Explorations in Teacher Development

Volume 24, Number 2

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From the Editor

What does learner autonomy mean to you? Do question types and scoring methods have an effect on learner motivation? How do students feel about doing homework? These are some of the questions our contributors, **Devon Arthurson**, **Tomoyuki, Kawashima**, and **Ewen MacDonald**, sought to explore in this issue.

The fall issue of the ETD always publishes the proceedings from our popular Teacher Journey Conference. This year, **Mary Hillis**, **Cristina Tat**, **Chad Cottom**, and **Yutaka Fujieda** shared their journeys with us in written form.

Please read the Call for Papers below if you are interested in submitting a paper. In this issue, we are debuting two new columns. Anyone is welcome to submit an installment for a column, so please read the descriptions at the beginning of the "Teacher Reflections" and the "Conference Reflections" to find out more. We are currently accepting submissions for the Spring 2018 and Fall 2018 issues of *Explorations in Teacher Development.* If you have any questions about what would be acceptable, please feel free to email me and ask away!

Happy Reading!

Amanda Yoshida, Publications Chair

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Call for Papers

Explorations in Teacher Development is a journal for teachers, by teachers, where we encourage people to share their experiences and reflections.

Papers for the *Explorations in Teacher Development* (ETD) Journal are accepted on an on-going basis. We encourage both members and non-members of our SIG to submit papers, so please share this information with your colleagues and friends to ensure a rich and diverse publication.

Following is a list of the categories and types of articles we are interested in publishing:

Research Articles (2000-3000 words)

•Narrative Inquiry

•Reflective Inquiry

•Action Research

Explorations (1000-3000 words)

•Reflections on beliefs/practices

•Learning / Teaching Journeys

Columns (500-1000 words)

•"Teacher Reflections"

•"Conference Reflections"

In addition, interviews of relevant educators/researchers as well as book reviews may be accepted at the discretion of the editors. Please contact us if interested in writing an interview piece.

TD SIG also publishes the proceedings of our Teacher Journeys conference held in June as well as occasional special issues in collaboration with other JALT SIGs.

If you wish to contribute to the ETD, please pay attention to the following requirements:

All submissions should use APA style and a maximum of 12 references. Submissions that are not in APA style will be sent back to the authors for reformatting.

Titles of papers should be 10 words or less.

Research articles should include an abstract of 100-150 words.

Explorative pieces do not require references but connections to the literature are encouraged.

Column contributors are invited to submit at any time, but you may want to send an inquiry regarding your idea.

All authors should provide their current affiliation and a contact email. A short bio and photo are optional.

When sending in a submission, please indicate which category of the ETD Journal your article will fit under.

Please note that all submissions for the research and explorations sections of the ETD will undergo a peer-review process and that, if accepted, we will provide feedback and

EFL Instructors in Japan: Reflections and Definitions of Learner Autonomy in Intercultural Settings

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The following article explores learner autonomy through the reflections of EFL instructors in Japan. In Japan, fostering learner autonomy may differ from other countries, yet that does not mean that it cannot be practiced. Through exploration of the instructors' self-definitions of learner autonomy; their reflections of when they were learners; and their experiences with learner autonomy particularly as language learners, insight can be given into how current EFL learners in Japan may feel about learner autonomy. Furthermore, instructors for this research project were asked about the similarities and differences Western and Asian countries, specifically Japan, may have in defining autonomy. Since there are many non-Japanese EFL instructors, the classroom becomes a site for intercultural exchange. Autonomy can be perceived by cultures in different ways and for instructors working in cultures different from their own, understanding their own perceptions regarding autonomy and also that of their learners' is a valuable investment. It would seem that the more awareness and discussion there is about intercultural issues, the more sensitive instructors can be to their Japanese learners' positions.

Introduction

Since I began teaching English in Japan nearly ten years ago, in the literature and through conversations with peers, it seems that some instructors feel that there are many barriers and even impossibilities to fostering learner autonomy in the EFL learning environment in Japan. Holliday (2006) cautions that some English native-speakers have a "'moral mission' to bring a 'superior' culture of teaching and learning to students and colleagues who are perceived not to be able to succeed on their own terms" (p. 386). However, perhaps it would be more constructive to replace the mindset presented by Holliday and shift the view from the impossibilities of fostering learner autonomy to opportunities for instructors to examine the intercultural factors present in the Japanese EFL classroom. This article will explore the reflections of EFL instructors in Japan's reflections about their own learner autonomy, their self-definitions of learner autonomy and their opinions about the cultural similarities or differences in how autonomy is defined by Western and Asian countries, specifically Japan. This article draws upon previous data I collected for a research project regarding grounded theory; however, in this article more emphasis will be placed on presenting the instructors' reflections and opinions regarding learner autonomy. In addition, this paper will outline ways in which reflective practice can potentially aid EFL instructors in Japan to better foster learner autonomy and ameliorate inequalities in the language learning environment.

