

ADVANCING LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY ONE ARTICLE AT A TIME



# OSAKA JALT JOURNAL

Volume 6, June 2019

ISSN: 2188-5192



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# Osaka JALT Journal

Volume 6, June 2019

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## From the Editor

Welcome to the 2019 *Osaka JALT Journal*!

We, the editorial team, are pleased to bring you this volume of the *Osaka JALT Journal* and hope that you find the articles contained in this volume to be relevant and thought-provoking.

In the first article, *'The Benefits and Use of Culturally Familiar Materials in Japanese University EFL Classrooms'* by Sheridan, Tanaka, and Tang, the authors extrapolate on the efficacy of culturally familiar teaching materials to improve foreign language learning. Specifically, Sheridan et al. make a strong case for a more overt approach to the utilization of culturally familiar teaching materials in the foreign or second language classroom and provide samples and guidelines for teachers to follow so that they can see if they too can help their students have greater vocabulary retention and better textual comprehension.

Fu continues a focus on the need to provide learners with culturally relevant teaching materials. In her article, *'Improving Materials Analysis Skills and Intercultural Competence through a Textbook Analysis Project'*, she highlights the benefits of having pre-service teacher training programs include a module on materials analysis that guides prospective teachers down a path toward becoming self-aware of the need for teaching materials to be culturally appropriate to the classroom.

In the third article, *'A Framework for Integrating Education for Sustainable Development in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom in Japan: An Appeal to the Language Teaching Community'*, Jodoin and Singer apply the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework to the English as a foreign language (EFL) field and demonstrate how pedagogies can be enhanced when curriculum designers and

teachers integrate the ESD framework into curricula. Should we choose to heed their enjoin, they convincingly argue that we may find that this pedagogical paradigm shift could lead to more meaning-focused input and output and fluency practice for our students.

The fourth article, *'Acculturation and the Challenges Japanese Students Face When Taking Degree Courses at Universities in the U.K.'*, presents findings in which the author, Birtwistle, explores the link between acculturation and second language proficiency in Japanese students studying English as a second language in the U.K. Anyone involved in preparing students for study abroad will want to take a look at some of the takeaways from this study to see how they can better prepare their students for future exchanges.

This volume concludes with Chen, Yang, and Lin's study on the assessment practices of teachers teaching English as a foreign language at universities in Japan. In their paper, titled *'Factors Influencing Teacher Judgment When Designing and Analyzing Quizzes at Universities in Japan'*, the authors highlight important considerations that need to be made about pre-service training content and make recommendations to stakeholders on what kinds of content may help new teachers become more skilled at foreign language assessment.

In closing, the editorial team and I would like to thank the many reviewers and authors who have helped to bring this volume to fruition. It is no easy task writing, reviewing or editing for a journal, but it is a collaboration that I am sure everyone involved feels passionate about. Accordingly, we hope you will find our earnest efforts in line with our best wishes for improved pedagogies and more proficient learners.

Ryan Smithers

# The Benefits and Use of Culturally Familiar Materials in Japanese University EFL Classrooms

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, a growing body of research into the use of culture in foreign language instruction has suggested that culturally familiar materials improve language learning. Building on the authors' initial research into this subject, a crossover study consisting of two groups of 51 Japanese university students was conducted to investigate the effects of simplified newspaper articles with culturally familiar proper nouns, compared with the same articles using culturally unfamiliar proper nouns, on vocabulary recall, comprehension and interest. First, we report the results of this study which affirms previous findings showing students who read culturally familiar articles achieve overall greater vocabulary recall, mean comprehension scores, and indicate more interest in the materials. Furthermore, our work demonstrates that the use of these passages changes the ways in which students think about, engage, and interact with their course material. Moreover, we present the results of a preliminary survey into textbook usage in Japan that supports a belief that more culturally familiar texts should be used in Japanese classrooms; however, such material usage seems limited. Finally, this paper concludes with an introduction into how teachers can easily find and adapt a variety of culturally familiar materials to be used in the EFL classroom.

*Keywords:* cultural familiarity, materials development, reading comprehension, vocabulary recall, student interest

English is a hypercentral language, the most widely used second language, and a lingua franca for business and academia, connecting research and students in the sciences and humanities (De Swann, 2001). With its overwhelming global reach, it is easy to lose sight of the culturally specific ways English is adapted in local contexts. One challenge English teachers currently face is the question of how to improve language acquisition and interest levels in our classrooms. These improvements can take many forms, and in this paper, the authors present an effective way to achieve this: the use of simplified culturally familiar newspaper articles to accomplish greater vocabulary gains, mean comprehension scores and interest. We start with a literature review of similar studies, across Eurasia and the United States, that have shown positive results. However, this study extends previous research by qualitatively linking reader interest with culturally familiar texts, surveying larger sample sizes and using more quantitative methodology to assess vocabulary and comprehension improvements.

Fundamentally, this paper attempts to offer greater support for the hypotheses: firstly, culturally familiar proper nouns improve L2 reading comprehension and vocabulary recall; and secondly, L2 learners express greater interest and engagement in culturally familiar contexts. Unlike most of the previous research, students' results in this study are gauged by alternatively using culturally familiar and non-culturally familiar newspaper articles, in a crossover design. Finally, the paper ends with examples and sources for culturally familiar material and methods to be adapted to individual classrooms, in homework assignments and classwork.

### **Literature Review**

The use of culturally familiar materials in foreign language instruction have proven to be

beneficial in several studies. Scholars from Turkey, Spain and the Middle East have shown culturally familiar texts increase comprehension (Alptekin, 2006; Erten & Razi, 2009; Demir, 2012; Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh, 2013). Demir's study (2012) also demonstrated students with culturally familiar texts had higher rates of vocabulary inference, simply by using culturally familiar names of countries, cities, dates, and events. In America, Pulido (2004) found adult learners of Spanish who read culturally familiar texts had higher gain scores on incidental vocabulary acquisition than those who did not.

Comparable research in Japan has also demonstrated the positive effects of culturally familiar texts. In the first of these studies, Chihara, Sakurai, and Oller (1989) showed that students' reading cloze scores improve when nouns, in particular English names of people and places, are changed to Japanese equivalents to make the context more localized. Sasaki's (2000) study of 60 students supported these findings while also demonstrating that those who read culturally familiar texts were able to recall vocabulary and content better than those who read the culturally unfamiliar ones. These findings may indicate an increased motivation for students to think critically about the content. These language gains and this increase in engagement was also shown in Sheridan, Tanaka and Hogg (2016; 2019), who found Japanese students were more interested in articles that were set in their home country. Additionally, vocabulary recall and comprehension rates also increased with culturally familiar texts (Sheridan et al., 2019). Thus, although the total number of studies conducted in Japan is small, there appears to be clear benefits to using culturally familiar texts. At the same time, in reality, textbooks made for a global audience dominate university educators' choice in Japan.

Despite the advantages of culturally familiar materials, the selection of texts that are culturally-based seems to remain low. After running a pilot study (Sheridan et al., 2016)

and concomitant to our main study (Sheridan et al., 2019), as part of our larger project we conducted a survey to assess textbook usage in Japanese universities (Sheridan, Tanaka, Ando, & Jackson, 2017). This survey gauged the most commonly used textbooks in Japan and determined the importance teachers in Japan placed on local culture in their selection process. A shortlist of 123 textbooks used in Japanese universities was created from 215 responses. Out of these textbooks, materials that were made in Japan or published specifically for a Japanese audience were selected only a total of 10 times (8.1%). The remaining 113 or 91.9% of textbooks selected were made by one of a handful of EFL book publishers geared toward an international audience. At the same time, on a 7-point Likert scale that assessed the importance of different factors in material selection, educators ranked the importance of cultural familiarity at 5.28. The survey, therefore, reflected that educators acknowledged that culture likely played a part in effective language pedagogy, but this did not seem to translate into classroom materials or practice; hence the need for further study to explicitly show the benefits of culturally familiar texts, and to promote further use in the classroom.

### **Hypotheses**

In order to demonstrate the broad efficacy of culturally familiar materials and the relative ease with which they can be incorporated into the classroom, we hypothesized that the results of this study would mirror those of previous studies, in particular Sheridan et al., 2019. This study aimed to reinforce the previous results that:

1. Culturally familiar proper nouns improve L2 reading comprehension and vocabulary recall.

2. L2 learners express greater interest and engagement in culturally familiar contexts.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

Four intact lower-intermediate level English classes at two private universities in western Japan participated in this study. Participants included one hundred and two students (42 female, 60 male) who were aged between 19 to 21 at the beginning of the study. Two of the authors taught the classes and collected the data for this study.

The participants from the four intact classes were divided into two equivalent groups in terms of size and their initial vocabulary knowledge based on their performance on the New General Service List Test (NGSLT; Stoeckel & Bennett, 2015). This NGSLT was used as it effectively covers over 90 percent of the core English language used in reading (Browne, Culligan, & Phillips, 2013) and the assignments in this study were modified newspaper articles. The mean NGSLT score for the students present in Group 1 was 80.17 ( $n = 42$ ) and 78.00 ( $n = 46$ ) for Group 2. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine the relationship between the NGSLT scores of the two groups. The ANOVA was non-significant,  $F(1, 86) = 2.12, p = .15$ . The results of the NGSLT and details of the two groups are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Group Data*

Group 1	Group 2
51 participants (33 female, 18 male)	51 participants (9 female, 42 male)
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> year students	2 <sup>nd</sup> year students
Mean NGSLT score: 80.17 ( $n = 42$ )	Mean NGSLT score: 78.00 ( $n = 46$ )

### ***Research Design***

In an attempt to replicate the results of previously published research demonstrating that culturally familiar contexts have a positive effect on language learning in EFL classes at Japanese universities, an experiment was conducted following a design similar to the most recent study done by Sheridan et al., 2019. This present study was also comparative between two groups using a crossover research design where the two groups alternated roles of reading modified newspaper articles which included either culturally familiar or unfamiliar proper nouns. This crossover design was adopted in order to reduce the bias inherent in non-random assignment and intact classes. The study contained four sets of paired reading assignments, with participants completing each assignment over a three-week period.

### ***Instruments***

#### *Reading Texts*

Four simplified newspaper articles, two set in a Japanese-based cultural context and two set in America, a foreign context, were used in this study. For each of the four articles an alternate version was prepared where proper nouns were changed to those that would reflect culturally familiar or unfamiliar contexts. All of the articles were carefully selected to ensure that both the culturally familiar or unfamiliar versions of the readings were equally believable in the alternative context. We did this to adjust a limitation in our previous study, wherein the results of an article on UFO conspiracy theories were swayed by students' faith in the Japanese government and their willingness to believe in foreign government conspiracies (Sheridan et al., 2019). This adjustment was made to account for this type of implicit bias.

The text used are as follows. The alternate version of the first article originally based in Japan, “The method to save a seat in Japan shows just how safe the country is” (Baseel, 2017) was modified to take place in Singapore as Singapore was considered the safest place in the world by the United Nations at that time. The alternate versions of the second and third articles originally based in America, “Coffee shop's unique offer on cheap coffee – all you need is good manners!” (McGuire, 2016) and “Researchers discover seaweed that tastes like bacon and is twice as healthy as kale” (Tasch, 2016), were selected because Japan is known for its good manners and the fact that seaweed is a staple in the Japanese diet. The alternate version of the final article originally based in Japan, “Tokyo Olympic stadium worker’s death caused by too much work” was modified to take place in PyeongChang, South Korea, because the Winter Olympics were scheduled to begin there just after the end of the school semester. To encourage discussion and increase the length of the articles to one page, a paragraph introducing moral ambiguity was also added to each of the articles. The final article, “Tokyo (*PyeongChang*) Olympic stadium worker’s death caused by too much work” (Guardian Reporter, 2017) appears in Appendix A for the reader’s reference. The modifications that were made to the article are italicized in parentheses. For each pair of readings, one group received the original article while the

Table 2  
*The Cultural Setting of Groups’ Reading Assignments*

Article	Group 1	Group 2
Save a Seat	Familiar	Foreign
Coffee Shop	Foreign	Familiar
Seaweed Bacon	Familiar	Foreign
Olympic Stadium	Foreign	Familiar

second group was assigned the identical text with proper nouns, monetary denominations, and units of measurements altered to match the cultural context. The groups were assigned the articles as seen in Table 2.

#### *Homework & Pre- and Post-tests*

To begin each article lesson, students were given a pre-test before the reading was introduced. The pre-tests were identical for both groups and included 10 vocabulary items and three opinion questions (Appendix B). After taking the pre-test, students were then assigned the reading with either the Japanese or the foreign context as homework. Both groups of participants were given identical homework assignments which ask them to summarize the article, form three discussion questions and write their overall opinion of the article (Appendix C). After completing these assignments and the in-class study and discussion, both groups retook the vocabulary and opinion questions on the post-test, with the addition of five comprehension questions (Appendix D). The four articles in Table 2 were used in this study, but due to space restrictions, this paper only presents the instruments for the final article, “Tokyo (*PyeongChang*) Olympic stadium worker’s death caused by too much work.”

The lexical items for the pre- and post-tests were selected from the vocabulary found at the 1500 level or above on the NGSL. This was reflective of students’ vocabulary proficiency levels based on their NGSLT results. Items from the first two bands were not used because students performed near-perfectly on this section of the NGSLT. The items were chosen through lexical analysis on VocabProfile (Cobb, 2015). Table 3 shows the lexical breakdown of the three bands of the NGSL, the NAWL, and includes the off-list

words that were important to the article. All of the off-list words in the articles that were not proper nouns were replaced with on-list word items.

Table 3

*Breakdown of the Lexical Items in the Olympic Article*

Article 1: Olympic stadium worker's death caused by too much work		
Frequency level bands	Current profile (token %)	Items on pre-test & post-test
NGSL_1	91.00%	None
NGSL_2	4.50%	complain (1493), disappear (1663), fault (1993)
NGSL_3	1.60%	consequently, announcement, recognition
NAWL	1.30%	stadium
OFF	1.61%	overtime, hectic (Japanese or foreign proper nouns)

Note: The numbers in parenthesis for the words in the second band represent their position on the NGSL

*Likert-scale to Gauge Interest*

Finally, in addition to the article, homework, and the pre- and post-tests, students were given a Likert-scale questionnaire to assess their interest in the article after the post-test (Appendix E). To better quantitatively gauge student interest, students were asked to indicate their reactions to the articles on a 6-point Likert scale with the questions on the survey being written in both English and Japanese. In our previous study, we utilized a 7-point scale, but in order to eliminate the opportunity for participants to give a neutral response by selecting the middle or neutral category (4), we adjusted the scale (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). We also made the questionnaire bilingual to ensure the questions were not misinterpreted, which might have been the case in our previous study.

## Results

### *Quantitative Results*

The statistical analyses of our hypotheses were conducted to compare vocabulary gains, comprehension and interest in the reading of simplified newspaper articles which contained either culturally familiar or unfamiliar proper nouns. The results were analyzed with one-way analysis of variances to determine whether there were any significant differences between the means of the dependent variables: gains from vocabulary pre-tests to post-tests, comprehension scores and student interest for each of the readings. The independent variable for each of these tests was the cultural context of the article. All of the statistical analyses were performed with the alpha level set at .05.

#### *Vocabulary Recall Through Articles Set in Culturally Familiar and Unfamiliar Contexts*

Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to measure the extent of the new vocabulary the participants acquired from each reading. Pre- and post-tests for each of the readings contained the same 10 items. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted for each reading in order to evaluate the relationship between the cultural familiarity of articles' settings and vocabulary recall. The independent variable was the cultural context of the simplified newspaper article. The dependent variable was the gains from vocabulary pre-tests to post-test. Table 4 shows the mean vocabulary gains for both groups for each of the four articles. For the first reading, the group that read the culturally familiar article achieved greater mean vocabulary test gains from the pre-test to post-test, but the ANOVA was non-significant,  $F(1, 94) = 1.71, p = .19$ . For the second, third and fourth readings, the group that read the culturally familiar article achieved greater mean vocabulary test gains, and the ANOVAs were significant,  $F(1, 98) = 25.59, p < .01$ ,  $F(1, 93) = 12.05, p < .01$ , and  $F(1, 88) = 9.58, p < .01$ . As assessed by  $\eta^2$ , the cultural setting

accounted for 21%, 12%, and 10% of the difference in vocabulary score gains respectively.

