and not having to carry paper around. プリントだと無くしてしまったり、毎時間持ってこないといけないけど、Microsoft Teams を使うと、プリントを無くす必要もなく全てその中に入っているので安心。 [With printouts, you lose them or have to bring them every hour, but with Microsoft Teams, you won't lose printouts and everything is in there.] They also recognized how being paperless was beneficial to the environment. このように紙をそこまで使わない授業はエコでいいと思います。 [This kind of class that does not use that much paper is good for the environment.] The researchers suggest that student preferences may vary, but electronic distribution could resonate with an eco-conscious target audience.

Conclusion and Implications

In a post COVID-19 world it has become evident that perhaps the novel coronavirus may never be fully eradicated, and society may need to co-exist with the virus. Because of the tremendous need for flexibility to help navigate the challenges and uncertainties of modern times, online learning environments that were created because of the pandemic may need to stay or remain an option. As a result, the need for technology and LMSs such as MS Teams will continue to be necessary.

The researchers designed an exploratory study that attempted to measure students' perceptions on the use of MS Teams at a Japanese university in Japan. Many students indicated that initially they

felt the MS Teams software was slightly difficult to use. However, over the course of 15 weeks, students quickly gained confidence using MS Teams and could point to a variety of reasons why they felt confident with it. Themes that were often repeated were easy or easier, convenient, useful, helpful, and accessible echoing similar themes found in previous studies of MS Teams and GC perceptions (Faisal et al., 2021; Fuaddah & Maharani, 2021; Gamble & Bailey, 2022; Hulse, 2019; Rachelinda et al., 2021; Wea & Kuki, 2020; Wichanpricha, 2021)

The researchers acknowledge that there were limitations to their exploratory study as it was limited to a small sample of students in one department at a Japanese university. In our questionnaire, we did not include the option of neither agree nor disagree. Moreover, in our study, MS Teams software was introduced and taught by the researchers in a competing pool of LMS options. More specifics on how students reacted to different versions of MS Teams (web app, mobile app, desktop app) and on different platforms (Windows, macOS, iOS, Android) could be further examined. Further research could also examine in more detail other functions of MS Teams such as the video conferencing Meet Now feature or Class Notebook that was not an emphasis in this research study.

The researchers' participant pool was in a blended and face-to-face environment that differed from other studies. Future studies on the MS Teams software could be held in a variety of different EFL delivery options: Face-to-face, online synchronous, online asynchronous, hybrid, HyFlex, blended, etc. Also, how students perceive the MS Teams software in different courses may be interesting to research. A teacher's application of the MS Teams software could be different for a grammar course, a TOEIC skills course, a speaking course, listening course, reading and writing course, presentation course, discussion course, content-based course, and so on. At the same time, how students perceive MS Teams

software under a more coordinated and standardized setting could also be looked at to better gauge perceptions. In conclusion, future research could make another inquiry and gauge Japanese university students whether they are as receptive to the MS Teams software or not when circumstances differ.

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Appendix A

Did Using MS Teams Make Learning English Easier or Harder or Made no Difference?

- 楽になった。［It was easier.]

- 使いやすかったです。［It was easy to use.]

- 違いはありません [No difference.]

- It became easier and more fun.

- 楽しくなった [It's been fun.]

- どちらともいえない [Can't say either way.]

- 英語学習が楽になりました。[Learning English is now easier.]

- 相変わらず難しい [Continues to be difficult. It was difficult before, it is still difficult

  now.]

- 最初は難しかったけど、慣れると結構使いやすくて、学習の手助けになった。

  [It was difficult at first, but once I got used to it, it was quite easy to use and helped me

  learn.]

Appendix B

Was Using a LMS Like MS Teams Helpful for Learning at This University?

- Teams is very good

- 役に立ちました [Helpful.]

- 思う [I think so.]

- 役立ったと思いました [I thought it was helpful.]

- 利用しやすく役に立った [Easy to use and helpful.]

- teams の方が楽だった [Teams was easier.]

- チームズがいいです！[I like Teams!]

- スマートフォンで課題や、授業内容にアクセスできるので、すごく便利でした。 [It was very convenient because I could access my assignments and class content on my smart phone.]

- 学習管理システムを用いたほうが良いです。いつでも、どこでも確認できるから [It is better to use a learning management system. Because you can check it anytime, anywhere.]

Exploring Humor and Cultural Differences Through Intercultural Humor Misunderstanding Case Studies

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Intercultural humor misunderstanding case studies are a promising classroom technique for guiding learners from diverse cultural backgrounds to examine cultural differences regarding humor. This paper describes sample classroom case studies about two different forms of humor, verbal irony and satirical news. The recommended steps for introducing such case studies are outlined. Practical expansion activities and student reactions are also shared.

異文化間で起こるユーモア誤解の事例を扱った学習は、多様な文化的背景を持つ学習者に対し、ユーモアに関する文化の違いを考察するよう導くクラス活動の手法として有効的である。本稿では、言葉で表す皮肉と風刺的な虚構のニュースという 2 つの異なる形式のユーモアについて、教室で行ったケーススタディの例を説明する。 このようなケース スタディ導入の望ましいステップを概説し、 実際の拡張活動と学生の反応も紹介する。

Keywords: humor; intercultural communication; verbal irony; satirical news

Literature Review

Konrad Lorenz wrote that "Laughter forms a bond, but it simultaneously draws a line" (1963, p. 253). In other words, humor has the power to both help and hinder communication, a double-edged sword that is even more relevant in the context of intercultural communication. While humor may be universal, the frequency of usage of respective forms of humor can greatly vary from culture to culture. Previous research (e.g., Bell, 2006; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Yamada, 1997) suggests that these differences in humor usage can cause difficulties in communication. Additionally, this humor barrier is not necessarily overcome simply with increased language proficiency. Research reveals that even learners with advanced language proficiency often struggle to comprehend, let alone engage in, humor in the target language, leading to embarrassment or even isolation (Bell & Attardo, 2010; Shively, 2018).

A growing body of research in the field of foreign language education recognizes the importance of understanding humor in intercultural communication. Wulf (2010), for example, proposed microskills instruction for helping English language learners engage in humorous interaction in the L2. In addition, Bell and Pomerantz (2016) suggested a backward design approach to better equip learners to detect, comprehend, respond to, and produce L2 humor. Other researchers have focused on helping learners to better understand respective forms of humor that they are likely to

encounter in the English-speaking world, including jokes (Hodson, 2014), satirical news (Prichard & Rucynski, 2019), and verbal irony (Kim & Lantolf, 2018).

Exploring Humor Differences in the Multicultural Classroom

Humor is such a complex and multifaceted aspect of culture and communication that perhaps it should not be relegated to a mere unit or one-off lesson. Instead, I designed a full 16-week pilot course entitled "Humor and Intercultural Communication." This course was open to Japanese and international students at a large national university in western Japan. Twenty-five students signed up for the course, including students from 10 different countries representing all three circles of English.

One consistent component of the course was what I refer to as intercultural communication humor misunderstanding case studies. Using these case studies was a way to examine real-world misunderstandings involving humor from a range of cultural perspectives in an attempt to identify causes of the misunderstandings and, in the end, consider possible solutions. I will share two of these case studies, representing two different forms of humor, including one face-to-face communication example and one online communication example. For each case study, I will explain the steps for introducing the case study, describe expansion activities, and share student reactions.

Case Study 1: Sarcasm Misunderstanding

The use of sarcasm can frequently lead to misunderstandings in intercultural communication, as it employs non-literal language, and the form and functions of sarcasm can vary from culture to culture. A real-world example of this was illustrated in the Japanese sports world with a 2012 incident involving Matt Murton, a star American player for the Hanshin Tigers baseball team. During a game that season, Murton made an errant throw in a game that was being pitched by Atsushi Nohmi, allowing a run to score. After the game, a Japanese reporter asked Murton if he was trying his hardest when he made the throw. Assumedly taking umbrage with this questioning of his effort, Murton retorted that he let the runner score on purpose because he dislikes Nohmi. Unfortunately, Murton's words were taken literally, and they were splashed across the cover of Kansai sports newspapers the following day (Coskrey, 2012). Despite his popularity and strong performance in Japanese baseball, Murton faced backlash from fans and team management, who were bewildered by his comments.

Warm-up Activities: Overview of Sarcasm in Respective Cultures

Before introducing the case study, students were tasked with examining the use of sarcasm in their own cultures. Sample warm-up questions included:

1. How common is sarcasm in your culture? If it is common, in what situations is it frequently used? What are the different possible functions (e.g., criticize a person or situation, make light of a situation, bond with others) of sarcasm?

2. Do you personally frequently use sarcasm? If yes, in what situations and with what kinds of people (e.g., friends only, family members) do you use it?

3. Are there any warnings or limits about sarcasm in your culture? For example, are there any situations (e.g., business meetings) when sarcasm should not be used?

The second question was included to stress that despite the focus on humor in different cultures, individual preferences for humor use must also always be considered.

Introducing the Case Study

Explaining the case study involves more than just summarizing what happened. As almost no students in the class were familiar with the incident (except for one or two Hanshin Tigers fans), the context needed to be explained in detail. For example, only American and Japanese students represented countries where baseball is a major sport, so a basic overview of baseball terminology (e.g., starting pitcher, score a run) was necessary. Additionally, important details about baseball in Japan (e.g., limits on foreign players, the fanatical passion of Hanshin Tigers fans) were also explained.

Concept checks were also employed throughout the overview of the case study to ensure that all students understood the incident fully. After all, humor that is obvious in one culture can cause confusion in another culture. Sample concept checks included:

1. Murton's *literal* words were "I don't like Nohmi, so I let the other team score a run." What was his *intended* meaning?

2. Why did Murton answer in such a way?

3. Who was the target of Murton's words?

Discussion and Expansion Activities

Discussion and expansion activities focused on examining why the misunderstanding happened and also considering solutions for avoiding such intercultural incidents involving sarcasm. Although this incident involved an American player on a Japanese baseball team, the case study was used as a springboard for examining how sarcasm is used in students' respective native cultures. Discussion

questions included:

1. What is the best solution to this incident? What could be done to avoid such future misunderstandings?

2. Imagine you are asked to explain the use of sarcasm in your own culture. What important information would you give? For example, do speakers give any cues when they are being sarcastic?

3. Do you think that understanding sarcasm and other verbal irony should be a part of English language education? Why or why not?

In addition to discussing the case, students also engaged in a range of collaborative activities to get a deeper understanding of how sarcasm and other forms of verbal irony is used in different cultures. This included sharing common possible cues for verbal irony, such as vocal (e.g., prosody) and nonverbal (e.g., facial expressions, gestures) cues. While many cues were deemed to be fairly universal, students did discover some variance, such as the infrequency of rolling one's eyes or making "air quotes" as a marker of sarcasm in Japan compared to Western countries. For a more detailed overview of instruction on verbal irony markers in language education, see our previous research (Prichard & Rucynski, 2020).

One entertaining collaborative activity for practicing identifying sarcasm markers in different cultures is a modification of the "truth or lie" activity. Students are given a range of conversational topics (e.g., movies, music, sports) and need to express a like and dislike about each one, using both literal and nonliteral language. (The sarcastic statement should include at least one verbal or nonverbal cue). Group members try to detect the sarcastic statement and identify the cue(s). An example from musical likes included:

1. I love X Japan. I have all their CDs.

2. I looooove AKB48. I have their posters on my wall.

The respective student used the vocal cue of an elongated vowel to reveal that he prefers hard rock to Japanese idol groups.

The last discussion question was included to expand the situation to focus not only on the case study itself, but also consider possible preemptive measures for avoiding intercultural humor misunderstandings in the first place.

Student Reactions

In addition to in-class discussions, students were tasked with writing a short reaction report to summarize their final opinions about the same questions. As these written reactions contained insightful comments that reflected learners' respective intercultural journeys, I would like to share a couple excerpts here. As all students in the class had either studied English or were studying Japanese at the time, many students chose to especially focus on the language education question (#3).