Learner Autonomy

The majority of publications regarding learner autonomy in language learning in Japan cite the Benson definition which considers such autonomy to be the learner's capacity to take control over their learning (2011). This definition alludes to the power element in learning with "take control." In classroom-based approaches, Benson (2011) writes "the key factor in the development of autonomy is the opportunity for students to make decisions about their learning within collaborative and supportive environments" (p. 163). Benson provides a definition of learner autonomy, yet in intercultural settings, other

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factors are necessary as Apple, Da Silva and Fellner (2013) call for: "[a] need for a better understanding of how teachers can support their students' autonomy… across diverse cultural contexts" (p. 30). Factors to consider could be the students' previous learning experiences; traditional learner and teacher roles; values that both the learners' and their instructor's cultures hold which this paper will explore in later sections. In the 1999 article Defining and Developing Autonomy in East Asian Contexts, referencing Jones (1995), Littlewood writes that some believe autonomy is associated with Western values and unsuited to learning in Asian countries (p. 72), thus echoing the opinions of those who feel fostering learner autonomy in a Western sense in the Japanese EFL classroom is impossible. Holliday (2006) argues that Western English-speakers impose stereotypes on non-Western students, "especially when they have difficulty with the specific types of active, collaborative, and self-directed 'learner-centred' teaching–learning techniques that have frequently been constructed and packaged as superior within the English speaking West" (p. 385). Having worked in Japan's EFL field for nearly 10 years, I do not feel that learner autonomy is an impossibility but attempting to assimilate Japanese students into thoroughly Western styles of learning may leave both the teacher and students with a negative experience. A respect for a culture's values, instead of a replacement, is necessary, in addition to open-mindedness and understanding.

The findings from Littlewood's study determined that for East Asian and Western students both were equally capable of developing autonomy in the manner they viewed best to meet their language learning needs (1999, p. 88). In addition, Aoki and Smith's (1996) study revealed that Japanese students desired to be autonomous, further contradicting the stereotype that Japanese learners are passive and rely on the teacher (Littlewood, 1999, p. 72). The literature indicates that learner autonomy is achievable for language learning in Asian countries. During the literature research, there did not seem to be any works that directly addressed the reflections of EFL instructors in Japan's reflections about learner autonomy. Little research, if any, explores how teachers in Japan define or reflect on their experiences with autonomy as learners, especially in regards to language learning. Reflective practice means that teachers must subject their own beliefs of teaching and learning to critical examination by articulating these beliefs" [as] "(t)eachers engage in personal self-reflection when they recall previous experiences for self-discovery … (and) become more aware of how they got to where they are at present (Farrell, 2007, pp. 9, 15). Furthermore, Borg (2003) writes that "teachers' prior language learning experiences establish cognitions about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualizations of L2 teaching during teacher education, and which may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives" (p. 88). It seems that the more consciousness that an instructor has of his or her own experience as a learner, the more empathy and awareness of a learner's needs and experiences an instructor possesses, and the better he or she can support the learners and create a safe learning environment for fostering learner autonomy. "In order to create spaces for learners to exercise their autonomy, teachers must recognize and assert their own autonomy" (Benson, 2011, p. 186). Drawing upon the words of Farrell, Borg and Benson, the following research project consisted of elements to create a hierarchical shift from experts to those practitioners, thus focusing on the experiences, definition and opinions of EFL instructors in Japan regarding learner autonomy and intercultural settings rather than on academics and scholars.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