Table 4  
*Vocabulary Gains and Comparisons between Groups*

Article	Group	Context	<i>n</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>SD</i>	Difference
SAS	1	Japan	46	-2	5	1.17	.25	1.70	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Foreign	50	-5	6	0.68	.28	1.97	0.49 ( $p = .19$ )
CS	1	Foreign	51	-5	5	0.73	.25	1.77	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Japan	49	-1	6	2.45	.23	1.63	1.72 ( $p < .01$ )
SB	1	Japan	51	-2	6	1.75	.27	1.91	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Foreign	44	-3	3	0.50	.23	1.53	1.25 ( $p < .01$ )
OS	1	Foreign	46	-2	5	0.61	.22	1.47	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Japan	44	-3	7	1.89	.36	2.37	1.28 ( $p < .01$ )

*Note.* SAS= Save a Seat, CS= Coffee Shop, SB= Seaweed Bacon, OS= Olympic Stadium

*Comprehension of Articles Set in Culturally Familiar and Unfamiliar Contexts*

After reading and discussing an article, participants took a five-item multiple-choice comprehension test. To examine the relationship of the context of the article on comprehension, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted for each comprehension test, with the independent variable being the cultural context of the article. The dependent variable was the scores on the comprehension tests. Table 5 shows the mean comprehension scores of both groups for each of the four articles read. For the first and second readings, the group that read the culturally familiar article achieved higher mean scores on the comprehension test, but the ANOVAs were non-significant,  $F(1, 95) = 3.92$ ,  $p > .05$  and  $F(1, 100) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .19$ . For the third article, the group that read the culturally familiar article had higher mean scores on the comprehension test and the ANOVA was significant,  $F(1, 95) = 7.43$ ,  $p < .01$ , with the cultural context of the reading accounting

for 7% of the difference in comprehension test scores. For the final reading, the group that read the culturally familiar article also achieved higher mean scores on the comprehension test, but the ANOVA was non-significant,  $F(1, 95) = 3.92, p = .06$ .

Table 5  
*Comprehension Test Scores and Comparisons between Groups*

Article	Group	Context	<i>n</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>SD</i>	Difference
SAS	1	Japan	47	0	5	2.81	.19	1.28	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Foreign	50	0	5	2.32	.16	1.15	0.49 ( $p > .05$ )
CS	1	Foreign	51	1	5	3.33	.14	0.99	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Japan	51	2	5	3.59	.13	0.94	0.26 ( $p = .19$ )
SB	1	Japan	51	0	5	2.92	.17	1.21	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Foreign	46	0	5	2.24	.18	1.25	0.68 ( $p < .01$ )
OS	1	Foreign	44	0	5	2.84	.24	1.60	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Japan	43	1	5	3.42	.18	1.20	0.58 ( $p = .06$ )

*Note.* SAS= Save a Seat, CS= Coffee Shop, SB= Seaweed Bacon, OS= Olympic Stadium

*Interest in Articles Set in Culturally Familiar and Unfamiliar Contexts.*

To examine the influence of the cultural context of the articles on students’ interest in them, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted for each of the readings. The independent variable was the cultural context of the article, Japanese or foreign, and the dependent variable was the self-reported interest scores on a Likert scale from 1 to 6, with 6 indicating the highest level of interest. As displayed in Table 6, the mean interest scores were higher for all of the articles set in Japan, however, the ANOVA results were non-significant for the first and third articles,  $F(1, 95) = 2.30, p = .13$ , and  $F(1, 95) = 0.48, p = .49$ . For the second and fourth articles, the ANOVA results were significant,  $F(1, 100) = 4.70, p = .03$ , and  $F(1, 88) = 14.14, p = < .01$  with the cultural context of the reading accounting for 5% and 14% of the difference in interest, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ .

Table 6

*Interest Survey Scores and Comparisons between Groups*

Article	Group	Context	<i>n</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>SD</i>	Difference of <i>M</i>
SAS	1	Japan	47	2	6	4.45	.14	0.93	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Foreign	50	1	6	4.16	.13	0.94	0.29 ( <i>p</i> = .13)
CS	1	Foreign	51	1	6	4.39	.13	0.90	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Japan	51	4	6	4.73	.09	0.64	0.34 ( <i>p</i> = .03)
SB	1	Japan	51	3	6	4.63	.11	0.75	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Foreign	46	3	6	4.52	.11	0.75	0.11 ( <i>p</i> = .49)
OS	1	Foreign	46	2	5	4.22	.12	0.79	(Japan – Foreign)
	2	Japan	43	4	6	4.79	.10	0.64	0.57 ( <i>p</i> < .01)

*Note.* SAS= Save a Seat, CS= Coffee Shop, SB= Seaweed Bacon, OS= Olympic Stadium

**Discussion**

*Analysis of Quantitative Results*

Students who read the culturally familiar articles had greater vocabulary gains for all four of the articles, with the results being statistically significant for three out of the four. These results strongly support the research which demonstrated that readings set in culturally familiar contexts promotes increased vocabulary recall. As previous studies have illustrated, the use of culturally familiar texts helps to reduce the number of unfamiliar proper nouns and therefore, decrease the lexical difficulty of the text by allowing students to focus more on the linguistic meaning of unfamiliar words as well as the meaning of the text as a whole (Sheridan et al., 2019; Demir, 2012; Ketchum, 2006; Jalilifar & Assi, 2008).

Students who read the articles set in the culturally familiar context also achieved greater mean comprehension scores for all of the articles in this study, however, only one of these differences was statistically significant with the critical level set at .05. These findings offer some support for the argument that readings set in culturally familiar

contexts improve understanding as shown in previous research (Alptekin, 2006; Erten & Razi, 2009; Demir, 2007; Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh, & Rezazadeh, 2013).

While other studies have demonstrated the efficacy of culturally familiar contexts in language education, our previous study (Sheridan et al., 2019) was the first to directly correlate student interest to these contexts. In this present study, interest in all four of the articles based in the culturally familiar setting was greater than that of the articles set in the culturally unfamiliar context, with results being statistically significant for half of the articles. This provides further support for our initial findings, demonstrating the relationship between student interest and cultural familiarity.

### *Analysis of Qualitative Data*

In addition to providing support for our previous study, the homework answers, post-test content, and article interest-survey results revealed a few key trends when read through the lens of qualitative descriptive research. In general, when students are interested in the content, they relate it back to their own lives. Thus, when students read culturally unfamiliar articles, they often tried to make personal connections to the materials. For the article about discounts on coffee for good manners, students were more likely to reference their own experiences at their part-time jobs. The personal connection allowed students to relate to the content despite cultural barriers. As one student who read the article set in the United States remarked, “I do a part-time job and am a cashier at a store. Some customers take an arrogant attitude... I can understand the feelings of the store clerk side by reading this article.” A second student who read the article set in the United States concurred: “...when I talk with customers in part time job, I want customers to use polite words. Everyone need to think about employee’s feelings and have sympathy.”

This trend was echoed in the article about death from overwork and student reactions. Students who read foreign articles further tended to cite current examples from the Japanese news media that they felt connected to the material. Thus, the students who read the foreign article about PyeongChang Olympic Stadium and the death of a worker repeatedly referenced the death of Dentsu worker who committed suicide in 2015 after overwork. The court case against the company was settled the same week the article was assigned, with the company found guilty of forcing employees to work overtime. Students repeatedly used this example to underscore the idea that while the article was set in Korea it was relevant to Japan and their lives. Indeed, one student made a direct comparison between the two countries, writing: “Olympic will be held in Japan in 2020. I think we should try not to repeat the same tragedy.” At the same time, in a different vein, one student who read the article set in Japan celebrated the sacrifice of the man who died to help make the Olympics possible: “I think working too much is not good, but it is wonderful what [he] did for the Olympic Games.”

Another thread found throughout the papers was a tendency to compare their own country to the foreign countries, in both positive and negative ways. Thus, one student wrote about the coffee article set in the United States: “I think that it would be good if such a system is in Japan.” A second student echoed this sentiment: “I want to spread this system in Japan.” Finally, a third student wrote that they “think that we introduce this system in Japan.”

Finally, students who read articles set in foreign countries tended to have more generalized responses. For example, in the article about the discovery of a seaweed that tastes like bacon, students who read the article set in Oregon tended to relate the discovery to human health or climate change. One student who read the article set in the United

States wrote: “I think seaweed will be a key part in changing diets,” and a second added, “...seaweed that tastes like bacon is wonderful discovery. If this seaweed becomes famous throughout the country, our food chain will change better in the future.”

Students who read the article set in Japan, however, had more visceral reactions: “...I want to eat. I want this seaweed to be laid in many markets,” and another wrote, “I thought this article was very interesting, and I really wanted to know if the seaweed tastes like bacon. I hope it will become common food in Japan as soon as possible.”

All of this qualitative data seems to indicate that students engage more with the material when it relates personally to them. When the material is culturally familiar, students engage directly with it and have greater language gains, as seen in our quantitative results. However, when the materials are culturally unfamiliar, students themselves try to link the content back to their own experiences and life in Japan, resulting in what we hypothesize to be a greater focus on content. This likely results in fewer concrete language gains because the student is focusing on both language and content. Thus, it is likely that culturally familiar contexts aid in this personalization of the material and the promotion of language gains.

Finally, this is supported by the fact that the students also had stronger responses to Japan-based articles and displayed a tendency to relate foreign-based material to their daily lives in Japan. Overall, the homework, post-tests, and article evaluations reveal that no matter what the contexts, students’ cultural biases will guide their learning. It stands to reason that working with those biases in a way that meets students’ educational needs and engages them with the material is a more productive pedagogy than attempting to teach students foreign language using difficult and foreign-based materials they cannot relate to their daily lives.

### *Materials Development*

The materials used in this study can be easily adapted for use in any classroom setting. The lessons are structured to be student- and discussion-centered. Centering a lesson around current newspaper articles has been demonstrated to be effective across multiple contexts as they are a source of authentic language usage, when authentic materials are defined as texts that are meant to communicate information to members of a society rather than teach language (Demir, 2012; Thomas, 2014; Tanaka, 2015). They further provide meaningful, focused input which is relevant to students' lives, which Thomas (2014) argues has the benefit of providing more "focus...on learners' interests and needs," as well as to "increase learners' motivation; and connect the classroom with the outside world" (p. 15). At the same time, scholars such as Tanaka (2015) and Thomas (2014) acknowledge the difficulty in using authentic texts in the classroom and offer a variety of scaffolding tactics to ease their usage. Following this work, we also provided some scaffolding in our careful selection of the texts we used.

Simplified newspaper articles from various cultural settings can be accessed for free from the websites Breaking News English and Learning English Online. While these websites do not offer articles only about Japan, they do contain many stories about Japan, ranging from the recent recognition of Ainu as First Nations to rugby players hiding tattoos in Japan. Furthermore, Thomas (2014) has noted the benefit of using texts or articles that introduce elements of local culture to global audiences. Her example was a Chilean restaurant in New York City, but articles about Japanese food gaining UNESCO World Heritage or Cool Japan initiatives and their global reception have also proved popular with students. Furthermore, there are a number of "pop culture" Japanese news websites such as Sora News 24, which covers a range of topics, from serious stories such

as #MeToo in Japan, to lighter topics associated with Japanese pop or virtual culture, such as the global reception of viral videos like Pineapple Pen, or Japanese nightclub host culture. To make news articles about Japan or Japanese culture level-appropriate, text analysis software such as VocabProfile (Cobb, 2015), which was used in this study, can quickly simplify the articles to match the proficiency of the course's students.

The homework assignment is designed to allow students time to think about the article, prepare their opinion, and formulate discussion questions to be used in group work. Furthermore, because it is designed to be as open-ended as possible, it gives the students a great deal of freedom to engage with the topic in a way that interests them. Thus, we see examples of students who read the foreign Olympic article relating it to work practices and social problems in Japan.

Such localization also opens multiple avenues for discussion based on student answers. For example, with the Seaweed article, students could be put into groups to design marketing campaigns for the seaweed in both foreign and local contexts. In the case of articles that addressed social issues such as the Olympics article, or again in the case of the seaweed article, students in groups brainstormed solutions to the problem of overwork or global warming. They thought about personal changes they could make as well as changes that would need to happen on a governmental level. Some students connected the two; as one student wrote about global warming and seaweed, "I agree with this article [that diets should change because of global warming]. I also think that the innovative seaweed will be a key part in changing our diets and I am interested in it. I want to eat it."

Through the homework, the reading, and the in-class activities, culturally familiar news articles can be a fruitful way to do several things. First, students tend to be interested

in news about their own country, and many of them often do further research into the topic before class. As one student wrote about the seaweed: “First, I don’t think that food supplies are related to global warming. But when I looked it up, I found out that there was a relationship. According to research, if the full vegetarian diet is spread globally, we can save more than 8 million lives by 2050 and reduce greenhouse gas by two thirds. I hope this algae will spread even more in Japan. I would like to eat it if it really tastes like bacon.”

This example also illustrates another important point: the use of culturally familiar contexts often makes it easier for students to connect Japan to global issues. By beginning in Japan and with the students’ personal experience, students often make the jump themselves to locate Japan’s stakes or Japan’s role in global issues. Students can see the immediate application of what they are studying to their lives and often to global issues. In that sense, newspaper articles are a wonderful, authentic resource to, as Thomas (2014) stated, “connect the classroom with the outside world” (p. 15). By using this methodology, you give the students the ability to bring forward the issues that interest them most and make the connections between the personal, the national, and the world for themselves, and that should be the hallmark of a true, transformative education.

## **Conclusion**

This work contributes to existing knowledge that culturally familiar contexts improve student vocabulary recall and comprehension of the texts. It further positively correlates culturally familiar contexts with student interest. In addition to providing further support for the use of culturally familiar materials in EFL classrooms, this paper also touched on the importance of meaningful materials to students’ lives and educational experiences. Finally, we provided readers with sources for productive material and laid out ways in

which such materials can be adapted to their classrooms, both in homework assignments and in-class work. Ultimately, this article proves the efficacy of these materials and lays out a map to assist teachers in utilizing such materials in their own classrooms.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors of this paper would like to thank Nicholas Hogg of Osaka Yuhigaoka Gakuen High School for his ongoing cooperation on this project. We would also like to thank Dr. Jonathan Aliponga of Kansai University of International Studies and Professor Shirley Ando of Otemae University for their guidance and hard work in the development of our survey questions. Finally, we would like to thank Gordon Carlson, John Jackson, and Susette Burton of Otemae University for their assistance.

### **Funding**

This research was supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science under Grant 16K02945.

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## Appendix A

### The Fourth Article

#### **Tokyo (*PyeongChang*) Olympic stadium worker's death caused by too much work**

A Tokyo (*PyeongChang*) city worker said the death of a 23-year-old man was from too much work. The man worked at the new Olympic stadium building.

Hiroshi Kawahito (*Woong Lee*), a lawyer for the man's family, said the man worked long hours and consequently got sick. He worked 190 hours and 18 minutes of overtime in the month before he died in March.

Tokyo (*PyeongChang*) city's work office made an announcement on Friday that these conditions were not fair or appropriate, about three months after the man's sad family called the work office to complain.

"We ask the building company, the Olympic group, the city and other people involved to not make another sad event like this," the lawyer said. The worker joined the building company in April 2016. He was involved in ground work at the area.

"We are happy to see our son get recognition for his hard work," his parents said. "We hope that the Tokyo (*PyeongChang*) Olympics will be safe and successful. However, we want people to work less. Do not work so much. Try to live life to its fullest."