Overall, the students largely agreed that at least some attention should be given to humorous, non-literal language such as sarcasm in language education. One student who moved with her family from Bulgaria to England as a child credited this early exposure to real-world English ("including plenty of sarcastic remarks") with providing her with the foundation to communicate smoothly in the English-speaking world. She wrote that "having had that experience which helped me understand, detect, and use sarcasm properly I believe greatly elevated my language proficiency as well as helped me get along better with English-speaking people." She further wrote that awareness of sarcasm is an important intercultural communication skill that should be included in English language education.

One bilingual Japanese student stressed that she regularly uses sarcasm in both English and Japanese, but that sarcasm in Japan is done "in a Japanese language way…and only with the right person in the right situation." She noted that language learners should be made more aware of these differences. Similarly to the Bulgarian student, she credited the experience of being an exchange student in the United States in high school with improving her intercultural communicative competence. Referring to the rigid attention to form in her secondary school English classes in Japan as "like being in prison," she argued for more authentic materials (e.g., movies or TV shows that illustrate real-world English such as sarcasm) in English language education.

Case Study 2: Satirical News Misunderstanding

Satirical news is another form of humor that varies in frequency and popularity from country to country. There is a particular gap in popularity between predominantly English-speaking countries and Japan, as reflected in the current number of Facebook likes for the following respective satirical news websites.

The Onion, USA (6.2 million likes)

The Daily Mash, UK (972,000 likes)

The Betoota Advocate, Australia (826,000 likes)

The Rising Wasabi, English-language site about Japan (42,000 likes)

Kyoko Shimbun (虚構新聞), Japanese-language site about Japan (23,000 likes)

As seen from the last two examples, even *The Rising Wasabi*, with the much smaller target audience of English-speaking foreign residents of Japan, has nearly twice as many likes as the most popular Japanese-language satirical news website, the *Kyoko Shimbun*. Additionally, when my co-researcher and I surveyed our Japanese students about frequency of reading satirical news for a previous study (Prichard & Rucynski, 2019), more than half of the 87 respondents (53.5 percent) responded that they "never" read satirical news, whether in English or Japanese.

This gap in the popularity and understanding of English satirical news was illustrated by the confusion caused by the October 12th, 2016 headline from *The Rising Wasabi*, "Osaka Launches Foreigner-Only Carriages To Curtail Inconveniences." Several Japanese readers accused this article of being "fake news," with comments such as "This post is not true. I live in Osaka for 23 years. I never see it. it's so bad joke…" and "This is obviously Photoshoped [*sic*]!" These commenters were correct in calling this headline "fake news," but what was missing was an understanding that satirical news websites do generally make it known that their "news" stories are merely jokes. For example, in the "About" section on their website, it is clearly written, "*The Rising Wasabi* is Japan's premium satirical news publication…."

What was likely also missing was the awareness that *The Rising Wasabi* article was meant to satirize a recent incident in which a Japanese train conductor in Osaka, in response to a complaint from a Japanese passenger, made a regrettable announcement apologizing for the large number of foreign passengers. This incident was picked up by the international media, prompting headlines such as "Japanese train conductor blames foreign tourists for overcrowding" (McCurry, 2016). Many foreign residents of Japan were offended by the conductor's choice of words, prompting the satirical article from *The Rising Wasabi* which, as often happens with humor, apparently got "lost in translation."

Warm-up Activities: Overview of Satirical News in Respective Cultures

As with the previously explained case study about sarcasm, students were again tasked with exploring the use of satirical news in their own culture. Similar sample warm-up questions included:

1. How common and popular is satirical news in your culture? If it is common, what types of satirical news (e.g., satirical news websites such as *The Onion*, TV shows such as *The Daily Show*) are popular? Who or what are frequent targets of this type of humor?

2. Do you personally enjoy satirical news? If yes, what kinds of satirical news do you like?

3. Are there any limits about satirical news in your culture? For example, are there any targets that are avoided or considered taboo?

Introducing the Case Study

As with the Matt Murton incident, very few students were familiar with either the original news story or *The Rising Wasabi* satirical article (although a majority of international students *were* familiar with *The Rising Wasabi*). So, several concept checks were included while explaining the misunderstanding in detail, including:

1. Who or what was the target of *The Rising Wasabi* article? What satirical statement were they making?

2. What is the difference between "fake news" (a term popularized at the time by then President Trump) and satirical news?

3. Are there any clues in the article from *The Rising Wasabi* that give away that it is satirical news?

The second question was important in order to understand the evolution of the term "fake news." Satirical news could also be called "fake news" or "spoof news," as it is humor and not real news. Trump's tendency to dismiss many media outlets as "fake news," however, was more intended to accuse them of being biased (or simply not supporting his agenda). In the context of Japan, a controversy regarding the accuracy of content in broadcasting erupted in 2007 when NHK (*Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai*, or Japan Broadcasting Corporation) aired a program that included exaggerated claims promoting the weight-loss properties of *natto* (fermented soybeans) (Murakami, 2009). This incident contributed to making the Japanese public weary of fake news, but the distinction here would be that the program aimed to deceive people, whereas writers of satirical news (generally) aim to entertain and (sometimes) criticize.

Discussion and Expansion Activities

As with the previous case study, discussion and expansion activities focused on examining both why the misunderstanding happened and also considering solutions for avoiding such future misunderstandings. Students were also asked their own views on both the potential effectiveness and offensiveness of satirical news. Discussion questions included:

1. If someone is not familiar with satirical news websites, what cues (other than just checking the name

of the source) can be used to identify satirical news?

2. What is your opinion about *The Rising Wasabi* website? For example, do you feel that some Japanese people may be offended by foreign writers using humor to criticize their culture? Or do you think that this is an effective way to shed light on social issues in Japan (including those affecting foreign residents)?

3. Do you think that understanding satirical news should be a part of English language education? Why or why not? Are there any benefits of reading satirical news (other than just for entertainment/humor)?

With regards to the first question, students were able to share several possible cues to help identify satirical news. Referring back to the photo used in the satirical story about foreigner-only train carriages, students noticed the use of the word "*gaijin*." This shortened form of *gaikokujin* (foreigner) is often considered derogatory and thus it is unlikely that it would appear in signs made by a railway company or in reputable media sources. Students also noticed differences with regards to style and design between satirical and real news websites. As an example, in *The Rising Wasabi* headline all words were capitalized, whereas sentence case capitalization is generally used for real news headlines. For a deeper analysis of cues to help learners detect satirical news, see our previous research on this topic (Prichard & Rucynski, 2019; Rucynski & Prichard, 2020).

For one collaborative activity, learners were tasked with selecting a range of articles from *The Rising Wasabi* and then worked together to identify both the meaning and *target* of the satire. Understanding the target of the humor is essential, as many humor misunderstandings occur because people do not understand the true target of the humor. (An example of this would be the previous case study, where the reporter, and not Nohmi himself, was the target of Murton's sarcastic comment.) *The Rising Wasabi* was chosen because most of the stories are focused on Japan, the one cultural context that all students in the class had in common. In addition, examining such stories together helped Japanese students raise their awareness of the foreign experience in Japan. One example of a misunderstood target included the lighter headline "Tokyo Reaches '*Atsui Ne*' ('It's hot, isn't it?') Yearly Peak." Most Japanese guessed that the target is simply that Japanese summers are hot, but the real target was the tendency in Japan to greet everyone in this season with "*Atsui ne*." To help avoid labeling this as an "Only in Japan" phenomenon, however, British students were quick to add that this would be equivalent to their common (but sarcastic!) greeting, "Lovely weather, isn't it?" Concerning a deeper topic, most Japanese students were baffled by the meaning or target of the headline "Seat Next To Foreigner Used Despite Clear Vacancies Across The Way," a satirical comment on the assumption

that the empty seat next to a foreigner on the train is usually the last one occupied. Japanese students were surprised and saddened to hear many international students in the class share that this has happened to them.

Student Reactions

For their written reactions, students largely focused on the second and third discussion questions, with a majority of students arguing that satirical news is an effective form of social commentary that also merits inclusion in English language education. One student from England stressed that an understanding of satirical news is important because headlines from *The Rising Wasabi* such as "Tokyo Disneyland Unveils New Fantasy Area Where Women Have Equal Rights" could initially come across as offensive if the reader does not recognize the headline as satire. The student further explained that "it's also important to realize that satirical sites…often employ hyperbole to not only get an initial reaction, but also to draw attention to wider societal issues that arguably do need addressing."

One student from Japan, who had also lived overseas, considered the issue of satirical news from different perspectives. She explained that she did not find such humor offensive at all because she had been exposed to this type of humor from a young age, but she also warned that "other Japanese people may find it offensive as they have not been fully exposed to that type of humor." In the end, however, she argued that an understanding of satirical news is beneficial in that it challenges readers "to dissect the true meaning of the headline where they are forced to critically think about what is going on in the society."

Another Japanese student who had never read satirical news before the class activities praised the potential of satirical news in making young people more aware of contemporary political and social issues. The student admitted that she rarely reads current political news in Japanese, citing the biased nature of Japanese newspapers as a major reason for her lack of interest in politics. On the other hand, she wrote that she was "amazed that *The Rising Wasabi* generated my interest in reading and knowing more about the current political and social situation in Japan."

Caveats and Conclusion

While students in this course generally had a very favorable reaction to using humor misunderstandings in intercultural communication as class content, there are always warnings when it comes to incorporating humor into language education. First of all, it must be noted that all students in

this course had fairly high levels of English language proficiency (and the course also included a number of students from inner circle English countries). As it was implemented as a content-based course, a minimum score of 600 on the TOEIC was required. This is not to say that humorous content cannot be included in courses with learners with lower proficiency levels. Especially when it comes to controversies or misunderstandings involving humor, however, great care must be taken to ensure that learners have a clear understanding of both the language and content.

Second, this course was greatly enhanced by the fact that there were students from a range of cultural backgrounds. Still, there is potential for using such intercultural humor misunderstanding case studies in English language classes with only Japanese students. Cases such as the Matt Murton sarcasm incident are culturally familiar (and based on a real-life incident) and thus worth exploring for activities examining intercultural communication in traditional English language courses.

Finally, these case studies were included as part of an entire course devoted to the role of humor in intercultural communication. Not all teachers will have the interest (or academic freedom) to design a full course based solely on humor. Still, these case studies could also work well as individual units or activities. It is important, however, to ensure that such activities have a connection with the respective course curriculum. The sarcasm case study, for example, would be most suitable for an English speaking or listening course, especially for students who are interested in studying abroad, or at least actively engaging in English communication outside of the classroom. The satirical news case study would, on the other hand, be more suitable as part of a unit on digital (as satirical news is frequently shared on social media platforms) and media literacy as part of an English reading course.

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Creating Learner YouTube Videos in a Communicative Language Class

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YouTube is one of Japan's most popular web platforms, with most young people engaging with it to some degree. It is an inexhaustible source of authentic, natural spoken language. Therefore, it should be an ideal resource to support language learners, yet its use is far from commonplace. This paper describes a YouTube content production project for a communicative English class. The process gives learners an understanding of the language and communicative style in the learners' chosen content. Learners then deepen this knowledge through guided discussions to highlight the communicative features displayed by successful YouTubers. Finally, learners consolidate the lexis, delivery patterns, and non-verbal communication to produce their own original YouTube videos. Thus, through extensive practice, learners improve their understanding of English use on the platform and enhance their general communication skills.