The 12 participants, 6 Japanese and 6 non-Japanese, who were selected for this research project, either were or had been my co-workers teaching the same university's English discussion class. Other commonalities that the participants shared were that all had an awareness of the concept of learner autonomy and activities used to foster learner autonomy as many of them used such activities in their lessons. They either had or were currently living abroad with experience learning a second or foreign language, though with varying proficiencies ranging from intermediate to utilizing a second language through their postgraduate studies. This gave them an intercultural awareness as they has lived or were living a foreigner in either Western countries or in Asian countries. These participants were chosen as it was important that they also mirrored their current or former learners' situation - learning a foreign language in a setting where the classes were completely taught in the foreign language as this university's unified curriculum requires. Their learning histories could reveal understanding to not only to those who are teaching foreign languages but also to those who are learning foreign languages. This could potentially decrease the power between the expert and non-expert through the act of sharing their experiences and

knowledge. Moreover, I was interested to know if other instructors, who shared a similar experience to mine, also felt that there were more similarities than differences between Western and Asian countries' definitions about autonomy. Nonetheless, these participants could provide valuable insight into learner autonomy as these instructors have had the time and awareness to reflect on their experiences through the lens of not only a learner but with the additional perspective as an instructor.

After the required ethical procedures were completed, the participants were sent a link to an online questionnaire comprised of open-ended questions. Through a survey-hosting website, all data was collected anonymously. The expected survey completion time was 30 minutes and participants were given a 10-day time frame to submit the survey. As it was anonymous, there was no intention to make assumptions about how Japanese instructors' responses differed from non-Japanese instructors' responses when the data was analyzed.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this project was a qualitative questionnaire. These three opened-ended questions will be the focus of this article:

1. In your own words, how do you define learner autonomy?
2. Do you think you were autonomous as a learner? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Western countries and Asian countries, specifically Japan, have similar or different ways of defining autonomy? Please explain your answer and feel free to give any examples of these similarities or differences.

The questions were constructed with emphasis to how instructors are in relation to varying levels of power. The instructors have more power in relation to their students but in comparing these instructors to academics and educational administration, the instructors have less power. The questionnaire also asks the instructors to return to a time when they were learners, again to being in a situation of having less power. In the EFL learning environment, learner autonomy can be a way for instructors to share power with their students. Question 1 seeks to compare and contrast the expert with the practitioners' definitions. Next, question 2 requires the instructor to return to the role of learner in regards to learner autonomy and to their experiences learning. Lastly, question 3 asks the participants' opinions about the macro-level structures, that of countries' definitions of autonomy broadening the scope to reflect on the national and cultural components shaping their practices.

Findings and Discussion

Question 1: In your own words, how do you define learner autonomy?

In the data analysis of the participants' definitions, through the frequency of keywords, 8 of the 12 responses had "own", 11 of 12 had "learn", and 6 of 12 had "ability/able" and 4 out of 12 had "responsible/responsibility. The following are excerpts from participants' self-definitions:

- "Allowing learners to learn on their own, at their own pace and in their own style."
- "It is the status where the learner can decide everything such as what to study, how to study, when to study, where to study, etc."
- "A learner should be able to perform tasks without being forced to, and know how to study on their own."
- "The ability to learn without aid from others."

Therefore "the ability to have responsibility for one's own learning" could be a collective definition of learner autonomy. It can be assumed that the responsibility for one's own learning means that another individual, most probably the teacher, gives the learner the responsibility. Taking the Benson (2011) or expert's definition "the learner's capacity to take control over their learning", it seems the participants or practitioners defined learner autonomy quite similarly save for "control" and "responsibility" as with "control" the focus is on power but with "responsibility" the focus is on ownership.

Question 2: Do you think you were autonomous as a learner? Why or why not?

All of the twelve participants stated that they had been autonomous learners. Three of the twelve participants did not specify when or where they had experienced being autonomous learners. Two made reference that when they were young learners, as well as junior high school and high school students in Japan, they did not experience autonomy. When reference was made to where their autonomous learning took place, it was in their classes at predominately college and graduate school, both in Japan and abroad, with one respondent mentioning these other sites where autonomous learning occurred: at high school, in independent language learning and in *judo*. The participants' responses reveal positive benefits of learner autonomy that are much richer than "control" and "responsibility". The responses below signify how learner autonomy gave the instructors self-awareness as learners and motivation to learn through goal-settings:

- "I know how I should teach myself depends on what I study."
- "(K)nowing how to set my own goals, creating timetables for studying, having a better understanding of course rubrics and aims etc."

