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Introduction

Introduction

We are delighted to welcome you to the first issue of the *NUFS Teacher Development Symposium Proceedings.* This issue includes six articles based on presentations from the first Teacher Development Symposium hosted by the Center for Language Education and Development (CLED) at the Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) held on Zoom on Saturday, January 9th, 2021. The symposium was an opportunity to bring teachers together to share and discuss issues, research findings, skills and activities to enrich teaching practice. The Teacher Development Symposium Committee would like to sincerely thank both the contributors who submitted their manuscripts and worked through the double peer review process and also the reviewers who took the time and effort to provide constructive and thoughtful feedback.

The first article in this issue is from Nicholas Bradley, Kevin Ottoson and Andrew D. Tweed who provide an insightful account of their experiences completing doctoral studies while working full-time, in addition to offering advice to teachers who are considering becoming doctoral candidates. The second article is from Jared J. Peo whose research examines participants' experiences with differentiated learning in a synchronous online learning environment. In the third article, Richard Hill explores participants' reflections on using a self-study planner as an aid to improve students' private study habits. In the fourth article, Jane Hislop focuses on learners' expectations about their upcoming writing courses as they prepared for a semester online and the anxiety many students experienced regarding writing in a second language. In the fifth article, Wan Jung (Amy) Lin reviews the literature on critical thinking in language classrooms, sharing a wide range of activities that promote critical thinking in this context, followed by the results of a survey she conducted investigating students' perceptions of these activities. In the final article, Lidija Elliott examines the relationship between language and culture in EFL classrooms, providing ideas about how best to mitigate the possibility of misunderstanding between teacher and students in this context.

The call for papers for the second NUFS Teacher Development Symposium currently scheduled for January 2022, will be announced on this website shortly.

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Doing a Doctorate: Three Experiences

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Abstract
Language education at university has always required high-level qualifications. Whereas a master's degree is typically the entry level qualification for people working in language education, the number of people holding doctorates has been rising. An increased number of doctorates in the profession may lead someone to consider undertaking doctoral studies as a means of maintaining or advancing their career. As studying towards a doctorate is a large undertaking, it is one that should be considered at length. To assist this deliberation, this article presents the reasons, experiences, and outcomes of three teachers who completed doctoral studies.

Introduction

The decision concerning whether to undertake doctoral studies is one that should not be taken lightly. A legion of documents from books and magazine articles to internet memes highlight the large workloads, long hours and, as is often the case, high costs involved. However, unlike much of the information available, this article does not present the process of doing a doctorate in generic terms but gives it from the perspective of three teachers who undertook specific courses and who detail their own individual views. These views cover objective information such as the university and course of study, but also their subjective experiences, reasons for embarking on a doctorate and their assessment of the "value" it afforded them. Additionally, from these experiences will be drawn advice for those who may be considering doctoral studies.

Before detailing the three individual experiences, it is worth considering some broader facts about holding a doctorate. Arguably the most influential is that of compensation. People who hold a doctorate are paid more on average than those who do not. This would appear to be a global reality with data in the UK (Vitae, 2020), USA (Michigan State University, 2020), and Japan (Real Estate Japan, 2020), among others, all showing higher yearly and lifetime earnings for doctorate holders. Although this should come as no great surprise given that each step up the education ladder typically brings higher financial rewards, it does confirm the

monetary incentive for doing a doctorate and, implied within this, that the qualification is desired by employers.

Perhaps a consequence of the higher remuneration and access to higher level positions, the number of people doing a doctorate is growing in most countries, quite substantially in many. In the US, for example, the number of people holding a doctorate increased from 2 million in 2000 to 4.5 million in 2018 (Census, 2019). This is similar to the increases seen in many other countries such as France, Germany, China, and South Korea (Mainichi, 2018). However, this phenomenon is not entirely global. In Japan, although long-term statistics such as 5,576 doctorates awarded in 1989 vs 15,658 in 2018 (Japan Times, 2019) might suggest a steady increase over time, they hide the fact that 2006 represented the peak in the number of doctorates awarded and, since that time, there has been a decline (Japan Today, 2020; Mainichi, 2018). The reasons for this decline are beyond the scope of this article, though anecdotal evidence suggests that it may be influenced by the idiosyncrasies and recent changes within the employment system, particularly in the higher education employment sector.

Though the recent decline in the number of doctorates awarded in Japan is an anomaly when considering the global trend, the reality of increased remuneration and access to higher level positions is not. This is a universal reality and so is true for the higher education sector in Japan.

Doctorate Experience 1: Nicholas Bradley, PhD.

Background & Rationale
After teaching on the JET Programme for two years and an *eikaiwa* [English conversation school] for a few months after, I returned to the UK and worked for a prestige German car manufacturer. A lack of job satisfaction and a desire to have a more pleasant environment for my two young children made me once again consider teaching in Japan. Rather than return to pre-tertiary teaching, I undertook a TESOL MA at the University of Leeds to gain access to university level employment in Japan.

After achieving this and teaching for three years in a Japanese university, I once again wished to advance my career. There were several reasons for this, such as the desire to teach more content courses or a wider variety of courses, and to gain an increased salary, but the most powerful motivator was to avoid the employment cycle faced by university teachers in Japan. This employment merry-go-round sees teachers hired by universities on fixed-term contracts of usually 4-5 years, though some universities have started to offer 10-year contracts.

Holding a doctorate allows for a greater likelihood of moving into a permanent position as the qualification is usually either a prerequisite or a preferred qualification for most life-time posts both in Japan and overseas.

University & Course

The School of Education at the University of Leeds is staffed by extremely approachable and supportive academic staff who possess the wealth of knowledge and experience and the extremely positive experience of completing my TESOL MA at the University of Leeds led me to explore the possibility of undertaking a PhD there within the School of Education. Living and working in Japan, the doctorate option available to me was that of the Split-site PhD. The course has two models, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Two Split-site PhD Models

MODEL B: INDIVIDUAL PGRS OF VERY HIGH QUALITY

The PGR is supervised by a research degree supervisor at the University of Leeds and a local adviser is appointed to provide day to day support. The adviser will be from a higher education institution, research institute, commercial or industrial organisation with a significant research component or reputation.

MODEL A: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH A COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION OR AN INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC OR RESEARCH INSTITUTION

Provides opportunities for research project collaboration between the University and high quality commercial or industrial organisations with a research component and reputation. The collaboration may lead to further research collaboration between the institutions.

PGRs are jointly supervised by experienced research degree supervisors from Leeds and similarly experienced researchers from the partner organisation.

	Model A	Model B
Method of study	full-time	part-time
Standard period of study	3 years	5 years
Period of study required at Leeds	18 months	8 months
Timing of transfer	End of Year 1	End of Year 2
Maximum time limit for submission	4 years	7 years

(University of Leeds, 2020)

Completion of the split-site PhD course requires the production and defence of a thesis containing robust independent research that is justified by the literature, attempts to make an original contribution to the field and is of publishable quality. The length of the final thesis is typically 100,000 words. To gain admittance to the course requires a research proposal that defines an area of inquiry that is feasible, relevant, and pressing, and which demonstrates academic ability and original thinking. These points will also be assessed in person by the potential supervisor who will speak to the candidate about the research proposal.

Once a research proposal is accepted by the supervisor, the candidate is able to formally begin work on the early stages of their doctoral work. From my own experience, I would present the PhD workflow as is shown in Figure 2; the items in **bold text** represent the stages that were the most demanding in terms of time, difficulty, or stress.

Figure 2: PhD Workflow

Extensive Reading	Substantial amount of reading around the subject and focusing on particular areas of interest.
Identify an area in which to contribute	Finding the "gap" in the field that can be filled through research.
Make a research plan	Creating specific research questions and identifying ways to answer them.
Pass the "transfer" stage	Creating a revised and substantive research proposal based on extensive reading and containing research questions, justification and proposed research methods. Approx. 10-15,000 words. Also includes gaining ethical approval.
Conduct the plan	One of the most enjoyable stages. Going out and collecting data.
Analyze data	Also very enjoyable to see data come alive.
Begin the drafting process	A huge task that cannot be overstated. Creation of many chapters and many thesis drafts that often change and need to be cross-referenced. A painstaking task of concentration and endurance.
Submit	Submit electronic and soft-bound paper copies of the thesis. Complete submission admin.
Defend (Mock & Real)	Practicing speaking about the main thesis of your research in clear and succinct ways. Practice answering questions both

		general and specifically related to the thesis. Mock defence with supervisors and later actual defence with examiners.

Outcomes

The value of the actual outcomes can only be assessed against the desired outcomes that provided the impetus for embarking on the PhD. In this instance, the actual and desired outcomes are congruent. At the midway point of my PhD, I was able to move into a permanent position that offered excellent job security. Being a PhD candidate and well on the path towards completion was a factor in gaining the position. Though job security was the primary goal, other positive outcomes are shown in Figure 3, which is not an exhaustive list.

Figure 3: Selected Positive Outcomes

- ✓ Development of my own personal educational philosophy and the ability to critically assess it
- ✓ Obtained a high level of expertise in research methodology and data analysis
- ✓ Gained substantial project management competency
- ✓ Greater ability to identify and critically analyze my own and others' beliefs and assumptions
- ✓ Greatly improved time management / organizational skills
- ✓ A feeling of achievement

Not all outcomes were positive, however. Although some negative outcomes were rather insubstantial, such as having a reduced interest in reading, others were not. The most significant was a strong feeling of burnout towards the end of my PhD. Adding PhD studies to a schedule that is already heavy from a very busy full-time job and managing a family life with young children was extremely demanding both mentally and physically. While one may assume that the feelings of fatigue might subside with the end of the PhD, the reality was that several years of such an intense schedule resulted in the feeling lingering longer.

With both positive and negative outcomes, the ultimate question is "If I could go back, would I do it all again?" Without hesitation I would answer "Yes" and I would have said this at every stage of the PhD. Of course, if I were to go back, there are some things that I would do differently as well as questions I would ask myself, or any PhD candidate to consider.

Advice

Doing a doctorate in any form is a huge undertaking, but a PhD also represents an enormous

project that has to be managed very carefully. The main advice I would give to myself at the start of the course would focus mostly on the endurance and management aspects of the course. These points are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: PhD Advice

Try to recognize when enough is enough. *It is quite possible to engage in an endless literature review. There is always something that leads to something else, which leads to something else. Knowing when you have enough to make your point, justify your methods or challenge an idea is very important.*
Data management is extremely important (backing up, file organizing and storage). *With masses of data, chapter drafts, articles and much more, effectively organizing and backing up data not only saves time when it comes to using the data, it prevents tragic losses and setbacks.*
Isolation makes you second guess. Contact reassures. *Doing a PhD at distance can be quite lonely and can leave you wondering (often quite pessimistically) about your progress. Connecting with other doctoral students and maintaining regular communication with supervisors reassures and keeps your mind on target.*
Hit the ground running and make hay while the sun shines. *It is a good idea to have a lot of reading done before the PhD starts. Life and work can throw up challenges that take your time away from your PhD. Being a little ahead of the game allows the flexibility to compensate for these. Additionally, any slow/easy times in work/life should be taken advantage of by spending extra time on doctoral work.*

Although the above are mostly for PhD candidates, the questions below should be considered by anyone considering doctoral studies.

- ✓ Do you prefer extensive focus on one subject or examination of many? (PhD / EdD)
- ✓ Is your interest in the subject(s) strong enough to maintain focus on them for several years?
- ✓ Are you able to manage your time well and work at length in isolation?
- ✓ Will a doctorate give you value for your investment in time and money?
- ✓ Will the investment in time/money negatively impact life?

Doctorate Experience 2: Kevin Ottoson, EdD.

Background & Rationale

After teaching on the JET Programme in central Japan for three years, I experienced a growing dissatisfaction with the lack of development as an instructor. As an undergraduate student in a teachers' college, I enjoyed using the concepts and skills in numerous practicum

assignments in American middle schools and high schools. Reflecting upon this time of satisfaction, I decided to enroll in the MA TESOL program at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS). During my time as an MA student at NUFS, I continued to develop as a teacher and better understand the EFL classroom as an assistant language teacher on the JET programme.

After graduating with an MA, I was able to gain employment at the university level as a foreign language instructor. With growing responsibilities, I felt that I lacked the necessary leadership skills to carry out my duties inside and outside the classroom at the university. Again, I started to look for professional development opportunities. After completing the Quantitative Research Training Project coordinated by Gregory Sholdt, I felt it extremely satisfying to take part in online professional development with a team of researchers. Soon I began to search for online doctorate in education programs that would provide a structured environment for me to continue developing as a scholar practitioner.

University & Course

In 2014, there were fewer completely online doctorates in Education programs to consider. The University of New England (UNE) in Biddeford, Maine, USA, was one such program that provided a 100% online doctorate in education focusing on educational leadership. In addition to the institution's regional accreditation, the flexibility and structure of the program made the Doctorate in Education in Educational Leadership at UNE an attractive place to further my education. The 51-credit hour Doctor of Education program at UNE (see Figure 5) has multiple start dates and can be completed in three years.

Figure 5: UNE Doctor of Education Course

EDU 801	Preparation for Transformative Leadership (Credits:3)
EDU 802	Qualitative Research Methods (Credits:3)
EDU 803	Interpreting Empirical Data (Credits:3)
EDU 804	Technology & Organizational Transformation (Credits:3)
EDU 805	Managing Change (Credits:3)
EDU 806	Policy Analysis (Credits:3)
EDU 807	Enacting Transformative Leadership (Credits:3)
EDU 808	Using Theory to Guide Research (Credits:3)
EDU 809	Conceptualizing Applied Research (Credits:3)
EDU 810	Ethical Leadership (Credits:3)
EDU 811	Diagnosing Organizational Dynamics (Credits:3)
EDU 812	Dissertation Seminar I (Credits:3)
EDU 813	Dissertation Seminar II (Credits:3)
EDU 814-817	Dissertation (Credits: 12)

Note: Each course is eight weeks in duration. There are two courses per 16-week semester.

At UNE, doctoral students work on their dissertation throughout the 51-credit hour program. The five-stage dissertation process (see Figure 6) begins with the application essay where students explore their dissertation topic. This exploration continues in the first year of the program. Into the second year, students refine their research topic. By the time students enter their third year of the program, they will have completed a first draft of the first three chapters of their dissertation. The rationale for integrating the dissertation throughout the program rather than just at the end is to avoid the "all but dissertation" (ABD) status and maintain a high retention and graduation rate.