YouTube は日本で最も人気のあるウェブプラットフォームの 1 つで、ほとんどの若者がある程度 YouTube を利用しています。本格的で自然な話し言葉の無限の源泉です。したがって、語学学習者をサポートするための理想的なリソースであるはずですが、その使用は決して一般的ではありません。この論文はコミュニケーション重視の英語授業の為の YouTube コンテンツ制作プロジェクトについて説明します。このプロセスにより、学習者は選択したコンテンツの言語とコミュニケーションスタイルを理解することができます。その後、学習者はガイド付きディスカッションを通じて知識を深め、成功したユーチューバーが見せるコミュニケーションの特徴に焦点を当てます。最後に、学習者は語彙、話し方のパターン、非言語コミュニケーションを統合して、自分だけのオリジナルの YouTube 動画を制作します。したがって、広範囲にわたる練習を通じて、学習者は本プラットフォームでの英語の使用についての理解を深め、一般的なコミュニケーションスキルを向上させます。

According to the Japanese Cabinet Office, Japanese high school pupils spent an average of 3 hours 37 minutes online in 2018, a figure which has increased annually since at least 2014 (Nippon.com, 2019). This finding illustrates the centrality of mediated communication in young people's daily lives. YouTube is one of the most popular platforms among the various online tools and applications. Indeed, a survey published on Statista (2021) found that 91 percent of 13–29-year-olds in Japan used the video-sharing application. The platform also has exceptionally high usage rates in the UK, where 97% of 16-24-year-olds use YouTube, and in the USA, the figure is 96% (SQ Digital, 2020). These results demonstrate not only the degree to which young people in Japan engage with

YouTube but also the platform's significance in the culture of the language many are studying. In the UK, an independent committee of inquiry set up to study tertiary education and the potential of web 2.0 technologies, "technologies that enable communication, collaboration, participation and sharing" (JISC, 2009, p. 8), concluded the following:

> Learning that is active – by doing – undertaken within a community and based on individual's interests, is widely considered to be the most effective. Driven by process rather than content, such an approach helps students become self-directed and independent learners. Web 2.0 is well suited to serving and supporting this type of learning. (JISC, 2009, p. 8)

YouTube offers several features that can facilitate these goals in higher education. As Balcikanli (2010, p. 92) points out, YouTube is an "unlimited resource for language acquisition/learning", with a multitude of registers and genres of spoken language available for the classroom and the autonomous learner alike. Therefore, when combined with production activities, YouTube's authentic spoken texts offer unique possibilities to model the target language in the relevant cultural contexts. Furthermore, the platform's videos can prepare learners for the ongoing challenges of second language acquisition in the digitally-mediated world where today's learners must operate. McBride (2009) argues that online learning tools, such as YouTube, give learners this authentic practice in the target language and its pragmatics. To elaborate, one aspect of pragmatics refers to how words are used in a practical sense, depending on context. For example, YouTubers often open videos with a phrase such as, "Hi, Guys." By watching YouTubers, learners can understand through repeated exposure that "guys" is often used as a term of address in a way that "men" is not. Moreover, learners see one of the informal contexts where "guys" is employed in a genderless manner and learn the types of intonation and body language that accompany this kind of utterance to achieve the appropriately casual delivery.

There is a point of caution, as various studies have reported initial trepidation among some at the prospect of sharing learner-created YouTube videos. However, these learners were willing to bear this discomfort for the positive benefits of the process, which included improvements in writing skills, communications skills, and motivation due to the increased relevance of the learning materials (Kelsen, 2009; Malhiwsky, 2010; Pong, 2010). Thus, while teachers should treat learner hesitance sensitively, the evidence shows that YouTube and other web technologies should increasingly supplement the educational materials of this generation of digital natives.

Purpose

This paper describes a process for aiding learners in creating authentic English language YouTube videos on topics of their choosing. Learners analyse and discuss YouTubers videos to comprehend the communication styles of the platform and social media more generally. Through these interactions, learners understand and later mimic these styles in their own content. Thus, increasing learners' digital literacy and English communications skills.

Procedure

This process was implemented with classes of first-year English majors containing 15 – 25 members of pre-intermediate to intermediate level, which meet for four 90-minute lessons each week. All the class members use iPads and have access to Wi-Fi. The procedure described in this paper is the final project in a social media unit and covers around eight lessons, as outlined below.

- Lesson 1 - Introduction to YouTube in the English language

- Lesson 2 – What Makes a Good YouTuber?

- Lesson 3 – Analyse English Language YouTubers (Learners' Selections)

- Lesson 4 – Discuss English Language YouTubers (Learners' Selections)

- Lesson 5 – Project Introduction – Create a YouTube Video

- Lesson 6 – Plan Learner YouTube Videos

- Lesson 7 –Learner Consultations

    o Create YouTube Videos (Homework over a vacation period)

- Lesson 8 – Watch Finished YouTube Videos as a Class

Lesson 1 - Introduction to YouTube (in English)

The teacher introduces the learners to the task with a *speed chat* activity. Learners make partners and discuss a question related to social media and YouTube. After two minutes, class members rotate to speak with a new partner using a different question. Four questions are used in the activity, included here for illustration:

1. Which social media platform (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram etc.) do you like best and why?
2. Who is your favourite YouTuber, and why?

3. How much YouTube or TikTok do you watch every day? Is it too much?
4. Could you live without social media for a day, a week or a month?

Following the *speed chat*, learners are given an observation quiz to focus the classes' attention on the video and draw out some salient features used by successful English language YouTubers. Learners are organised into groups of four. Then, the class is shown the video by the YouTuber KSI entitled "*I Spent $10,000 On Shoes and This is What I Got...*" (KSI, 2018). Learners are then asked several visual and language-based observation questions, with the first correct answer receiving points for that team.

For all but the highest-level classes, it is wise to use the closed caption subtitles feature as the speaking can be fast and laden with slang and colloquialism. The decision was made not to pre-teach vocabulary as it would be time-consuming and reduce the impact of the activity. Moreover, there is ample opportunity for the class members to learn helpful lexis throughout the project. The captions are sufficient for learners to follow the gist, participate in the quiz and get a flavour of the communication styles. After the quiz, the teacher leads a class discussion about the language and delivery style used in the video. Figure 1 illustrates some typical questions used.

Figure 1

Discussion Questions to Highlight the Communicative Style of the YouTube Example

Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the video?

2. What were the good points about the video?

3. What were the bad points about the video?

4. Is there anything that stood out?

5. Are there Japanese YouTubers like that?

6. Was there language or words you didn't understand?

7. Did you notice anything about the style (of communication) or words that he used?

8. Did you notice anything about the filming style or editing that was interesting or different?

Next, learners are tasked with introducing their favourite Japanese YouTubers in English in groups of four. The language choices were made to allow learners to focus on the communicative style of the YouTubers, in the first instance, without overburdening the class. Once learners have observed this style closely in their first language, they will then repeat the activity with English language YouTubers. This step also allows learners to highlight cultural differences between Japanese and English language YouTubers and later incorporate these new patterns into their delivery in their own videos. Learners use iPads or smartphones to search for a video of their favourite YouTuber. Then, they are given 10 minutes to answer the questions in the worksheet in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Worksheet to Introduce a Japanese YouTuber in English

Each group member is given around five minutes to introduce their YouTuber (using the first

box in the worksheet). Next, learners play a one-minute section of their video, and finally, they briefly discuss their video (using the second box). The activity is reviewed by asking each group to nominate the member with the most interesting video, which is then discussed with the class.

The final part of this lesson asks learners to prepare for a more structured and expanded version of the previous activity in the next lesson, using the worksheet in Figure 3. Much of the information can be copied from the preceding worksheet and appended as necessary. However, there is now an extended discussion phase, facilitated by learner-created discussion questions, for which class members must prepare new material.

Figure 3

Expanded Worksheet to Introduce a Japanese YouTuber in English

You will have 10 minutes to introduce your favourite YouTubers to your group

- Introduce your Youtuber (using your notes from task 2)
- Show your group a bit of your favourite video (watch 2 or 3 minutes)
- Discuss your video with the group using your discussion questions

Task 1 Your YouTuber: Choose a video from one of your favourite YouTubers

Task 2 Background information: complete the table below

Favourite youtuber	
Reason you like them:	
How often do you watch?	
Themes/topics	
Good / Bad points	
What are interesting features? / what stands out?	
What language, behaviour effects, music, settings do they use?	

Task 3 Discussion questions: Write 5-10 extra discussion questions about your chosen video that you can use for your discussion.

- What did they think about the videos? Good or bad? Why?
- What stands out for you about the video?

Lesson 2 – What Makes a Good YouTuber?

Learners warm up with another *speed chat* activity using new questions based on YouTube and social media. Then, learners are allocated to groups of four for this expanded discussion, in which each group member will lead for 10 minutes. The aim now is to start pinpointing the key features that contribute to making good YouTube videos for the class members to learn and mimic in their own videos.

This discussion is more structured to assist the learners in keeping their section of the conversation going for the full 10 minutes and limiting the entire process to 40 minutes. The learners are not obliged to use all their discussion questions, as this might lead to more of an interview style of interaction. The aim is to have learners use follow-on questions/comments, such as "*Tell me more*" and "*Why do you think that*?", to expand their classmates' answers. The learners will ideally have practised these questions during previous discussion activities. In addition, learners are given the casual language in Figure 4 to help them talk about the video features and connect their thoughts.

Figure 4

Casual Language to Introduce Video Content

Useful Language for Introducing Videos

- Have you seen this?

- Have you heard of _____?

- I'm gonna show you _____.

- I found this really interesting video on/about _____.

- What do you think of _____?

- Check this out!

- Show me that part again.

- How/Where did you find this?

- I was shown this by _____.

- I saw this at/when _____.

After the discussions, each learner completes the worksheet in Figure 5 to document the features they believe make a good YouTube video. The learners' answers will later be compiled into a guide for the class. Some class members are now chosen at random to talk about their answers. Interesting, original or valuable points can be highlighted and discussed.

Figure 5

Worksheet – What makes a good YouTuber?

Lesson 3 – Analyse English Language YouTubers (Learners' Selections)

The focus of this lesson is for each learner to analyse an English-language YouTube video that they will use for an extended discussion in lesson 4. This process gives learners further structured exposure to specific examples of language used in these types of videos and the chance to compare Japanese and English language YouTubers. Learners are given one entire class session to complete the task.

Learners add their video selection to the shared *Google Document* shown in Figure 6 to ensure a wide selection of YouTubers and expose the class to each other's choices. This document also helps build a list of suggested YouTubers for later cohorts. Accordingly, this group of learners is also given the list of suggested YouTubers compiled from previous classes, shown in Figure 7.

Figure 6

Shared Document - Learner YouTuber Choices

Choose a YouTuber who speaks in English or a mix of English and Japanese. Enter their details below. If you are not sure, think about some of your hobbies and search for these on YouTube, in English and you should find some YouTubers - watch some until you find an interesting one.