There is also evidence of the joy and interest taken in learning when the learner identifies as an autonomous learner with these responses:

- "I studied extra materials on my own and keenly pursued subjects that were not required - because I was interested in them."
- "I think that I am autonomous as a learner. Anytime I have made a decision in going to school or taking classes, I had a goal in my mind. Also, every day, I enjoy learning something new through books, the Internet, friends, school, and etc. I see unlimited opportunities to learn in our life, which I really appreciate. Learning is my internal desire that makes me happy."

The reflections of the participants as learners indicate not only the details of where and when the autonomous learning took place but the positive effects of learner autonomy. This could aid EFL instructors who want to foster learner autonomy to understanding that their activities will have other positive elements such as sharing control and responsibility with their learners, as well as considering their learners' feelings and position more deeply.

Question 3: Do you think Western countries and Asian countries, specifically Japan, have similar or different ways of defining autonomy? Please explain your answer and feel free to give any examples of these similarities or differences.

Of the 11 responses, all stated that there were similarities in Western countries and Asian countries' definitions. Since one participant responded "No." without any further elaboration, this answer is omitted in the data analysis because it cannot be confirmed if the "No." means there are "No similarities." or "No differences." Many of the participants felt that the emphasis, importance or value placed on autonomy or the ways in which autonomy is demonstrated are what differed in the countries' definitions with less emphasis, importance or value placed on autonomy by Asian countries than Western countries. The subsequent answers signify this as:

- "I am not sure if there are significant differences between Western countries and Japan. However, there would be a clear difference between the two in that Japanese schools (especially junior high schools and high schools) cannot provide lessons to students where they can boost their autonomy."
- "In Japan, usually learners do not have to figure out the best learning style by themselves, and without knowing their own best learning style, they are given things to do, so they only have to think about when or where to do it. But sometimes they are not given anything so they can decide what to do by themselves. And this is called learner autonomy."

The above responses seem to indicate that the opportunity for learners in Asian countries to explore learning styles and to increase their autonomy in their learning may be quite limited. However, these responses below reveal that in Japan

learners have the capacity to be autonomous learners and that their instructors have the ability to create environments to foster autonomy.

- "I think that learners have the ability to be autonomous in their own ways, and above all, should independently accept autonomy or not. I think the main differences are at an ideological level, and less at a classroom level."
- "I believe each teacher can also define autonomy even though they have to teach in their school systems."

Regardless of the external factors connected to learner autonomy, such as differing emphasis, importance or value Asian countries, in Japan learner autonomy can be fostered. The participants' answers reveal that there are more similarities than differences between Western and Asian countries regarding definitions of autonomy. Understanding the placement of emphasis can aid those instructors, working in intercultural settings and seeking who seek to implement activities that foster learner autonomy, to have more cultural sensitivity towards their learners' values, as well as their learners' previous learning experiences.

Implications and Limitations

The study has implications that can make fostering greater learner autonomy in EFL learning environments achievable. As learner autonomy may permit the instructor to share power with the learner, more activities used to foster learner autonomy and lessen power imbalances in the classroom should be used. Instructors' reflections of their experiences as learners can be empowering providing them with more insight into their classroom practices. If they were very autonomous learners, particularly in language learning, they could use the techniques that were successful for them in their lessons, and possibly to have more discussion with their learners and peers about these topics. In addition, reflecting on how an instructor was as a learner, may give the instructor more empathy for his or her learners bridging the divide between two often unequal positions of power. One limitation of this study is that not all EFL instructors in Japan have had the experience of studying a foreign language or being autonomous learners. Another may be the selection of participants who held similar experiences and opinions to mine. Hopefully, those instructors who feel that impossible barriers exist to fostering learner autonomy in EFL learning environments in Japan will reconsider their views. More studies, discussions and reflections in EFL settings in Japan about learner autonomy could make for new and creative ways that instructors can provide more opportunities for their language learners to be more autonomous in their studies.

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Overlooked Motivational Strategies: Question Types and Test Scoring Methods

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Scoring tests is such a routine task that teachers seldom consider whether or not this process could have pedagogical applications. This paper reports on action research which explored the possibility of using question types and test scoring methods as motivational strategies. Two types of tests, cloze and translation tests, were given to first-year senior high school students in high-stakes achievement tests, and scoring methods which differed from the conventional exact-answer scoring method were adopted. In order to examine whether the question types and scoring methods motivated students to study English, a questionnaire survey was administered to 118 students. Student reactions were analyzed in accordance with their English proficiency levels. Data analysis suggested that the translation test and its scoring method contributed to enhancing motivation of students with lower proficiency levels.