Work at the new stadium has been hectic because of a slow start. An earlier stadium plan was dropped due to rising costs and a bad design. On any given day, about 1000 people work at the project.

The death of the worker caught Japan's (*South Korea's*) attention when his family said he died from too much work. The body of the man was found in the central mountains weeks after he disappeared.

The man left a note that said he "worked way too much." Because he worked for the city, the man's family should now get public money. However, some people think it is his own fault and he should have just said no to all of the overtime.

## Appendix B

### Pre-test for Article 1

#### Vocabulary questions:

**lawyer:** She wants to become a *lawyer*.

- a) a person who works at a store assisting customers
- b) a person who works in a hospital helping sick people
- c) a person whose job is to guide and assist people with the law
- d) a person whose job is to help and treat sick animals

**overtime:** He did a lot of *overtime* before his vacation.

- a) work less than is necessary
- b) work more than is usual
- c) work the normal amount
- d) work the same as always

**announcement:** The president made an *announcement* about the new law.

- a) an agreement or promise
- b) a change or improvement
- c) a secret document
- d) a written or spoken statement

**hectic:** He lives a *hectic* life.

- a) boring
- b) busy
- c) relaxed
- d) quiet

**stadium:** We went to the *stadium*.

- a) a building used for sports
- b) a building used for studying
- c) a place to buy clothes
- d) a place where people read

**disappear:** He *disappeared* around the corner.

- a) moved quickly
- b) moved slowly and quietly
- c) was no longer able to be heard
- d) was no longer able to be seen

**fault:** The mistake was her *fault*.

- a) answer
- b) goal
- c) opinion
- d) responsibility

**consequently:** He did not study for the test and *consequently* failed.

- a) as a result
- b) completely
- c) in a bad or negative way
- d) without knowledge

**complain:** I often *complain* to him.

- a) ask questions
- b) call in a loud voice
- c) say you are unhappy
- d) speak fast

**recognition:** He received *recognition* for his hard work.

- a) a pay raise
- b) a special bonus
- c) extra vacation or time off
- d) special attention or notice

**Discussion questions:**

1. What is the greatest number of hours a full-time worker should work in one week?  
Why do you think so?

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2. Why do you think some people work too hard?

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3. Do you believe companies are responsible when their workers damage their health from working too hard? Why or why not?

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**Appendix C**  
Homework Assignment

Summarize the main points of the article in your own words. What is most important about the article?

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Write down three open-ended discussion questions you have after reading the article.

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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Write your opinion! What do you think about the article? What do you agree with? What do you disagree with? Why?

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## Appendix D

### Post-test for Article 1

Note: *The vocabulary and discussion questions in the pre-test were identical; we reproduce here the comprehension questions that were only included on the post-test.*

#### Comprehension questions:

How much overtime did the man work in the month before his death?

- a. About 80 hours.
- b. About 120 hours.
- c. Just over 170 hours.
- d. Just over 190 hours.

What area did the man work in?

- a. Ground work.
- b. Office work.
- c. The city office.
- d. The stadium office.

What was the man's parents' message for others?

- a. Life is full of successes and failures.
- b. People should work less.
- c. Try to go on more vacations.
- d. Work hard to get recognized.

Why was the earlier stadium plan stopped?

- a. It was expensive and had a bad design.
- b. Not enough workers were available.
- c. Too many accidents and deaths.
- d. Workers worked too much and got sick.

Where was the man's body found?

- a. At his parent's home.
- b. At the stadium.
- c. In the mountains.
- d. In the work office.

## Appendix E

### Survey Item to Gauge Student Interest

Are you interested in this newspaper article?

この新聞記事に興味がありますか:

1	2	3	4	5	6
全く興味ない	興味ない	やや興味ない	やや興味ある	興味ある	とても興味ある

Why do you think so? なぜそう思いますか? (英語で教えてください。)

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# Improving Materials Analysis Skills and Intercultural Competence through a Textbook Analysis Project

**Akemi FU**

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## **Abstract**

The present paper is motivated by another small project (Fu, 2017) in which 17 pre-service teachers of English analyzed the portrayal of Japanese and other cultures in English textbooks approved by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). This paper further pursues the merit of teaching culture via theoretical frameworks, focusing on the types of cultural information (i.e., products, ideas, and behaviors) being represented. Consistent with DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004), a comparison of pre- and post-project teaching plans supported the educational merits of teaching culture. Using the theoretical framework of Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), three pre-service teachers of junior high school level English examined the cultural elements in textbooks. This project not only provided the participants with opportunities for critical analysis and evaluation of the teaching materials, but also deepened their understanding of the cultural ideas embodied in cultural products and behaviors.

*Keywords:* intercultural competence, international understanding, textbook analysis, teacher training

**O**ur increasingly globalized society requires more than linguistic skills. It also requires intercultural competence, which necessitates awareness and understanding of different cultural ideas, beliefs, and values. To this end, MEXT and teacher-training courses now include specific targets with regard to the teaching of culture. For instance, *Gakushu Shido Yoryo* (Course of Study; MEXT, 2011) lists three goals related to international understanding: 1) to help students develop their

understanding of various views, 2) to nurture their interests in language and culture as well as a respectful attitude toward different languages and cultures, and 3) to deepen their understanding of international culture. In the category of teaching plans and content, Section 3, Part 2: A, B, and C clearly states:

[...] Teachers should take up a variety of suitable topics in accordance with the level of students' development, as well as their interest, covering topics that relate to issues like daily lives, *manners and customs*, stories, geography, history, *traditional cultures*, and natural science of the people of the world, *focusing on English-speaking people and the Japanese people*. (MEXT, 2011, emphasis mine)

The guidelines also suggest that the content and quality of teaching materials should be helpful in the following.

[...] *enhancing the understanding of various ways of viewing and thinking*, [...] *deepening the understanding of the ways of life and cultures of foreign countries and Japan, raising interest in language and culture* and developing respectful attitudes toward these, [and ...] *deepening the international understanding from a broad perspective*, heightening students' awareness of being Japanese citizens living in a global community, and cultivating a spirit of international cooperation. (MEXT, 2011, emphasis mine)

However, making something a requirement does not necessarily ensure its attainment. We need to seek realistic and fruitful ways to help teachers achieve the suggested goals. As Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) pointed out, merely exposing students to cultural products does not bring about educational merits; direct attention must also be drawn to them so that students are able to objectively analyze and extract embedded information from them. Moreover, to be successful in this endeavor, the

teachers also must have solid critical thinking skills, especially at the start of their practice. During their practicum, teachers in training must make lesson plans and obtain approval from their supervising teachers before teaching their classes. The lessons of these teachers in training oftentimes focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the development and application of linguistic knowledge. Burke (2008) characterizes pre-service teachers as having one of three basic profiles: communicative language teachers, grammar-translation teachers, or hybrid teachers (i.e., combinations of the two other types). In short, though the approach may vary, the ultimate pedagogical focus is essentially lexico-grammatical form and/or meaning. However, in addition to selecting materials targeting linguistic elements, teachers in training also must critically analyze these materials in terms of cultural content, since their attitude toward this has a strong influence on their students' learning. The purpose of this study was to examine one particular method of effectively preparing pre-service teachers to teach culture in their classrooms.

### **Literature Review**

This section begins with a brief literature review to illustrate different models of culture with which the project participants were presented. It then goes on to explain the importance of intercultural competence, as proposed by Deardorff (2006, 2011). Finally, it summarizes some of the pedagogical merits of teaching culture.

#### ***Competing models of culture***

There are numerous models of culture from which to choose. Variations of one of the most popular (e.g., Peterson, 2004; Yashiro, Machi, Koike, & Isogai, 1998) use an “iceberg” to show culture in terms of surface and underlying levels (see Figure 1). The

surface level represents observable artifacts and behaviors, such as different greeting customs (e.g., bowing, hugging, shaking hands). However, as much as 80% of culture (e.g., connotations of respect or familiarity) is said to be imperceptible (Peterson, 2004). As such, these aspects of culture often go unnoticed, though they heavily influence the visible ones.

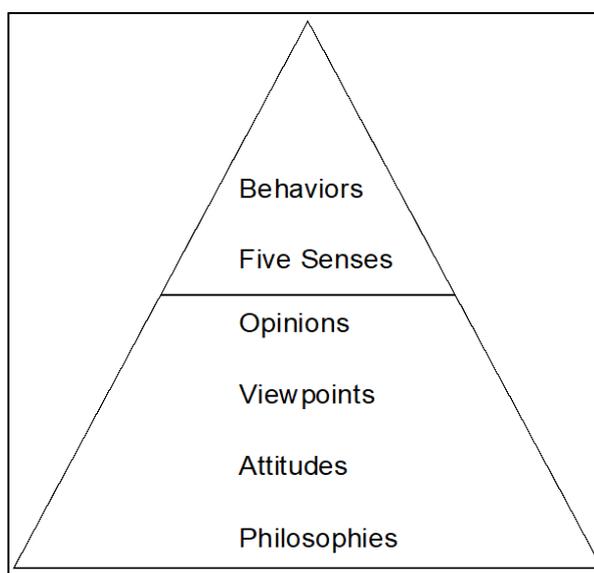


Figure 1. The Iceberg Model of Culture (Peterson, 2004).

A second well-known type of culture model (e.g., Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997) uses an onion-shaped figure (see Figure 2). As the terms themselves clearly indicate, the explicit level includes tangible elements, such as language, food, clothing, and buildings, while the implicit level encompasses intangible elements, such as subjective ideas regarding whether something is good or bad, logical or illogical, right or wrong. The latter derive from basic human instincts (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997), which are strongly tied to the way people try to use their surrounding environment for survival.

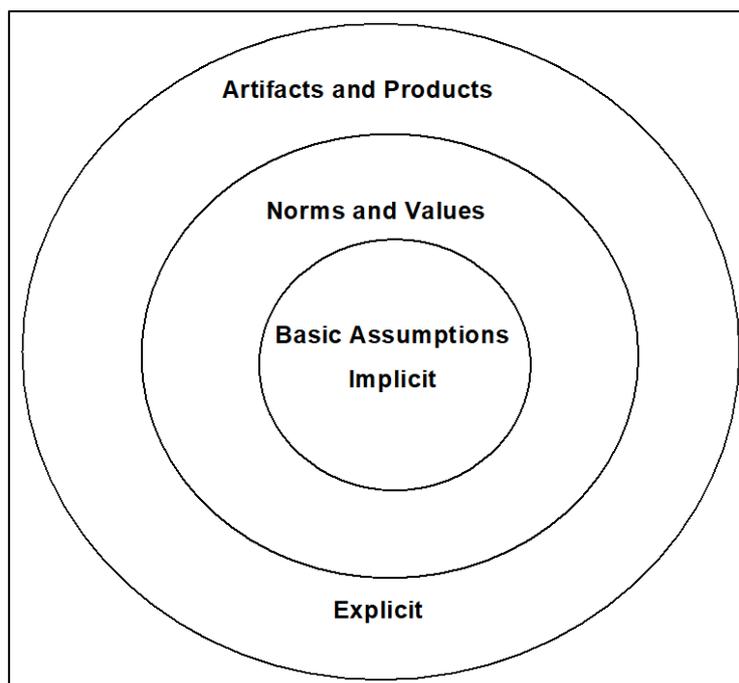


Figure 2. The Onion Model of Culture (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).

A final common cultural model is that of Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), which employs three circles, each one containing different cultural elements, namely products, ideas, and behaviors (see Figure 3). The construction of this model is noticeably different from that of the iceberg and the onion model. However, a quick glance reveals the interaction between its three constituent elements. This visualization was considered a great advantage for introducing the notion of culture in the English Education Methods course. Thus, this model was used as the analytical framework for the current project.

Once the appropriate model was chosen, a definition of intercultural understanding was needed. Deardorff (2006, 2011) describes the development of intercultural competence as an on-going process with four main aspects: attitude, knowledge and skills, internal outcome, and external outcome (see Figure 4). Most relevant to the participants in this project were knowledge and skills, including developing cultural self-awareness, deepening cultural knowledge, and honing analytical abilities, as these greatly influence

how students learn culture in their English classes.

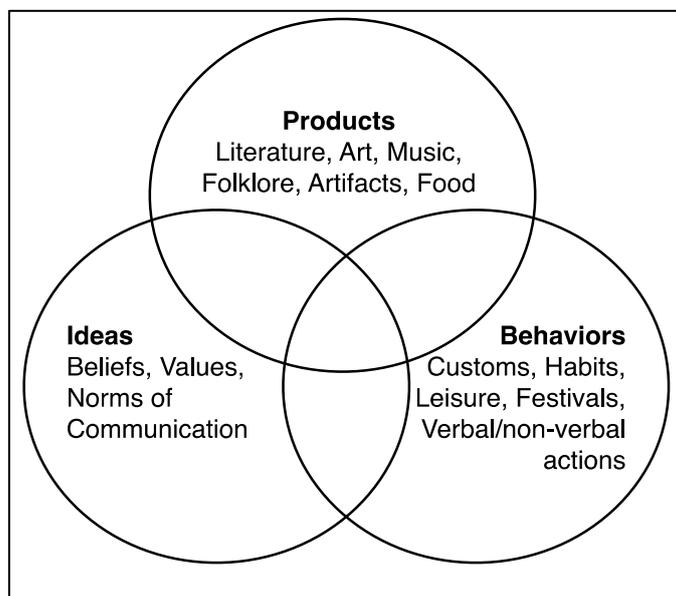


Figure 3. The elements of culture, theoretical framework for analysis, adapted from Tomalin & Stempleski (1993).



Figure 4. Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006, 2011).

### *Pedagogical benefits of teaching culture*

Previous studies emphasize the pedagogical merits of teaching culture. For example, its beneficial influence has been found on the improvement of socio-linguistic competence (Kramsch, 1998). Teaching culture also has a positive effect on learners' attitudes toward different cultural views (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). As Kramsch (1998) points out,

[o]ur purpose in teaching culture through language is not to make our students into little French or little Germans, but in making them understand why the speakers of two different languages act and react the way they do, whether in fictional texts or in social encounters, and what the consequences of these insights may mean for the learners. (p. 27)

Another suggested benefit of integrating culture into language teaching is that it can help students develop into intercultural citizens (Byram & Wagner, 2017; Porto, Houghton, & Byram, 2018). In today's diverse world, where the very definition of "native speaker" has become increasingly elusive, rather than drive learners toward the questionable traditional target of "native-like" language proficiency, it is arguably more productive to foster the development of their ability in other essential skills, such as intercultural negotiations.

As to how to successfully infuse culture into language learning, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) emphasize the necessity of training to draw appropriate information from the teaching materials, since little benefit can be expected from only showing cultural documents or artifacts in class. They also suggest that cultural awareness can sensitize learners to the impact of culturally-induced behavior on language use and communication and that it can lead future teachers to develop their professional capacity.

## **Method**

This section describes the study participants and project procedures.

### ***Participants***

The participants in the project were four pre-service teachers who had all finished a three-week teaching practicum in junior high schools and who were enrolled in *Eigoka Kyoiku Hou* (English Teaching Methods) and *Kyoshoku Jissen Enshu* (Practical Teaching Studies), two required courses for obtaining a teaching license in English. These semester-long college courses were held in spring and fall, respectively.

### ***Procedure***

In the first stage of the project, two 90-minute class sessions were spent covering different models of culture. Emphasis was placed on the fact that important cultural elements are not always tangible, such as clothing and buildings. Moreover, these intangible elements are not only equally important, they also strongly influence their tangible counterparts. In the first model that was presented, culture was portrayed as a set of eyes to see the world (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). In the second, it was represented in terms of “big C” artistic culture versus “small c” everyday culture (Benett, 1998). Next, culture was depicted as the onion of Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010). Finally, it was presented in terms of the ideas, products, and behaviors model of Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), which was used as the analytical framework for the rest of the course. Following confirmation that they clearly understood these models, the participants each chose a chapter from a MEXT-approved English textbook and analyzed the chapter guided by three prompts:

1. What cultural elements are represented in the chapter?
2. Where do these element(s) fall within the product-ideas-behaviors framework?
3. What other element(s) might you add in the classroom to deepen students' understanding about culture? How?