Student Name	YouTuber	Topics / Themes	Link

Add any interesting vocab that you find while watching the videos to the list below

Vocabulary item	Meaning

Figure 7

Suggestions for English Language YouTubers

Some suggestions for YouTubers in English

YouTuber	Topics / Themes	Link
LankyBox	Comedy	https://youtu.be/DVfiDruUZKA
AK-English	Natural daily conversations in English.	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWdFb_w3JI1BPTiBCXERq2Q
travellight	traveling	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZ4hZoV-OOUo14Qm7qQE6zA
bilingual baby	family life	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHBnOMB61Xe9eT4oSs3B_NQ
Kanon	Life of London	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB48i-3A65IN7bIY0LhhTbw
Simone Giertz	invention	https://youtu.be/ab47XHidvwQ
kanon	Daily life of U.K.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNEYWUzRiQw&feature=share
bilingual baby	family life in japan	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHBnOMB61Xe9eT4oSs3B_NQ
Narumi Shikiya	American high school - prom	https://youtu.be/aXkYPbRNyf8
Ellie Thumann	Daily life/school edition	https://youtu.be/Zhx9Ki9bUkE
Jusuf	lifestyle	https://youtu.be/6F9jP33PGoQ
Miss Haroo	lifestyle in Australia and teaching English	https://youtu.be/VWhv6PfE-i0
Korean Billy's English	US / UK / Aussie English Pronunciation Differences [KoreanBilly's English]	https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=XgwE3QOdcE&t=133s
Two Gaijin	Introduce UK culture and talk about Japan from their position.	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfkanPvIqYqvHtdvwwhhuMg
Epic Meal Time	Cooking and eating	https://www.youtube.com/user/EpicMealTime
Narumi Shikiya	Introduce university life in America	https://youtu.be/1_KdgRF4eoY
McJugger Nuggets	Family life	https://www.youtube.com/McJuggerNuggets
bilingual Chika	Lifestyle in Japan & US	https://youtu.be/CEWuEbzD7uQ

YouTuber	Topics / Themes	Link
Bethany Mota	fashion	https://youtu.be/Jlt0gtirM7g
Rachel and Jun	everyday life/ The difference between Japan and America	https://www.youtube.com/user/MyHusbandisJapanese
Georgia Merry	sing a song/ vlog	https://www.youtube.com/user/GeorgiaMMusic
Miranda Sings	comedy	https://youtu.be/gQF3gifzRw0
Christen Dominique	lifestyle	https://youtu.be/BQWhTjr-4y8
The Key of Awesome	parody of the famous music videos.	https://www.youtube.com/user/barelypolitical
First football channel	amazing goal, super play on soccer	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIdCCQpxnJIkIP5P1V_hFsQ
Smosh pit	comedy	https://youtu.be/DNIAItjEILc
James Charles	makeup	https://youtu.be/3uk6rKXbG1M
Liza Koshy	Comedy	https://youtu.be/RdG5q9naHqk
HauteLeMode	fashion	https://youtu.be/TFg3wH7DSPY
JREKML	k-pop	https://www.youtube.com/user/JREKML1
F2Freestylers	Soccer	https://youtu.be/vNeD-KanEdU
Maestro Ziikos	comedy/music	https://youtu.be/mtawV9BVQpw
Ninja	game play	https://youtu.be/x2e0YBFAJn8
nigahiga	comedy	https://youtu.be/ZF8jBu6aHKk
Rudy Mancuso	comedy/musician	https://youtu.be/aP0bKcsSNuA
FunForLouis	everyday things/adventure trip	https://youtu.be/xBLwD3608kw
Vogue (channel)	fashion and celebrities	https://www.youtube.com/user/Americanvogue

Learners sit in groups of four while they choose a YouTuber and video, even though they are working individually. At this time, learners are encouraged to share and discuss sections of interesting videos in English as they work. The class works on this activity for 15-20 minutes. Any learners who finish early can begin the next task to complete the worksheet in Figure 8 about their chosen video.

Figure 8

Worksheet – Analyse an English language YouTube video

Task 1 - Complete the table

YouTuber	
Themes / topics	
Good / Bad points	
Interesting features / what stands out?	
Interesting language effects, music, setting	
New slang, idioms	

Task 2: Write 10 discussion questions about your YouTuber that you can use for your discussion in the next class.

Task 3: Write some information about yourself that relates to the topic in your video
(have you had this experience? How would you feel if you had this experience? Do you have a story about someone who did something similar?)

Task 4: Write some useful conversation phrases
(to avoid silence, add reactions/information and move on)

Task 5: Write some useful topic vocab and phrases

The worksheet in Figure 8 is similar to that used for analysing the Japanese YouTubers, but it is slightly expanded to challenge the learners incrementally. Thus, there is a requirement for learners to connect the video content to their own experiences in *Task 3*, and so they should support their turn-taking with examples and even anecdotes where possible. This technique works best if practised over multiple (structured) discussions. Therefore, for learners without this experience, this section could be omitted without detriment to the process overall. *Task 4* refers to useful communicative phrases class members have learned during the semester to help them maintain L2 communication in times of difficulty. These are expressions such as "*How do you say xxx in English*", "*I don't know what xxx means*", or "*Let me think about that*". A list of these types of phrases can be given to learners, or it could be brainstormed and practised through classroom English activities beforehand. The critical point is that learners have these phrases at their disposal and ideally would have practised previously.

The class members work individually while in groups that are encouraged to share and discuss sections of their videos in English. A final point on the worksheet relates to the sections about language. As well as adding the terms in Figure 8 learners also add them to Figure 6, *Shared Document - Learner YouTuber Choices*, which has a vocabulary section at the end. A completed example of this shared document is included in Figure 9.

Figure 9

A Completed Example Shared Document - Learner YouTuber choices

You Tube

Choose a YouTuber who speaks in English or a mix of English and Japanese. Enter their details below. If you are not sure, think about some of your hobbies and search for those on YouTube, in English and you should find some YouTubers - watch some until you find an interesting one.

Student Name	YouTuber	Topics / Themes	Link
▮	ANDREW LEVITT	Go on a trip to a famous spot	https://youtu.be/UMfIKWrM7gM
	FBE	reacting to Japanese television commercial	https://youtu.be/-rmfPnccKN4
▮	AllEars.net.	introduce Disney parks (sometimes other amusement parks, universal studio)	https://youtu.be/H-UfMsnfbvg
▮	Saffron Barker	eating the entire McDonald's Christmas menu	https://youtu.be/3xWNFhOZH0s
▮	Wengie	Testing simple life hacks, DIYS	https://youtu.be/75sB02W9qwo
▮	Josh Pieters & Archie Manners	tricked people with a fake Ed Sheeran	https://youtu.be/_SgCl3_cZcY
▮	FANNIX	reacting to Japanese songs	
▮	Drew Binsky	travel to every country	https://youtu.be/CWeWxl7ruGE
▮	Niko Omilana	SNEAKING A Painting Into National ART GALLERY	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-OyRZoNb6o
▮	Courtney Raine	Trying the new Starbucks Holiday drinks and foods	https://youtu.be/ALYffIsLIUA
▮	James Charles	He tested some ridiculous makeup hacks from 5 Minutes Crafts YouTube channel. And spoiler alert, it was a major failure.	https://youtu.be/Xq8mjyyTRTM
▮	VOGUE(Cara Delevingne)	Here's an introduction to the contents of her bag.	https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1Qvp-F5fnLhj0RvmbPcKlfpvRGm2GHqS
▮	HoomanTV	Driving as a Uber	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDglY7QqyKM&t=172s
▮	Roman's Cooking Corner	baby's cooking	https://youtu.be/NfEGlFHi35I
▮	Rupa sensei	English teacher	https://youtu.be/8zUJcBJLylo
▮	Naruchan	Elementary students solve center questions	

Vocab	Meaning
notorious	Infamous / very famous
doofus	foolish or stupid person
reified	make more real / to bring into reality or to define
qualify	to have legal right
squeal	to shout with high voice
crappie	extremely poor quality
homie	close friends. Short version of homeboy
hash	to mess something up
rage	to get very angry
dumb	stupid
damn!	oh my god
ginormous	very large
suck	boring / not good / low quality
breathtaking	very beautiful or surprising
dude	term of address for another person – substitute for the person's name or the word 'you', very casual
heck!	a sound to show what you are annoyed
cleanse	to make something completely clean
multiple	a huge variety
y'all	you all
damn	curse word
grieve	to make you feel sad and angry, especially about death
deserve it	to earn something
BOOM!	Exclamation – to show something is finished or happened quickly; great, amazing
misconception	Misunderstanding or believing something which is actually a mistake

Learners tend to highlight informal slang phrases broadly, but not entirely, as the vocabulary list illustrates. Moreover, the terms are not especially predictable and so pre-taught vocabulary would seem of limited use for these tasks. Therefore, this learner-sourced approach to vocabulary acquisition may better suit the kind of informal and unpredictable natural language found on social media. To practice this language, class members learn these terms for a quiz later. In addition, learners are given a brief instruction document for the discussion in the next lesson, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Instructions for Introducing and Discussing an English Language YouTube Video

Lesson 4 – Discuss English Language YouTubers (Learners' Selections)

Learners each lead the discussion for 10 minutes in groups of four (40 minutes total) and then rotate into new groups to complete the task for a second time. This process effectively takes a full 90-minute lesson. The intense focus can be tiring for learners, but it is an experience that gives most learners a real sense of accomplishment. For homework, class members update their worksheets in Figure 3 to consolidate what they have learned from the YouTubers. Then the teacher compiles and summarises these points into a guide to help the learners prepare their videos. The guide is a short, concise list of 15 – 20 points. A typical version of the list is shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Good YouTube Video – Summary Guide

Good YouTube Videos - Summary

Summary
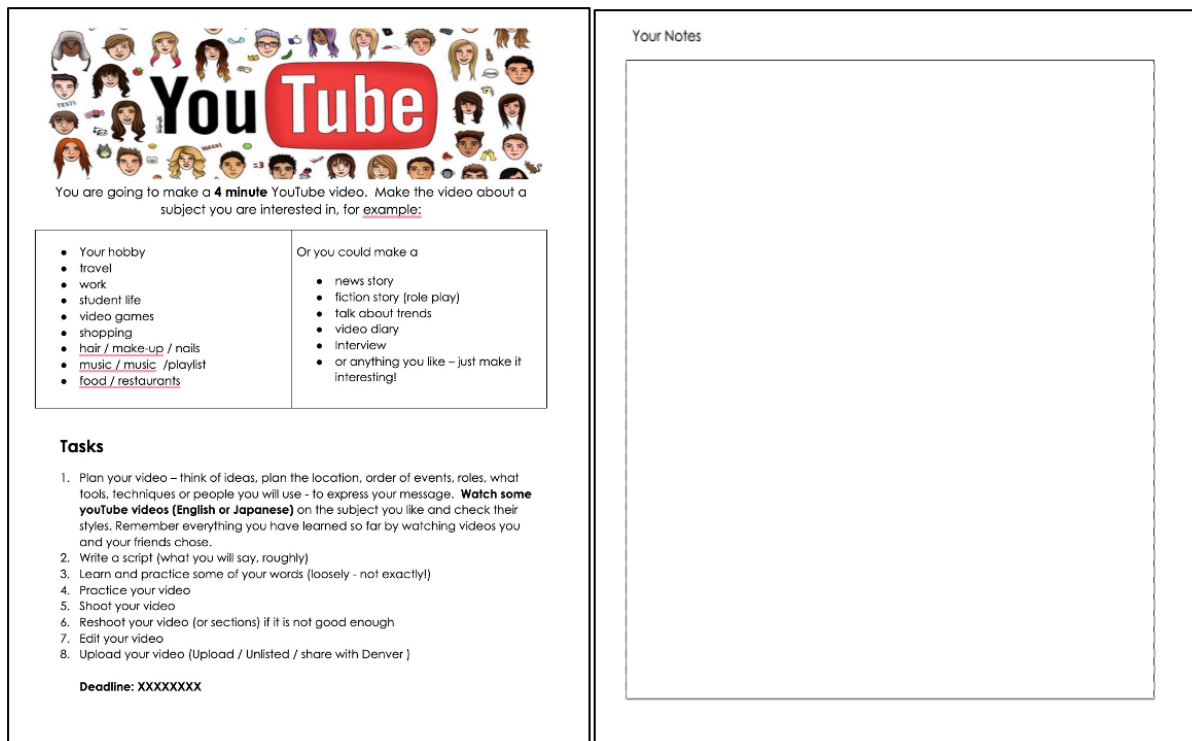
1. Clear
2. Easy to understand
3. Good Volume - check
4. Casual talk like talking with friends
5. Good Reaction / Expressions
6. Good Comments / contents
7. Effective sound (effects)
8. Good Editing - different angles, take many versions (use the best)
9. Talking skills (original phrases, humour, variety)
10. Original features (location, mascot, persona)
11. A good plan for the contents of the video
12. Appropriate music for the mood
13. Good images / video clips (variety)
14. Impact
15. Subtitles / titles (optional) **only important points**

Lesson 5 – Project Introduction – Create a 4-Minute YouTube Video

This lesson is the ideal time to review the vocabulary in Figure 9 with a good vocabulary activity. Applications such as Quizlet and Kahoot have games that can be used as excellent warm-up reviews. These vocabulary terms form the authentic language components of the learners' original YouTube-style video. Whereas the points in Figure 11 are primarily the presentational and stylistic framework through which the vocabulary is expressed. As such, the guide is reviewed next, with the lexis fresh in the class's mind. Then, it is time to introduce and explain the project sheet in Figure 12. Learners are next shown exemplary YouTube videos completed by previous cohorts to support the explanation. Naturally, learners' consent should be obtained, so when each class finishes their project, the learners who produced the best videos are asked to complete a consent form, if amenable. These examples of videos are immensely beneficial in allowing learners to see what can be achieved by learners of similar age and ability given appropriate imagination, effort and attention to detail.