Introduction

Tests are a double-edged sword for students. While good results can generate high motivation, poor results can demotivate students. Therefore, it is worthwhile for teachers to take into account how good test results may influence student motivation. However, scoring tests is a routine task for teachers, and teachers often repeat conventional question types and scoring methods without giving a second thought to potential benefits that tests can provide. To explore the potential benefits of using tests as a motivational strategy, an action research project was developed by a group of high school teachers. The new question types required greater effort for preparation on student side, while the new scoring methods allowed students to obtain good scores with relative ease which they would not have achieved in usual tests. To examine a) whether students found the new question types and scoring methods motivating to study English, and b) whether English proficiency levels exerted any effects on student reactions, a questionnaire survey was conducted.

Importance of Enhancing Self-Confidence for Motivation

Unsatisfactory performances in tests can demotivate learners. Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) investigation into 656 Japanese senior high school students revealed that the test score is the second most demotivating factor for low motivated students. Furthermore, in a 2004 study conducted by Falout and Maruyama, 38.9% of low proficiency and 31.7% of high proficiency university students attributed demotivation to disappointment in performance, and it was the leading demotivating factor in both groups. Literature shows that Japanese learners are more inclined to attribute the cause of their demotivation to internal factors such as reduced self-confidence (Tsuchiya, 2006). This finding suggests that self-confidence is a crucial factor for Japanese learners to maintain their motivation to study English. Indeed, self-confidence influences achievement (Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1994; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Expectancy-value theories explain that motivation is produced by two factors: an individual's expectancy of success in a given task and the value the individual attaches to success in that task (Dornyei, 1998, p. 119). In other words, the more likely they feel they can achieve the goal and the more valuable the goal is for them, the higher and more positive their motivation to accomplish the task will be. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) argue that learners will attempt tasks slightly beyond their skill level if they overestimate their current proficiency level. An interesting finding is reported that students get higher scores on tests if the test begins

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with easier test items (Jinks & Lorsbach, 2003). These studies indicate that students' perceived competence and prospect of completing the task will influence their achievement.

As has been argued above, one area where we can see the influence of students' perception on their achievement is testing. The positive or negative influence of testing on teaching and learning is called washback (Bailey, 1996). Alderson and Wall (1993) propose 15 possible effects as Washback Hypotheses, and some of them refer to the potential washback on learner's motivation. For instance, "a test will influence how learners learn", and "a test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of … learning." (p. 120) On the basis of these hypotheses, this research project was designed and it attempted to examine whether question types and scoring methods would have beneficial washback on student motivation.

Method

Participants

This research was conducted at a public senior high school in central Japan. A total of 238 students were enrolled in the first year, and three teachers taught the same course to these students. Students were divided into six mixed ability classes at random. Data was collected from half of the students (N=118). They were in three classes which the author was in charge of. All the students were bound for university and their English proficiency levels were higher than the national average. Students scored 59.6 on average in a national standardized proficiency test administered by Benesse Corporation in which the mean Standard Score (SS) is always fixed at 50. The SSs ranged from the lowest 39.5 to the highest 77.2, and the standard deviation (SD) was 7.6. To examine the effect of proficiency levels, participants were divided into three proficiency groups based on their SSs. Upper Proficiency Group (UP) consisted of 35 students who earned SSs higher than 63.4, or the group's mean SS (59.6) plus the group's half SD (3.8). Likewise, Lower Proficiency Group (LP) was made up of 42 students whose SSs were below 55.8, or the group's mean SS (59.6) minus the group's half SD (3.8). The remaining 41 students whose SSs were between 55.8 and 63.4 were classified into Middle Proficiency Group.

Context of Study

The entrance examinations to university have a dominant influence on the teaching and testing at high schools. Nishino (2011) revealed that the entrance examinations to university are the second major reason, after the class size, why teachers are hesitant to introduce communicative language teaching. For teachers at high ranked schools, preparing students for entrance examinations is the ultimate goal to strive for. They believe giving classroom tasks and question types for tests which are similar to those in university entrance examinations is the most efficient. Kikuchi (2006) looked into the difficulty of the reading passages for entrance examinations of 20 prestigious universities in Japan in 1994 and in 2004. In spite of the Ministry's repeated request for a shift toward communication-oriented teaching at senior high schools, Kikuchi found that reading passages for entrance examinations remained very difficult and that translation tasks were still frequently used. Under these circumstances, it is fairly common among high school teachers to continue giving translation tasks for in-house tests.