Figure 6: Dissertation development-5 stages
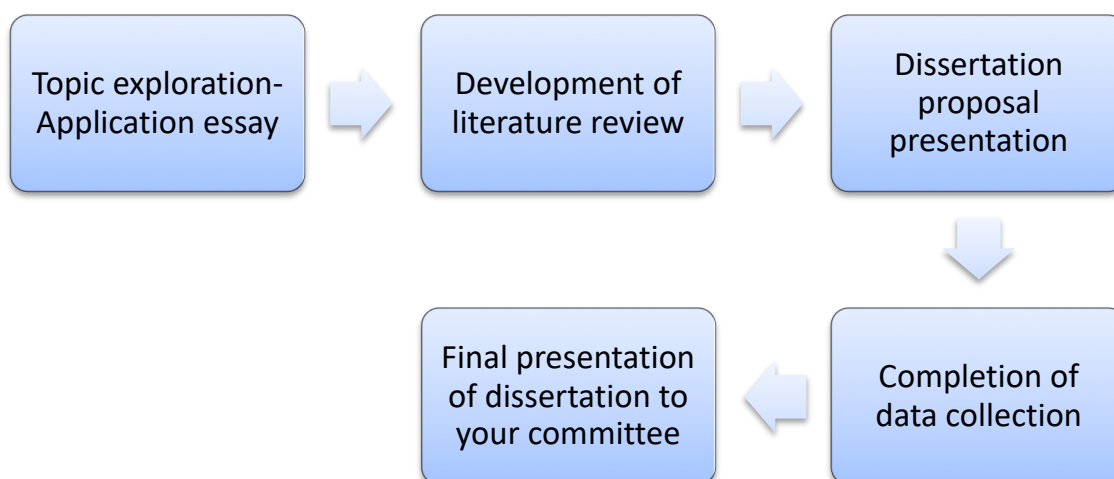
Outcomes

The EdD program at UNE enabled me to develop research skills and education leadership skills. Thus, I have a better understanding of my students and colleagues though part of me feels that I have not fully utilized the knowledge and skills I have learned due to the nature of my current teaching position. However, at the time of writing this paper, I have been able to secure a tenure-track position at a university where I will teach students who are studying childhood education. As my main goal of development as a scholar practitioner has been achieved, I feel a deep sense of accomplishment. Completing a terminal degree program while working full-time and raising two children under six definitely was a taxing experience. Being able to make it through this program helped develop resilience and grit to help me work through other turbulence in life. Additionally, this program enabled me to land several interviews for permanent positions at the university level. Thus, my chances for career advancement increased due to the completion of the EdD program at UNE.

The outcomes of this EdD program at UNE were mostly positive, but there were some negative outcomes during and after the program. First, I suffered from a severe lack of sleep. Being the primary caregiver of my children only allowed me to focus on my studies from 10pm - 2am. Routinely, I would have to pull all-nighters on the weekends. This lack of sleep caused my teaching and personal relationships to suffer. Additionally, I felt like I was missing out on important events and time with friends and family. Due to time and financial constraints, I was unable to take part in numerous activities. Finally, while I felt a wonderful sense of accomplishment, my salary and responsibilities at work remained unchanged. At times, I still find myself asking myself, "Was it worth it?" At this point, I would say, "Yes and no." Perhaps, I can better answer this ten years later.

Advice

Before I chose to enroll in the EdD program at UNE, I frequently sought out advice from those who either completed a doctorate, were currently enrolled in a doctoral program, or had chosen not to do a doctorate. Now I find myself the one who is asked about my experience and any advice I can give. The following pieces of advice (see Figure 7) are what I typically offer.

Figure 7: EdD Advice

Talk to current and former participants
Seeking out advice and perspectives will help you make a better-informed decision on enrolling in a doctoral program. Additionally, once registered, talking with others will be a source of mentorship and support. Doing a doctorate can be a lonely experience at times. Reach out to others as much as you can.
Communicate clearly to those around you about deadlines
Your friends and family will likely not be aware of important deadlines coming up. Communicating to people around you about upcoming tasks and deadlines will help them understand times when you may be busier than normal. Hopefully, this knowledge of your schedule will help them provide the needed support during stressful times.
Anticipate turbulence and be flexible
Most likely, you have an area of research that you would like to explore more in detail. When you begin the program, you would likely have a good idea of what you would like to research. However, situations can change. Your position, place of work, or personal life may likely change over the next several years. Furthermore, a global pandemic might put your research plans on hold. Thus, your original research plan may need to be altered. Consider possible alternative research plans should you encounter unforeseeable changes to your personal or professional life.
Don't neglect both your professional life and personal life
Taking on a doctorate can cause you to neglect other important areas of your life. You will often hear about the importance of maintaining a work-life balance. However, consider how to maintain a balance within your work. Focusing on your dissertation can cause you to neglect other areas of your professional life. As a foreign-language lecturer in Japan, I neglected teacher development, language learning, and publications. All of these can carry

> *importance in your current work situation and securing future employment. Of course, if in Japan, your prospective employer will be interested in your doctoral research, but they will also know about your Japanese language ability. Every interview I have had has either been partially in Japanese or entirely in Japanese.*

In sum, these are some of the pieces of advice that I often find myself giving to others. Of course, everyone's situation or motivation for doing a doctorate is different. Thus, I tailor my advice accordingly. Pursuing a doctorate will not be right for everyone. Even at this time, I am not sure if it was right for me. However, in 2015, it seemed like the right decision. In the end, I completed my doctorate in education, and it has helped me achieve some of my goals. Consider your goals and how a doctorate might help you achieve them. At the same time, consider other avenues to achieve those goals.

Doctorate Experience 3: Andrew D. Tweed, EdD

Background & Rationale

I first started working as an EFL teacher in 2000, in a rural area of Japan near Mount Fuji. After working at an *eikaiwa* for a couple years there, followed by teaching English at a vocational college in Tokyo for three years, I returned to the US to do a MATESOL in 2006. After I completed my MA, I thought about doing a doctorate, but I instead decided to go to Southeast Asia, where I worked mostly as a manager and a teacher trainer. The six-plus years in Vietnam and Cambodia involved really rewarding and enjoyable work, but after a while I started to feel complacent professionally, and I wanted to be exposed to fresh ideas, which were backed by research. I therefore decided to undertake a doctorate, and I believed this would help me with university positions once my wife and I returned to Japan.

After considering a number of other universities, for various reasons, I decided to apply to the Doctor of Education in TESOL program at Anaheim University (AU) in California. One reason I chose AU was that I liked that I could take it online, and so it did not matter if I was in Cambodia or Japan. In addition, while it was online, their program included both synchronous and asynchronous coursework, as well as two residential sessions, which helped reduce feelings of isolation. I also decided on AU because it offered a nice balance between the practical and theoretical. For example, while it offered highly useful courses in curriculum design and materials development, it also included more theory-based ones in research methods, instructed second language acquisition (SLA), and pragmatics. One other reason I opted for Anaheim's doctorate was because of its esteemed faculty. David Nunan started Anaheim's Graduate TESOL program, and the professors who teach the courses are generally regarded as experts in those particular areas. Thus, for example, Rod Ellis taught instructed SLA, Brian Tomlinson taught materials development, and Kathleen Bailey taught

teacher education. This was different from my MA where only a relatively small number of professors taught all of our courses, and they frequently taught outside of their areas of expertise.

University & Course

Figure 8 presents an overview of the coursework, which in my case, took me two and half years to complete.

Figure 8: Coursework for Anaheim Univ.'s EdD Program

- Synchronous online lectures every Saturday morning
- Lectures followed by discussions with classmates
- Moodle for weekly tasks, e.g., discussion forum
- Two residential sessions, in Tokyo or southern California
- Generally, two papers for each course
- Qualifying and comprehensive exams

I would like to highlight the fact that the course has been designed in a way that provides a lot of interaction with the professors and between classmates. The synchronous classes and discussion forums facilitated various modes of interaction. Furthermore, the residential sessions, which were about three days each and alternated been Tokyo and southern California, were helpful in fostering stronger bonds with others in the program.

For me, the most difficult aspect of the course work was writing two papers for each course. However, I also feel like this made me a much better writer. By the end of the EdD I had written about thirty papers. Also rather challenging were the qualifying and comprehensive exams, as these required periods of intense study sessions of previous material in order to pass.

Figure 9 shows an overview of the dissertation process. While the dissertation for AU's EdD in TESOL can be done in as short as one year, mine, being qualitative, took approximately two and half years. I wrote the dissertation proposal while taking a general course on dissertation proposal writing and the professor of that course, while not my advisor, gave me some helpful guidance. Particularly in the early stages of working with my advisor, I also made some significant changes to the original proposal, which required more time. Furthermore, as my study involved a grounded, bottom-up approach to analyzing the data, I experienced some difficulty settling on an appropriate theoretical lens with which to make sense of my data.

Figure 9: Anaheim Univ. EdD in TESOL Dissertation Process

- Write dissertation proposal
- Formally request to work with an advisor
- Write the dissertation with ongoing support from advisor
- Send completed dissertation to one external examiner, one internal examiner
- Carry out defense to one external examiner, one internal examiner and advisor
- Address any required or suggested revisions and then re-submit

In addition to academic challenges, I dealt with a number of more general obstacles to completing the dissertation. Some of my most significant problems were health related: worsening eyesight, tooth aches, back pains, shoulder pains, and the most disruptive of all, chronic headaches. This was also happening amidst a very stressful work situation, where there was frequent turmoil among members of our small self-access center team.

Dealing with AU's administration also caused me a good deal of frustration. I was pushed to take double course loads, I had to argue with them to take a term off when my health was in poor condition, and added to that, I had to keep paying for each additional term of my dissertation. While academically, I had an excellent experience with Anaheim, their administration left me ultimately feel somewhat negative about the university.

Outcomes

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss the positive and negative outcomes of doing a doctorate. Regarding the former, I am now much more focused in terms of my research interests. Both the coursework and my dissertation helped me to narrow in on learner autonomy and psychology in language learning as my primary areas of interest. I am also more confident in both the practical and theoretical domains of TESOL. Last but certainly not least, I am more competitive in the job market. I have landed two university positions in the past five years directly linked to my professional interest in self-access centers.

At the same time, there have been some negative outcomes. The cost of my doctorate was about $60,000 US. Hopefully, this investment pays off in the long run. In addition, I have experienced what might be called a doctoral hangover. I still feel somewhat run-down by the whole process and I have only recently submitted the paper based on my dissertation to a journal. Finally, I have some lingering health issues which took root during my doctoral studies, most notably, poor eyesight and back pain. Anyone considering doing a doctorate should be aware of these potential payoffs and pitfalls.

Advice

I started my doctorate while working in Cambodia. A colleague of mine there from England used to say, "I would like to have done one, but I don't actually want to do a doctorate." In my case, I am glad that this experience is over, and I am pleased that I have got my doctorate. However, I would not put myself through that process again. Especially at my age, it would not make sense from a cost-benefit perspective.

Related to the financial benefits of doing a doctorate, I do believe teachers thinking about doing one should be aware that it may not actually pay off. Doctorates are expensive and time consuming. Teachers in our field should consider other things that they can do to advance their careers to provide themselves with a financial boost. For example, they can take on more classes, teach privately, open a business, become an examiner, or work for a publisher. Now with the widespread use of video conferencing applications, they could try online teaching as well. Of course, there are other things not directly related to English teaching that they can do. I have worked as a music teacher in Japan. Some people get paid for writing and copywriting, while others translate. In sum, I would suggest that TESOL professionals consider the reasons for doing a doctorate and what they would hope to get out of it, and they should compare that with what they could get from putting their time elsewhere. I am happy that I did a doctorate. It has helped me in a number of ways. But it is certainly not the best option for everyone.

BIO DATA

Nicholas Bradley is an associate professor at NUFS and holds MAs in TESOL and History, and a PhD in Applied Linguistics. He has taught at university in Japan for 10 years and is currently the Director of multiple courses within the Core English Program.

Kevin J. Ottoson is a language instructor at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan. He holds an Ed.D from the University of New England. His research interests include study abroad and the development and assessment of intercultural competence.

Andrew D. Tweed holds an Ed.D. in TESOL from Anaheim University. He is a lecturer in the World Language Center and coordinator of the Self-Access Center at Soka University in Tokyo. Andrew's research interests include learner autonomy and psychology in language learning.

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A Semester of Choice: A Differentiated Approach to Online Learning

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Abstract
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, a small private university in the Tokai area transitioned from face-to-face learning to online instruction. While it may have been deemed a success in many ways, it was challenging to meet diverse learning groups' needs on such short notice. To assist students who learn effectively in different ways and have varied learning preferences and multiple intelligences, the author modified one online course's design to offer flexible forms of participation and flexible assignments with various modes of completion. While the primary goal behind the changes was to improve students' language development, the teacher additionally set out to foster student motivation and autonomous learning. This article will explore three participants' experiences with differentiated learning in an online environment.

A Semester of Choice: A Differentiated Approach to Online Learning
The COVID-19 pandemic that started in the spring of 2020, placed an enormous burden on the education system in Japan. In response, a small private university in the Tokai area transitioned from face-to-face learning to online instruction. During the first semester of this study's course, most classes took place synchronously online via Zoom. The decision was made with limited time to prepare an online curriculum, so while it may have been deemed a success in many ways, it was challenging to meet the diverse learning groups' needs. In response to the obstacles of the first semester, the author implemented a differentiated approach to learning based on the principles of adult education, motivation, and universal design for learning.

Adult Education
In 2005, Phillip Ozuah provided a commentary on adult learning. He proposed ten principles concerning how adults learn best. While some of the principles reflect similar ones of pedagogy, five stand out for this study: "adults learn best when they want or need to learn something, when they are in a non-threatening environment, when their learning styles are met, when their previous experience is valued and utilized," and "when there are opportunities for them to have control over the learning process" (Ozuah, 2005, p. 86). He argues that adult education should be more focused on immediacy and a need to learn and promote autonomous learning. As university students are young adults and choose to continue their education and what they study, this argument seems applicable to higher education.