Figure 12

YouTube Project Sheet

For the rest of this lesson, learners begin brainstorming ideas independently, with no particular structure. The learners have now been exposed to many examples and techniques from previous learners and professional YouTubers, and it is essential to allow class members to follow their interests if the process is to be rewarding and motivating. However, the teacher should make time to discuss ideas with each learner individually, allow them to ask questions and assist in choosing topics if needed.

Toward the end of this lesson, learners are given the grading rubric, Figure 13. The rubric attempts to reinforce the characteristics of good YouTubers the learners have highlighted, thus, keeping the learners focused on completing the task successfully. Finally, the class is instructed to come to lesson 6 with a clear outline of their plan for the video.

Figure 13

Grading Rubric for YouTube Video

	Register / Style	Language	Video presentation / editing	Presentation Skill	Presentation Content
1	**No use** of internet language styles and vocab.	**Very basic.**	**Little thought** or ideas were put into the audiovisual presentation.	**Reads** from a script. Little or no eye contact. Voice difficult to hear.	Most **basic** topic. No thought or originality.
2	**Some use** of internet styles and vocab.	**Basic.** Can't communicate well. (r/l/v/b/s/th) not clear.	**Some thought and ideas, with** graphics or music.	**Sometimes reads** from the script but has practised. Voice may be quiet and monotone.	**Simple** topic with some originality.
3	**Good use of** internet styles and vocab.	**Good.** Can communicate well using **small** vocabulary and simple grammar. mostly clear pronunciation.	**Interesting format** with ok use of sound and graphics effects	Can speak well, **without notes.** Sounds natural but the voice is quiet or monotone.	**Original** topic with interesting points.
4	**Very good use** of internet slang or abbreviations and has a youtube style of speaking	**Very Good** vocab. Uses words learned in the course. **Good** use of tense, articles and verbs. (r/l/v/b/s/th) clear.	**Very interesting** format with good use of sound and graphics effects. Displays some originality.	**Speaks freely to the camera.** Voice is appropriate volume. Uses gesture and or expression. Confident.	**Original** topic with interesting points and some **unexpected** ideas to increase the impact.
5	**Excellent use** of internet slang or abbreviations and speak like a real YouTuber.	**High-level** vocab. Basic grammar is almost perfect. More **complex** grammar is used (eg relative clauses, perfect tenses). (r/l/v/b/s/th) very clear.	**Excellent** ideas and format that makes the video visually and thematically interesting. Excellent use of sound and graphics	**Speaks expressively** to the camera. Voice is clear. Very confident. Changes pauses, pitch, volume for dramatic effect.	**Very original** topic with a consistent theme or story which brings the content to life. Very interesting for with a high level of impact.

Comments:

Lesson 6 – Plan Learner YouTube Videos

Most of this lesson is spent guiding learners individually in planning their videos' content, logistics and scheduling. It is important to give learners enough time; however, it is not the best use of time to have learners edit videos in a communicative language class. Therefore, after this lesson, there is one more session to review the finalised plans, and then the task is completed as a homework project over the winter vacation.

During this lesson, the teacher can also review some of the example videos from previous classes and highlight how they demonstrate the positive YouTube features identified by the class. Learners are then informed that they will have a vocabulary quiz in the next lesson based on the terms they collected in the worksheet in Figure 9. Finally, learners should be given some guidance on using an editing application. The application used in this implementation was *Apple iMovie*, which is

straightforward to use, and all of the learners in these classes had iPads. A short two-page guide was created for the learners that covered the basic editing features, included in Figure 14.

Figure 14

iMovie - Basic Guide
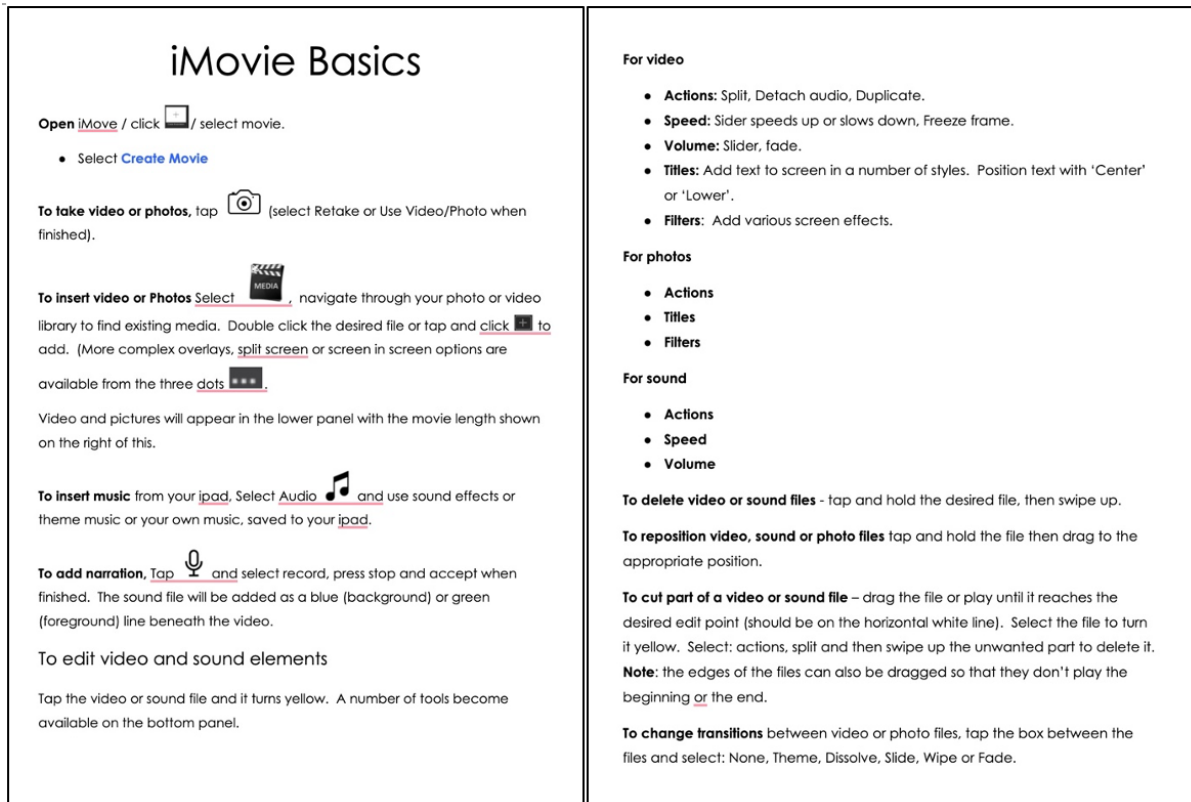
Lesson 7 – Final Planning & Learner Consultations on YouTube videos

Learners are given the vocabulary quiz at the start of the class to prepare for filming their videos' speaking sections. The teacher then reviews learners' final plans individually while the other class members work independently. This project is scheduled so that this last consultation class comes just before the start of the winter vacation. Then the deadline for completion is immediately after the conclusion of the holiday.

Learners must upload their videos to the actual YouTube application to give learners an authentic experience and allow classmates to view and comment on the videos. The completed work is posted as an '*unlisted'* video, meaning only users supplied with a link can view the video. Once the teacher has graded the videos, the learners can remove them from YouTube. Learners are given the instructions in Figure 15 on how to upload their work.

Figure 15

How to Upload a YouTube Video

Upload a YouTube Video

Open iMovie
- Open on your iMovie project
- Click the share button
- Select 'Save Video'
- Check library to see if your video is there

Open YouTube
- Click the + icon at the bottom centre of the screen.
- *You will see "YouTube would like to access your photos"*
- *If you can see your video choose 'keep current selection'*
- *If you can't see your video choose 'select more photos'*
- *Then, choose your movie review video*
- It will start to play and you have the option to 'trim' if you want
- Tap 'next' on the top right of the screen
- **THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT** - You need to scroll down to see the visibility options. **Make visibility setting 'unlisted'**
- Tap 'next' on the top right of the screen
- Tap 'upload video' on the of the screen

When the video has finished uploading
- Click on the 3 dots
- Select 'share video'
- Select email
- Send to Denver

Lesson 8 – Watch Learner YouTube Videos as a Class

In the final lesson, the class watches all the videos together from a playlist collated by the teacher. An example of the settings used for the playlist is shown in Figure 16. As the class watches the videos, learners are encouraged to write comments for each class member using the YouTube *comments* function, like they might for an actual YouTube video. Finally, learners can vote for their favourite videos, and the results can contribute toward the class members' grades in a class points system, or it can just be conducted as a fun way to round off the class, as the teacher prefers.

Figure 16

Settings for the Unlisted Playlist of Learner Videos

Conclusion

This process was created iteratively over many teaching cycles, with materials being continually refined to give the set of supporting documents and methods presented in the paper. It has taken considerable effort to arrive at this point. Each stage of learning has been layered, through trial and error and careful consideration, in an attempt to make the implementation clear and incremental for learners. However, this continuous improvement process, based on direct and indirect feedback from the classroom, is ongoing to ensure the materials remain relevant to learners. These methods have proved effective in the environment in which they have been implemented. However, that is not to say that this approach is definitive; it is presented here in the hope that more educators will consider using the powerful potential of YouTube to support language learners in ways that suit their specific learning environments.

These materials can take time to produce and manage but not elaborately more than the average assignment or project. However, the rewards in terms of learner engagement and communicative output have proved a worthwhile investment. In line with the literature in the introduction to this paper, the hope was to harness YouTube's popularity and its unique position as a depository of virtually unlimited spoken language to produce a stimulating and beneficial learner-centred project. Indeed, the videos produced by the learners have often been surprising in terms of the level of authentic language production, attention to detail and range of subject matter.

The variety of topics (from cooking, make-up and craft tutorials to music, travel and game reviews), together with the high production values, points to the high level of engagement learners have with a project where they can choose the input and output content. By analysing and then mimicking the YouTubers, learners can repurpose segments of language to add authenticity to their speech, and this can significantly improve their understanding of English language social media when encountered independently. Moreover, learners realise through this modelling that YouTube can be a legitimate, effective and enjoyable tool for autonomous learning throughout their future studies.

This revelation is often reflected in the class members' weekly learning journal, written as part of the Freshman English course. Learners have commented on their surprise at using YouTube in the classroom and how it was valuable and enjoyable. Moreover, many learners pledged to use YouTube independently as an English language learning tool. The journals also highlighted learner reticence at the prospect of sharing their videos, as described in the literature. Learners were, though, incredibly enthusiastic about viewing their classmates' efforts. Furthermore, as the studies detailed, the enjoyment

learners seemed to attain from this activity appeared to outweigh their initial nervousness. Thus, the experience of using YouTube in the classroom has been overwhelmingly positive, in line with the view that these kinds of technologies have an important role to play in supporting active, self-directed learning in the classrooms of the 21ˢᵗ century.

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デンバー・ベリンは、東京の亜細亜大学の講師です。彼の興味には、メタファー、コーパス言語学、コンピューター支援言語学習（CALL）とコンテンツと言語統合学習（CLIL）に焦点を当てた教材開発が含まれてます。

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Growth of L2 Voice and Confidence via Journal Writing

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Journal writing in a foreign language is a practice that can potentially reap numerous rewards for language learners, especially those whose language learning history has lacked sufficient opportunities for output. This research project takes a quantitative and qualitative approach to assessing the value of assigning two journal entries per week to high school students over the course of a full school year. Likert-style survey results indicated that students who wrote more journals felt they could write with much better grammar, express themselves in English more easily, and write more quickly as a result of the journal writing homework than students who wrote less. A clear correlation between the number of journal submissions and scores on the Global Test of English Communication (GTEC) writing test could also be seen. Open-ended survey responses found that students were motivated by the opportunity to write in their own voice about their preferred topics.