The participants were asked to work on this task individually and then exchange ideas with their classmates. This phase consisted of one 90-minute class. The participants were then instructed to make a teaching plan for their chosen chapter.

## **Results**

One participant was absent from the session when the students engaged in textbook analysis, so her data was excluded from the analysis. However, a comparison of the remaining pre-and post-project teaching plans showed qualitative improvements in the participants' materials analysis and preparation. For instance, in the pre-project teaching plans, the main foci were almost always lexico-grammatical features, and the analytical scope was limited to the content of the chosen chapters. On the other hand, the post-project teaching plans included cultural elements. Based on their understanding of a theoretical framework of culture, the participants were able to explain embedded beliefs and values in the category of ideas. In addition, their analytical scope went beyond the chosen chapter, connecting the content with that of other chapters, with interdisciplinary perspectives (often history and the social sciences) and current social events (e.g., registration of Japanese foods with UNESCO and a letter from former U.S. President Obama). The fact that these student teachers were able to integrate such information and facts into their teaching plans demonstrates increased intercultural competence in the knowledge and skills category (Deardorff, 2006, 2011). In addition, these results support claims from previous studies that students must be trained to extract appropriate

information from the material (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993).

Table 1

*Comparison of Pre- and Post-project Lesson Plans from Student A*

	Pre-project	Post-project
Textbook and chapter	New Crown 1, Lesson 3 I like soccer	New Crown 2, Lesson 4 Enjoy Sushi
Goals and Objectives	To understand grammar To learn how to express numbers and to memorize target words	To gain knowledge about the history of food culture [SUSHI]
In-class content	Pronunciation practice and spelling drills for numbers Introduction to target grammatical structure [What do you ---?]	To introduce current styles of sushi To know about historical changes in sushi, using <i>ukiyo</i> e paintings a. To notice differences b. To compare sushi in Japan and abroad c. To show sushi's 2013 registration as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage item
Additional materials	Handouts to practice target grammatical patterns	Color pictures of <i>ukiyo</i> e 10-page slide show

Table 1 shows the comparative results from pre- and post-project teaching plans from Student A. Her pre-project teaching plan focused heavily on lexico-grammatical features, such as memorization of the spelling and pronunciation of numbers, and comprehension of the grammatical structure “What do you ---?” After the textbook analysis, however, her teaching plan showed qualitative differences. First, it appropriately employed technical terms from the given theoretical framework. Second, it shows a connection between the cultural product, food, with historical changes in sushi in Japan,

food found abroad, and current world events. These changes indicate an improvement in materials analysis and preparation skills as well as in intercultural competence, especially in the area of knowledge and skills (see Deardorff, 2006).

Table 2  
*Comparison of Pre- and Post-project Lesson Plans from Student B*

	Pre-project	Post-project
Textbook and chapter	Sunshine 2, Program 5, International Food Festival	Sunshine 2, Program 1 <i>Origami</i>
Goals and Objectives	To understand English text shorter than 50 words  To understand about Korean food culture	To learn about <i>origami</i> , its history, and the origin of <i>semba-zuru</i> , and its embedded beliefs  To deepen understanding about the atomic bomb in <i>Hiroshima</i>
In-class content	Translate English text into Japanese  Based on the Japanese translation, three questions, one about <i>Kimbap</i> , Korean <i>Norimaki</i>	Origin of <i>semba-zuru</i> , cranes and turtles as symbols of longevity  Where do we often see <i>semba-zuru</i> ? <i>Koshien</i> (high school baseball tournament)  For sick and hospitalized people  For peace park in <i>Hiroshima</i>
Additional materials	None	Posters  Letter from former U.S. President Obama after visit to <i>Hiroshima</i>

Table 2 compares the pre- and post-project teaching plans of Student B. Her pre-project teaching plan focused heavily on reading comprehension based on English-to-Japanese translation. Although the similarity between *Kimbap* and *Norimaki* was noted,

no further explanation was given.

On the other hand, her teaching plan after the textbook analysis showed qualitative differences. First, it appropriately employed technical terminology from Tomalin and Stempleski's model (1993). Second, it showed the connection between the cultural product of *semba-zuru* (1,000 paper cranes) and the embedded beliefs of an association between cranes and longevity. It also explained why so many chains of *semba-zuru* can be seen at Koshien stadium and Hiroshima Peace Park (i.e., the custom of presenting *semba-zuru* illustrates a belief in prayers for good or peace). It further connected the idea of peace with the current social events in Hiroshima. In May 2016, former U.S. President Obama visited Hiroshima Peace Park with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. After his visit there, he sent a thank you letter to the local media, who had sent him a small book about Hiroshima's recovery. The student teacher provided a bilingual copy of this letter to the class. In this way, she demonstrated her ability to analyze the teaching materials from a theoretical perspective and integrate the class content with other related areas. Like Student A, her teaching materials analysis and preparation skills improved, as did her intercultural competence, especially in the area of knowledge and skills (see Deardorff, 2006).

Table 3 shows the results from Student C. Her pre-project teaching plan targeted the learning of new vocabulary and grammatical features, interrogatives with What do you--? and How many----? Her post-project plan, however, showed careful planning and appropriate use of technical terms. By means of comparison, it sought to deepen students' understanding about festivals in Korea and Japan. It demonstrated a clear connection between products (e.g., food, clothing, and festivals) and ideas (e.g., beliefs and values) and gave a very informative explanation about different festivals across the four seasons

along with the various beliefs embedded in them, such as how festivals in spring are based on prayers for good harvest, those in summer for avoiding pests, contagious diseases, and natural disasters, those in fall for celebrating the harvest and thanksgiving, and those in winter for anticipating revitalization.

Table 3  
*Comparison of Pre- and Post-project Lesson Plans from Student C*

	Pre-project	Post-project
Textbook and chapter	Sunshine 1, Program 4 Recycling	Sunshine 2, Program 1 Did you enjoy your vacation?
Goals and Objectives	To learn: What do you ---? (verbs) How many ----? (numbers)	To learn about Korean festivals To reflect students' cultures and find similarities and differences To gain knowledge To compare and contrast To deepen students' understanding about importance and meanings of culture
In-class content	Learn new vocabulary Explanation about new grammatical structure	Pictures of Korean food and festivals Pictures of Japanese festivals, such as rice planting festival, <i>Gion</i> festival, <i>Danjiri</i> festival, and <i>Hadaka</i> festival → common embedded values Spring: prayers for good harvest Summer: prayers to avoid pests, contagious diseases, and natural disasters Fall: Harvesting, thanksgiving Winter: Revitalization
Additional materials	Handout for drill practice	Colored pictures of food and festivals

In this way, the student demonstrated her ability to analyze the teaching materials from a theoretical perspective and integrate the class content with other related facts. As

with Students A and B, Student C's teaching materials analysis and preparation skills improved, as did her intercultural competence, especially in the area of knowledge and skills (see Deardorff, 2006).

### **Future directions**

The present study is limited in regard to sample size, participants' teaching experience, and the balance between language and culture learning. Since this is a small case study with data from only three participants, it is difficult to generalize the findings from this project to other educational contexts. All participants were college students who had just finished a three-week teaching practicum in a public junior-high school. Thus, their experience in real teaching environments was quite limited. This inexperience was evidenced by imprecise descriptions, such as "to understand grammar," in their teaching plans. It is expected that materials analysis skills for making lesson plans and conducting lessons should improve with practice and experience. Thus, future studies should examine how these abilities continue to develop over the duration of a career, especially with respect to the balance between linguistic and cultural learning targets.

In the post-project teaching plans, attention to linguistic elements was limited in favor of an emphasis on culture. Though one important pedagogical goal of this project was to provide the student teachers with opportunities to analyze the representations of culture in English textbooks, future studies should also consider the optimal balance between linguistic and cultural learning.

### **Conclusion**

The present paper examined a main pedagogical goal of English education, namely the

teaching of culture. Pre-service teachers who had finished a three-week teaching practicum engaged in textbook analysis and composed teaching plans. A theoretical framework (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993) was helpful for them in critically analyzing textbook representations of culture and integrating content across chapters and academic disciplines using current social events. This finding supports the pedagogical benefits of teaching culture.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Dr. Paul Lyddon for his insightful comments and numerous suggestions on earlier versions of this paper, to Ms. Takako Yamamori for her technical support, and to the anonymous JALT Osaka Journal reviewers for their kind feedback. The author would also like to thank the warm audience at the JALT Osaka Back to School Conference 2017 for their comments and input. Any remaining shortcomings in this manuscript are, of course, entirely mine.

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# **A Framework for Integrating Education for Sustainable Development in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom in Japan: An Appeal to the Language Teaching Community**

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## **Abstract**

Environmental issues like climate change will have tremendous impact on our world, and current Japanese university students will be tasked with finding solutions to these problems. To ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and values needed to confront these challenges, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a powerful tool to mainstream sustainability into university course curricula in Japan and around the world. Integrating ESD in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses offers an opportunity to increase students' environmental awareness as well as teach them important English language skills. This paper will introduce the Framework for ESD Integration into EFL as a Process to conceptually and theoretically align ESD and EFL. The paper will also discuss how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be utilized in EFL classrooms as a source for timely, relevant, and important content within this framework. Lastly, the paper will make the case that mainstreaming ESD in EFL will not only provide students with meaningful content rooted in important social, environmental, and economic issues but also help our Japanese students to become better future citizens and English communicators.

*Keywords:* Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The scientific consensus is clear: environmental degradation in the era of the Anthropocene poses a serious threat to life on earth. Climate change and environmental sustainability are common topics of public debate, media coverage, and scientific inquiry. However, citizens are numbed by the continuing torrent of negative environmental news and feelings of helplessness in the face of such complex and dynamic problems and teachers struggle to introduce these ideas into their classrooms in meaningful ways. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a powerful tool that can be utilized by citizens and teachers to learn about these important global challenges and the solutions to overcome them. ESD is essentially tasked with identifying sustainable goals and working towards them in order to confront and solve social, economic, and environmental problems (McKeown, 2002, pp. 13-14). Mainstreaming ESD in all disciplines, including English-language education, is extremely important to educate students in sustainable best practices and promote the creation of a sustainable future. So, how is Japan involved in these efforts and how would Japanese students benefit from the ESD mainstreaming process?

### **English Language Education and ESD in Japan**

The Japanese government, under the Higher Education Bureau and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), is not only promoting the use of English in HE through a policy of internationalization but it has also drawn up a plan for ESD in Japan alongside the Japanese Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016). In terms of internationalization, MEXT has dedicated significant resources to both promote English as a medium of education in Japanese universities as well as to create global appeal for

HE in Japan. According to a MEXT publication entitled, 'Higher Education in Japan,' there is a clear push towards English as a medium of instruction:

Amid ongoing globalization, in order to develop an educational environment where Japanese people can acquire the necessary English skills and also international students can feel at ease to study in Japan, it is very important for Japanese universities to conduct lessons in English for a certain extent, or to develop courses where students can obtain academic degrees by taking lessons conducted entirely in English (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2016, p. 17).

MEXT has also drawn up an Action Plan that has been built alongside the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) with significant goals aimed directly at Japanese Higher Education (HE) institutions. According to the MEXT publication, 'Overview of ESD Activities in Japan,' Japan's Action Plan for the DESD aims to:

- encourage everyone and every organization to participate in the creation of a sustainable society within the period 2005 to 2014;
- address the integrated development of the environment, economy, and society, with issues that focus on environmental conservation as a starting point;
- increase awareness of the challenges facing developing countries and strengthen cooperation with the same (SIC) (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016, p. 5).

Overall, there is a clear recognition in Japan that HE institutions embrace both English education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD); however, there is little overlap between these two goals and often confusion about how to implement these ideas effectively. This is despite the clear overlap between 'sustainability' topics found in common English language textbooks in Japanese HE (Jodoin & Singer, 2018).

The good news is that ESD mainstreaming is happening in higher educational institutions around the world and the adoption of ESD best practice is, in many cases, changing the way in which entire disciplines are taught (Grierson & Hyland, 2012; Azapagic, Perdan, & Shallcross, 2005; Barlett & Chase, 2013; Barth, Michelsen, Rieckmann, & Thomas, 2016; Barlett & Eisen, 2002). Some efforts, however, have faced tremendous challenges (Corcoran & Wals, 2004; Stevenson, 2006; Johnston, 2013). For instance, one major barrier to integration of ESD in higher education is institutional resistance to change because many practitioners are not familiar with ESD approaches, such as place-based learning, and have a hard time envisioning them in their curriculum. On the other hand, ESD has been successfully integrated into disciplines like engineering due to widespread support by their engineering teaching community (Minster et al., 2013). Disciplines in language teaching in Japan, such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), have been much less engaged in relevant curricular reform connected to ESD. Thus, not only is there an argument to be made that future citizenry are in urgent need of this knowledge but also that language teachers are in a good position to offer this knowledge, improve our student's level of English, and empower our students to participate in these necessary global conversations.

### **Mainstreaming ESD in the EFL Classroom**

Although EFL may not be intuitively related to ESD, English education can contribute significantly in two important ways: First, many topics commonly found in EFL textbooks and classrooms fall within the purview of ESD and, secondly, English education can play a significant role in not only promoting sustainability concepts but also initiating a dialogue with the values, beliefs, and norms associated with sustainability.

As for expanding ESD-linked content, one approach is to seek to include in the curriculum some discussion of the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals, or the SDGs. The SDGs represent a “universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity” (United Nations Development Programme, 2018) and include seventeen goals ranging from, “No Poverty” to “Reduced Inequalities” (United Nations, 2016). Furthermore, each of these broad goals opens onto a wealth of connected ideas and topics that would make for effective chapters in English textbooks or engaging lessons. For instance, “Reduced Inequalities” can be used to create materials on topics such as economic growth, landlocked developing countries, or income inequality between the rich and the poor. The material and topics that are provided by the SDGs are extremely dynamic in their broad reach, and, more importantly, they deal with real social, economic, and environmental problems with which students have a sincere interest in engaging.

The second way that English education and EFL can support mainstreaming ESD is by providing a platform for students to be exposed to ideas as well as creating the opportunity for students to dialogue with these concepts. EFL’s primary goal is to teach students English, which is often done through the use of content and topics that help facilitate English discussion, writing, reading, and listening. However, the topics used in EFL are often seen as secondary to the goal of learning English and are frequently unappealing for students or are taught in superficial ways. Such relative disregard for topics may result in content in EFL texts that is quickly forgotten by students as they proceed to the next chapter. Content like the SDGs, however, encompass engaging and timely topics that can easily be connected to students’ fields of study. In addition, EFL, as a communicative and interactive discipline, offers numerous possibilities for exploring

topics in the classroom in meaningful ways. By its very nature, "... a well-balanced [EFL] course consists of four equal strands: (1) meaning-focused input, (2) meaning-focused output, (3) language focused learning, and (4) fluency development" (Nation, 2013). This means that learners in EFL contexts are engaged in ample listening and reading (meaning-focused input) and speaking and writing (meaning-focused output), are using language features such as grammar and vocabulary (language focused learning), and are making use of what they know (fluency development). These four strands can be strengthened by integrating interesting content rather than by regarding content as simply a means, for instance, to teach a grammar point. By using content as merely a means to an end, students are deprived of a genuine opportunity to weave in the four strands meaningfully. Furthermore, the very nature of practicing a language allows for use of this language in debates, conversations, and opportunities to reflect or offer opinions. This is not only useful for learning a language but ESD promotes engagement with attitudes and values as a fundamental tenet. Therefore, using the SDGs as a source of content in EFL courses will allow for a more meaningful teaching opportunity in the classroom as well as a more memorable lesson for students.