Ozuah (2005) suggests that adults are more knowledgeable about their learning preferences due to having much experience in and out of the classroom. Moreover, adult learners are more likely to be looking for practical solutions to immediate problems. The course's benefits and goals need to be clear and personal to meet the students' expectations. Adult learners of languages often have some specific goals, and they will be more driven to study and improve if they see the required tasks as useful and effective. A great way to meet these expectations is to offer options so adult learners can control how and what they learn. Keeping these recommendations in mind can help improve motivation and engagement.

Motivation

Motivation is often discussed as a quantifiable characteristic that students have or do not have or something they can gain or lose. How to improve motivation has been a significant area of EFL research as motivation has been connected to achievement (Fan, 2012; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Pan & Wu, 2013; Peacock, 1997). Greeno, Collins, and Resnick (1996) categorized prominent theories on motivation into three groups: extrinsic motivation (the Behaviorist/Empiricist view), intrinsic motivation (the Cognitive/Rationalist view), and engaged participation (the Situative/Pragmatist-Sociohistoric view). Although the groups are not all-encompassing, adherents to these theories have used them to shape research and data interpretation. The goal of their research is to find interventions teachers can implement to get immediate and measurable results.

Olmanson (2016) proposes that these perspectives sometimes ignore moments in classrooms that are not easily measured or described. Instead, motivation might be better expressed as moments of acceleration and deceleration where individuals, small groups, and entire classes can experience changes in motivation either together or alone. These moments are unpredictable and complex, influenced both intrinsically and extrinsically, but not necessarily exclusively. Following this line of thought, rather than limiting interventions based on one theory, it would be better to design a course that allows for as many opportunities for acceleration as possible.

Acknowledging that motivation may be too complex to define with one theory, Williams and Williams (2011) focus on five key ingredients for improving student motivation: "student, teacher, content, method/process, and environment" (p. 122). Teachers' and students' roles should go beyond traditional views of consumer and producer as students should be seen as necessary materials for educational success. How and when content is delivered is important and should be easily accessible. The authors are quick to explain that no one motivational theory is necessarily better than the others. Instead, they are pieces of a bigger puzzle. Thus, teachers should consider them when designing courses, trying to include as many of these ingredients as much as they can.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a framework that seeks to design all aspects of a course to maintain the curriculum goals and objectives while maximizing learning for as many students as possible (Coyne, Pisha, Dalton, Zeph, & Smith, 2012; Meyer & Rose, 2000; Rogers-Shaw, Carr-Chellman, & Choi, 2018; Staskowski, Hardin, Klein, & Wozniak, 2012). Staskowski et al. (2012) argue that instead of a one-size-fits-all design, the framework requires a flexible and customizable approach to learning. Although the basis of UDL was to make learning accessible for students with special needs, Coyne et al. (2012) posit that "designing for diverse learners results in better learning outcomes for all individuals." The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) has identified three core principles of UDL: "multiple means of representation, multiple means of action, and multiple means of engagement" (as cited in Rogers-Shaw et al., 2018, p. 22). In other words, content for the course should be provided multimodally (e.g., audio, video, transcriptions, and images). There should be various ways of completing tasks or assignments (e.g., oral or written). Also, students should have opportunities to work in groups of various sizes or individually or to use a computer or a textbook. These options are a few examples of how UDL can be used. The key is to make these options available for all students to best match their learning needs and preferences.

Differentiated Learning
Differentiated learning is a responsive teaching approach aimed at meeting increasingly diverse students' needs. It is a flexible, varied, and empowering approach that leads to sharing responsibility for learning with the learner. It encompasses activities and assignments and classroom expectations, assessments, content presentation, and environment. For example, instead of one timed writing task involving one prompt, a teacher may provide multiple methods for completing the task: 1. A timed writing task with a prompt and structured outline; 2. A timed writing response with a prompt; 3. A blank sheet of paper. Tomlinson, Brimijoin, and Narvaez (2008) present the approach as a necessary tool that should be used to enable students "to do more than would be possible without it" (p. 4). In the example provided, more students would be able to achieve and challenge themselves more.

Despite offering varied and sometimes leveled assignments, it must be clarified that differentiated learning is not tracking (Tomlinson et al., 2008). Teachers must balance how participation, group selection, and assignment choices are made. At times, this means teachers need to allow students to make their own choices. Using the writing task above, the students could choose their preferred writing task, even if it may be too demanding to complete. The belief is that students can learn from the experience just as well as the completion. Other times, the teacher may need to give some specific work to help students progress in critical areas. In other words, the teacher may guide a student toward one of the three writing tasks.

Differentiated learning is not a new approach to language education. Surfacing in the early 1990s, teachers and researchers viewed differentiated learning as a means of teaching "mixed-ability" classes (Convery & Coyle, 1993, p. 7). More recently, the approach has expanded from "mixed-ability" to include students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse interests and learning preferences (Borja, Soto, & Sanchez, 2015). Its student-centered focus makes differentiated learning a promising approach to language education.

Aims of the Study
A few issues arose concerning the synchronous online classroom and assignments during the first semester of the course. The use of English and the amount of participation in small group work had been inconsistent. It was difficult for the teacher to manage the breakout rooms in a meaningful way. The teacher often had to play the role of an English or participation police officer moving between breakout rooms and reinforcing the class's expectations. Even students who could be considered more motivated to participate were found sitting silently with their groups in a breakout room. Additionally, many students were not completing assignments on time consistently. This issue was particularly a problem when the assignment work was used to complete small group tasks.

The author decided to use a differentiated approach to online learning to address these issues. The implemented approach's goal was to meet more students' needs by improving student participation, helping students take more responsibility for their learning, and offering a more flexible learning approach. Ultimately, this would help students improve their English proficiency development.

The research question and sub-questions guiding this study are:
1) What are students' perceptions of differentiated learning in a synchronous online environment?

     a. How do students describe their experiences with differentiated breakout rooms?

     b. How do students describe their experiences with differentiated assignments?

Method
Participants
The course for this study was a compulsory course for non-English majors, offered to second-year students. During the fall semester, the classes met synchronously online for twelve weeks and asynchronously for three weeks. Classes met twice per week for 90 minutes. A differentiated approach was administered to two sections of the course consisting of 65 students (86% female), 33 students in one class and 32 in the other. Most of the students fit within the CEFR B1-B2 range upon entering the course. Despite seeming reasonably homogenous, the students had diverse backgrounds, learning preferences, English fluency levels, motivation, and confidence.

Three of the female students volunteered to participate in semi-structured in-depth interviews, which made up the primary source of data collection. The interviews took place at the end of the semester and were used to understand their experiences with the class's differentiated approach (see Appendix). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed and coded for themes. Archival records, surveys, and participant observations were also used. Pseudonyms are used in all references to participants.

Application of Differentiated Learning
Two significant changes to the course were adopted to provide students with multiple options to develop their English skills and facilitate active participation during online classes. The first change took place with the Zoom breakout rooms. Zoom is a video communication application that allows a host to hold meetings with multiple participants simultaneously. One function available for hosts allows them to send participants into breakout rooms to interact privately in groups. During the second semester, students were often given a choice to join one of three styles of breakout rooms: all-English, mostly-English, and no-requirement. The style of the room was not a requirement but rather an expectation for that room. Participants who chose to join a room style would be expected to, and they would expect their group members to participate accordingly. Students would indicate their room style preference by adding a 1 for all-English, 2 for mostly-English, or 3 for no-requirement before their Zoom ID.

A maximum number of participation points were allotted to each style to provide some extrinsic motivation. The maximum number of points (10/10) could be earned by students who joined the all-English style, while fewer points could be earned for the mostly English and no requirement groups (8/10 and 6/10 respectively). Group sizes were limited to about 3-5 students per group, which meant there were often nine or ten breakout rooms. With so many breakout rooms in one class, students were required to complete participation surveys about their groups at the end of each class. The surveys asked students to compare their participation with that of their group members. Also, they commented on any issues or technical problems they may have had. The purpose of this change was to help improve confidence and speaking time, reduce anxiety, make the groups more enjoyable, and provide options that could match student motivation and interest in a topic. It was not a mode of tracking students as they could choose any room style no matter their proficiency level, and they could migrate between styles daily.

The second significant change to the class was a change to assignments and how they were

completed. Each assignment was divided into three sections. The first section included the necessary work needed to participate fully in the next class. This section included tasks such as previewing reading sections, vocabulary practice, and some critical responses to the topic. Six out of ten points were awarded to this section. The second section added a research element. Students were provided with a task that required research outside the textbook to complete it. The final section added a response or reflection. Students were often asked to record a Flipgrid video or write a reflective paragraph or two connecting the topic to their own lives. Two points could be earned for each of the final two sections. The first section of an assignment was the only section that students were expected to complete.

The additional sections of the assignments were diverse and multimodal to offer students more paths to the content. The purpose of this change was to make it easier to participate in class and connect with the content personally. The change also promoted autonomous learning by making students responsible for completing two sections of an assignment. It also allowed students to skip sections of an assignment due to a busy schedule, a lack of interest in the topic, or any personal reason. By completing these two sections, students would have more information to bring into small group conversations, and they would be doing more to improve their English.

It was important for the teacher to review the expectations and possible points before choosing a breakout room style and introducing assignments. During small group activities in breakout rooms, the teacher would move between groups to facilitate discussion, share ideas, and encourage students when necessary. During these short observations, the teacher would take notes to later compare with student surveys.

Findings

Five themes, three about the breakout room styles and two about the assignments, emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews: the breakout room styles provided a more comfortable environment for speaking English, increased speaking time and opportunities, and encouraged English use; the assignments were more interesting and useful than in the first semester, and they were flexible and promoted student responsibility. The following paragraphs will look deeper into these themes using the students' own words to support the findings.

Breakout Room Styles Provided a More Comfortable Environment for Speaking English

All three participants commented on how the new breakout room styles provided a more comfortable speaking environment.

"For breakout rooms, it is the best environment to practice English for me because other classmates are also willing to speak English." — Riko talking about the all-English breakout room.
"I like speak English, but my English is so bad…If I can't understand English, so my friends use Japanese to explain. So, I can understand my friends say." — Kanako talking about the mostly-English breakout room.
"I feel very comfortable choose the level because I want to use English a lot…this semester I can choose, so use the all English room and I can use a lot of English." — Tomoka
"So, I feel other member also tried harder, and they speak English so much, so I feel very comfortable, and also I can try to harder." — Tomoka

Students commented that they were more likely to use more English when they could choose their breakout rooms. For Riko and Tomoka, this meant that they could use the amount of English they desired. Both students consistently chose the all-English breakout room style for small groups. Tomoka further explained that when her group members spoke English, it encouraged her to participate more. On the other hand, Kanako had less confidence in her English ability and felt more comfortable without the pressure of only using English. Although Kanako typically joined the mostly-English breakout room style, she did try to join the all-English style once. By joining the other style, she realized that she was more comfortable in the mostly-English style room. This gained knowledge is an advantage of the differentiated learning approach. Students need to understand their proficiency levels to make more effective strides in their learning.

Breakout Room Styles Increased Speaking Time and Opportunities

At times during the semester, students were not allowed to choose their breakout room styles. In these cases, students were grouped randomly. Riko and Tomoka discussed issues they had in these rooms compared with room styles they could choose.

"In the breakout room, I noticed that some of them start to speak Japanese when the teacher don't come to the small breakout room. But, in — after changing to the new activity, they speak more English than before." — Riko comparing the new style to randomly grouped breakout rooms.
"I feel a little bit disappointed, and even though I try to focus on my way, but I tend to do the way they do…if I join such — those students, I tend to speak Japanese more even though I wanted to speak English all the time." — Riko talking about joining a randomly grouped breakout room with unwilling members.
"So, I feel so happy because of — I can study harder, and also I don't feel frustrated…because I want to study harder and use English more, but so other member don't speak so I can't speak English." — Tomoka comparing the new style to randomly grouped breakout rooms.

Both Riko and Tomoka talked about how members influence them in their groups. If group members were less interested in using English or participate less, Riko felt disappointed. In randomly-grouped breakout rooms, the students who want to speak English the whole time are more likely to be grouped with students who do not share their views. As Riko mentioned, students may perform in English while the teacher is in the breakout room, and teachers may be unaware of this situation. Riko elaborated that she felt awkward talking to her classmates in English if they were using Japanese. Instead of encouraging others to speak in English, she would use Japanese as well.

Breakout Room Styles Encouraged English Use

All three members talked about using more English in the breakout room styles than in randomly-grouped breakout rooms.

"For me, it is hard to balance the Japanese and English portions, and I guess that even though students are in the second level of the class, most of the students maybe — it is just a guess, but most of them speak Japanese than English. So, if I were in the breakout room, I would not practice English as much as I do.." — Riko discussing why she joins the all-

English breakout room.
"I want to English better and more fluently, so we choose level class. So high-level class member is always speak English, so I am influenced good English feeling." — Kanako discussing choosing a breakout room.
"So, I feel other member also tried harder, and they speak English so much, so I feel very comfortable, and also I can try to harder." — Tomoka (used earlier, multiple themes).

Riko assumed that students in mostly-English breakout rooms were not speaking as much English as she was in the all-English breakout rooms. Her assumption was based on previous experience, and it parallels responses from the previous theme. Kanako claimed that the all-English breakout room influenced her to speak English, while Tomoka used more English because she felt comfortable. Tomoka's response hints at how she felt when she joined the all-English breakout room. When she joined the more demanding breakout room, she felt nervous about speaking because her self-efficacy diminished. Having multiple options allowed Tomoka to discover a comfortable environment and build confidence.

The Assignments Were More Interesting and Useful Than in the First Semester

Riko and Kanako specifically commented that the assignments were more interesting and useful than the first semester. Tomoka also shared this sentiment, but she did not elaborate. When asked if there was anything they did not like about the assignment changes, all participants said they had nothing to share.

"I think the homework became less than the first semester, but the content is more narrow and deeper. So, I could learn more deep into the topic." — Riko
"Yeah, I like the video section, so it is very interesting homework and my video — my friends watched, so received comments. I am very happy friends comment." — Kanako discussing the Flipgrid activities on assignments

Riko makes a critical statement: the homework was less time-consuming yet facilitated further engagement with the content. She also shared a similar opinion to Kanako about using Flipgrid videos for assignments.

The Assignments Were More Flexible and Promoted Student Responsibility

All three participants commented positively about having choices, and they claimed that these choices were not available in other courses. Being given choices made them feel more responsible for their learning.