母語以外を使って日記を書くことは、言語学習者にとって計り知れないほどの効果を潜在的にもたらす練習になります。特にこれまでアウトプットの機会が少なかった学習者に対してはより効果が現れます。この研究では、高校生に一年間「量を重視したもの」と「質を重視したもの」のそれぞれ 2 つの日記を毎週出してもらいました。結果としては、生徒は自分たちで思っていたよりも簡単に正しい文法を使って、短い時間で書くことができていました。さらに、よりたくさんの日記を書いた生徒は、提出が少なかった生徒に比べて格段にレベルが上がりました。日記を書いた量と GTEC のライティングのスコアとの間には明確な相関関係が見られました。このライティングについての研究からは、自分の言葉で、自分の書きたい内容を書く機会こそが、生徒がやる気になるとわかりました。

Keywords: Writing, Journals, Autonomy

Journal writing has the capacity to give English language learners in Japan much needed opportunities for output, help them find their voice in another language, and to improve their motivation, confidence, and writing skills.

"When a child draws a picture, we don't compare it to Michelangelo's work. Instead, we delight in the accomplishment" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008: p. 244). Similarly, foreign language learners need time to organize their burgeoning linguistic knowledge. Traditionally, foreign language instructors have focused on comparing students' language output to the near perfection of the native standard. Error-based correction highlights the flaws in a learner's output as opposed to allowing their

interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) to develop. Journal writing affords learners the opportunity to write in a low-pressure environment where they can focus on content without the fear that their errors are going to be put under the microscope.

Journal writing has the potential to provide multiple benefits for students of English as a foreign language. Writing is a skill that needs continual practice and daily journal writing is an excellent way to achieve this (Lagan, 2000). It affords learners the opportunity to produce their own writing, something that is especially important in language-learning contexts such as Japanese high schools where the focus is often on explicit grammar instruction and entrance examination preparation (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009). Such students generally lack the necessary opportunities for output. Output is critical in the language acquisition process in that it leads to students noticing gaps in their L2 knowledge, formulating and testing linguistic hypotheses, and reflecting on their language (Swain, 2013). The practice of writing in high school has shown to be negatively correlated with writing apprehension at the university level (Cornwell & McKay, 1999).

Another benefit of journal writing is that it allows learners to find their voice. Leki (in Armstrong, 2010) said that the goal of writing "is not to learn grammar, but to express ideas. It is in the act of expressing ideas that students learn language" (p. 693). Hyland described language learning as gaining control of the ability "to achieve particular purposes in social contexts" (2003, pp. 70-71). Journals allow learners the ability to practice making meaning. In learning contexts where the focus is on grammar instruction and rote memorization of vocabulary, such opportunities for output can provide valuable potential for practice in making meaning and finding a voice (Elbow, 2000).

Method

This research project was conducted at a private Japanese high school in western Japan with 374 first year high school students (ages 15-16). As a part of their communication course, students were required to purchase a B5-sized notebook and were given the assignment of writing up to three entries of seventy or more words per week. Students were expected to write at least 44 journal entries over the course of a year to receive full credit: 12 in the first semester, 18 in the second semester, and 14 in the third semester.

Students were given no grammatical feedback in their journals, but rather content-based responses. Numerous studies have shown no benefits in grammatical accuracy occur with the presence of grammar-based feedback (Semke, 1984; Fazio, 2001). This is in line with the results of Semke's (1984) study showing that learners had significantly greater gains in fluency and marginally greater

gains in accuracy on a cloze test when they received content-based feedback rather than grammatical feedback on their writing. There were no specific deadlines for each specific journal entry, but students only received credit for journals that had been written within the previous week. In addition, students could write no more than three entries per week. This was to prevent students from waiting until the end of the semester to hand in their notebooks, requiring them to interact with English at a more evenly distributed pace. It has been shown that students perform better when given a structured set of deadlines (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002).

Journals comprised 25% of the students' final grade. All students received 100% of their journal score if they completed the journals, regardless of the quality of English. Students who wrote above and beyond the goal of 44 journal entries received extra credit. Regarding the content of the journals, students were free to write about whatever they wanted. Occasionally, topics would be suggested to activate schema for future classes, but students were never required to write about suggested topics. The instructor made content-based comments on approximately 25% of the journal entries.

This research project used the data of how many journal entries each student handed in, surveys completed at the end of the school year, and GTEC writing scores. The GTEC is a standardized English test with a writing section that is evaluated manually by professional test graders. The end of the year survey included three Likert-style items gauging the students' perceived improvement in their ability to write grammatically correct sentences, their ability to express themselves in English, and their ability to write quickly (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).

The answers of students who wrote more journal entries were compared to those who wrote fewer to see if any trends could be ascertained. The survey also included open-ended questions intended to elicit student opinions about the journal-writing homework.

Results/Discussion

The most basic data to be derived from this research is the number of journal entries submitted by each student. Unsurprisingly, the semester goal dictated the number of journals many students wrote. Of the 374 students, more students submitted exactly the target number of journals, 44, than any other number. The average number of journal submissions was 42.4 and the median was 43. Two students wrote the minimum possible number of journal entries, 0, for the duration of the year. In contrast, two students also wrote the maximum number of journals possible, 96.

Figure 1

Number of Journal Entries Submitted Frequency Chart
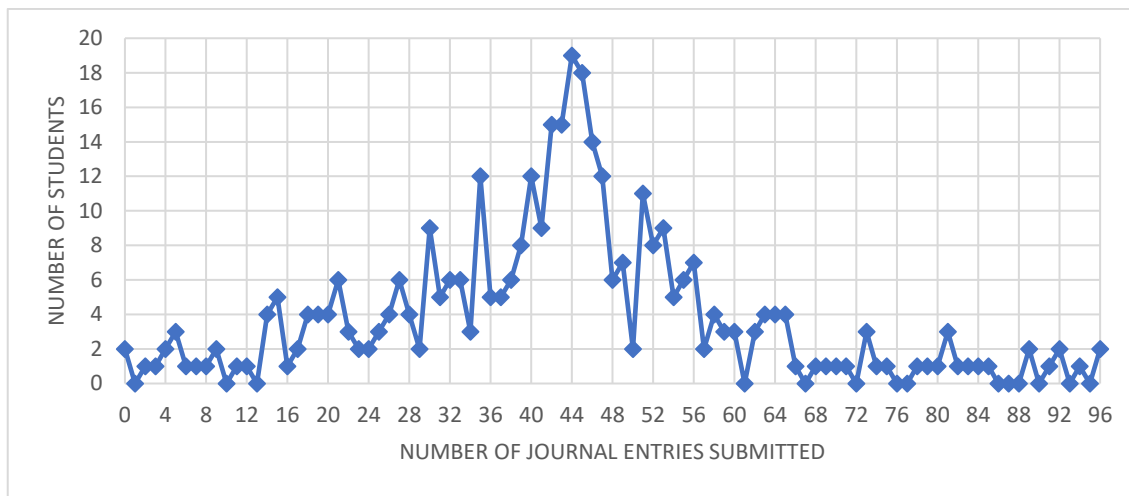
Likert-type Statements

Students responded to a five-point Likert-type survey where they were asked on a scale of one to five whether they agreed with the following three statements:

1. I can write with much better grammar now than I could at the beginning of the year.
2. It is easier to express myself in English now than it was at the beginning of the year.
3. I can write more quickly now than I could at the beginning of the year.

Overall responses to these questions showed mild agreement with the statements. The mean scores for the three statements were 3.43, 3.51, and 3.54 respectively.

Table 1

Five-Point Likert-style Responses

	Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3
1	17 students	16 students	13 students
2	26 students	30 students	29 students
3	136 students	118 students	119 students
4	144 students	142 students	144 students
5	34 students	51 students	51 students
Average	3.43	3.51	3.54

A marked difference, however, can be seen when students are grouped based on the number of entries they submitted throughout the year. Student surveys were anonymous, so this data is based on students' self-reporting of how many journal entries they wrote each semester. For example, in the first semester with a target of 12 journal submissions, students had the option of choosing 1) No journal entries, 2) Just a few (1-4), 3) Around half the goal (5-7), 4) Most of the goal (8-11), 5) Exactly the goal or maybe 1 or two more (12-14), or 6) Many more than the goal (15+). The numbers were adjusted for other semesters based on each semester's target submission number.

Among the 125 students who reported achieving the target number of journal entry submissions in each of the three semesters, the average response of the three statements were 3.7, 3.87, and 3.79 respectively. In contrast, the 60 students who did not achieve the target number of submissions in any of the three semesters had average responses of 2.95, 2.95, and 3.1 respectively. A further look at outliers on both sides shows that the 34 students who submitted a significantly greater number of entries than the target each semester responded with averages of 3.85, 4, and 4.03. On the other hand, the 22 students who reported turning in less than half of the goal in each of the three semesters had average response scores of 2.82, 2.67, and 2.91.

These differences in students who wrote more than the target number of journal entries and those who wrote fewer show that students who wrote more were much more likely to agree that their grammar has improved, that they can express themselves better in English, and that they can write more quickly than they could at the beginning of the year.

Table 2

Contrast Likert-style Responses by Rate of Journal-Entry Submission

	Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3
Students who did not achieve half of target any semester (n=22)	2.82	2.67	2.91
Students who did not achieve target any semester (n=60)	2.95	2.95	3.10
Students who achieved goal each semester (n=125)	3.70	3.87	3.79
Students who achieved many more than goal each semester (n=34)	3.85	4.00	4.03

Standardized Writing Scores

Each year, students at this school take the GTEC standardized English test. This test includes a timed writing section that is scored by professional evaluators. The test is taken in December, so only journal data from the first two semesters, finishing in December, were used to derive the correlation data. There was a significant positive correlation between journal writing volume and GTEC writing scores, *r=.34, p≤ .001*. The data can be seen clearly when divided into groups of roughly similar numbers of students based on the number of journal entries submitted (Table 3). The average score of each particular group in Table 3 is higher than any of the groups that turned in less.

Table 3

GTEC Writing Scores of Roughly Equal Groups of Students

Journal Entries Submitted	n=	Average GTEC Writing Score
0-75 (all students)	369	119.8
39-75	72	127.4
32-38	74	122.0
28-31	81	119.7
20-27	77	116.2
0-19	65	113.2

A similar pattern can be seen if the divisions are based upon journal submissions rather than on creating equal groups of students (Table 4).

Table 4

GTEC Writing Scores by Uniform Groups of Journal Entry Submissions

Journal Entries Submitted	n=	Average GTEC Writing Score
All students	369	119.8
66-75	10	130.4
56-65	11	128.6
46-55	18	129.7
36-45	64	123.4
26-35	148	120.2
16-25	71	115.7
6-15	31	113.1
0-5	16	109.5

Despite the data clearly showing a significant correlation between journal entries submitted and GTEC writing scores, it cannot necessarily be assumed that journal writing caused the increase in scores alone. There are a number of other factors that likely played a role in the correlation. For example, the type of students who do their homework are possibly the same types of students who generally do well on writing tests. These students are likely to have additional accumulated knowledge and skills due to their propensity for fully taking advantage of educational opportunities. Another potential factor is that students who are already adept at writing are apt to find writing a high volume of journal entries easier to complete than students who are not adept at writing. Thus, proficient writers would tend to write more than those who are not proficient. Since this data is limited to one specific writing test, we cannot see whether the journals specifically created growth in student writing ability. However, the combination of learner surveys where students who wrote more entries reported greater growth and the clear delineation of writing scores based on journal entries submitted, it seems likely that the journal writing played a positive and significant factor in writing ability.