### **Framework for ESD Integration into EFL as a Process**

Integration of ESD into EFL classrooms can be understood based on a theoretical framework, as shown in Figure 1. It should be noted that effective engagement with SDG content would require students to have a fair level of English language ability in order for them to be able to engage with the SDG content in meaningful ways. The framework will most likely work best with students at an intermediate, or at least B1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe (COE),

2001). Students below this level of English may have the capability to engage with the topics in their native languages but to have useful ‘meaning-focused output’ with SDG topics, a minimal of English skill is required. The framework helps to demonstrate that ESD mainstreaming in EFL is quite feasible since many tools, such as content related to the SDGs, are readily available.

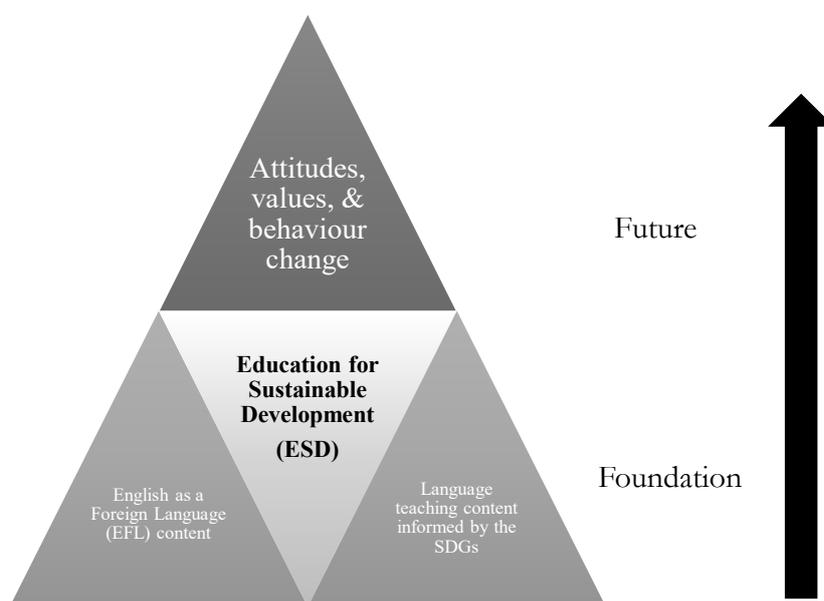


Figure 1. Framework for ESD Integration into EFL as a Process.

The framework in Figure 1 consists of a set of triangles, with Education for Sustainability (ESD) making up the central keystone of the framework. ESD is directly linked to the foundational blocks, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Language Teaching informed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the peak block (“attitudes, values, and behavior change”). At the peak of the framework are the attitudes, values, and behavior change that students will develop as a result of the mainstreaming process. The arrow to the right of the triangle is representative of the

process over time. The foundation is laid by EFL and content informed by the SDGs with the implication that students' understanding of sustainability through ESD grows into future values, attitudes, and, most importantly, behavior change in line with ESD approaches.

### **EFL Content**

As mentioned earlier, EFL can be regarded as presenting an opportunity to advance student understanding of ESD. What is currently missing from EFL, however, is the commitment to topics and content that have social, economic, and environmental value. That is not to say that all EFL content is of poor quality, but that content needs to be considered more seriously in the early stages of course and lesson development. EFL should not only provide students with language skills but it should also inform and challenge students using compelling and critical topics. EFL, in terms of the Framework above, is a foundational cornerstone.

### **Language Teaching Content Informed by the SDGs**

The SDGs are a significant source of relevant topics as seen below in Figure 2. These seventeen broad topics are further divided into several related sub-topics and fields that can easily be linked with common topics in EFL. For instance, “Good Health and Well-Being” could easily be worked into a lesson about the benefits of healthy eating or sports. The topic also can be connected to a broad range of university department curricula, from “Decent Work and Economic Growth” in economic and mathematics departments to “Industry Innovation and Infrastructure” in engineering and architecture departments. This can be more broadly applied to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or Content

and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). More importantly, the SDGs prioritize real world issues and how to overcome these challenges:

The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges of the world at large. The SDGs are an inclusive agenda. They tackle the root causes of poverty and unite us together to make a positive change for both people and planet. (United Nations, 2016)

The broad appeal of the topics found in the SDGs, and their importance in terms of setting priorities for the world to act, make the inclusion of the SDGs in informing EFL content a foundational cornerstone of the Framework.

Figure 2. The Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2016).

### Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)



Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been scaling up since the Decade of

Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), or DESD, ended. In part due to strong promotion by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014), implementation of good practice is on the rise in universities around the globe. There is evidence that the promotion of ESD in curriculum, tailored to local social, economic, and environmental contexts, can enable the knowledge, values, and behavior needed to achieve sustainable societies (Laurie, Nonoyama-Tarum, McKeown, & Hopkins, 2016, p. 240). Although there is still divergence on how ESD is interpreted as well as how ESD is implemented in higher education, ESD continues to transcend barriers between schools, universities, and communities, and interest is flourishing (UNESCO, 2012). ESD sits at the nucleus of the triangle, as it is considered the pedagogical philosophy that can foster future citizens who can overcome our current social, economic, and environmental challenges.

### **Attitudes, Values, and Behaviour Change**

Ultimately, we want citizens who can not only communicate ideas using the lingua franca, or English as the current most dominant language in terms of diplomacy, business, and science, but we also want these citizens to possess attitudes that promote sustainability, to adopt values that promote sustainability, as well as to demonstrate behaviors in line with these attitudes and values. To do this, ESD can be used as a teaching tool to challenge students' understanding about the world around them. Thus, attitudes, values, and behavior change sit at the pinnacle of the triangle.

### **Discussion**

The Framework in Figure 1 is meant to help address two main concerns with current EFL

instruction: (1) EFL curriculum designers and teachers should consider the topics and contents in courses and textbooks with greater consideration, and (2) it is about time for the EFL discipline to begin the ESD mainstreaming process.

EFL teachers with a few years of experience often complain that many of the topics in university English texts are either uninteresting or forgettable, soon extinguished from a student's memory upon finishing a chapter. Furthermore, topics and content are often taught in isolated chunks of information that rarely complement or feed into each other. The Framework in Figure 1 envisions the content as being an important part of courses and textbooks - timely, engaging, and prioritizing real world issues and solutions. The 17 SDGs offer this kind of content. This promotes language acquisition using impactful content that, by its very nature, is interconnected and will scaffold nicely through an EFL course or textbook. For instance, a textbook could start with a chapter on sea level rise in major Japanese cities and the impact of this on local communities, which would fall under the 13th goal, or "Climate Change" in the SDGs. A subsequent chapter of the same textbook could focus on how clean water is guaranteed for Osaka citizens and how that clean water is produced, which would fall under the 6th goal, "Clean Water and Sanitation." This example not only envisions applications in a local context, but it also allows for ample overlap in vocabulary, themes, concepts, and ideas. Lastly, a textbook, or course of this kind, will push students to consider the language necessary to discuss and write about the content (meaning-focused output), learn about something that is relevant to them through reading and listening (meaning-focused input), and build fluency through the recycling and scaffolding of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and topics. Curriculum makers and teachers already have tools, like the SDGs, at their disposal to create meaningful content alongside effective language teaching.

Mainstreaming ESD is essential for the EFL world. This may not be immediately intuitive for EFL practitioners but by examining the promise of ESD as used in the EFL classroom, the importance of the mainstreaming process becomes clearer. ESD represents the union of how to teach sustainability in light of social, economic, and environmental challenges faced by citizens. This means that ESD covers not just environmental concerns, but how the resources we use intersects with the valuation we apply to them in society and how this affects people. ESD, in essence, is a way of envisioning content in ways that overlap with real-world issues and solutions from many perspectives, addressing how people, resources, and money are used in the world and creating relationships between relevant ideas. For instance, teaching students about animals is a popular topic in EFL textbooks but this is often taught as an isolated chapter and the content is not revisited in any meaningful ways. Moreover, much of the vocabulary, grammatical forms, and concepts are presented only once and recycling is limited. By applying an ESD lens to the topic of animals, several possibilities arise in terms of recycling topic material and offering students more opportunities to use language and develop opinions. This could be done by examining animals through social (What is the purpose of cat cafes in Japan?), economic (What are the costs associated with caring for animals in Japan?), and environmental prisms (Are there any endangered animals in Japan?). A simple topic can be expanded to become a much more dynamic set of topics that will have positive language learning repercussions (e.g. vocabulary overlap and recycling) as well as positive ESD impacts in terms of challenging students to think about their own local contexts and different perspectives on the same topic. Lastly, the topic of animals can be linked to SDG 14, “Life below Water,” or SDG 15, “Life on Land,” offering further possibilities for real-world applications. Overall, ESD can be used as a meaningful way

to explore important topics in more depth as well as provide opportunities to use language in meaningful ways. EFL practitioners can add significant value to their English language lessons while giving students knowledge and exposure to consequential content.

Overall, using the framework entails some further understanding about how ESD works, but it can be used as another means in moving EFL into the ESD mainstreaming process. Considering topics for EFL courses and textbooks from a sustainability point of view, particularly in terms of the SDGs, can encourage students to engage in the material more critically, expand their understanding of the world, and encounter important and timely ideas.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to invite EFL curriculum makers and teachers to join the burgeoning movement for mainstreaming ESD into tertiary-level curricula. The advantages of adopting the Framework for ESD Integration into EFL as a Process are multiple. First, the content introduced in EFL classrooms will be informed by meaningful, real-world challenges as embodied by the SDGs. The SDGs offer a breadth of topics that will appeal to students, as they are grounded in their experiences and consequential global and local issues. Second, mainstreaming ESD offers EFL practitioners language learning opportunities through topic recycling and overlap and it challenges students from many different perspectives and contexts. This helps to localize topics of interest for students and promotes their ability to engage with their values and attitudes in worthwhile ways through meaning-focused output, meaning-focused input, and fluency practice. Considering the urgent challenges the world currently faces, introducing students to important social, environmental, and economic topics in meaningful ways, while

imparting the English language skills necessary to engage with the world around them, is not only apt but paramount.

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# Acculturation and the Challenges Japanese Students Face When Taking Degree Courses at Universities in the U.K.

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## **Abstract**

This paper corresponds to a presentation made at the JALT SIG Study Abroad Conference in Kyoto in 2018. It was based on research done by the author for an MA TESOL dissertation which examined the effects of acculturation on perceptions of English language proficiency and second language acquisition (SLA) on first year Japanese students at universities in the U.K. The findings indicated that acculturation was a low to moderate affective variable on English language proficiency ( $r = +0.45$ ), and a moderately affective variable on the respondents' levels of progress ( $r = +0.58$ ). This would therefore seem to indicate that the extent to which individuals acculturate tends to influence their levels of foreign language proficiency. The purpose of the presentation was to highlight some of the challenges that Japanese university students may face when taking degree courses in the U.K. or in other English-speaking countries. It was also intended to facilitate discussion between educators, students, and university administrators, with the aim of making students more aware of, and therefore better equipped to deal with, the rigors of undertaking degree courses in a foreign language whilst living in English speaking countries.

*Keywords:* acculturation, degree courses, overseas Japanese students, study abroad

**A**cculturation is a process that primarily occurs in groups and individuals who migrate to, or temporarily live in, a foreign country. It takes place through social interaction between the immigrant group and the indigenous population, whereby the migrants adopt the attitudes, behavior, ethnic identification, language, etc. of the host society, in order to integrate or assimilate with them. Integration

refers to individuals who adopt the culture and language of the host society while retaining their heritage, culture and language, whereas individuals that assimilate embrace the new language and culture and may eventually lose some of their mother tongue and customs (Berry, 2002; Birtwistle, 2016; Young & Gardner, 1990).

The changes that occur through the process of acculturation were first conceptualized in the social sciences, in the fields of anthropology and sociology, and then later in psychology as well (Berry, 2002; Young & Gardner, 1990). One of the earliest definitions of acculturation was by the sociologist Robert Park in his 1928 article, *Human Migration and the Marginal Man*. Acculturation is usually perceived and measured in one of three ways: as a unidimensional, a bidimensional, or a multidimensional process (Birtwistle, 2016; Thomson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009).

### **Unidimensionalism**

Park's seminal view of acculturation is that of a linear unidimensional process, whereby through social contact the culture of the host society takes the place of the culture of the immigrant group. Park hypothesized that as individuals become progressively more acculturated, they move along a continuum away from the heritage culture towards that of the host society. This linear unidimensional conceptualization of acculturation occurring on a spectrum spanning from unacculturated at one pole to acculturated at the other, is also known as the bipolar modal of acculturation (Berry, 2002; Birtwistle, 2016; Bosher, 1998; Fox et al., 2013; Salamonson et al., 2007).

### **Multidimensionalism**

Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits' (1936) conceptualization of the acculturation process recognized that acculturation affected not only the culture of the immigrant group, but

that of the host society as well. Social contact between the two groups leads to various changes in customs, culture, and social behavior in both the group of immigrants and in the indigenous population, for example in clothing, communication patterns, food, and language (Berry, 2005; Serrano & Anderson, 2003). Many later interpretations of acculturation have also come to perceive it to be a nonlinear and multidimensional process, which occurs in groups and individuals in more than one dimension, for example, on cultural and psychological levels (Birtwistle, 2016; Fox et al., 2013; Salamonsen, 2007; Young & Gardner, 1990).

The process of acculturation occurs not only at the group level, but at an individual level as well, for example in sojourners, individuals who temporarily live in another country in order to work or study. In order to differentiate between acculturative changes at the group and individual levels, according to Berry, Graves first introduced the term ‘psychological acculturation’ in 1967 (Berry, 2002). The term refers to changes in attitude, behavior, language, and identity, etc., that take place at the individual level. Berry (2002) pertinently points out that acculturation affects the individual in a twofold manner; at one level the individual is “influenced externally by the host culture” (p. 19), and also at another level by the changes that are occurring as a result of acculturation in the group culture that they now belong to (Berry, 2002).

### **Bidimensionalism**

Bidimensional models of acculturation were developed to counter the apparent inadequacies of unidimensional theory which fails to recognize that the process affects both the host society and the immigrant group (Ngo, 2008). Whilst bidimensional studies acknowledge that changes do occur at the group level, they tend to focus solely on acculturation at the individual level. This is most probably due to the fact that

bidimensional models were originally developed in the field of psychology, as opposed to sociology, and influenced by the work of the psychologist John Berry in particular (Ngo, 2008).

Berry's model has also influenced studies undertaken by SLA researchers, for example (Bosher, 1998; Young & Gardner, 1990), and is "particularly appropriate for conceptualizing the interface of acculturation and SLA" (Young & Gardner, 1990, p. 2) as it recognizes the important and interconnected roles that language and identity play in the acculturative process and vice versa (Birtwistle, 2016).

### **Berry's Model**

In Berry's model (2002), which is bidimensional (Goetz, 2009; Fox et al., 2013; Ngo, 2008; Thomson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009), and cross-cultural (Young & Gardner 1990), he proposes that depending on an immigrant's answers to two pivotal questions concerning their stance towards the heritage culture and also that of the host society, individuals will adopt one of four possible strategies when acculturating: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. The two issues that individuals are faced with are: 1) whether to maintain the heritage culture; and 2) whether to seek relations with the host society.

Assimilation entails embracing the new culture totally whilst rejecting the heritage culture, which corresponds to answering 'no' to the first question and 'yes' to the second question. Whereas by answering 'yes' to both questions the strategy utilized would be one of integration, as the individual seeks relations with the host society while maintaining the heritage culture. By retaining the heritage culture and rejecting the host society, an individual would be adopting a strategy of separation. Individuals who answer 'no' to both questions would become marginalized, as they have no affiliation to either culture.