"And the new assignments, we can decide the homework by our responsibility so that some students are working hard to complete all of the steps and some of them just want — necessary thing." — Riko
"But, so we can choose section — homework, so it is so good because video homework. Some people are bad at video, so we can choose video section, so it is so good." — Kanako
"So, I feel that the change was so helpful for me because this semester also I had a lot of homework to do… So, I can choose according to my English level or my schedule. So, I can try to do my best." — Tomoka discussing the flexible homework.

Tomoka was the only participant to comment that she did not always complete all three homework sections. However, she emphasized this as a positive point as she was busy with other classes, which helped her avoid stress. Kanako may have often joined the mostly-English breakout rooms, but she completed all three sections of the assignments because she likes English and believes more opportunities to use English will lead to more significant improvement. Riko was the only participant to discuss the assignments in a slightly negative way: "*I am a little bit stressed about the homework option because that's my personality – I try to complete all of them to get full points even though I am busy.*" On the other hand, she was well aware of the choice, and she decided to complete the assignments.

Discussion
Findings from this study should be considered carefully. The goal for this research was to interview five to ten participants, but only three volunteered. While the three participants were diverse in many ways, their congruent trait was being highly-motivated. While this does not discredit any of their answers, it does suggest that some students may not have been interested in sharing their opinions because they did not find the changes useful or practical. Despite this deficiency, some valuable insights were gained when interviews were compared to participant observations and surveys. These insights will be examined along with the discussion of the findings.

Concerning breakout rooms, there is potential with differentiated learning to improve motivation, speaking and learning opportunities, and student ownership of their learning, especially for highly motivated students. By offering students a choice, they can be in a more comfortable learning environment. All three participants discussed this, including Kanako, who preferred the mostly-English breakout room. Relevant to participant observations, the students who often joined the no-requirement breakout rooms seemed to lack confidence, not proficiency. It might be assumed that students would improve confidence, negotiation of meaning, listening skills, and speaking skills with more opportunities to speak. However, this research did not evaluate learning outcomes, so it is impossible to make this claim. One valuable point was that participants could recognize proficiency levels and learning preferences due to the options.

Unfortunately, there were some negative observations with the breakout rooms. Participants in the study spoke of being more influenced by unwilling group members than positive role-models. In other words, they were more likely to use Japanese if their group members used it than asking group members to use English. This situation was especially evident in observations of mostly-English breakout rooms. It also seemed to progress throughout the semester, implying some novelty to the breakout room change. More consideration would be needed to balance accountability with flexibility. Also, this breakout room change was experimented with in smaller classes ranging from eleven to seventeen students. It was more likely that students could not join their preferred breakout room styles because no other classmates requested the same style. Finally, most students continued to use the same breakout room styles the entire semester. More migration between room styles would have been preferred.

Assignment changes were favorably welcome. All interviewed participants shared positive opinions about these changes. Additionally, many students in both classes had complained of being overworked and spending too much time online, so it was not a surprise that having less required work was appreciated. The more in-depth content that Riko talked about has the potential to boost motivation because it can help build a purposeful connection to the

material. Multimodal tasks offer multiple paths to the content, increasing accessibility. While the responses to the assignments were overwhelmingly positive, some students continued to underachieve when completing them. This observation may not be unusual considering the students are non-English majors, but it does warrant more consideration.

As is expected with research, hindsight and more time with the relevant literature have led to possible alternatives for future courses. Regarding breakout room styles, variation in group sizes calls for more consideration. For convenience, most groups consisted of four or five students. However, this ignores students' learning preferences of smaller groups or independent work. Additionally, smaller groups could provide more opportunities for improving English skills and confidence. With more group possibilities, how to assess participation and survey students becomes an issue.

Assignments were provided as one assignment with three sections. However, it may be wiser to offer multiple smaller assignments of less value. For example, provide students with five or six multimodal possibilities and allow them to choose up to four to be completed. This adjustment would allow students to have more control of how and what they study.

The surveys conducted asked students to rank the group members based on participation, themselves included. There was an additional area for comments. Because they were limited in information, these surveys primarily served as aids to grade participation. However, one observation emerged. Most students tended to be more critical of themselves than group members. For example, one student ranked herself as the lowest participant in her group when the teacher felt she had been the most active. Furthermore, students were unlikely to criticize group members for not participating. This behavior implies that students were not developing group interdependence as much as anticipated. Perhaps, they did not want to be held responsible for a classmate receiving a low participation score and thus did not feel responsible for helping classmates improve.

Limitations
This study's most significant limitation was its number of participants. While the insights gained should not be dismissed, the study would benefit from interviews with students having negative impressions of the changes or with less-motivated students. Differentiated learning aims to help all students do more than they could without it. Thus, alternative voices are possibly more crucial.

Another limitation of this study was the method of data collection being limited to English in interviews. More students may have participated in interviews, and participants may have offered more detailed answers if they were able to use their L1.

Conclusion and implications
Differentiated learning is a rewarding and worthwhile approach, but implementing and researching it are time-consuming endeavors. Offering variation and choices in group activities and assignments can increase participation, facilitate more comfortable learning environments, and develop more interest in assignments. For participants in this study, the differentiated approach helped them take more responsibility for their learning.

Despite the benefits of the approach, some aspects of differentiated learning should be researched further. Large classes like those in this study can be challenging to manage and offer the timely feedback necessary for language development. With such demand required

from a teacher, more research needs to be done on learning outcomes to understand its effectiveness in higher education better. More research should also employ classroom observations (online or in-class) to understand student engagement and motivation better. The author encourages teachers to learn more about this approach as diverse students are already present in classrooms and will continue to increase in the future.

BIO DATA

Jared J. Peo has been teaching EFL/ESL at the university level for over 7 years. His time at NUFS has helped him focus his research and personal development on intercultural competence, motivation, autonomous learning, extensive reading, and study abroad.

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Appendix

A Differentiated Approach to Online Research: Interview Protocol

1. What changes have you noticed this semester?

2. How do you feel about the changes?

3. How do you feel when a teacher gives you options for homework, participation, etc.?

4. One major change you had this semester was the different breakout rooms: there were 3 styles. How did you feel about this change?

    a. Which room did you usually join? Why?

    b. Did you ever join another room style? Why/Why not?

    c. Did you ever feel any pressure to join a specific group? Explain.

    d. How did you feel about your group members' participation and English use?

5. Another major change was the options on the homework. How did you feel about this change?

6. How often did you complete all parts of the homework? Explain.

7. Do you feel these changes were useful for you? Explain.

8. Did you enjoy the changes to the class? Explain.

9. Was there anything you didn't like about these changes?

10. What did you learn from this new style (having options)?

11. What could be done differently?

12. What advice would you give students who have a class like this?

13. Is there anything you would like to say that I did not ask you about?

Autonomous Learning: A Case Study of Four University EFL Learners and Their Self-Study Skills alongside English Language Academic Courses

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Abstract

In this case study students were to balance courses with self-study when attempting to improve their skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing in English. However, with the emergence of the novel coronavirus and subsequent restrictions related to on-campus learning, students have had to study English online and have been unable to access their tutors for one-to-one council in person. As teachers and students alike adapt to online classes it is important to still look at students' self-study. Students' opinions from reflections, questionnaires and interviews are offered with information that shows a self-study planner has helped students continue with their self-study. This is a preliminary study that was conducted over two semesters. The results show that asking students to reflect after they have studied has an impact on their planning process for future self-study.

Learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec,1981). More recently autonomy refers to the learner's broad approach to the learning process, rather than to a particular mode of teaching or learning (Benson, 2011). If students enter a mandatory course or program, then they are deprived the freedom of choice essential to the development of autonomy (Riley, 1986). However, autonomy does not directly mean independent study where a student isolates themself (Benson. 2011). Kohenen (1992) explains that autonomy can include independent study, but also can be when a student is responsible for their own conduct in the social context. Blidi (2017) and Lai (2017) recognize that students fostering autonomy can begin with educators or teachers. Therefore, autonomy can be utilized when a learner uses a particular mode of learning, social or independent study and could utilize freedom of choice in language development; or supported learning such as teacher-suggested handouts or materials. If a student uses a handout shown to them by a teacher autonomous learning can still develop. Kershaw et al. (2010) explain that students may feel overwhelmed by choices and may not have a clear idea of themselves of what they want or need. Benson (2001) adds that promoting autonomy is not leaving students on their own but that they are actively encouraged or assisted. Kershaw et al. (2010), referring to a self-access center, explain that materials can be extremely motivating resources and give additional support to learners. Perhaps materials given to a student with instructions is not autonomous learning but can encourage students to plan and reflect in their self-study. This ongoing study examines how a self-study planning and reflection sheet supported four first-year students pursuing their private language goals as they dealt with an online mandatory English course. This is research that will continue beyond the current study however this paper looks at the first two semesters in which the self-study planner is trialed and used. The following section includes context on the participants, background into the self-study planner and data collection.

Participants

The participants of this study were four first-year university students enrolled in a mandatory integrated skills course called 'Core English' (CE). I chose these learners from among my CE students as they consistently attended a voluntary English club online over the year. Having a

good rapport with the students helped with the interviews, questionnaires, reflections and general participation as explained below in the self-study planner section. Each student's self-study planner usage is described in the profiles below.

Kana

1st year Female Core English Student
Information received from the study planners:
Used the study planner 22 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the planning part (top half) 22 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the reflection part (bottom half) 20 (times) weeks out of 24
Successful Planning (planning that was accomplished or more) 16 times out of 24

Miki

1st year Female Core English Student
Information received from the study planners:
Used the study planner 17 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the planning part (top half) 17 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the reflection part (bottom half) 0 (times) weeks out of 24
Successful Planning (planning that was accomplished or more) 5 times out of 24

Sara

1st year Female Core English Student
Information received from the study planners:
Used the study planner 24 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the planning part (top half) 24 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the reflection part (bottom half) 24 (times) weeks out of 24
Successful Planning (planning that was accomplished or more) 24 times out of 24

Keisuke

1st year male Core English Student
Information received from the study planners:
Used the study planner 11 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the planning part (top half) 11 (times) weeks out of 24
Filled out the reflection part (bottom half) 11 (times) weeks out of 24
Successful Planning (planning that was accomplished or more) 7 times out of 24

Data Collection and Procedures

In English Club, the students and I regularly talked about the pandemic and its effect on their personal and academic lives. It became apparent that the students were unhappy (see questionnaire and interview highlights in results below) about the amount of homework they were receiving and felt that it was due to the changed circumstances of their English courses from the classroom to online. They were particularly concerned with being unable to continue with their self-study, achieving personal goals and general English language acquisition and development. I introduced the students to a textbook by Ellis and Sinclair (1990) titled 'Learning to Learn English'. The book is designed to help teachers train learners of English as foreign or second language from lower-intermediate level upwards (Ellis & Sinclair, 1990). This book outlines two goals for learners: 1) to become effective language

learners, and 2) to take on more responsibility for their own learning. Although dated I believe this textbook still holds relevant self-study ideas and teaching suggestions relevant to present day. Furthermore, the book has all the components that help students to make a self-study planner. After all the students were shown the textbook, and through collaboration online during an English club in May 2020, we made the self-study planner included here as Appendix A.

The top of the handout contains a planner so students can choose and plan how to achieve their desired goals. In English club, they shared their study planning habits and often talked about different study methods to achieve their respective goals. The handout is a simple planner splitting the days into three parts—morning, noon and evening—designed so as not to put more pressure on the students. For example, studying at a specific time might cause a student to feel hindered rather than motivated (Rovai & Wighting, 2005). Once the planned studying had occurred or not as the case may be students were asked to fill out the second half of the handout which is a reflection. As with all plans, some things do not occur as intended, so students would specifically describe how they studied and made note of when the studying took place. This would encourage students to accurately see what they did and to show them whether their plans were realistic or not. Filling this out weekly would hopefully further encourage students to more realistically adjust their plans and goals. The students, lastly, also directly stated how they were feeling. After a few weeks, they were able to check and make educated judgements as to why plans did or did not work. Thus, the next time they make a goal autonomously, it may have a better chance of success . The planner was designed to be simple so I could instruct or remind students to use it if they stopped and they could start again without feeling burdened or overworked. They received one example (already filled in) when I introduced the planner to the students and in English club they were offered explanations anytime they had any questions.

The self-study planner was utilized by the four participants from June 2020- November 2020. In this six-month period I received the planners by email every week after completion. Some planners were submitted late, and some weeks students did not write a plan. As this is an ongoing study, I would suggest that all of my classes use these planners in the future and to cover different goals. The longer the study-planner is used for the more data would be collected and a student's language learning journey could be traced. However as stated above this paper will cover early findings of students' usage with the self-study planner.

In addition to the Self-Study Planner, I also collected data from two interviews with each participant and questionnaires. The students were individually interviewed twice, once at the beginning of June and once after November. The June interview took place three weeks after the study-planner was distributed. All interviews were recorded online with the participants' permission and were all conducted in twenty minutes each on average. In the questionnaires all students were asked the same initial questions, but received different follow-up questions intended to allow them to elaborate further. Questionnaires were made and filled out in Google Forms. Students received four questionnaires each, once in June, July, September and October. Regarding data below, only relevant highlights are presented in this paper below with reference to the students' usage of the study-planners.

Research Questions

1)While students conduct their university studies (online or in adapted programs) what impact does the self-study planner have on students' private study?
2)What are the effects of reflection on future planning?

Students' Narratives

Below are student narratives which show highlights from interviews, questionnaires and reflections. They show insight into the students' feelings and thoughts while using the self-study planner. Although students consented to data collection, to maintain their privacy I have replaced all names with pseudonyms.

Kana

Study Planner Highlights:

> *I have (a) part time job most nights and so when I get home I feel so sleepy and I am unable to study.*
> *I think my vocabulary study is too little. I need to study vocabulary in the morning and the evening and not just one time.*
> *I am not motivated on the weekends. I never do my plan on the weekends.*

Kana using the self-study planner is thinking about her part-time jobs or other commitments that take time or effort. Furthermore, I am happy to see that the students feel certain study, such as vocabulary, is more effective at certain times of day. I hope Kana continues to reflect on what kinds of study she feels would be more effective at particular times of the day. This could enable her to successfully achieve her goals with more informed planning.