Student comments

At the end of the year, students were given a survey that included both the previously mentioned Likert-type questions and an area for open-ended feedback. Of the 280 responses, 177 were considered positive, 89 were deemed negative, and 14 were neutral. A vast majority of the negative comments focused on the copious amount of journal writing required in the third semester. Upon reflection, this was considered to be a valid criticism. The third semester is shorter than the first two and students were required to write more journal entries per week than previous semesters in order to receive full marks. As previously mentioned, one of the goals of the journal writing homework was to provide students with a tool for self-study that they can take beyond the classroom and continue to use in the future. It is never expected that all high school students find a particular homework exercise valuable, especially one as demanding as the journal writing homework was. Nearly two-thirds of the comments being positive shows that journal writing homework provides tangible benefits to the students. This next section will look at some of the comments to explore those benefits.

"I thought of writing journals as an obligation at first. However, after I started, I realized it was a meaningful opportunity for self-reflection. I was also really excited when I got comments back from the teacher." (all student quotations translated by author)

"At first I couldn't get used to writing journals. I just wrote to get the minimum number of required journal entries. After a while, I started writing not to reach the minimum, but because I wanted to continue writing."

These two students' responses were representative of the common attitude that journal writing started out as an arduous task but changed as the students became better equipped to complete the task. Students began to feel a sense of achievement and came to enjoy writing journals.

"Thinking in English on my own, I was able to figure out in which situations I should use which grammar structure. I was able to practice and learn new grammar structures."

"Throughout the process of writing so many journal entries, I learned to use many expressions in many ways naturally."

These quotations reflect the active role output plays in the learning process (Swain, 2013). Students have a lot of inert grammatical knowledge that they have learned, but when are given ample opportunity to actively use that knowledge and experiment with its use, they are able to make connections and because skilled at the use of that knowledge.

"Through writing the journal, I was able to practice writing practical English phrases so many times. That improved my English. Moreover, I now have a record of my memories."

This student's quote speaks to both the practical and personal nature of journal writing. Journal writing does indeed give students extensive opportunities to practice English, but much of its value lies in the meaningful nature of journal writing. Student journals offer a snapshot of their high school life with English practice that is meaningful and personal to them. This is further emphasized in the following quote from another student:

"As a method for memorizing vocabulary, this is much better than keeping a vocabulary notebook because you are writing about things you care about and words you want to learn. I found it to be a really efficient way to learn."

"By writing about the things going on in my life, I naturally wanted to use various grammar forms. This really improved my motivation to learn."

Both of these previous two quotes seem to hint at a connection between language learning and meaningful use of the language. Numerous students commented on how they appreciated the opportunity to use English in ways they were deciding. Students seemed to be motivated by the chance to take ownership of their English usage.

"The journal writing homework was great because even when I scored poorly on tests, I was able to get decent grades."

Time on task is a principal determinant of language acquisition (Clifford, 2002 in Rifkin, 2006). Journal writing homework rewards quantity of output rather than mistake-free output. This system rewards students for writing more, thus spending more time with the foreign language.

"This homework really helped me prepare for the GTEC and EIKEN writing sections." -Student

"I was so surprised when I got my GTEC writing score back. I'm sure it was the result of all the journal entries I wrote. I'm so happy!" -Student

In conjunction with the GTEC test showing that students who wrote more journal entries achieved higher scores on the writing test, there were also a few students who explicitly stated that they believed writing journals improved their ability to succeed on such writing tests. As previously mentioned, the correlation between test scores and journal writing may not be causative, but students recognizing their improvement lends greater validity to the supposition.

"It was a great experience because I otherwise don't have the opportunity to write so much in English. I hated doing my [listening and fill-in-the-blanks homework] and just handed it in because it was my duty. However, I could freely write in my journal so it was fun." -Student

In addition to journal homework, all students were required to do regular listening homework in which they would listen to a speech or conversation and fill in the blanks. As the above student alluded to, journal writing homework allowed students more ownership over the language, creating more enjoyment and motivation. Furthermore, the journal writing homework added an element of elasticity lacking in their other regular homework. With more skill-level targeted homework, students outside of the level of the homework find it too difficult or too easy. In contrast, journal writing allowed all students to write at their own level and integrate the linguistic knowledge available to them in their interlanguage.

Conclusion

While this research has not proven a causal effect of journal writing on student writing ability, it has shown many indicators that this is indeed the case. The first piece of evidence comes from students' own impression of their language growth. Students who wrote more journal entries were more likely to believe that they could write more grammatically, express themselves more easily, and write more quickly compared to students who wrote less. The students' GTEC writing scores seemed to support these opinions. Students who wrote more tended to attain higher scores on the writing section. Finally, student surveys showed that many students made the connection between the journal writing homework and increased writing ability. Future research into journal writing should include both a pre- and post-test to gauge learner growth in writing ability.

In addition to an improvement in writing ability, the student comments touched upon some other value aspects of journal writing. First and foremost, it allows students the ability to have a voice. It puts authorship and ownership of language in the students' hands. This appears to be a highly motivating aspect of the homework. Furthermore, journal writing homework has a high degree of elasticity. While some students were still mastering basic grammatical forms and writing on a limited range of topics, other students were free to challenge themselves with more difficult topics, vocabulary, and grammatical structures. This allowance for diversity of ability allowed each student to benefit at their own level. Lastly, journal writing is a task that students can do into adulthood even after they finish taking English classes. Most students are unable to master a language within the confine of classroom walls and hours. Language learning is a lifelong journey that requires continued effort. Thus, discovering tasks that are motivating and effective is the plight of the linguistics researcher and introducing those tasks to teachers is the responsibility of the teacher.

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Book Review

Female Foreign English Teachers in Japanese Higher Education: Narratives From Our Quarter

Diane Hawley Nagatomo, Kathleen A. Brown, Melodie Lorie Cook (Eds.). Hong Kong: Candlin & Mynard ePublishing, 2020. 314 pp.

Reviewed by: Brian Nuspliger, Otemae University

This book is a collection of 22 narratives written by foreign women working in institutions of higher education in Japan. The impetus for the book was to collect stories that document the challenges for women living and teaching in Japan and offer inspiration on how to overcome them. While the focus of the book is female educators, the diversity of the authors and the multiple identities they encompass creates a work that goes far beyond the editors original idea of a "girlfriends' guidebook." Any teacher, any foreign resident of Japan, or any woman would find this book to be a valuable resource. The tone of each chapter is consistently academic, yet the personal stories and individual voices of the authors engage the reader in a way that is uncommon.

In the first chapter, Diane Hawley Nagatomo situates Japan within a global context in regard to gender equality. Japan consistently ranks at the bottom of international surveys, and the participation of women in higher education is no exception. But comparable discrepancies are also seen among female academics in Europe, North America and Australia. So while the trend is more extreme in Japan, gender roles and expectations hamper women working in higher education around the world. The more traditional and patriarchal nature of Japanese society may in fact skew the imbalance even further among foreign teachers, by attracting more western men than women to live in the country long term.

Against the setting that Nagatomo introduces, Amanda Yoshida and Adrianne Verla Uchida discuss their shared journey as language teachers in chapter two. The two met as coworkers teaching in a public junior and senior high school in the Tokyo area. As they each pursued graduate degrees while

working, their informal support network helped them to maintain motivation and manage their own efficacy as teachers. Even after moving on to work in different universities, the strong connection they had created remained and they continue to collaborate and support each other. Their story offers insight into how teachers transition to university jobs in Japan and how to navigate the hiring process.

In the next two chapters, the authors discuss how they established mentor relationships that helped to advance their careers. Sarah Mason met three women who became informal mentors through a mother's network while caring for her children. She later established a formal mentorship with an Australian professor visiting Japan. This relationship evolved into the woman becoming her PhD supervisor, all through a chance meeting at the annual JALT conference. As with her three previous informal mentors, Sarah recognized the opportunity to make a connection and boldly took the chance. Although all of her mentors were female, many of the authors in this book discuss the role that male mentors played in their professional lives. Kristie Collins notes that in all the places she worked in Japan, both male and female mentors supported her in her efforts to secure a tenured position. At the start of her journey toward tenure, she felt that balancing research, teaching, and community service would be the key to her success. After finally reaching her goal, she notes the importance of finding mentors to encourage and champion one in their job search. She also states the importance of professional development groups, Japanese language skills, and self-care in the marathon effort towards a permanent position in higher education in Japan.

Professional development (PD) is, understandably, a recurring theme in many chapters. Louise Ohashi talks about the role her involvement with JALT has played in her career. Two female colleagues were instrumental in her becoming involved and presenting at conferences and later a male mentor encouraged her to volunteer and eventually take leadership roles in the organization. Her identity as a mother gave her the insight to introduce policies that made the annual conference more family friendly and inclusive of members who must balance PD with childcare. She has gone on to encourage other women to become volunteers and leaders within the organization. For Wendy Gough, JALT was also important in creating a professional network that supported her career development. Most of the mentors she met were male, but they supported and encouraged her to overcome the challenges she faced as a woman in higher education in Japan such as bullying and harassment. With their support and her experience with leadership and success in the JALT community, she became more self confident and found her niche as an educator, leader, and mentor to younger and less experienced male and female colleagues.

Another major theme in the book is the interplay of race and gender in creating double discrimination. Several authors mentioned encountering the expectation in Japan that foreign English teachers should be white, blond, and blue-eyed. For Avril Haye-Matsui, being Black, British, and a woman all presented different and intersecting challenges in her pursuit of a career in higher education. As she states, while not all issues are about race and gender some are and these need thought and discussion to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace (p. 208). It's hard to pinpoint one distinct source of the examples of discrimination she discusses, but the fact she received different treatment than her coworkers is clear. For Richa Ohri, her Indian looks paved the way for her to teach how to cook curry, wear a saree, and make chai although she had no particular experience or expertise in any of these areas. However, her looks were a barrier when applying for English teaching jobs since she did not fit the preconceived racial stereotype of a native English speaker. She discusses how both her race and her gender led her to feel she was a "lesser other." She used determination and qualifications to overcome these barriers and now focuses her research on the kind of stereotyping and exclusion that she experienced firsthand.

Foreign women of Asian descent face a further complication when they are regarded as non-native speaking teachers. Tricia Okada discusses the identity of Filipinas teaching English in Japan. Since English is an official language in the Philippines, the distinction of who is and isn't a native speaker is not nearly as common there as it is in Japan. Instead, the focus is on how proficient a speaker of English the individual is. Yet, in terms of finding employment in Japan, the native speaker distinction is important. So much so, that one of the Filipina teachers in Okada's study was discriminated against by a fellow Filipina when she was told "I am a native; you are not a native. (p. 246)" In her chapter, Donna Fujimoto relates a story about a job early in her teaching career where she learned she was earning less than a white, male coworker who was younger and less experienced than she was. At the time she attributed the disparity in pay to her gender, but later came to wonder if it could also be related to racial discrimination since she didn't fit the stereotype of what a "legitimate" English teacher looked like. These stories document real instances of discrimination, as well as the complexity of intersecting identities.

Yoshi Grote and Cynthia Smith both discuss their multiple identities as lesbians, mothers, teachers and foreigners. Their chapters offer advice not only on how to successfully navigate these many roles, but also how to handle coming out to colleagues and students. Any LGBTQ educator thinking of moving to Japan would benefit from their candid, firsthand accounts of the challenges they have faced. And the final chapter, by Jo Mynard on academic leadership in

Japan, should be required reading for a teacher transitioning to a leadership position in higher education. While reflecting on her own experiences, she offers a concise yet detailed description of the tools she used to become a more effective leader within the rigid setting of Japanese academia.

Other topics are touched on in this book, several of which indeed could be the focus of individual volumes in themselves. Phoebe Lyon discusses the law and reality of maternity leave in Japan, and Fiona Creaser talks about various forms of harassment and how to deal with them. The breadth of the topics these narratives encompass emphasizes the diversity of the group of authors. Beyond solely their identity as foreign females working in higher education in Japan, there is a unity in their stories. Hearing the persistence, determination, and resourcefulness of the authors in their own words is profoundly inspiring.