There are two main criticisms of Bidimensional theory (Ngo, 2008); firstly, it takes a somewhat unsophisticated view of acculturation as the wording of the two pivotal questions reveals a rather simplistic perspective on the complex processes involved. Secondly, it is static in the sense that migrants are deemed to be capable of only a finite number of changes (Ngo, 2008), whereas people tend to renegotiate their identity at various stages during their lifetimes when they are faced with new circumstances of a transformative nature, and not only when they migrate to another country (Birtwistle, 2016).

### **Conceptualizations and Measurement of Acculturation**

Perhaps the two most contentious issues in modern acculturation theory are definition and measurement (Berry, 2002; Bosher, 1998; Flakerud, 2007). The issue of conceptualization and whether acculturation is a unidimensional, bidimensional, or a multidimensional process tends to be divisive. Furthermore, there is little agreement among the multidimensionalists about which dimensions, such as attitudinal, behavioral, value, etc., to include or exclude when measuring acculturation (Birtwistle, 2016; Salamonson, 2007).

There are quite a large number of dimensions. Bosher (1998) cites seven, and Flakerud (2007) identifies twelve, and a myriad of possible permutations that could be operationalized when surveying acculturation (Flakerud, 2007). Amongst the myriad of dimensions, language use and preference are included in the vast majority of studies. Indeed, in a review of 134 acculturative studies undertaken by Thomson and Hoffman-Goetz, it was established that language was the “one domain common to all of the instruments’ surveyed” (2009, p. 989).

Moreover, there is sometimes a lack of consistency when labeling the dimensions of

acculturation, as some researchers have labeled the same dimension differently (Bosher, 1998). This lack of consistency is probably attributable to the difficulty of labeling dimensions. Dimensions can be problematic to label due to their overlapping nature, as some dimensions tend to contain elements of each other, for example, ‘social contact as one aspect of the behavioral dimension’ (Bosher, 1998), or in the authors study, ‘behavior’ and ‘language preference’ (Birtwistle, 2016).

Most unidimensional or linear interpretations envisage that through adapting to the new culture and language that the heritage culture and language will eventually be lost (Thomson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009). This notion of a tradeoff, that the acquisition of new language skills comes at the expense of losing the ethnic language, is similar to Lambert’s concept of subtractive bilingualism (1974; Young & Gardner, 1990).

Subtractive situations can occur when an individual from a minority language is exposed to an educational environment where the majority language is dominant. Factors such as social pressure, and a lack of educational instruction in the L1, may lead to an individual rejecting the heritage culture and language as it has a negative impact on their new socio-cultural identity (Lambert, 1974; Pliidemann, 1997; Young & Gardner, 1990).

However, Bosher (1998) points out that many individuals actually chose to retain their heritage culture and language and adopt “some form of biculturalism” (Bosher, 1998, p. 4). Her notion of biculturalism is comparable to Lambert’s concept of additive bilingualism (1974). Additive bilingualism, as Young and Gardner (1990) have highlighted, is similar to Berry’s strategy of integration (2002), which occurs in individuals that integrate into the new culture whilst retaining their native language and identity.

Whilst some immigrants, and to a lesser extent L2 learners, may report that learning

a foreign language has impacted on their native language skills, it is clear that Lambert feels that additive bilingualism is the most conducive to SLA; “in fact we are now convinced that striving for a comfortable place in two cultural systems maybe the best motivational basis for becoming bilingual” (Lambert, 1974, pp. 18-19). Additive situations in SLA can be considered to be the opposite of subtractive bilingualism, as the individual feels that rather than losing skills that they already have they are gaining new ones (Cook, 2008). Additive situations may also improve the learner’s cognitive skills, and have positive effects on an individual’s socio-cultural identity (Lambert, 1974; Pliidemann, 1997)

### **Schumann’s Model**

Perhaps the most well-known theory of SLA and acculturation is Schumann’s (1986) socio-psychological model, in which he hypothesizes that SLA is dependent on an individual’s ability to acculturate. The degree of socio-psychological distance between the learner and the culture of the target language affects the level of acculturation. In this model psychological factors such as culture shock, language shock, ego boundaries, and motivation affect the degree of acculturation. Affective sociological factors include: the level of congruence and cultural parity between the two societies, integration patterns such as whether or not the host society is receptive to immigrants and sojourners, the cohesiveness of the learners study group as a potential barrier to acculturation, and the length of residence in the target language culture (Birtwistle, 2016).

Schumann’s conceptualization of acculturation is clearly consistent with unidimensional theory, as his interpretation is that of a bipolar process, spanning from unacculturated at one end of the spectrum to acculturated at the other: “any learner can be placed on a continuum that ranges from social psychological distance to social and

psychological proximity with speakers of the TL (target language)” (1986, p. 380).

One criticism of Schumann’s model and his hypothesis that the degree of acculturation affects SLA and therefore by extension an individual’s second language proficiency, is that the converse hypothesis may also be applicable, i.e., second language proficiency affects the level of acculturation. Lambert, however, allows for the possibility of a reciprocating relationship between language learning and identity as he proposes that “the acquisition of a second language influences one’s self identity and vice versa” (Lambert, 1963, 1967, as cited in Young & Gardner, 1990, p. 3)

### **Acculturation, Identity, and SLA**

How well individuals acculturate may well affect the extent to which they acquire the second language (L2) and vice versa. It is quite likely that learners that also have a strong desire to integrate are benefiting from a reciprocating relationship between acculturation and SLA, as studying the language would seem to facilitate the acculturation process, and becoming more acculturated would appear to facilitate the acquisition of the L2 (Birtwistle, 2016; Young & Gardner, 1990).

Through the process of acculturation individuals will tend to progressively identify more with the people and culture of the host society (Hochman & Davidov, 2014), and previous studies have found a causal path between host country identification and language ability (Hochman & Davidov, 2014). Salamonson et al. (2007) found that English language acculturation predicts academic performance in nursing students who spoke English as a second language.

Researchers such as Young and Gardner (1990), and Boshier (1998), have examined the links between second language acquisition and acculturation, and concluded that the learners’ acculturative stance is an affective variable on SLA and vice versa, and that the

relationship is probably reciprocal in nature. Furthermore, individuals that identify with the host culture are more likely to be successful than individuals that do not (Birtwistle, 2016; Young & Gardner, 1990).

An individual's acculturative stance will in all probability impact on the frequency and number of opportunities to practice the L2 with native speakers or other ESL students, as learners who are proactive will undoubtedly come across more chances to engage in conversation than those who are not. In addition, by seeking out and interacting with people from the host country learners will in all likelihood have an increased incidence of observing local discourse communities and building new schemata, which are important factors in the development of listening and speaking skills (Birtwistle, 2015, 2016).

The relationship between acculturation and SLA is complex and extremely interconnected, so much so that it is difficult to imagine becoming truly adept in one without the other. Brown captures the nature of the relationship between language and culture well, "culture is deeply ingrained within in us, and that language is the most visible and available expression of it" (1994, p. 164).

## **Background**

Worldwide, international students have been steadily increasing for a number of years, and particularly so since 2000. The OECD estimated that there were 4.5 million people studying abroad in 2012, and a large proportion of these were in the U.S and Europe, of which the U.K has the largest share (Universities U.K, 2014). The number of Japanese studying abroad is also increasing; there were 60,138 Japanese studying overseas in 2012, which was an increase of 5% compared with 2011 (MEXT, 2015).

University students face many acculturative or transitional difficulties when moving

to the L2 environment, as they not only have to adapt to the rigors of a new academic culture whilst taking an undergraduate or post graduate degree in a foreign language, but they also have to renegotiate their own identity in the wider society of the host country as well (Birtwistle, 2016; Zhou et al, 2008).

It has been well documented in the literature that some Japanese overseas university students struggle to acculturate on two levels; socially with other students of a different ethnic background, and also into the society of the host country in general, which can lead to feelings of being “marginalized” and “isolated” (Sato & Hodge, 2015, p. 78).

Furthermore, as cultural differences between East Asian countries and English-speaking countries are quite wide, individuals may also be prone to culture shock (Liu, 2011). Culture shock, which Furnham and Bochner (1986) describe as “the psychological distress caused by exposure to unfamiliar environments”; and which is not uncommon in such a “profound life event” as moving overseas to become an international university student (Kim, 2001 as cited in Lombard, 2014, p. 174).

Moreover, there is a trend among Asian overseas students who were high academic achievers in their own country, and who perceived themselves to be proficient in English before arrival in the L2 environment, struggling to come to terms with poor academic performance, and an inability to communicate effectively in English (Birtwistle, 2015, 2016; Liu, 2011; Sato & Hodge, 2015,).

In Sato and Hodge’s (2015) descriptive-qualitative study of Japanese ESL exchange students at an American university, they found that a significant number of individuals had come to perceive themselves to be academically inferior to international students from other countries since arriving in the L2 environment. Furthermore, as a result of acculturative difficulties and transitional challenges some Japanese students were

dissatisfied with the progress they had made in their English studies.

The wide ranging problems that some Asian overseas students have to contend with (culture shock, loneliness, language difficulties, and poor academic performance) impact not only on an individual's sociocultural identity (Berry, 2002; Hawkes, 2014), but also on their "academic identity" as well (Hawkes, 2014, p. 4). The consequences of these various acculturative difficulties can be anxiety, a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and avoiding social situations with native speakers, all of which tend to have a negative impact on the development of English skills (Berry, 2002; Birtwistle, 2016; Liu, 2011).

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this research was to examine the effects of acculturation on perceptions of English language proficiency and SLA in Japanese overseas university students at British universities. The author hypothesized that those students that have acculturated the most will perceive themselves to be more proficient in English, and also to have made the most progress in acquisition of the L2. Additionally, as many of the social factors and affective variables that Schumann proposed affect language learning have not been investigated in SLA research (Bosher, 1998), a further aim was to examine his hypothesis (1986) that social and affective factors come together to form an acculturative variable that is a key dynamic in SLA, particularly in the L2 environment

As most studies on acculturation and SLA tend to survey individuals that have been resident in the host country for a relatively long period of time, first-year university students were chosen to capture the process of acculturation in the early stages of development. Secondly, the author, like Young and Gardner (1990), hypothesized that acculturative processes begin soon after arrival in the L2 environment, particularly in individuals who have already studied the foreign language. This presumably would be

especially the case in overseas university students with advanced language skills (Birtwistle, 2016).

The subjects were 51 Japanese first year students at four universities in the U.K. Respondents were asked to assess their level of language proficiency, and also their perceptions of progress made in English since arriving in the L2 environment. The study utilized a combined multidimensional and unidimensional approach. Like many contemporary studies, the multidimensional method was utilized in order to examine how the various dimensions or affective variables affect the acculturative process. In addition, and in order to shed light on Schumann's hypothesis that, "social factors and affective factors cluster into a single variable" (1986, p. 379), the respondents were given an acculturative score (see Appendix, Figure 1).

The acculturative score, which has been used in previous studies, for example Serrano and Anderson (2003), is used to assess an individual's level of acculturation on a bipolar scale and is therefore classified as a unidimensional approach. It was calculated as the sum of the dimensions of acculturation that were operationalized in the instrument: language use, language preference as an aspect of behavior, social contact, motivational attitude (integrative/instrumental), levels of acceptance in British society, importance of maintaining the native language, and ethnic identification. The respondents were surveyed on their perceived level of English proficiency: reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, and whether they had made as much progress with their English as anticipated, both academically and in general terms.

Language is considered by many researchers to be the most "salient" (Bosher, 1998, p. 7) or "sensitive" dimension (Salamonson et al., 1997, p. 87), when assessing acculturative changes. It is also deemed to be of particular relevance when evaluating the

correlation between academic achievement and acculturation in overseas students in higher education (Salamonson et al., 1997). Moreover, it is also regarded as one of the primary indicative factors of host country identification, as the common bond of a speaking the same language is closely related to “group membership and identity” (Hochman & Davidov, 2014, p. 346).

The attitude dimension was included in the design of the instrument to evaluate the participants’ motivation in studying English, and to determine whether it was of an integrative or an instrumental nature. An integrative motivation would presumably tend to indicate an individual’s propensity to acculturate, whereas an instrumental motivation would tend to denote that an individual was learning English for more practical reasons, and not to gain cultural insight. Additionally, in Schumann’s (1986) model, motivation is one of the affective factors in L2 acquisition.

Attitudes towards the importance of taking part in British culture, and maintaining the heritage language were also included, as they have been used in a number of previous studies, for example (Young & Gardner, 1990; Serrano & Anderson, 2003; Salamonson et al., 2007), as “[they] are affective correlates of L2 behavior and proficiency” (Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1994, p. 418). Furthermore, and utilizing Berry’s (2002) model, an inclination to take part in British culture would suggest an acculturative strategy of assimilation or integration, whilst a proclivity to maintain the heritage language would imply a strategy of integration or separation.

The social contact dimension has been included in many previous studies, (Bosher, 1998), and was incorporated in the study, as it is a useful indicator of the learners’ acculturation strategy. Together with affective factors, Schumann considers social factors to be the primary sets of variables in the acculturative process (Bosher, 1998). This

dimension attempts to gauge the extent to which individuals seek relations with members of the host society, which corresponds with Berry's (2002) strategy of assimilation or integration. Conversely, individuals who either isolate themselves, or only tend to socialize with members of their own ethnic group, would be adopting strategies of rejection or marginalization respectively, which would presumably have a detrimental effect on the acquisition of language skills in the majority of cases.

The dimension, 'acceptance by the host society', examines one aspect of how easy or difficult individuals perceive integration into the host society to be, additionally, feelings of being accepted or welcome tend to reinforce identification with the host society (Nesdale & Mak, 2000, p. 485). Conversely, if there is little similarity between the immigrant's heritage culture and that of the host society it could lead to feelings of rejection, which would tend to decrease an individual's identification with the host society (Nesdale & Mak, 2000).

Furthermore, cultural differences such as acceptance by the host society would both be classified as socio-psychological variables in Schumann's acculturation model, and also examine pivotal concepts in Berry's model, such as 'integration' and 'rejection', and were therefore included as dimensions of acculturation in the author's research (Birtwistle, 2016).

## **Findings**

Initially acculturation was intended to be measured by means of an acculturative score which was calculated from the dimensions contained in the instrument. However, as some respondents had been in the U.K longer than the sample mean (0.78 Years), and as length of stay in the L2 environment was found to be an affective variable on both language proficiency and SLA, and had also been utilized in previous studies, it was added as a

sixth dimension to gain a more accurate gauge of the processes involved.

The results were evaluated by correlation analysis, and the findings indicated that acculturation was a low to moderate affective variable on English language proficiency ( $r = +0.45$ ), and a moderately affective variable on the respondents' levels of progress ( $r = +0.58$ ). This would therefore seem to indicate that the extent to which individuals acculturate tends to influence their levels of foreign language proficiency, and also SLA (See Appendix: Figures 2 and 3).

The respondents were highly motivated, as both the instrumental and the integrative motivational attitude indices received appreciable loadings. The students appeared to have slightly more of an instrumental motivation to learn English, as they ranked ambition, which stresses the practical value of learning English, higher than the importance of studying to be able to communicate with native speakers, which is an integrative motivation. Although, and as might be expected, subjects generally perceived the cultural gap between Japan and the U.K. to be quite wide; however, the majority reported moderately high levels of acceptance in British society.

The final three items on the questionnaire were open ended questions to gather qualitative data. Subjects were asked: a) to consider how much they had changed since arriving in the U.K; b) to give an example of how they had changed; and c) whether life in the U.K had generally been a positive or a negative experience. Responses were analyzed and then classified into categories or commonly occurring themes that could be identified from the data. Only items that had been mentioned by more than one respondent were listed (See Appendix: Table 1)

Thirty-nine percent ( $n=20$ ) of the respondents considered that they had changed only a little since arriving in the U.K, 33% ( $n=17$ ) of individuals reported moderate changes,

and 27% (n=14) reported that the experience of being a student at a British university had been a significant influence on them as a person.