Questionnaire Highlights:

> *'It made me feel guilty when I didn't study.'*
> *'I feel I have studied more because I write a plan on Sunday that I wouldn't do (have done) if I hadn't used the sheet (study planner).'*

Perhaps Kana would not feel guilty or reflect without the study planner.

Interview Highlights from December:

> **'I had not considered planning my own study before only school study.'**
> *'One time after studying I used English in my part time job, like, naturally, and my boss praised me. After that I planned a lot to study the next week on my sheet (study planner) because I felt good…I felt motivated.'*

Kana shows that motivation is related to how she plans. Having received praise Kana noticed how motivated she felt the next week. Furthermore, the students show that they prioritize planning school study over personal study.

> *Yes. There were weeks I did more because I wanted to write reflections.*

It is interesting to me that the students wanted to do more to have more to write about when reflecting. I believe if Kana were to continue with the self-study planner for another semester at least she may learn more about reflecting. It is positive though that through using written reflections Kana studied more.

Miki

Study Planner Highlights:

Miki never reflected on the study planner. She reflected in the interviews and there is an excerpt below explaining her feelings on why she did not write a reflection. Miki did not understand how reflections could be useful. In future research I will spend more time with

participants on the positives and various outcomes that could occur through reflection.

Interview Highlights from December:
> *I didn't know what to write to be honest. I wasn't really happy studying online so my motivation was always...kind of...hesitant? Yes. Like low.*

In early English clubs I showed different examples of reflections. In hindsight, this was insufficient and students needed more from me to show how reflections are more than just a writing exercise but used to guide future planning. This is something I would like to address in the 2021-2022 academic year.

> *I want to keep using the study planner for vocabulary but I want to learn how to reflect. It made me study more but I think I can do much more...much. I want to use different study planner(s) for speaking, listening, reading...writing.*

I am encouraged by Miki's desire to change or use the study-planner more. If the students adapt the study-planner for their own needs, I believe it can only increase their awareness of their own studying. I will encourage Miki to keep using the study-planner into a second year and to try various goals. Hopefully she will learn more about her studying effectiveness and thus improve future planning.

Sara

Study Planner Highlights:
> *I like this because before I planned my studying on my phone but this (study planner) feels moreop real or more serious.*

> *My listening is getting better but I don't know why. I am listening to podcasts more (time than she had planned) than my planning. I like English (British) comedians.*
> *I want to use this planner for homework too. And make homework red and self-study blue (Sara is referring to color coding her planning time-table).*

These reflections could lead to Sara changing her future planning. Sara explained she will listen to more British comedians or podcasts after reflecting. Furthermore, she desired to improve her planning time-table.

Questionnaire Highlights
> *Definitely. Before (before the pandemic) I wanted to go to abroad this summer but I can't. So I will study more...I will speak more. I want to use the planner to speak to my friends and practice speaking...I will practice English conversation.*

Sara did note that she wanted to use the study-planner for more speaking, but she did not. Perhaps further discussion for the study-planners' possible different uses is needed.

Interview Highlights from December:
> *I like the study planner but I want to do debate more in English Club. I don't think the study planner helps me with debate or some other speaking skills. I think it helps with time but I don't know how to write about speaking skills. Please teach me!*

This was the most direct comment I received with regards to speaking and the study-planner. Clearly, the students have the desire to incorporate speaking skills in their personal language

development. Sara explained that she did not know how to write about speaking skills so in future, I need to provide some expressions or more examples of reflections so students have the tools to precisely express their feelings. They were writing reflections every week so without a variety of expression it could feel repetitive which may be damaging to their motivation to continue with self-study planners.

Keisuke

Study Planner Highlights:
> *I am bored of reflections. Thank you Richard for helping me but I don't know what to write except good or bad.*

This student does not see the use or benefit of reflections. As I have stated before, I believe this is an area I can address in English Club.

> *I like that I can that I write something and I know you (myself) will read it. It makes me think more about my work and studying.*

Some students were not independent enough and still needed some guidance from their teacher involved in their self-study programs. Perhaps knowing a teacher will read their thoughts encourages them to be more considerate in their writing. However, I would like them to feel that the self-study planner is their own. This latter comment does contradict the previous comment, so Keisuke perhaps had mixed feelings on reflections in this study.

Interview Highlights from December:
> *I think this (study planner) helped me talk in English club. I always could check and speak about something I studied.*

If the study-planner helps with English club or other aspects of the students' language learning world then I feel it is a benefit more than a chore or hindrance. Also checking previous planners does have benefits for students such as Keisuke to have records of what they have studied. Keisuke has explained above that the planner gives him content to talk about in conversations at English club. As this study is ongoing, there may be more benefits that are unforeseen in the planning process. More data and more research are needed.

Summary

The students' study-planner usage feels more positive than negative. More research is needed to determine an answer to the first research question, however the students have made it clear they are thinking about planning more. I intend to keep using and analyzing study-planners with students to see the effects on their planning and reflections. Reflection perhaps needs more guidance or support as one student never reflected and another seemed discouraged at reflecting weekly. I believe that planning then reflecting consistently has impacted the students' future planning to be more obtainable and realistic. There are also comments made by the students that suggest they are thinking about the time they have allocated to study and what they are studying. Additionally, students have expressed opinions on their study-life balance and questioned their motivation for studying while keeping part-time jobs and other commitments.

Conclusion

The self-study planner and its usage have contributed to students thoughtfully considering the way, how and amount of time spent studying. The thought and self-analysis that occurred particularly in the interviews, questionnaires, and reflections is very promising. Furthermore, this research will continue in the 2021-2022 semesters. I would like to revise the study planner with English Club members (new and existing) and investigate the relationship between planning and reflecting self-study. This study will also be extended to participants who do not attend English club, but in regular university classes as more data is needed to determine how effective the self-study planner can be.

BIO DATA

Richard Hill holds an MA in TESOL and has experience in English language teaching ranging from kindergartens, junior high and high schools, colleges and universities. He currently teaches integrated courses at NUFS having previously been a Learning Advisor at Meijo University.

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Appendix

Name: Date :

What I would like to focus on this week :

What will I use to achieve this:

When I can do it:

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M
Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon
P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M

                                Date:

What did I study:

How I did it:
When I studied:

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M	A.M
Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon	Noon
P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M	P.M

How did you feel about this week of studying?

Japanese University Learners' Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

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Abstract
This paper explores foreign language writing anxiety among Japanese university students enrolled in a compulsory English academic writing course which was taught online for an indefinite period of time due to the COVID-19 virus. All students were English majors and were taking either a second or third-year writing course taught by the author. The courses were taught online using Zoom and Google Classroom and the study addresses language learners' anxiety in both online and offline writing since students completed some writing tasks online during class and other tasks offline as homework. This study began with an initial reflection given to students as a preliminary task prior to the beginning of the spring semester. Findings showed that students had feelings of anxiety in various aspects of their writing and this provided the motivation for the present study. The paper focuses on students' anxiety in second language writing and shows that they held strong views about their past experiences of writing and their expectations of the upcoming course.

Introduction
This research is part of a larger study exploring students' views about second language writing. It was conducted at the beginning of the 2020 academic year as the university prepared to go online due to the COVID-19 virus. This study began with a reflection given to students which was part of the preliminary activities they were required to complete prior to beginning the semester online. The purpose of this reflection was to explore students' experiences about writing academic English and to gain an understanding of the concerns students may have prior to moving to an online mode of teaching. Findings from the reflection showed that students had experienced writing anxiety in their academic writing courses. Although students were not asked directly about anxiety in writing, it had emerged as a common theme throughout the preliminary reflection in both second- and third-year classes. The present study, therefore, aims to investigate anxiety among these writing students as they prepared for a semester online and after they had gained some experience in this new mode of learning. In the reflection, there were many references to anxiety when writing in English. Words such as "anxious", "fear", "worried" and "stress" appeared frequently in their reflections. To gain a deeper insight into anxiety among students, a second reflection was given to students on completion of their first essay.

Both the second- and third-year writing courses taught by the author followed a process writing approach involving recursive and overlapping stages; students were expected to complete various prewriting activities such as freewriting, mind-mapping, brainstorming, and outlining, before moving on to drafting, peer-reviewing, revising, editing, and proofreading their writing.

Literature Review
Anxiety, among other affective variables, can have a great influence on learners' experiences in language classrooms. Research into language anxiety began a few decades ago with many of the studies focusing on anxiety in speaking in foreign language classrooms or on language learning in general and therefore did not target other language skills such as writing (Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). In the following years, there has been a considerable amount of research conducted in the field of anxiety in second and foreign language

classrooms. Research into anxiety in second language writing tends to focus on the negative impact that writing anxiety causes students such as the detrimental effect it can have on learners' performance and experience in writing classes including reduced levels of self-confidence (Hassan, 2001; Liu & Ni, 2015) and a reluctance to spend time on planning their writing assignments which is an important part of the process approach to writing. Many studies have also investigated the sources of writing anxiety (Cheng, 2004; Choi, 2013). Studies have shown that there are various sources of writing anxiety such as organizing and developing ideas during the writing process (Jawas, 2019), a lack of writing competence, or a perceived lack of writing competence, including a lack of grammatical knowledge and academic vocabulary (Yu, 2020), a fear of negative feedback from peers or their teacher (Abdel-Latif, 2015; Hislop & Stracke, 2017; Lu & Liu, 2011) and past experiences of receiving negative feedback.

The Study
Context
Participants in this study were all English majors enrolled in either a second or third-year compulsory academic writing course at a Japanese university. There were two second-year writing classes and two third-year writing classes. There were 20 students per class in the second-year writing course and 18 students per class in the third-year writing course and all four classes were taught by the author. In the second-year writing class, students wrote two argument essays per semester. In the third-year writing class, students were required to write a thesis on a topic of their choice with approval from their teacher. The topic needed to be one that had had sufficient research, so that students were able to conduct a relevant literature review and one in which students could conduct their own original research in the form of a survey or interview. Classes were 90 minutes long and were held once a week on Zoom. Google Classroom was used by the teacher to post materials and to communicate important information to students who also uploaded their outlines and essay drafts to the site. A writing class in both courses would usually begin with 10 minutes freewriting, group discussion of the freewriting topic in breakout rooms, and introduction of the lesson focus by the teacher. The second half of the class would typically be in the form of a workshop with students working on their outlines or drafts with help and feedback from the teacher. Students were also required to share ideas about the topic they were researching and to discuss their main arguments.

Data Instruments
At the beginning of the spring semester, students were given a preliminary reflection to complete which they uploaded to Google Classroom (Appendix A). The reflection included general questions about students' perceptions of writing and their expectations for the upcoming semester. When reading students' responses to the reflection, the teacher noticed that students often expressed strong feelings of anxiety. She decided to give students a second reflection (Appendix B) around the middle of the semester which focused on students' concerns about writing in English and their feelings about online writing classes. Students completed the second reflection when they had completed the final version of their first piece of writing. Data were analyzed inductively. For the purpose of this paper, only those themes which are related to anxiety in second language writing are included. When presenting the findings, all quotes are written using the students' own words and have not been corrected. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

Findings and Discussion
The data analysis from the reflections revealed six main sources of students' anxiety: lack of

writing ability, comparison with peers, feedback, fear of making mistakes, fear of plagiarism, and overcoming challenges.

Lack of writing ability

The main source of students' anxiety was their perceived lack of proficiency in various aspects of their ability in their writing skills. Specifically, students were anxious about their lack of knowledge in the following areas: vocabulary, grammar, organization, APA, and gathering sources:

> *I often made the vocabulary and grammatical mistakes and use the wrong way to write essay because I do not know much about the correct grammar, paragraph structure and essay structure. My sentences were short, lack of information or boring, so I worry that the reader could not have fun through reading my essay. [Sae]*

Students expressed their concerns that the reader would not enjoy reading their essay due to a lack of academic writing ability. Students were worried not only about the teacher reading their work, but also about their classmates reading and responding to their writing during the peer review. Students also wrote about their frustration at not being able to express themselves when writing in academic English: "I became anxious because it is difficult for me to write in academic English. For example, I always feel stress when I can't write what I want to convey things" [Noriko].

Students also wrote about how much longer it took for them to write in academic English with some students writing that it takes an "extremely long time." They also wrote about how different it is to everyday English which is the variety of English they are most accustomed to. However, sometimes anxiety was not due to their lack of ability in academic English, but to the difficulty in finding sources of information: "I am worried about references. We cannot go to the library to find references for writing because of coronavirus, and I am afraid I might be not able to find enough information" [Shun]. In addition to finding online sources, students in the writing program were strongly encouraged to visit the library to find books and journals on their topics, however, due to the pandemic, this was no longer possible. It was a common concern among students that they would not be able to find enough information on their topics on the internet. Some students explicitly said that there was a lack of English sources on the internet, although clearly this was not the case.

Comparison with peers

The second main source of students' anxiety was the tendency for them to compare their ability and level of proficiency with their peers. Students were very much aware of their own ability and wrote about how they compared unfavorably with their classmates. Comments like these frequently appeared in the reflections: "My friends are better than me at grammar" and "Especially, I am lack of vocabulary. My classmates know a lot". In addition to a perceived lack of grammar and vocabulary, some students referred to their lack of imagination and how this made writing essays difficult: "I have no imagination like my friends" [Yuri]. Yuri explained how she found writing essays difficult due to her lack of imagination and thought her writing was "boring". Students were also worried about not being able to write enough words in their freewriting or to reach the minimum number of words in their essay drafts. "My classmates write enough but I cannot. I realize that I am inferior to everyone" [Kensuke]. It is clear that students were continually comparing their ability and progress with their classmates. Surprisingly, this was a belief shared among both higher and lower level students.

Feedback

The third source of anxiety was regarding the feedback students received from both their teacher and their peers. In terms of teacher feedback, their concerns were that they would not be able to grasp the meaning of their feedback: "I'm anxious when I don't understand the teachers feedback" [Kento]. Students trusted the feedback from their teacher, although they worried that it would be too difficult for them to understand. However, they often viewed their peers' feedback as unreliable and comments like the following were common among students: "I worry my classmates' feedback is not reliable" [Nao]. Rather than regarding their classmates' feedback as useful and helpful, there was instead a tendency for students to mistrust peer feedback.