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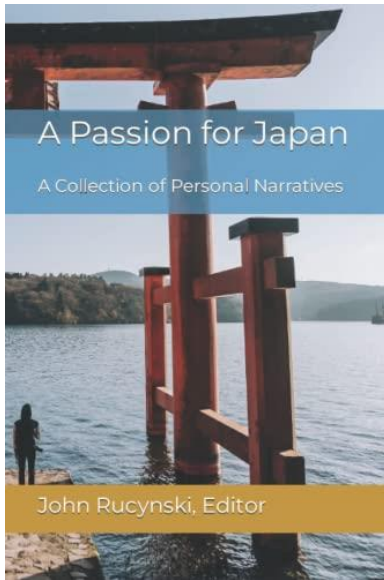
Book Review

A Passion for Japan: A Collection of Personal Narratives

John Rucynski

Ashiya: BlueSky Publishing, 2022. 362pp.

Reviewed by: Diane Hawley Nagatomo, Ochanomizu University

The thirty-one engaging stories in John Rucynski's edited *A Passion for Japan: A Collection of Personal Narratives* make this different from typical books found in the Japanese section of bookstores. Each author describes their passion—or in reality, their *passions—*that have shaped their experiences of living in Japan. Some passions, particularly those related to Japanese language and/or culture, were cultivated in their home countries, and they were the impetus for bringing them to Japan, either as researchers in academic institutions or as students of a revered *sensei* of a traditional art or practice. But many authors describe finding their passions after arriving in Japan, sometimes after going down several related (and sometimes not-so-related) paths. Regardless of how or why a passion was discovered, it provided a niche for the authors that has enabled them to call Japan "home".

What is particularly interesting about this book is the sheer variety of topics presented by authors from Australia, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, India, Japan, New Zealand, Romania, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It isn't surprising that a number of chapters deal with traditional Japanese culture. The passions described in these chapters overlap into different areas, but the authors write of their love affairs with calligraphy (Chapter 1), festivals (Chapters 2, 3) religions (Chapters 16, 26), drums (Chapters 4, 5), pottery (Chapters 15), tea ceremony (Chapter 13), sumo (Chapters 7, 8), theater (14), rituals (Chapter 25), and literature (Chapters 27, 29, 29). Japan is also well-known for its nature (which is, of course, related to many traditional Japanese practices), so it isn't surprising that some chapters deal with exploring the Japanese countryside (Chapters 17, 18), living in it (Chapters 10,

11, 30, 31), and even growing vegetables in it (Chapter 12). When it comes to contemporary aspects of Japanese culture, it was interesting that there were no chapters devoted to pop culture such as anime or manga. Instead, there were chapters describing how a prior hobby or interest in a home country was carried over into their lives in Japan. Some of these interests, which originated outside of Japan but have been widely adopted by Japanese people for the Japanese context, include a passion for indie music and soccer (Chapter 6), chess (Chapter 19), tennis (Chapter 23), baseball (Chapter 9), theater (Chapter 14), volleyball refereeing (Chapter 20), and being a leader in an academic or international society (Chapters 21, 22). Additionally, some authors' passions involved a search for identity as shown in chapters by a Japanese returnee (Chapter 23) and an American Korean-Japanese (Chapter 24). Perhaps the one type of passion that can be most widely shared with others is translation, particularly of literary works (Chapters 27, 28, 29).

One benefit of personal narratives is that readers are able to enter a writer's head and see how deeply the author is connected to the subject being discussed. This is not a book *about* Japan per se, but about thirty-one people who are deeply connected to it because of the practices they engage in. We could learn what sparked these people's interest in Japan (such as coming across a photo book about Japan in a Romanian's neighbor's dining room or discovering similar techniques between the traditional theater of Cameroon and Japan) and how they developed their knowledge and expertise in them. Because I am also a foreigner living in Japan, there was something in each chapter that resonated with me, even though I only have a smattering of knowledge about many of these topics. I could particularly relate to the authors who stated they had come to Japan with the intention of staying only for a year or two, but *something* propelled them to extend their year—in some cases to decades. Reading the authors' descriptions of their earliest experiences in Japan felt a little like a trip in a time machine because some had arrived in the 1970s, describing a very different initial experience from those who arrived in Japan during the past decade.

Another feature of this book, which I particularly enjoyed, was the inclusion of photographs in most chapters. Sometimes these pictures showed the author engaging in their passion, such as playing chess, interviewing sumo wrestlers, or writing calligraphy. But often, the pictures enabled the reader to envision the passion by showing festival scenes, mountain scenery, housing architecture, or even a still-shot of pottery tools.

While reading this book, I kept thinking of Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) theory of identity, which says that identity forms from being members of a group and engaging in the

practices of that group. In this theory, there are three modes of: *engagement,* which is the "doing" of the activities a particular group does; *imagination,* which is how one sees oneself as a member of the group; and *alignment,* which involves feelings of attachment for a group and its practices. As Wenger (1998) states, not all members of a CoP participate in the community in equal ways; some are insiders and power holders, others are peripheral members who may or may not achieve full participation, and some may leave the group entirely for another one. In this collection of personal narratives, we can not only see what the people are doing, how they envision themselves in their groups, and how they have aligned themselves with the practices of these groups, we can also see various examples that illustrate different degrees of belonging. Some of the authors have gone from being an outsider or peripheral member of a group to being an insider with power (for example, becoming a head priest for a Buddhist temple or a director for the International Sumo Association). We can also see how these authors came to be accepted as insider members of their groups by engaging in the practices that are common among members of that community (for example, officiating at volleyball games, guiding tourists around a world heritage site, or playing for the Japanese national chess team). We can see how identity has developed in some of the contributors through recognition for their work as practitioners of their passion (for example, holding art exhibitions, engaging in performances, and publishing translated works) or as academic researchers (of traditional childbirth practices or of mythology). Most authors describe various encounters they have had with others while engaging in their passions, which strongly illustrates the importance of relationships in a CoP. These encounters not only involve receiving help and advice from masters passing down the knowledge of their crafts (such as calligraphy) but also from older and wiser members of a community (such as more seasoned gardeners sharing the wisdom on how to best plant a garden).

This book would be of interest to a variety of readers. First, it would be fun for armchair travelers who enjoy travel memoirs, especially if they are interested in traditional aspects of Japanese culture. Some of those chapters provided background and introductory information that could be a springboard for a reader to do some deeper search. But I think this book could be of greater value to someone who is planning to come to Japan for work or study. Not only is there a thorough overview of various aspects of traditional and modern Japanese culture, but these authors have demonstrated ways that a person can make friends in Japan (which is not always an easy thing to do) and become a part of a community. Long-term residents of Japan may also like to see how others have invested their time and energy here and also see that it is never too late to take on a new passion or make friends in a new community. In fact, an alternative title to this book could have been "Belonging in Japan" because that

is precisely what these authors have accomplished.

Diane Hawley Nagatomo has been teaching and living in Japan since 1979. She is a recently retired professor from Ochanomizu University and currently is a specially appointed advisor to the president. Because she loves being in the classroom, she continues to teach part-time at three universities. Her academic works include Exploring Japanese University English Teachers' Professional Identity and Identity, Gender and Teaching English in Japan. A life-long dream, her first work of fiction, The Butterfly Cafe, will be published in July 2023.

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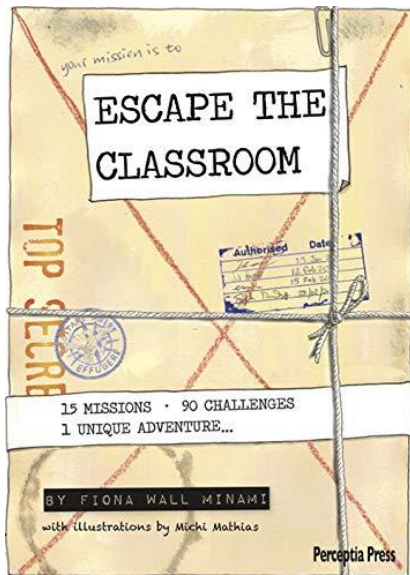
Reviewed by: Robert Sheridan, Faculty of Agriculture, Kindai University

Escape the Classroom is an innovative English communicative textbook which uses the theme of escape rooms to promote teamwork, cooperation, decision-making, creativity, and communication in English in order to solve puzzles, break codes, find useful objects, and open locks. It is designed to be an active and engaging, nontraditional text that still fully utilizes language skills, and in this, it succeeds. Furthermore, it is broadly adaptable and versatile, which for many educators and curriculum designers is an important point in a post-COVID world of socially-distanced language instruction.

With a CEFR level of B1–C1, this task-based learning textbook is designed for intermediate to advanced English level learners. The author herself has noted in an interview with Bricolage Teacher (Toews-Shimizu, 2021) that the book works well both in the classroom as well as online using breakout rooms, making it a versatile text. Each lesson unit is designed to last 90 minutes which is ideal for university classes in countries such as Japan. The immersive and engaging nature of the materials, however, suggests that the book could be easily adapted to advanced high school classes and adult classes. In addition, it is important to note that while being designed as a cohesive textbook that can be used for an entire semester, the materials could also be used as activities for a single class for a change of pace, or they could be combined with other, more traditional classroom materials. The versatility and adaptability of the book, together with its active engagement, are important departures from traditional textbooks that offer students new ways to learn the language.

The textbook is made up of 15 units called "missions" which are each six pages in length. Students must work together as a team to accomplish the mission before time runs out. Each mission begins with an illustration of a door looking into a room that the students need to escape from. While looking at the picture, students begin by previewing the mission of their team by discussing what they think they might have to do. After 'entering the room' on the following page, the students are introduced to six main activities they must successfully complete as a team to accomplish the mission and ultimately escape the room. These six activities are cleverly named so the first letter of each activity spells "E.S.C.A.P.E" in every mission (for example the activity titles for Mission 1 are **E**nter, **S**py, **C**hallenge, **A**nswer, **P**uzzle, **E**scape and are **E**nter, **S**olve, **C**ommunicate, **A**nswer, **P**uzzle, **E**scape for Mission 10). In the first two activities, through a variety of exercises, students preview keywords and expressions that are associated with the mission. Students then must use the new vocabulary to complete the remaining four activities, such as puzzles, cryptic messages, and codes. The individual missions are centred around various themes such as time (Mission 3: Clock), food (Mission 6: Eat), and science (Mission 10: Lab), which makes the book engaging for learners from a variety of majors and backgrounds.

All of the activities are cooperative where full participation by each team member is necessary to succeed. In several of the activities, students even need to individually cut out pages of their books to contribute to solving the puzzles and codes to accomplish the team missions. Time limits and competition between teams to be the first to come up with the solution are encouraged making this book both cooperative and competitive.

The book also includes a wide variety of additional activities. Each mission has a destination city which is only revealed after the students solve a puzzle. Hidden words placed in illustrations or cryptic messages are also included in each unit. In the back of the book are fact files consisting of a challenge and follow-up activity. These include two short reading passages connected to the theme which can be used as extension activities to improve student reading and writing skills.

Finally, it is evident that a great deal of thought and detail has not only gone into the content of the book but also its design. All of the images, which were illustrated by Michi Mathias, are attractive and full of detail. It all starts with the textbook cover, which looks like a manila folder reflecting its espionage theme. Small details throughout the book such as a motto on the cover written in Latin "Cogitare, Agere, Effugere" which means "Think, Act and Escape!" brings additional intrigue to the

book. This attention to detail has been also recognized by the British Council as *Escape the Classroom* was chosen as one of its finalists for the ELTon Award for Innovation in Learner Resources in 2021.

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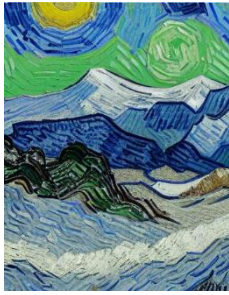
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