This research was undertaken when teachers were in desperate need of a change. The school had a long history of sending graduates to prominent universities, but its popularity was on a decline. Teachers were under greater pressure to raise student proficiency levels. After deliberate discussion, they decided to set recitation of the textbook text as the main goal of their lessons and adapt the test accordingly. They were aware of the significant benefits of recitation in enhancing English proficiency levels on the basis of their own learning and teaching experiences. Teachers also decided to change question types to the tasks to reproduce texts from the textbook. Their choice was unusual, but the teachers made the drastic decision under a strong conviction that it is the test that has the greatest impact on students. College-bound high school students take many tests. With regards to high-stakes tests, they usually take in-house achievement tests (5 times a year), in-house proficiency tests (3~4 times a year), and external proficiency tests by private companies (3~6 times a year). In-house achievement tests have important consequences for students because their scores from these tests form a principal component of their semester grade. In addition, the transcript of grades are submitted to university when students apply for admission. On the other hand, in the case of external proficiency tests, it is customary for test-takers to indicate the names of

universities they want to attend in registration. By doing so, test-takers can learn their relative positions in comparison with their seniors at the same school or with their competitors outside. This information is crucial for students as well as for teachers in choosing the universities they will apply to.

Question Types

In most high school achievement tests in which translation tasks are common, students write more Japanese than English. Consequently, they are often used to remembering a Japanese translation of the text before tests. When teachers decided to give new types of questions in tests, they thought it necessary to give guidance to students and emphasize the importance of reproducing the English precisely. One question type was a cloze test where students filled the gaps in the texts with the exact word(s) which were in the texts from a textbook. Teachers chose missing words intentionally not only from the parts of the text which included new words and phrases but also from the other parts in order to remind students of the importance to remember the whole text. The sentences with blanks were provided either in English or in Japanese, and students always had to answer by using the missing English words from the original English text. The other question type was a translation test. The translation test required students to translate whole or part of a Japanese sentence into English using expressions from the original text. The formats of the tests remained the same throughout the year.

Scoring Methods

The number of answer blanks in the cloze test varied from 14 to 17 across test administrations, but the total number of scores which were given to each cloze test was always kept at 11. Hence, the scores were compressed. Table 1 shows the scores students earned using both the conventional and new methods in the case of a cloze test with 17 blanks. The scoring method was intended to be lenient to students with lower proficiency levels. Even if they answered as few as three blanks correctly, they still got four points. On the other hand, it set the ceiling for students in the higher proficiency range. Students who gave 17 perfect answers and those who answered 14 questions correctly, both received the maximal points of 11.

Table 1: Scoring Method for the Cloze Test

Numbers of Correct Answers	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10-13	14-17
Scores Earned with Conventional Scoring Method	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10-13	14-17
Scores Earned with New Scoring Method	0	2	4	6	8	10	11

In the case of the translation test, two points were always allocated with each question. The new scoring method differed from the conventional method in that one point was subtracted only when two errors were made. Therefore, both students whose translation was flawless and those who made one error received two points. Moreover, one point was given even when three errors were made (Table 2).

Table 2: Scoring Method for the Translation Test

Numbers of Errors	4	3	2	1	0
Scores Earned if Marked Conventionally	0	0	0	1	2
Scores Earned if Marked with New Method	0	1	1	2	2

These unconventional scoring methods were adopted in order to reduce the severity of the test and to encourage students. If marked conventionally, points were always deducted for an error. However, the new scoring methods had a wider range of tolerance to errors. This was because the level of requirements became higher with the new question types. Any deviance from the original text in the textbook was counted as an error. For instance, even a missing article was

regarded as an error. For this reason, the teachers thought it necessary to tolerate a minimum number of errors and to encourage students to try without being afraid of making errors.