Fear of making mistakes

The fourth source of anxiety was the fear of making mistakes. Students wrote about how they worried about making mistakes in grammar, using incorrect words and making mistakes with APA in-text citations and referencing. Some students also had unrealistic expectations of themselves: "I think it is too difficult because I do not have perfect English writing skills. So I feel stress that I will make many mistakes" [Yuriko]. Students often wrote that they lacked the ability to write in academic English and some students wrote that their main goal was to develop perfect English academic writing skills.

Fear of plagiarism

The fifth source of students' anxiety in writing was their fear of plagiarism. Students were very concerned about using APA correctly: "In essay class we should use APA style, but I'm not used to writing in APA style. I use casual phrase when I speak English class and talk with friends, so APA is so difficult for me to use. I worry I will fail the essay" [Daiki]. Students wrote how difficult APA was for them since it is only ever used in academic writing and therefore was very unfamiliar for them, however, they did understand the importance of using APA in their writing. This can be seen in students' concern regarding accidental plagiarism and how worried they were that they may accidentally forget to use quotation marks when copying a sentence from a text. Some also worried that they may copy their friends' ideas: "I feel stress that I may forget to quote or copy my friends' ideas" [Yumi]. Students were very aware of the issue of plagiarism, but felt that they lacked the skills to avoid it.

Overcoming challenges

Although students expressed their anxiety about writing in academic English, the study also found that students were able to overcome some of these challenges. In some cases, students were motivated to spend more time revising their work. "I have less spelling mistakes. When I finish writing, I spend a lot of time reviewing my essay. I always review it, so I do not make carless mistakes" [Noriko]. Students expressed a willingness to improve their writing skills and comments such as "I will improve my writing skills" and "I want to turn my weaknesses into strengths" were found throughout both reflections.

Interestingly, students seemed to adapt very well to the online mode of teaching and there was little anxiety among students regarding the new online mode of learning. Some students wrote about their preference for online classes since the classes seemed to have fewer students and it seemed "less scary". Although the number of students in the classes was similar to previous years, students seemed to feel that the classes were smaller and less threatening than classroom lessons.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the present study. First, data were only collected from two reflections therefore limiting the amount of data collected and were only collected at the beginning of the course and again half-way through the course. Reflections given throughout the writing process could have yielded interesting data regarding whether students felt stress when they were not being evaluated, for example, during the early planning stages of their essay draft such as when they were freewriting, brainstorming ideas, and developing their thesis statement and essay outline. Also, regular reflections throughout the writing process may have revealed at what stages students experience higher levels of anxiety. Furthermore, all reflections were written by students in English; they may have been better able to articulate their feelings had they been allowed to write in Japanese.

Conclusion

The study showed that the students held strong views regarding the factors that made them anxious and that they had experienced anxiety about writing both prior to the start of the semester and while they were writing their first draft of the essay. Students' greatest concern was regarding their writing ability and how their writing would be received by their teacher and peers. They demonstrated an awareness that academic English is different to the variety of English that they use in everyday communication, however they believed that they lacked the knowledge and ability to write academic essays effectively. Furthermore, they worried about accidentally plagiarizing their classmates work or inadvertently copying others' drafts while they were sharing their work in breakout rooms. In addition, they also felt anxious concerning the reaction of their peers to their drafts. Although they worried about their peers reading their paper, there was a tendency among students to mistrust this feedback and did not consider it to be as reliable as that of teacher feedback. Despite this lack of trust in their peers' feedback, students compared themselves unfavorably to their classmates in terms of their ability in academic writing and viewed their peers as being superior to themselves regardless of their actual ability. Students also appeared to have unrealistic expectations of themselves and their learning objectives, with some students aiming for unattainable goals such as developing perfect academic writing skills. Clearly, students did not regard making mistakes as an important part of the learning process and a common source of anxiety was a fear of making mistakes. Although students were worried about several aspects of writing in a second language, this anxiety was not always a negative influence on learners' experiences in second language learning. At times, being aware of this anxiety helped students to overcome it and provided them with the motivation to improve their writing.

BIO DATA

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Appendix A

REFLECTION 1

Give your answers to the following questions. Please give as many details as you can.

1. How do you feel about writing in Japanese?
2. How do you feel about writing in English?
3. What are your strengths when writing in English?
4. What are your weaknesses when writing in English?
5. What do you like best about writing in English?
6. What do you like the least about writing in English?
7. What are you looking forward to the most about having an online Writing course this semester?
8. What are you least looking forward to about having an online Writing course this semester?

Appendix B

REFLECTION 2

1. What are your main concerns about writing in English?
2. Would you prefer to have a writing class online or in the classroom?
3. Any other comments?

Incorporating Critical Thinking in Language Classrooms

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Abstract
Whether or not to teach critical thinking skills in language classrooms has long been discussed among language teachers. This paper first reviews different viewpoints in the current literature on including critical thinking in language classrooms. Next, the author will share some simple activity ideas that incorporate critical thinking into content-based integrated English skill courses through questions asked after reading and giving presentations, different types of debates, and discussion questions that require evaluative and analytic skills. After a semester of instruction, a short questionnaire identifies Japanese students' struggles in asking questions and thinking deeper when they read and listen. Survey also indicates their increased motivation and curiosity towards topics covered in the curriculum, all of which facilitate English production. Future studies should focus more specifically on asking questions and its psychological effects on language learners, as well as implications on building a safe community when practicing critical thinking skills.

Incorporating Critical Thinking in Language Classrooms
In Japan, the mandatory English education system that requires students to study English in order to pass the entrance examinations demotivated students in English learning, regardless of levels (Kikuchi, 2013). Studying English is then considered passive, receptive, and irrelevant in Japan. Thus, it is relevant to ask how curricula can be presented differently between high school and university. The author proposes that educators train students to actively process information and contemplate what they receive in class. In this way, educators can avoid memorization and grammar-translation—identified as one of the five demotivating factors among Japanese university students (Kikuchi, 2009, as cited in Kikuchi, 2013).

Introducing critical thinking seems to provide a new perspective on language teaching. Shirkhani and Fahim (2011) suggested that the promotion of critical thinking encouraged learners to take charge of their thinking, which helped them "monitor and evaluate their own ways of learning more successfully" (p. 112). They continued to state that learning how to think critically made language learning more meaningful to students (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011).

This paper aims to promote student motivation by posing two questions regarding the researcher's designed activities in her integrated skill English classes:

RQ1: To what extend does critical thinking help learners in language learning?
RQ2: Does critical thinking help language learners to be more confident and motivated in their overall communication?

In this paper, the author will briefly review some benefits and concerns about teaching critical thinking, introduce a few activities conducted in her integrated-skill English classes, and students' feedback on the activities collected in July 2020.

Literature Review

The Role of Critical Thinking in Language Classrooms

Atkinson (1997) called for educators' attention to be cautious in teaching language learners critical thinking skills. Atkinson described critical thinking as a social practice imprinted in English-speaking cultures, believing individualism and self-expression were culturally unique to Western cultures. Educators might be imposing values that did not align with learners' cultural values by teaching critical thinking skills. Atkinson believed that Asian culture emphasized contextualization, consent, and relationships with the world, which impeded analytical skills by Western norms. Of course, Atkinson did not claim that language learners did not think; rather, learners had their own ways of thinking from their respective cultural backgrounds, and it, in most cases, did not align with Western logic and arguments (Atkinson, 1997, 2003; Cutrone, 2010; Park, 2013, as cited in DeWaelsche, 2015). Thus, pressuring language learners to decontextualize and align with the Westerners' norms could draw potential problems (Atkinson, 1997, 2003; Cutrone, 2010).

Despite the consideration of learners' cultural differences, other educators criticized the stereotypes implied in the previous point of view, which indicates the tendency to dichotomize the world into two cultures, the West and the East (Kubota, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The categorization of viewing Western as *critical*, *analytical*, *decontextualized,* and Eastern as *vague*, *ambiguous*, *relational* demonstrates how culture was understood as "fixed, objective, homogeneous, ahistorical, and apolitical […] [that did] not recognize the organic and plural nature of culture influenced by political and ideological forces and intricate power relations within the culture and between cultures at a certain time" (p. 17, Kubota, 1999). The labels also overlooked the complexity of postcolonial and poststructuralist views of cultures.

Further, the argument that language educators should not impose different ways of thinking on language learners lacked poststructuralist and postcolonial concerns (Kubota, 1999, 2004). Language educators should include critical pedagogies to help learners find their voices in the world rather than being consumed by the ideas dictated by the government or the world (Kubota, 1999; Crookes, 2012; Sultan et al., 2017).

Critical Thinking in the Curriculum

One of Atkinson's concerns in his 1997 article was that there had never been a clear definition of critical thinking. Different scholars had proposed various definitions without a conclusion. He then drew from Johnson (1992, as cited in Atkinson, 1997) that critical thinking was interchangeable between terms like "metacognition, higher order thinking skills, problem solving, rationality, and reasoning" (p.74). However, despite various versions of different definitions throughout history, Davidson (1998) argued that there was a significant area of overlapping with little difference, even when viewed as "paraphrases of the same concept" (p.120). Yet, Davidson encouraged educators to teach Japanese learners critical thinking skills to succeed in the academic world (also see Bagheri, 2015).

From the historical trend of critical thinking, Lai (2011) explained how it has turned from a philosophical perspective (e.g., *quality of what* people think) to cognitive behaviorists (e.g., *how* people think). Cognitive behaviorists studied what behaviors and skills people perform. Elder and Paul (1994) stated that "critical thinking is best understood as the ability of thinkers

to take charge of their own thinking" (p. 34) rather than social norms. Bagheri (2015) suggested that educators should teach critical thinking as a "higher use of language learning strategies. Thereupon, the more language learning strategies used on learning the language, the better language learning will result" (p. 975).

Bloom's taxonomy was the most well-known in critical thinking in the education field (Lai, 2011). Bloom's taxonomy on critical thinking portrays a hierarchical model wherein remembering and understanding are essential skills, followed by applying and analyzing in the middle and evaluating and creating the top of the pyramid (Baker & Westbrook, 2018). This taxonomy is adopted in this paper due to the straightforwardness and simplicity of the six skills.

Due to course textbook selection, the six skills were only introduced to students verbally with some examples. Throughout the semester, the words *analyze, apply, evaluate,* and *create* are repeatedly mentioned in class. R*emember* and *understand* seem to be skills that students have achieved by answering comprehension questions. Simultaneously, the author also believed that each individual has different behaviors in their critical thinking journey. Emphasizing these six skills did not mean eliminating other behaviors. For example, Moore (2013) interviewed seventeen tenured staff from various academic fields in an Australian university to elicit their understanding and practicality of critical thinking in their teaching. The seven definitions and behaviors were critical thinking as *judgment-making*, *skeptical and provisional view of knowledge*, *simple originality*, *careful and sensitive reading of the text*, *rationality*, the adoption *of an ethical and activist stance*, and *self-reflexivity.* In class, for example, the author encouraged learners to be reflective, even though it was not included in the six skills of Blooms.

Classroom Activities

The author has been experimenting with different routine activities in her integrated-skill content-based English classes. Activities were done in physical classrooms in 2019, while in 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, courses had been moved online, and activities were redesigned to fit the online setting. The author will introduce the revised activities that she incorporated online from April to December 2020.

Reading

While reading textbook articles, students were instructed by the researcher to annotate the text, including underlining, circling, commenting, and asking questions. Underlining and circling help students focus on text and gather essential information. Commenting, for example, "True," "Interesting," and "This is new to me" helps readers identify what kind of information it is. Asking questions allows students to stay curious about the topic and think actively about what is written, rather than reading receptively. Asking questions during reading helps students to leave rote memorization and memory recall during the reading process, and it transforms receptive tasks into more student-guided thinking and cultivates metacognitive reading strategies (Singer, 1978; Magogwe, 2013; Joseph et al., 2016).

In-Class Handout

As a unit assignment, students completed the following tasks (see Appendix A for an example from one unit):
1. New Findings: students wrote down newly learned information from the reading.
2. Question Asking: students wrote down any questions they raise while reading.
3. Research: students chose one of their questions and researched for answers online.

4. Reflection: teacher provided a few questions that required critical thinking for the students to answer in a short paragraph.

Question Sharing and Discussion
The author designated time for students to share their unique and self-generated questions (Task 2 of the in-class handout) in pairs or groups in class, identified as social reading strategies (Magogwe, 2013). This was to promote collective learning where students explored the same topics from different perspectives.

Speaking
The integrated skills courses included a considerable amount of speaking and listening activities in class (while reading and writing outside the classroom). The nature of speaking, regardless of conversation or presentation, required immediate responses in communication. Students were encouraged to ask questions promptly to demonstrate their curiosity toward the class content and classmates' opinions.

In-Class Discussions
In-class discussion questions were carefully designed to not only share ideas but also to urge students to exercise their prior knowledge, analyze given information or current events, evaluate specific plans, apply class material into their daily lives, or create plans to solve problems. It was critical that students learned how to confidently express their disagreement in these discussions and provide supporting reasons. Asking follow-up questions was then an essential skill in conversations of this kind.

Q & A Discussions after Presentations
At the end of every presentation in class, the audience was obliged to ask questions immediately, while the presenters must take questions and reply immediately. It requires a high level of concentration when listening to their classmates' presentations. The author also encouraged the audience to take notes and think of questions to ask while listening, rather than thinking about questions after the presentation ended.

Casual Debates
This debate activity is done regularly in class. The students are paired up for a debate topic, for example, "the government should take care of the civilians' health" on a unit about fitness and health. They would play 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' to decide who agrees on the statement and who does not. It is to help students to improvise reason and questions. It also requires active listening to be able to come up with questions or arguments against the partner.

Group Debates (Roleplay)
This collaborative group activity was only conducted for the second-year course for almost all units (see Appendix B for debate topics and details). With each unit topic, a prompt was given to students a week before the debate day, as well as a different role assignment (see Table 1 as example). According to the assigned roles and given situation and positions, students would research for the information they needed to participate in the debate. A week later, on the debate day, students were placed into groups of the same roles for a 5-minute *uchiawase* meeting (i.e., pre-meeting in Japanese) where they exchanged their research and ideas. Later, they were placed into their debate group. The role which called the meeting would be the moderator (for example, the head politician in Table 1 was the moderator). It was ideal that different members, not solely the moderator, would question each other in groups, but it depended on the topic, group dynamics, and the moderator. The debate activity

usually took about 20 to 25 minutes.