As to whether life in the U.K had generally been a positive or a negative experience; over a half 55% (n=28) responded in the affirmative, just over a quarter, 27% (n=14), were of the opinion that it was both positive and negative, 9% (n=5) didn't know or were not sure, and 8% (n=4) reported that it had been a negative undertaking.

Examination of the qualitative data revealed that a majority of the individuals surveyed were adapting quite well to life in the U.K, and had experienced acculturative changes that were generally positive. Individuals reported changes in their "way of thinking", that they had become more "culturally aware" and "internationally minded", which would probably indicate that they had taken an integrative stance towards the acculturative process. This would point towards the kind of changes that might be expected in the early stages of acculturation (Berry, 2002).

On the whole comments were generally more positive than negative, and of all the themes that emerged from the qualitative data, "way of thinking", was the most frequently mentioned. Respondents reported that they had become more "tolerant" and "broadminded". Closely associated with "way of thinking", and the second most frequently occurring response was individuals that described themselves as becoming "more international" or "culturally aware".

Cultural awareness was not just limited to becoming more knowledgeable about British culture, but also included references to students and friends from other cultures, that they had met in the U.K. "Self-growth" also had quite a high frequency of occurrences, individuals identified changes in character such as, becoming "stronger as a person", more positive, and better able to "speak [their] mind".

It is reassuring to educators and students alike that the majority of respondents were becoming accustomed to life in the L2 environment and were making what they perceived to be satisfactory progress in their academic studies and also in English in general. However, some had had difficulties in adapting to the new academic culture, and had also faced other transitional challenges, for example language difficulties, culture shock, loneliness, and isolation. Moreover, almost one in five 18% (n=9) of students had either found studying at a university in the U.K to be a negative experience, or they were still undecided.

### **Challenges**

It emerged from the qualitative data that some individuals had had difficulties with their academic work, or were dissatisfied with their lack of English progress, or a combination of both. Becoming accustomed to academic culture in English speaking countries can be challenging for Japanese students to adapt to due to the disparate nature of the respective academic cultures. In Japanese academic culture, the learner tends to be passive and to absorb knowledge from the teacher, whereas at universities in English speaking countries students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning, develop critical thinking skills, and to be willing to express their own ideas (Birtwistle, 2016).

It was also evident that some respondents had experienced culture shock, which can cause psychological distress in individuals that find it difficult to adapt to life in the host society in general, and a new academic culture in particular. These problems can be further compounded if the individual is also struggling with the language and academic work (Birtwistle, 2016; Sato & Hodge, 2015).

Apart from the difficulties inherent in having to adapt to a new academic culture, problems with academic work may well have been attributable to a lack of progress in

their English ability since arriving in the L2 environment, or alternatively to a specific weakness in one area, such as listening skills for example, which would make comprehension difficult in academic lectures (Birtwistle, 2015; 2016).

Regarding social contact, individuals reported in the quantitative data that their close friends were predominantly from their own ethnic group (Japanese), but that they would have preferred to participate in social occasions where the majority of people present were from the host society (U.K), presumably to practice English and to make friends (Birtwistle, 2016).

Additionally, from the qualitative data, it appeared that some individuals had found it difficult to make friends (in general), and others had made no British friends at all. This would seem to indicate that they may well have suffered from loneliness and isolation, which perhaps could also have led to feelings of being marginalized (Berry, 2002; Birtwistle, 2016).

Dissatisfaction with both academic performance and experiences of life in the U.K that some individuals reported may well have been attributable to insufficient social contact and a lack of interpersonal relationships with native speakers. Indeed, researchers have found causal links between low levels of contact with native speakers, a lack of personal connections in the L2 environment, and ESL proficiency and academic performance (Liu, 2011; Trice, 2004).

### **Suggestions**

From subsequent follow up research and also from the discussion section of the presentation it was apparent that students generally appear to be well supported by study abroad counselors in Japan before departing overseas, for example, in application procedures, finding suitable courses and universities, and visa requirements, etc., but are

perhaps given little guidance pre-departure on how to proceed upon arrival. In the L2 environment, individuals reported that the level of support that they received was variable and often seemed to be dependent on the individual academic tutor assigned to each student, and that it was not atypical to meet one's academic tutor only once or twice per semester.

The following are suggestions taken from the literature and the discussion at the presentation that overseas students have found to be useful strategies when studying abroad, and which educators could perhaps try to encourage individuals departing for overseas study to participate in:

- Do a language exchange
- Do a part-time job
- Do volunteer work
- Go to the university language centre
- Join clubs and other social circles
- Keep a diary of ethnographic observations of life in the host society
- Keep a listening log (diary)
- Participate in leisure activities
- Research resources available in the L2 pre-departure
- Take an active interest in the host society (media, radio, T.V, etc.)

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This study concluded that acculturation was a moderately affective variable on overseas university students' perceptions of both their language proficiency, and also on the progress that they made since arriving in the L2 environment. Since acculturation was an affective variable on language it indicated that the extent to which individuals acculturate, tends to influence foreign language proficiency.

It has been documented in the literature that acculturation is difficult to quantify and to accurately measure, and that it varies from individual to individual, and the author's study also found that to be the case. Although the use of an acculturative score gives an indication of an individual's level of acculturation, it is however only an approximation, and is therefore difficult to interpret with precision.

Additionally, the study supports to some extent Schumann's hypothesis that "the learner will acquire the TL only to the degree he [she] acculturates" (1986, p. 379). However, whilst the results did appear to indicate that acculturation was indeed a significant factor in SLA, it was clearly not the only affective variable on language acquisition as Schumann would seem to infer (Birtwistle, 2016).

It is clearly worth bearing in mind however, that while some individuals who, despite not having a propensity or inclination to acculturate, will still become proficient in the L2; students that are proactive, and take an integrative acculturative stance, tend to be both more successful in SLA and also in their universities studies in the L2 as well. Indeed, in doing so it is to be hoped that they will find their sojourn overseas to be a more productive and rewarding experience.

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Appendix

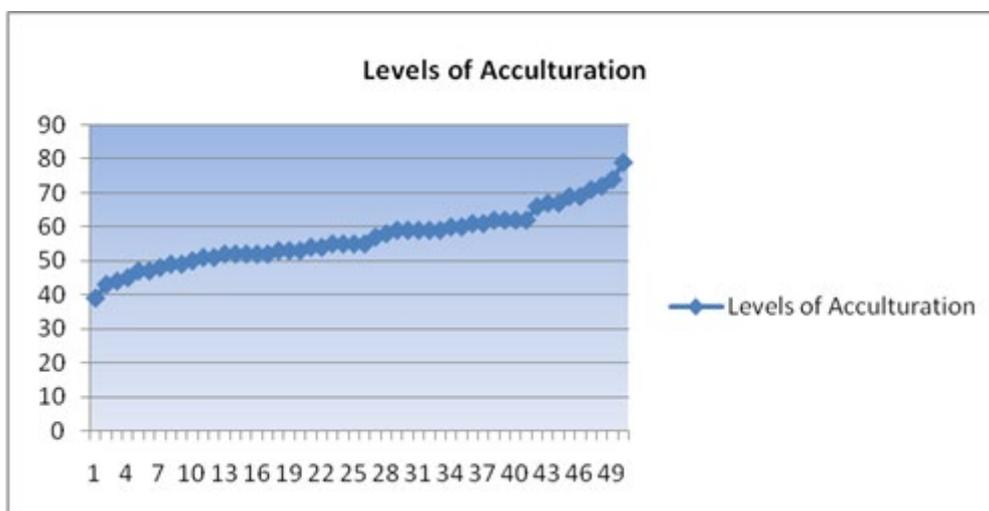


Figure 1. Acculturative scores of subjects, with X Axis representing 51 subjects and Y Axis representing the levels of acculturation as measured by the acculturative score; which is the sum of the dimensions contained in the instrument and the length of stay in the L2.

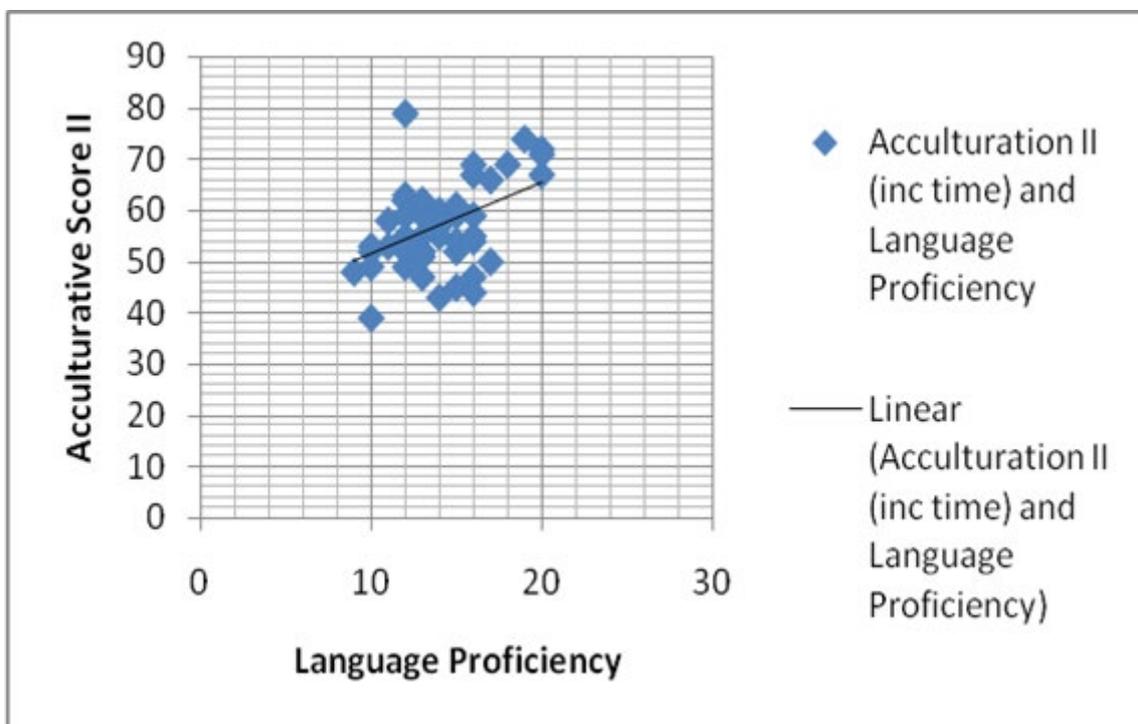


Figure 2. Acculturative scores and English proficiency of subjects ( $r = 0.45$ ).

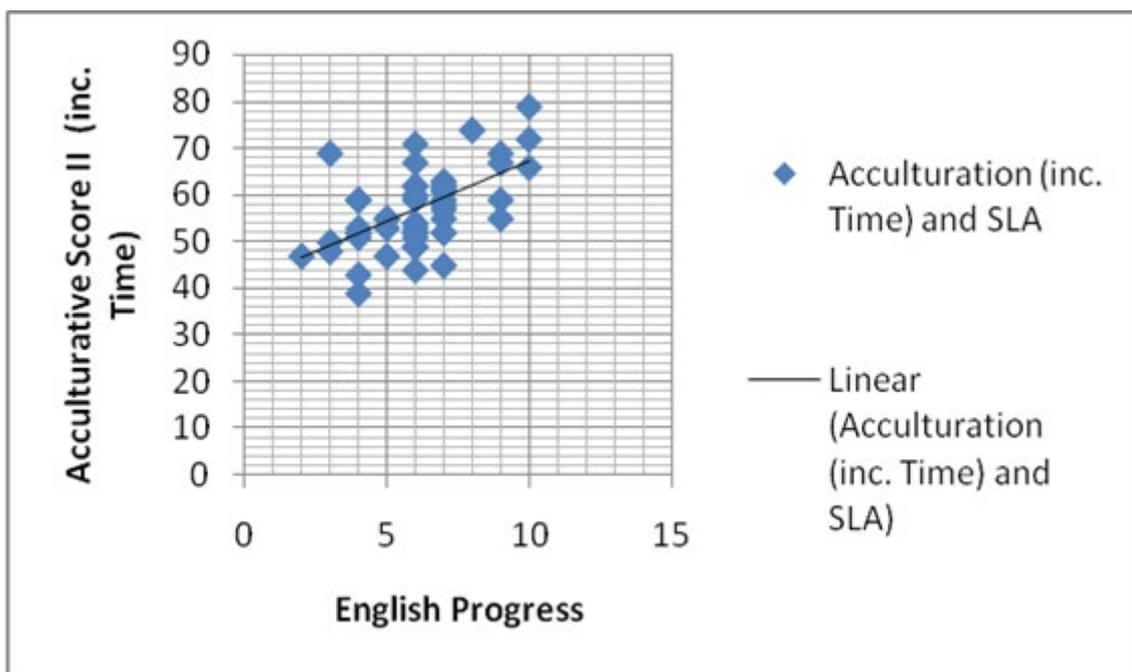


Figure 3. Acculturative scores and SLA for the subjects ( $r = 0.58$ ).

Table 1

*Qualitative Data*

+ve/- ve	Categories: Recurring Themes and Patterns	Frequency of Occurrence
+	Way of thinking	6
+	More international/cultural awareness	4
+	Self-growth/character/own opinion	4
-	Lonely/isolated/culture shock	3
+	Less anxious about making mistakes (in English)	2
+	Appearance/clothing (less concerned)	2
-	Appearance/clothing (different fashion sense)	1
+	Food and drink	2
+	Identity	2
-	Identity	1
-	Academic difficulties	2
-	English skills (frustration)	2

# Factors Influencing Teacher Judgment When Designing and Analyzing Quizzes at Universities in Japan

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## **Abstract**

Assessment is important in foreign language classrooms. It allows teachers to evaluate student progress and accordingly adjust their teaching to help students learn the target language. Teachers can use a variety of assessment tools to determine whether or not students are achieving a specific learning goal. Teachers often use quizzes to provide students with timely feedback. This study explored the backgrounds of EFL teachers and their practices and philosophies with regard to quizzes. Twenty-six teachers at three universities in Japan were surveyed and interviewed. Most of these teachers have taken one graduate-level class in language assessment and also have completed guided practicum in creating and marking quizzes. However, they are still reluctant to design and analyze quizzes, citing teacher workload as well as a lack of training and the need for collaboration with instructional teams.

*Keywords:* language, assessment, quiz, design, analysis

**I**s language assessment important? Many teachers will respond with an emphatic “yes” because language assessment is a crucial step of the learning process, helping both teachers and students evaluate needs and progress. When students can see how they are doing,

they know whether or not they understand the material being taught in classes. When teachers can see how students are doing, they can determine whether or not their teaching has been effective or if changes are needed. There are two types of assessments: summative assessments and formative assessments. Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning. Examples include midterm and end-of-term exams. These assessments usually have high point values and occur after months of study or at the end of a semester (Glazer, 2014). Formative assessment, by contrast, is used to monitor student learning and provide immediate feedback. They have low point values and take place several times throughout the course (Afitska, 2014; Popham, 2008).

Quizzes are standard in many university classrooms, and they can be summative or formative. In some courses, quizzes replace midterm and final exams for the purpose of assigning a final grade. In other courses, quizzes help teachers focus the learning on a few key concepts at a time as well as frequently monitor student progress during the semester. A formative quiz generally is a short test with 10-20 questions and usually has less of an impact on student grades than midterms and final exams.

When a quiz is valid and reliable, it can give teachers a good idea about student learning. However, it is not known how teachers currently develop classroom assessments for integrated English language courses at universities in Japan. This study investigated the backgrounds of 26 university (medium-sized, private) EFL instructors and their approaches to designing and using quizzes, with special attention to how these instructors described their approaches. This study aims to answer the following question: What factors influence a teacher's decisions when designing and analyzing quizzes for the EFL classroom in Japan?