Data Collection and Analysis

After participants took two achievement tests with the new question types and scoring methods, a questionnaire was administered. It had two statements: "The cloze test and its scoring method motivate me to study English," and "The translation test and its scoring method motivate me to study English." Participants responded by choosing an answer closest to their ideas from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). They were also asked to write the reasons for their choices. In addition, the impact of the new scoring methods for each proficiency group was examined by comparing the scores with those obtained when marked conventionally. The answer sheets for the second achievement test of all the participants were copied and partially marked again with the conventional scoring methods. The achievement test was always based on two chapters in the textbook. Due to time limitations, the cloze and translation tests on the first chapter were marked again for comparison. Participants were not informed of their score differences between conventional and new scoring methods when they answered the questionnaire. Hence participant evaluations were based on their own experiences of the new methods.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that the means of the ratings for all the 118 participants were 4.55 for the translation test and 4.21 for the cloze test. This suggests participants found the question types and marking methods for both cloze and translation tests more motivating. It also indicates that the translation test was more favorably received by participants. Table 3 presents the results of further analysis into the difference among proficiency groups. It indicates that the mean scores of three proficiency groups centered around 4.2 for the cloze test, whereas participants in LP found the translation test more highly motivating. However, when one-way ANOVA was run on the ratings, no statistical difference was detected between groups in either question type.

Table 3: Reaction to Question Types and Scoring Methods

Proficiency	Upper Group (N=35)	Middle Group (N=41)	Lower Group (N=42)
Cloze Test	4.20	4.24	4.20
Translation Test	4.40	4.48	4.76

The analysis of qualitative data revealed that participants positively responded to the cloze test and its scoring method. A total of 54 comments were collected, and 68.5% were in favor. They referred to the ease of getting higher scores, e.g., "I can get full marks if I work hard." Owing to greater possibilities of obtaining high scores, participants became more willing to prepare for the tests. For instance, "If I memorize the English text, I can get higher scores. So I feel I can work hard next time too." In addition, the leniency of the new scoring method reduced stress during the test preparation. One participant wrote "As a few mistakes do not affect my scores, I can relax and prepare for the test." On the other hand, two reasons for dissatisfaction with the new method emerged from the 17 negative comments. More than half of the comments referred to fairness. For example, "It is not fair that the scores are the same even if the number of correct answers differs." Furthermore, three comments mentioned negative washback. They stated that it might encourage students to slacken their efforts in memorizing words, and that they might end up memorizing the minimal number of expressions. However, this concern did not seem to be a widely held one, for there were many positive comments referring to the eagerness to learn target sentences more precisely. For example, "The cloze test makes me feel like memorizing the English texts perfectly." "In order to get more points, I pursue higher accuracy of my knowledge."

Regarding the translation test, 51 comments were gathered, of which only four comments (7.8%) were negative. Nearly half of the positive comments were about the sense of achievement. Typical comments were as follows: "This way, it is easier for efforts to bear fruit," and "The harder we work, the more scores we can get." Some students mentioned, "The translation test demands that we should study the details, not just the outline of the text. So we need to check our answers

carefully for that." The other half of the comments were about adequacy of the level of requirement. Any deviation from the original text was counted as an error. For this reason, the lenient scoring method mitigated the harshness of the test and it helped maintain participants' motivation to study hard. They stated, "It is very difficult to remember the use of articles. That's why, the moderately low level of requirements in scoring makes me feel like giving it a try." On the contrary, a small number of comments (N=4) showed that they were apprehensive that some students would make light of small mistakes. Overall, it could be summarized that except for a few, participants favorably received the question type and scoring method of the translation test.

The differences in scores by two scoring methods lent support to the finding that the translation test and its new scoring method motivated LP participants. The cloze test used for this investigation had 31 gaps and full marks were 22 points. If marked conventionally, the full marks would have become 31 points, meaning a nine-point increase. Table 4 shows the percentage of participants who would have been affected by the gain or loss if marked with the conventional scoring method. As far as UP is concerned, nearly two thirds of the participants would have gained 6 to 9 points with the change in scoring methods. On the other hand, the scores of 22% of the participants in Middle Proficiency Group would have been one or two points lower. The situation would have been even more unfavorable for LP. As much as 59% of the participants would have lost one or two points. These results underpinned the legitimacy of the teachers' conviction that the new scoring method would have been more advantageous for Middle and Lower Proficiency Groups.