To better explain the activity and planning, the author would use a Unit 6 scenario from the *Prism Reading 2* textbook, which included a video introducing an artificial river project in China planned to solve water shortage in Northern China. The author considered the project as a relevant, complicated, and debatable one to review issues related to animals (Unit 1), environment (Unit 2), and technology (Unit 6). After watching the video together in-class and checking comprehension, students discussed the advantages and disadvantages of this project in China. Then, the author introduced the debate scenario and assigned roles (see Table 1). A week later, on the debate day, the head politician started the meeting, took notes, and made the final decision.

Table 1
Role Assignment for Unit 6: Discovery and Invention

Group	Roles
1	You are a fisherman in China. The polluted water from the south will pollute the lake. You can't fish anymore.
2	You are an environmental activist. This project is going to damage nature and the environment. You don't want to see that.
3	You are a farmer in the North. You need the water for farming.
4	You are a resident in Beijing (in the North). You need the water from the south.
5	You are working for a construction company. You want the income, so you want the project.
6	You are the head politician. You will ask questions to ask the group, lead the conversation, take notes, and make a final decision.

Student Responses and Discussion

A questionnaire was given in July 2020 to university sophomore and junior students majoring in a foreign language other than English (n=46) after a semester of instruction (from April to July 2020). All questions given in English and Japanese. It was made clear that participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and did not affect their grades or relationship with the author. Students responded to eight statements based on a four-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), followed by three open-ended questions (see Table 2). All English and Japanese responses were accepted, and Japanese responses were translated into English by the author.

Questionnaire results show that students felt optimistic about asking questions, critical thinking, and researching even after one short semester of instruction. Based on items 1 and 6 (see Table 3), asking questions was not an easy task for most sophomore and junior students. Yet, they considered it helpful to stay curious about different topics when studying English. The survey did not show significance if researching their proposed research questions was difficult; nevertheless, it was optimistic that the act of researching was something they enjoyed doing.

Table 2

Survey Questions

Item	Questions
1	I think asking questions is difficult.
2	I think asking questions helps me to be curious.
3	I think asking questions helps me to think and explore deeper in different topics.
4	I think research on the questions I make is interesting.
5	I think research on the questions I make is hard.
6	When I read or listen to presentations, I can come up with questions easily.
7	I think after learning how to think critically, I was challenged to use more variety of English words.
8	I think I became more confident and prepared when I talk about these topics in English after learning how to think critically.
9	What did you learn the most from critical thinking skills?
10	How do you feel about yourself when you can think deeper about certain topics?
11	Any other thoughts?

In terms of vocabulary learning, it is significant to see learners were more aware of the increased vocabulary they have gained during the semester. In the EFL context, vocabulary acquisition can be challenging for language learners. Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) indicated that "English vocabulary knowledge and learning rates in the EFL context fall far short of what is considered to be a norm in the L1 context" (p. 229). Comparing vocabulary learning between the EFL context and the L1 context could be unrealistic, but it was important to notice the factors between the two. Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016) specified a number of factors, including insufficient input and output. Therefore, students' acts on researching on their generated questions granted them opportunities for exposures to new vocabulary, similar to the effect on extensive reading, which was considered helpful in vocabulary acquisition (Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb, 2016). On another note, researchers have proposed metacognitive reading strategies helped learners acquire vocabulary (Tseng et al., 2006; Cubukcu, 2008; Teng & Reynolds, 2019). Unfortunately, the survey did not include learner metacognitive behavior to indicate which activity or behavior was helpful in their vocabulary acquisition. On item 8, it is encouraging to observe that students felt more confident after a semester of various activities that cultivated critical thinking.

As shown by responses to the open-ended questions, students also showed more confidence and maturity about themselves when trying to think more critically. On item 9 about what students have learned through critical thinking, they expressed that they learned to examine all received information (including the textbook), not to make any judgment calls right away, and became more objective than before. It is significant that they learned to think from various perspectives and angles, to think deeply, and to stay interested, curious, and knowledgeable.

Table 3
Survey Results

Item	Count				Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4		
Asking questions						
1 Asking questions was difficult.	2	13	25	6	2.76	0.73
6 Asking questions after presentation was easy.	4	23	15	4	2.41	0.77
Helpful in thinking and researching						
2 Helped curiosity	0	1	7	38	3.80	0.45
3 Helped think in-depth	0	0	10	36	3.78	0.42
4 Researching self-generated questions was interesting	2	0	18	26	3.48	0.72
5 Researching self-generated questions was hard	2	17	14	13	2.83	0.90
Self-improvement						
7 Vocabulary acquisition	0	8	31	7	2.98	0.57
8 Improved confidence	0	12	26	8	2.91	0.66

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree

Some students also responded that they had used English words that they had never used before. The survey responses also showed that they learned how to ask questions, how to discuss, and how to approach problems, how to listen to others more seriously and closely to understand their answers, and to have their own opinions and not to be afraid to say no and criticize. It is probably more encouraging to see one response connecting the experience of critical thinking to be more reflective and relevant:

- *"I realize that thinking deeply means being able to know what I really feel." (S10)*

In terms of students' self-image, among those who answered the question, 87% of the responses were very positive, showing that they felt more knowledgeable, confident, more interested and curious, happy, proud, concentrated, enthusiastic, cool, excited, educated, sense of achievement, fulfilled, actively working, and mature. Some responses also included that they felt their researching skills had improved. Further, the activities provided opportunities leading to the discovery of more advanced vocabulary:

- *"As I am researching, I would encounter more technical or advanced vocabulary, and it is useful for studying." (S35)*

Some students also expressed that they had never been given opportunities to think, pose questions, and research like this:

- *"It was a lot of fun researching on the areas that others may not be interested or areas I never doubted or wondered. It was the first time for me to express my own opinions, so I enjoyed the class very much. (S8, translation)*
- *"It is hard to think the topics deeply because I didn't have such opportunities so much." (S26, translation)*
- *"I have never had classes where I had to research on the lesson topics further…" (S40, translation)*

Through the activities, they learned to explore more actively on their own to connect what they learned in class and reflected on their lifestyles and behaviors. It was also due to the nature of critical thinking, where there is no "yes" and "no" in the first place; the students feel more comfortable saying "no" and express their *honne* (i.e., "real opinions") due to their growing critical thinking skills. These safe places are needed in university classrooms while promoting critical thinking:

- *"...but by acquiring critical thinking skills, I could link the lesson topics with my personal life, reflect it effectively, and improve my quality of life. I became proud of myself for being able to do that, and I was confident that I might have become a little more mature." (S40, translation)*
- *"it is important to think about one thing, and through thinking I get to see how I can improve my behavior and arikata (what I thought I should have behaved)." (S45, translation)*
- *"I want a place where I can think and give my opinion [;] I want to think deeply, I value many things I gained from it. I thought I didn't understand myself even though I was myself. [This class] is unique, but I find it fresh and fun."(S8)*

Importantly, extensive thinking can drain students' energy sometimes. Since they were continually thinking and questioning, and as mentioned before, it could be their very first time doing this explicitly and purposely, they found themselves sometimes skeptical, feeling ignorant, and tired. The more they researched, the more they wondered what was true:

- *"It's very fulfilling to ponder a particular topic and find out what you're wondering about, but at the same time, the feeling of ignorant is tiring." (S30, translation)*
- *"[It is difficult to] consider what is the answer." (S34)*
- *"Doing it required a lot of time so first parts are hard." (S3)*

Overall, students' responses were encouraging and positive. One student also shared the necessity of teaching critical thinking in the Japanese school systems:

- *"I think the movement for teaching critical thinking in Japan is great and it should be taught in all schools." (S15)*

Limitations and Implications

For future lesson improvements, the author will continue developing similar activities to help learners think critically, especially through debates and discussions, with more student choices. Also, the survey of July 2020 is comparatively short and general. It is desirable to survey students with more specific questions, particularly about how the action of asking questions benefits or harms learners in their presentations (both presenters and audience), debates, and discussions. At the same time, it is essential to examine how learners see themselves and others in learning to think critically. Another idea is to assess if learners develop more responsibility and autonomy in their learning. Finally, it is possible that when learners connect English learning to their own lives and reflect on their past actions, some may feel discomfort and need emotional support. Learners especially need a safe place to confidently express their opinions and disagreement in a language they are still uncomfortable with. It is essential to investigate what kind of support can instructors and the class community provide.

Conclusion

Regardless of the extent to which Japanese educators believe in critical thinking, Japanese students responded positively to learning critical thinking skills. It benefits learners not only to obtain practical and useful information in English but also helps them be critical and reflective in their own learning. Learning to be independent thinkers helps learners to connect what they learn in class and how they behave. Bohon et al. (2017) described learning as "[requiring] a constant back and forth of conflict resolution, [and involving] internal conflict as a learner moves between reflection and action and between feeling and thinking" (p.614, Kolb's experiential learning theory, 1984). The practice of critical thinking benefits language learning. As described in the discussion, the possible emotional experience of applying critical thinking skills in English participation also becomes part of the learners' linguistic repertoire, "the lived experience of language" (Busch, 2015, p. 341).

Of course, it can be dangerous if language educators judge how learners process their information and how they think. Teaching critical thinking to students is not to impose the educator's ways of thinking on their students; it is to help learners and educators understand what is different in their ways of thinking and why there are differences. Throughout the process, all involved parties can reflect on themselves and on their thoughts that, so far, they had taken for granted. Therefore, asking questions is an effective start to cultivate higher-level thinking, and it does avoid Japanese educators' tendency to justify or criticize students' ways of thinking. Examining learner confidence through thinking critically can be deducted as a better approach than assessing critical thinking skills.

BIO DATA

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Appendix A

This is an example of an in-class handout from one chapter from another course with the textbook Reading for Today 3: Issues.

Integrated English 4
Chapter 12 In-class Assignment

Vocabulary
Do you have any vocabulary words you want to try to use in this assignment? Here are the words from this chapter. If you have other English vocabulary or phrases you want to use, please put them down in the blanks. You can add more blanks too.

affordable	amazing	devastating	automatically	effectively	exhausted	incision
option	perform	react	reality	recover	require	skeptical
task	Traditional	Traumatic	treatment			

Reading
1. New findings?
What is something new that you learned from this article?

2. Questions that help you think
We have talked about what critical thinking is like. Please write down the questions that you have while you read. You can specify lines if it's from the reading. For example, "Have we seen any errors from surgical robots?" "Do doctors need a special license to operate a robotic surgery?"

Understanding and exploring the reading
3. Research

Please choose two questions from part 2, and research for answers. You can research Japanese sites, but please write some answers in English here. Bullet points are OK.

Your Question:
.
Source:

Your Question:
Source:

Reflection

4. There are a few questions to help you reflect on this chapter. You can choose one question and write about it. One paragraph of about 100 words is good.

    a. Robotic surgery would allow surgeons to perform operations on patients miles away. Do you think a patient would want a surgeon who is so far away? Why or why not?

    b. How can modern technology help a surgeon perform an operation that is less dangerous for the patient? What do you think?

    c. To see robotic surgery more common and available to people in Japan, what needs to be improved to see more robotic surgery in reality? For example, health insurance system, medical education, better Internet connection, and more. Please choose one area, and explain why it needs to be improved and why it is necessary.

Vocabulary

Did you use those vocabulary words? Of course, it is OK that you didn't use them. If you did, please highlight those words **in your writing**. Use CTRL+F or Commend+F to look for the words and ==highlight== them. (Choose your favorite color.) Of course, any form is OK. For example, joy becomes joyful.

If you don't know how to highlight, this is how you do it.
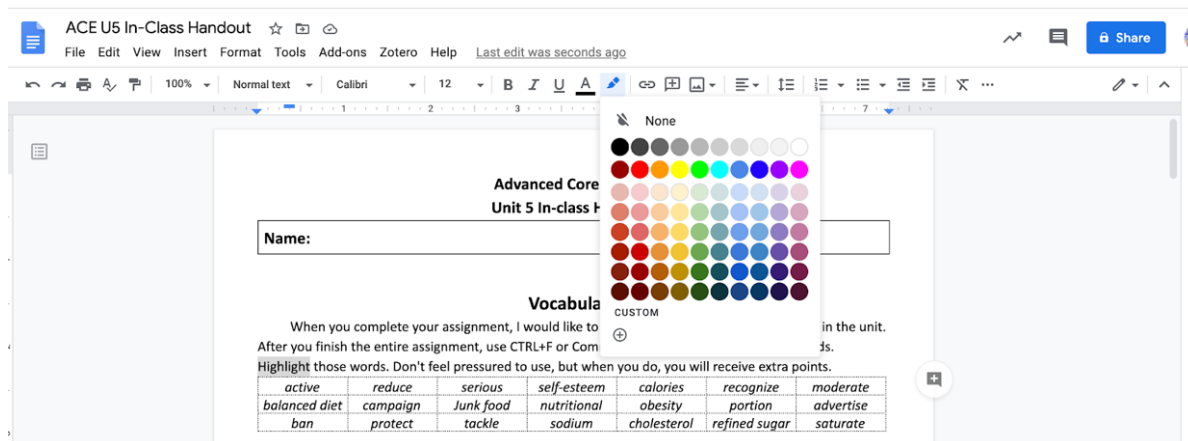
Appendix B

Group debate (role play) topics for all units.