## Literature Review

Kwan (2011) noted that quizzes have certain benefits for both teachers and students. First, teachers can adjust classroom instruction based on the students' performance on quizzes. Second, returning quizzes with feedback to students at the beginning of the following class brings the previous topic to the students' attention. Tropman (2014) gave reading quizzes to 58 undergraduate students in philosophy classes throughout the semester in which her study took place and administered a survey at the end of that semester. The survey results indicated that the majority of her students had positive opinions about the quizzes and felt encouraged to do the reading assignments.

Quizzes do not always have a positive impact on learning attitude and academic performance. Azorlosa and Renner (2006) conducted a year-long study with 81 students enrolled in two sections of a psychology course. In this study, students were given an essay exam, followed by eight quizzes, and then a second essay exam. The results show that the quizzes had no effect on the exam grades. In the field of ESL/EFL, Stoeckel, Reagan, and Hann (2012) found no differences in the reading attitudes between a treatment group of 90 Japanese first-year university students taking weekly quizzes and a control group of 87 students who did not take quizzes.

Although the usefulness of quizzes is still being debated, some researchers have been investigating other factors that might affect a student's mastery of course content. Olson (2005) compared the impact of pre-lecture and post-lecture quizzes on the perceptions of 16 students in an engineering course about their reading assignments outside the class, and their understanding of the lectures. The results showed that nearly 70% of the pre-lecture quiz group ( $n = 8$ ) reported that they had read the corresponding material before each lecture, while only 7.8% of the post-lecture quiz group reported

doing so. Also, the pre-lecture quiz group reported greater understanding of the lectures. According to Olson, this was probably because the pre-lecture quizzes urged students to do the required readings in advance, which helped improve their comprehension of the lectures.

Validity and reliability are important for judging the quality of a test or quiz (Brent & Anne, 1998; Coniam, 2014). The classic definition of validity is that a test measures what it claims to measure. For many English tests, this means the items will be closely linked to a specific language feature—grammar, or pragmatic use of the language—that has been taught in class. However, the issues involved in validity are more complex. According to Brown (2000), validity can be subdivided into three categories: content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity. Content validity refers to the degree to which the test items match the test objectives. The degree of matching can be determined by a group of experts who are highly trained in the content of the test. Criterion-related validity is the degree to which one test is related to an older but similar test (concurrent validity) or some other measure that the test is designed to predict (predictive validity). Construct validity defines how well a test measures a hypothetical construct, such as proficiency or ability.

Reliability concerns the consistency of an examinee's scores over time. Reliability can be measured in many ways. One way is to give the same test to the same individual at two different times. If the test has solid reliability, the results from both tests will be the same. If the results are very different, then the test does not have validity. A second way to measure reliability is to compare the results of a test given to a large number of test-takers. If the results are consistently very poor or very good, then reliability is low because there is very little variability. However, if the scores range from poor to good,

then reliability cannot be accurately estimated. In a small class, group variability may affect reliability. When the group of test-takers is homogeneous in ability, the reliability of the test scores is likely to be low, and when the group is not homogeneous in ability, the reliability is likely to be high.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

The participants were 26 EFL instructors with experience in teaching an integrated English skills course at three Japanese universities (12 Asian, 13 Caucasian, and 1 African). They ranged in age from the late 20s to the early 50s. There were 10 female teachers and 16 male teachers.

### ***Research Design, Instrumentation, and Data Collection Procedure***

For this study, the authors took a mixed-methods approach with a convenience sample based on personal networks (Creswell, 2013). The data for this study were collected from two sources: surveys and interviews. Based on recommendations from Irwin and Stafford (2016), a 22-item survey (see Appendix) was designed to solicit from the 26 teachers their demographics and the methods they use for designing quizzes. The survey was reviewed by a small group of content experts before it was distributed to the teachers.

To obtain information outside the survey, the researchers interviewed 11 teachers who had shown interest in providing more input on quizzes. The interviews were conducted at the teachers' offices and followed a designed interview protocol. Each interview consisted of the following three open-ended questions:

1. Please briefly describe your background. Do you have any specific experience or

training in English or foreign language assessment?

2. Can you describe your philosophy and approach to designing or analyzing quizzes for EFL students?
3. How would you say your philosophy and approach have been formed? Have they changed over time?

The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. The audio was recorded, carefully transcribed, and analyzed. The researchers employed thematic content analysis in order to find common patterns across the interview data. The four steps that the researchers followed were: 1) reading through the transcript interview responses several times; 2) coding the entire text; 3) searching for themes or patterns within the data; 4) creating a narrative that included quotes from the teachers.

## **Results**

### ***Questionnaire Responses***

The responses for Section A of the survey regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1. The average total years of teaching experience was 9.77 years, while the average total years with the current school was 4.50 years. Of the 26 teachers, 24 (92.3%) hold a master's degree in TESOL or a related field, and the other two teachers have a business or engineering master's degree. Twenty-one teachers (80.8%) have taken a course in developing language assessments. More than half of the teachers (15, 57.7%) had 1-5 hours guided practicum experience in language testing, while 8 (30.8%) had more than 5 hours, and 3 (11.5%) had no experience at all.

Table 1 also shows that the average number of quizzes given was 8, with each quiz averaging 13.6 questions. For the sake of comparison, the teachers are classified into two

groups based on the number of years that they had studied assessment. The first group (G1,  $n = 21$ ) studied assessment for less than a year, and the second group (G2,  $n = 5$ ) studied assessment for one year or longer. The average number of quizzes given by the two groups was approximately 7.4 for G1 and 10.6 for G2. The  $p$  value of significant difference between the two groups was 0.194. Additionally, G1 gave quizzes with an average of 14.8 questions, which is 5.8 questions more than that of the G2 group. The  $p$  value between groups is 0.048.

Table 1

*Survey answers*

	<b>Years as EFL teacher</b>	<b>Years with correct school</b>	<b>Number of assessment classes</b>	<b>Number of hours of guided practicum</b>	<b>Number of quizzes given</b>	<b>Number of questions per quiz</b>
Mean	9.8	4.5	1.1	5.4	8.0	13.6
Median	8.5	3.5	1.0	4.5	9.0	15.0
Mode	4, 6, 12	1	1	5	2	20
Minimum	2	1	0	0	0	5
Maximum	25	12	5	16	16	20
Range	23	11	5	16	16	15

For the question regarding the reasons why the teachers give quizzes, 23 (88.5%) of the teachers reported that they believed that quizzes help them frequently assess student understanding of the concepts taught, as well as quality of their own teaching (see Table 2). For example, one teacher wrote “I used quizzes to quickly understand students’ level of understanding after teaching.” Another teacher wrote “Using quizzes can help me check if students understand what I’m teaching. When they don’t, I know where my

teaching has missed the mark.” Two other teachers believed that students who take quizzes can gradually acquire correct knowledge because feedback can be provided immediately after students submit their answers to the quiz questions. Additionally, one teacher used quizzes to keep students engaged. She replied, “Quizzes get my students to pay attention in class.”

Table 2  
*General Justifications for Quizzes*

To assess students	To have students acquire knowledge	To engage students
23 (88.7%)	2 (7.8%)	1 (3.8%)

Multiple choice questions (18 teachers, 69.2%) are the most common type of question used in quizzes, followed by true-false questions (3 teachers, 11.5%), matching questions (3 teachers, 11.5%) and fill-in-blank questions (2 teachers, 7.7%; Table 3). Regarding the frequency of analyzing and interpreting quiz results, 16 (61.5%) of the 26 teachers reported that they rarely analyzed and interpreted quiz results.

Table 3  
*Types of Questions Used in Quizzes*

Multiple choice	True-false	Matching	Fill-in-blank
18 (69.2%)	3 (11.5%)	3 (11.5%)	2 (7.7%)

### *Interview Responses*

During interviews, the teachers were asked questions about the quizzes that had been

created, the theories or beliefs behind their work, and what general guidelines they applied when creating and analyzing quizzes. After printing out and reading the interview transcripts several times, the researchers identified three themes that teachers would like to pursue further: 1) quality and fairness; 2) teacher collaboration; and 3) challenges (see Table 4).

Table 4  
*Themes and Keywords*

Themes	Keywords
1. Quality and fairness	valid, fair, consistent
2. Collaboration with other teachers	share, support
3. Challenge	difficult, problem

The researchers also identified keywords related to the themes. For Theme 1, the researchers found that the teachers frequently used words such as “valid,” “fair,” and “consistent” in their reflections about quizzes. The word “valid” was used nine times, “fair” six times, and “consistent” five times. The following are a few examples:

- “Quizzes should be *valid* in order for the results to be accurately applied and interpreted” (female, 28-year-old).
- “Quizzes must be repeatable and yields *consistent* scores for each student” (female, 51-year-old).

For Theme 2, the keywords included “share” (six instances) and “support” (five instances).

- “It is vital for teachers to *share* ideas and learn from each other” (female, 33-year-old).

- “We can *share* ideas about how to design better quizzes” (male, 27-year-old).
- “I work together with other teachers and *support* each other in everything we do” (female, 40-year-old).

Finally, the teachers used words such as “difficult” (four instances) and “problem” (three instances).

- “I found it *difficult* to make my own quiz, I wish I could. But I was busy.”
- “I want to analyze and interpret quiz results. The *problem* is that no one is doing it.”

### ***Discussion***

The findings suggest a statistically significant relationship between a teacher’s years of study in assessment and the average number of quiz questions used ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, the average number of quizzes given to students remained statistically unchanged regardless of the length of their study of assessment ( $p > 0.05$ ). Compared to the other teachers (14.8), the group of teachers who had studied assessment for at least one-year used fewer (9) questions in each quiz. One teacher who continues to study assessment provided a possible reason during her interview when she described how she built and edited her quizzes. She reported that her ideal format is around 8-12 questions. She further explained that, when a quiz has fewer than eight questions, it goes quickly and does not seem as much of an experience. More than 12 questions, however, makes students spend too much time in the classroom taking quizzes.

During the interviews, teachers with longer periods of assessment training showed stronger concern for the quality of the quizzes. They spent more time developing quizzes

that provide useful data and maximize student learning. However, the same teachers reported that they still lacked the skills necessary to effectively revise quizzes, communicate assessment results, and improve instructions from the first day of quiz practices. This finding appears consistent with prior research showing that language assessment training is insufficient and creates problems for the school (Lam, 2015; Plake & Impara, 1996).

The survey results also revealed differences in the quality of teacher collaboration on assessment. While a teacher's years of experience are unrelated to the quality of the collaboration, teachers in schools with larger enrollments may have better collaboration than teachers in small schools with only one or two teachers per course. One teacher from a large school described teacher collaboration in general and about quizzes in particular as extensive and beneficial. At her school, the teachers of the same course collaborate closely with each other to improve the validity of the quiz. They hold pre-semester course conferences to discuss how to test learning objectives. As the semester proceeds, these teachers take turns writing, reviewing, and proofreading quizzes. For example, a teacher will write a quiz and, at least one week before the actual test date, send a draft to the other teachers for comments or suggestions.

More than half of the teachers reported that they were unable to create their own quiz (14 teachers, 53.8%) or analyze/interpret quiz scores (16 teachers, 61.5%) on a regular basis. The reason might be that university teachers face many demands/challenges at work and lack sufficient time. Furthermore, although quizzes are quick and easy to administer, they require significant time to design and analyze. This time needed for all aspects of designing, administering, and analyzing student quizzes may explain why the teachers in the study are comfortable with administering quizzes but reluctant to analyze

and act upon the results.

The methodology used in this study has two limitations. One limitation is sample bias. In the procedure of recruiting interviewees, some teachers might have been more amenable—willing to accept a suggestion—than others to being interviewed, which invites bias into the results. Another limitation is the small sample size. The small amount of useful information made it difficult to clarify relationships between conceptual categories of interest. However, the authors feel that the data offers insight into how teachers at other schools develop their quizzes, improves our own self-awareness of assessment skills, and helps us identify professional growth needs for effective assessment practices.

## Results and Recommendations

To help undertrained teachers, the authors used the responses received in the study to develop a set of quiz specifications (Table 5). The specifications might guide teachers on how to construct quizzes that produce valid and reliable results.

Table 5  
*General Quiz Specifications*

Specification	Description	Example
Learning goals	Revisit overall goals for the course and determine which ones will be evaluated with this quiz	Unit for understanding and giving directions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand directions to a place</li> <li>• Use words and phrases to Identify places</li> <li>• Use prepositions of location to give direction</li> <li>• Read about a person’s experience living in different places</li> </ul>
Intended stakes	Determine the value of quizzes	Low stakes: weighted between 2-10% of final

	on final grade	grade
Response format	Include several kinds of questions and measure a range of skills	Listening: multiple choice, gap fill Vocabulary: matching, gap fill Grammar: multiple choice, gap fill Reading: multiple choice, gap fill
Number and weighting of tasks / items	Find the ideal number of tasks and quiz items; assign scores to individual quiz question based on what the class as a whole learned from what was presented	Listening: 0-5 items (0-25%) Vocabulary: 3-5 items (25-35%) Grammar: 3-5 items (25/35%) Reading: 3-5 items (25-35%)
Wording / Grammar	Write quiz items in simple, clear language	Look at the map to answer the question.  My friend asked me to return these to the X, but I don't know where it is. Oh, the X is on Border Avenue, across the street from the fire station. A. Library B. Grocery Store C. Drug Store D. Bakery
Quiz length	Decide the proper length for each quiz	10-15 minutes
Order of tasks	Put tasks in proper order	Listening Vocabulary Grammar Reading
Grading / Reporting	Award points based on the correct answer; calculate quiz scores	Make an answer key; give a single score on the quiz
Evaluating the quiz	Review the test results, look for patterns and correlations	Review the questions with the highest frequency of incorrect answers and identify the causes of poor performance

Since it is important for teachers to become more skilled in assessment, training courses should prepare teachers to perform the following tasks: 1) define clear learning goals; 2) use a variety of methods to gather evidence of student learning; 3) analyze achievement data and make good inferences from the data; 4) provide appropriate feedback to students; 5) make appropriate instructional modifications to help students improve; 6) involve students in the assessment process and effectively communicate the results; and 7) engineer an effective assessment environment that boosts student motivation to learn (University of North Carolina, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

This study showed that the teachers' judgments on quizzes center on a number of factors, the primary ones being pre-service training, collaboration, and teacher workload. Although this was only a small-scale, exploratory study, the data may be of interest to those who are involved in foreign language programs. Further research on a larger scale must be done to investigate how pre-service training, in-service training, and quiz-giving experience vary among language teachers and to what extent these differences affect their practices of and approaches to designing and analyzing quizzes. In addition, there is room to explore how to implement online quizzes in the classroom and study their benefits, such as streamlined data collection.

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## Appendix

### Survey

#### *A. Background*

1. What was your major field for your highest graduate study?
2. How many years have you worked as a college EFL teacher (round up to the nearest whole number and include the current school year)?
3. How many years have you taught at this school?
4. About how many undergraduate or graduate level classes have you taken at a college or university in second/ foreign language assessment?
5. About how many hours of guided practicum experience have you had in second/ foreign language assessment?

#### *B. Practice of designing quizzes*

1. What is the name of the course you teach?
2. What is the name of the textbook for the course you teach?
3. Why are you testing?
4. Who are you testing?
5. How important are the quizzes for the course grade?
6. What is the most tested type of question that you use?
7. How many questions will be there on each section of the quiz? How much will each section be worth for the overall grade of the quiz?
8. How much time will each quiz take overall? Is there a time length per section?
9. In what order will the sections be tested?
10. Conditions necessary for marking the exam?
11. How will the score be reported? As a whole score, or per section? What is the passing grade?
12. This school year, how many quizzes did you give to students?
13. This school year, how often did you work with other faculty on writing and reviewing quizzes?
14. This school year, how often did you create your own quiz?
15. This school year, how often did you analyze and interpret quiz results?
16. This school year, how much percent of your time at work did you spend in creating, marking, and analyzing quizzes?
17. Would you be interested in giving more input on quizzes in a follow-up meeting?