Unit	Unit Topic	Debate Topic	Designer Acknowledgements
3	Transportation	Mayor Kawamura would like to improve Nagoya's traffic congestions and listens to different plans to make the final decision. Roles and instructions: – Work for a road construction company. You want that money. – You work for a transportation development company. You want that money. – You want to protect the environment. – You work for a building construction company. You want that money. – You are Mayor Kawamura. Prepare some questions to ask.	Niall Walsh
4	Customs and Traditions	Their teacher is getting married. The secretary will listen to different designers and friends to plan the wedding for their busy teacher. Roles and instructions: – A wedding planner from the USA. Plan the wedding according to American culture. – A wedding planner from Taiwan. Plan the	Wan Jung Amy Lin

Unit	Unit Topic	Debate Topic	Designer Acknowledgements
		wedding according to Taiwanese culture. – Wedding planner for unique themes. Prepare a wedding theme for the secretaries. – Hotel staff. Prepare reception and banquet for 100 guests; design a central piece, food, and music. – Amy's secretaries. Please prepare questions to ask planners and staff. Decide on location and style.	
5	Health and Fitness	Civilians and businesses are meeting with Japanese politicians to decide if the government should tax products that are bad for health. Roles and instructions: – You are a worried parent from Okinawa, which has the highest rate of obesity in Japan. You want the tax. – You are the CEO of Ezaki Glico; you do not want the tax. – You are a concerned office worker. You do not want the tax. – You are a farmer. You want the tax. – You are the CEO of a life insurance company. You want the tax. – You are the head politician. You will ask questions to ask the group, control the debate, take notes, and make a final decision.	Jared Peo
6	Discovery and Invention	The Chinese politician listens to civilians' opinions from the North and South, and construction company about the artificial river project and decide how to proceed.	Wan Jung Amy Lin
7	Fashion	An eco-friendly mall in Japan would like to take in two more shops but would like to avoid scandals and sweatshops. The mall owner has a meeting with representatives from different brands. Roles and instructions: Representatives from Zara, Nike, Uniqlo, H&M, and GAP. Make a sales pitch for your company & you should research possible problems in your own company and one or two other companies.	Jared Peo

The Connection between Language and Culture: How Japanese Culture Affects Learning English

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the connection between culture and language learning in an EFL context in Japan. Many researchers and teachers have been acknowledging the importance of integrating cultural knowledge into foreign and second language teaching in the classrooms because there is a strong link between the way the language is used and the cultural values which dictate this use. This study focuses on how cultural values and beliefs can sometimes be an obstacle for learning English or any other foreign language and how these affect students' use of this language. This can be often seen in university classrooms when students appear reluctant to speak or are silent. The paper will present the challenges the author encountered in teaching English regarding cultural misunderstanding and how author attempted to deal with them. The author will talk about possible strategies in order to help teachers and their students to overcome cultural barriers and to reduce cross-cultural misunderstandings in language learning.

Key words: culture, language, language education, communication

Introduction
When teaching or learning another language, it is very important to understand that you will encounter individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Because of these cultural differences, there is a possibility that people may not understand exactly what others are trying to say. Or, in the same vein, there is also a chance that people may not understand certain habits, body language cues, behaviors, or reactions that people from different cultures may have that are different from their own culture.

An understanding of the relationship between language and culture is important for language learners, users, and for all those involved in language education. In the interest of not hitting any cultural roadblocks and enabling the most efficient learning environment, it is important that both teachers and students understand each other's cultures and become aware of their own unique socio-cultural behaviors. This mutual understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds and cultural nuances ensures that neither the student nor teacher gets offended over something that was not meant to be offensive. This also makes sure that both parties can best understand what exactly the other is trying to convey, as understanding cultural nuances and minor cues are crucial in understanding the full meaning of what others are saying.

What Is Culture?
Assigning one single definition to culture is extremely difficult, especially in an increasingly international world. While on the surface, culture might seem easy to explain or understand, the definition goes much deeper than what the average person may think. Without understanding culture, it becomes difficult to understand the perspectives of others. As Geertz (2000a) notes, by Clyde Kluckhohn's account of culture (Johnson, 2013, p.99) as (1) "the total way of life of a people"; (2) "the social legacy the individual acquires from his group"; (3) "a way of thinking,

feeling, and believing"; and (4) "an abstraction from behaviour…" (pp.4-5).

Culture shapes and it is shaped by almost every aspect of an individual's life, going as deep as their personal beliefs, their world view, the assumptions that they make, and even their thought patterns. According to Condon (1973, as cited in Kuo & Lai, 2006), "culture can be defined as a way of life. No matter where people live, their behaviors and thoughts follow and are generally based on their own cultures" (p. 2). Therefore, by understanding the culture of students, teachers are able to better understand their interests, their concerns, and what motivates them in the classroom, which is necessary for being a good teacher.

Culture is also a core part of human nature; it is a part of all of us. Humans, whether people realize it or not, use culture to develop and adapt societies, to understand new and different forms of knowledge, and to form relationships with other people. These are all activities governed by the influence of culture. This makes culture a very powerful tool, for all kinds of day-to-day life activities, but also for teaching and learning language.

What Is Language and How Does Culture Relate to Language?

The relationship between a language and the culture of the speakers of a language is very closely intertwined. It can be said that language acts as a representative of a culture in a way, as the members of a culture communicate through their common language, thus imparting a piece of their culture into it. Gleason indicates that "language is not only the product of culture, but also is the symbol of culture" (Gleason, 1961, as cited in McIver & Young, 2020).

This is especially true for a nation like Japan. With thousands of years of history, the Japanese language and culture have become so intertwined and have reached a symbiosis very unique among other world languages and cultures. So, in the same way that a language can represent a culture, a culture can shape and change a language. The members of a culture think and speak in their language, so it follows naturally that as they grow and change, their thoughts and words will change with them. For example, teachers can see instances of different cultures having words for concepts or ideas that do not exist in other languages. In Japanese, there is a saying, "*shouganai*", without a direct translation to English, the saying means something like, "It cannot be helped". This saying is a good example that illustrates a socio-cultural difference between Japanese and English-Speaking cultures. "*Shouganai*" is in a sense indicative of an understanding that there are many things that exist outside of the individual that are not within our control and cannot be helped. Contrast this to many English-Speaking cultures which are strongly individualistic and do not immediately acknowledge the society around them, but themselves first. To what a Japanese person may say "*shouganai*", a Westerner may say "Why must this happen to me?". Expanding on this, it can be said that culture and language are in a way inseparable. Because of this relationship between language and culture, it is important to understand both and their relationship in order to best teach and learn a new language, especially in a culture where the two are so intertwined like Japan.

Japanese Socio-Cultural Differences and How to Address them

In order to form a positive teacher-student relationship and ensure that Japanese students stay

motivated to learn, an English teacher must understand how to empathize with Japanese students and accommodate for cultural nuances. This understanding includes being aware of the many socio-cultural differences and uniquely Japanese patterns of communication present among Japanese Students. In addition to this, an effective English teacher should also know what these socio-cultural differences mean and be able to appropriately react to them.

Being able to understand situations in which these differences are negative or positive will determine how a teacher should move forward in the classroom. There are many social and cultural discrepancies in culture and language between the East and West, stemming from everything from language to personal values. Understanding the many socio-cultural differences present in Japan that have a bearing on learning and communicating in English allows teachers to connect to students struggling to learn behind a socio-cultural barrier. To start, here are a couple of common instances of socio-cultural differences.

Silence

According to King & Harumi (2020) "Silence is an issue that touches all who teach" (p. 3). English teachers regularly encounter long silences in the classroom. There are two different reasons why a classroom may fall silent, one being negative, and another mostly positive. It is important to understand both reasons to effectively connect with your students.

Positive silence occurs when students are thinking and/or processing information from their teacher. This can be seen after a teacher asks a question or assigns group work. Students need some time to think and prepare to answer questions or participate in group work, especially considering these activities are not being done in their native language. This silence is necessary and positive and should not be cause for any concern. Tannen (1985) confirms that "Silence is seen as positive when it is taken as evidence of the existence of something positive underlying - for example, proper respect; the silence of the telephone when it represents solitude for creative work; the silence of `sweet silent thought'... "(p. 94).

On the other hand, negative silence makes people uncomfortable "hinges on whether or not participants feel something should be said, in which case silence is perceived as an omission" (Tannen, 1985, p. 96). Negative silences occur when students are disinterested in a topic, are not paying attention, or do not wish to participate. This variant of silence is unwelcoming in the classroom as it is not conducive to learning.

To get a better understanding of the nature of these silences and how to identify them, teachers need to understand the foundation upon which this socio-cultural habit is built. In this case, silence most likely stems from the Japanese cultural value of actions over words. This appreciation for silence and actions over words has its roots in Buddhism, particularly the Zen aspects of Buddhist teaching, which state that speaking in itself is superficial and that enlightenment can be reached only through silence. Because of this, it really should not come as a surprise that most Japanese people will value silence over unnecessary speaking, and actions over words.

Moving on from the cultural foundations and on to the social foundations for this behavior. Japan

is a small, ancient island nation/society. The aim is almost always intergroup harmony therefore Japan has developed into what is referred to as a "high-context culture". "High-context cultures rely on context (social or physical) to convey a large part of the message's meaning. Messages are more elliptical and indirect; don't trust words alone" (Nam, 2007, p.107). So, people became very skilled at understanding each other`s message or "reading the air" ("*kuuki yomenai*").

What defines a high-context culture is that its members operate with the understanding that the people in their country share the same cultural background and understanding as them, so a lot of communication and details are implied during conversation. This contrasts rather starkly to Western "low-context" cultures, where a shared understanding and cultural background cannot be assumed. "Low-context cultures context is not assumed; messages are more direct and completely encoded in words; put thoughts into words and let them carry the meaning" (Nam, 2007, p.107). Effective communication is simple and clear. Meyer states (2015) that "The United States is the lowest context culture in the world, followed by Canada and Australia, the Netherlands and Germany, and the United Kingdom" (p. 34). Due to the very diverse lingual, ethnic, and value systems that tend to be present in western countries, when speaking, individuals find themselves having to explain many things in great detail, where the Japanese do not.

Another reason for this communication style is the difference between collectivist and individualist cultures. Chiu, Kim & Wan (2008, as cited in Carducci, 2012) stated that "Individualistic cultures, such as North American and Western European countries, are characterized by a cultural perspective that emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual's personal characteristics, needs, and motives as the focal point of predicting and understanding the individual's actions" (p. 414). Japan and east-Asian nations tend to be more collectivist than in western countries. In Japan, this collectivism means that the Japanese people value face-saving, fulfilling the needs of others, and group orientation over themselves, contrasting more individualistic western societies. "Collectivistic cultures such as Japan, India, and China tend to be characterized by a cultural perspective that places less emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual's personal characteristics as the focal point of predicting and understanding the individual's actions" (Carducci, 2012, p.414).

How Japanese collectivism manifests in the classroom will usually display the use of silence, where students may remain silent in order to save face by either not standing out in front of their peers or avoiding being embarrassed. This silence can also be a tool to maintain group order, as some Japanese students may think that by remaining silent, unnecessary conflict or disorder is avoided. According to Harumi (2001) students,

> Tend to be silent when they are not sure whether their answers are right or if their ideas differ from those of others. It might sound strange that Japanese students are too awkward to state their opinions freely. However, this derives from the Japanese cultural norm of wa—meaning harmony—and the importance of consensus-decision making. In order to keep harmony, there are students who think that they should provide answers which match others' ideas (p. 32).

On top of this, silence can also mean that a student is formulating an opinion, gathering the

courage to speak in English, is leaving space for a senior to speak, or is attempting to disagree in a less confrontational manner. Regardless of the exact reason, it is important to be able to identify and understand the cultural reasons for this silence, know whether it is positive or negative, and be able to accommodate for and, if needs be, address it.

Ambiguity

Japanese statements are often said to be ambiguous or indirect, especially by Westerners. "Japanese is ambiguous" ('*aimai*') or that Japanese "don't say things clearly" ('*hakkiri iwanai*')" (Pizziconi, 2009, p.221). This ambiguity is fostered by the nature of the Japanese language itself and supplemented by Japanese socio-cultural values. This is derived from the Japanese tendency towards collectivism and their valuing of empathy and politeness towards others. According to Matsumoto, Kudoh & Takeuchi (1996) "Japanese people took advantage of the power of collectivism and channeled their energies into selfless work for the common good" (p. 83). In order to refrain from conflict or to avoid offending others, it is very common that Japanese people will repress their own ego and not become too partial to one side, so as to avoid isolating themselves as well. A good example of this indirectness and impartiality can be observed in the Japanese use of the word "no" ("*iie*"). Out of a reluctance to offend someone by disagreeing with an opinion or refusing a request, Japanese people will often try their best to avoid saying "no" directly. This can be done through apology or doubt, and most popularly as we have discussed, ambiguity and silence.

In addition to this, there is the politeness phenomenon, to which the previously discussed Japanese socio-cultural tendencies of silence and ambiguity are closely related. The Japanese language has many different words for addressing different types of people politely. Because of this, it can be very difficult for a Japanese person to find the right way to express politeness in English, which may result in silence or an ambiguous statement.

There are of course many other complex Japanese language-based behaviors that contrast to those of English. After understanding some of the major socio-cultural differences between Japanese and English-speaking peoples, an English teacher can form a more complete understanding of their Japanese students.

Suggestions and Tips

The English classroom will always be a place that at least two different cultures exist. To supplement the growth of this understanding and to support an efficient and effective classroom learning dynamic, here are some tips and suggestions on how to best accommodate for and work with Japanese socio-cultural differences.

The teacher's questions should not be too easy or too difficult, if they are too easy, students may see them as meaningless, resulting in a negative silence. If the questions are too difficult, students may become frustrated and unwilling to participate. Because of this, it is best if the teacher asks questions of moderate difficulty, appropriate for students` level and awards positive feedback for participation, which will encourage students to participate in classroom interactions more.

Provide students with opportunities to use and experience different types of communication by assigning pair work, group work activities, and having discussions. Pair work can serve as a comfortable way for students to work, and group work is a great way to take advantage of the group-minded nature of Japanese culture. A great way to supplement group work is by giving each member of each group their own responsibilities and making sure each student has a chance at performing each role. According to Bouchard and Nicolai (2014) "The importance of pair/group work in Communication Language Teaching has been identified by many researchers on language learning and teaching, notably by Nihalani et al. (2010),who argue that L2 interaction in the language classroom can potentially be achieved through collaborative/cooperative learning in which students work together to achieve a common goal" (p. 96).

Self-esteem and confidence are key to learning a language. Environments that induce anxiety are not conducive to learning and should be avoided. The teacher should foster an environment in which students are comfortable and are not anxious to speak. This can be done by ensuring that both parties understand each other's cultures. The teacher should also make sure the student understands that through hard work, they can learn English.

The classroom needs to be made a pleasant environment where students know that it is okay to make errors and are comfortable with doing so. This is necessary for classroom participation and ensuring effective teaching.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the connection between culture and language learning in an EFL context in Japan. The author showed how cultural values and beliefs can sometimes be an obstacle for learning English or any other foreign language and how these affect students' use of this language. This can be often seen in classrooms when students appear ambiguous, reluctant to speak or are silent.

It is important for a teacher to find ways to encourage communication in EFL classes while accommodating Japanese culture and styles. An understanding of students' culture can help to narrow the cultural gap that sometimes creates confusion and frustration in English communication classes.

BIO DATA

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