Table 4: Score Differences in the Case of Cloze Test

Proficiency	+9	+8	+7	+6	+5	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
Upper Group	25%	13%	8%	17%	4%	8%	0%	8%	4%	0%	8%	4%
Middle Group	0%	3%	9%	6%	13%	6%	0%	9%	3%	28%	19%	3%
Lower Group	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	17%	0%	8%	4%	8%	46%	13%

Table 5: Score Differences in the Case of Translation Test

Proficiency	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8	-9
Upper Group	17%	13%	17%	13%	21%	4%	4%	8%	4%	0%
Middle Group	6%	6%	19%	13%	6%	9%	22%	19%	0%	0%
Lower Group	17%	17%	0%	21%	13%	4%	8%	8%	8%	4%

Table 5 shows how the score would have differed in the case of the translation test with 11 questions. Each question was worth two points, so full marks were 22 points. Regardless of proficiency levels, more than 80% of the participants would have obtained lower scores. However, especially noteworthy was that slightly higher percentage of LP than UP would have been hardly affected. The total score of 34% of LP and 30% of UP would not have changed at all or would have become one point lower. This demonstrates that participants in LP prepared very hard for the translation test.

This action research has limitations as well. As the mean SS (59.6) suggests, participants were in the higher range of English proficiency in comparison with average Japanese high school students. Many of the participants in LP in this study would be categorized into middle proficiency group in other studies. Furthermore, it should be noted that classroom activities were adapted to reinforce the relevance with the new question types as well.

To conclude, the results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis suggest that the new test types and their scoring methods contributed to enhancing students' motivation to study English. Especially, the translation test and its scoring method were more favorably received by students as proficiency levels went down. The examination of the impact of the new scoring method revealed that answers of as many students in LP as in UP were flawless. This means that the question

type and scoring method contributed to motivating LP participants. They were able to see the goals they should strive for and the process they should go through to attain the goal.

Note: An earlier version of this paper was presented at JACET-Kanto 9th Annual Convention on July 12, 2015.

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Ask Your Students: Japanese Students' Feelings and Beliefs on Homework in *Juku*

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With the knowledge that students' views can often be different than those of the teacher, this paper describes an action research project undertaken in an English Program at a *juku* (Japanese cram school) to discover students' perceptions on the benefits of homework and their feelings towards it. Analysis of students' responses to a questionnaire on homework allowed for critical reflection of my teaching practices by informing my assumptions on the benefits that homework brings. It also provided an opportunity for the identification of additional areas for further research, to better meet students' learning needs.

Homework is a traditional, common and well-known outside-the-class activity, providing students with the chance to do further study and practice than in the limited time available in the classroom. It allows students the opportunity to prepare in advance for a subsequent lesson, and reinforces and improves retention of classroom learning (Burnham, 1988; Harmer, 2015). In the case of second-language learning, homework allows students to practice language items and grammar points, and develop their language skills. It is also a way of increasing learners' contact with English (Nation, 2013). In addition, students must have a high degree of self-reliance when doing homework, which can "promote and build up learning autonomy" (Harmer, 2015, p. 106).

Assigning homework can also have potential downsides. Students may not enjoy doing it and see it as "a necessary evil" (Burnham, 1989, p. 1), and enforcing homework compliance can be difficult (Harmer, 2015). It can give students additional stress, and deprive them of time for their own personal interests and development (Burnham, 1989; Costley, 2013). It has also been questioned whether homework actually leads to greater academic achievement (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006).

While the benefits of homework can be seen from a teacher's point of view, students' perceptions may be quite different. In order for a teacher to gain greater awareness of their teaching practices, it is important to understand students' beliefs and attitudes, which Brookfield (2015) proposes as one of the four lenses that a teacher can use to become a critically reflective teacher. Understanding student perceptions allows teachers to see to what degree their beliefs and assumptions resemble those of the students, and can help them to make necessary changes to their classroom practices that assist student learning.

Japanese education often extends outside of school to include what are called *juku* (cram school) and *eikaiwa* (English conversation school). Homework is not often part of the *eikaiwa* experience (Hooper, 2017), but it is common in *juku*. However, there has been little academic research on homework in *juku* despite its existence.

Literature review

Concerning English education in Japan, research on students' perceptions of homework is limited. However, several studies are informative in examining students' motivations, views, and preferences.

Brown (2006), in a study of EFL Japanese college students, found that the strongest motivator for doing homework was to 'learn English', with a desire to improve specific language skills. Other strong motivators were to be successful in future classroom sessions, and to be able to follow the lesson content and participate in the classroom. Less frequently

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mentioned motivators included academic success, an interest in English, avoiding negative personal affect, and for personal or instrumental goals that English could help them achieve in the future. Among students who participated in a communicative oral English homework assignment at a Japanese university, Provenzano and Yue (2011) reported that most students believed the homework was beneficial to their oral English ability, through improving their fluency and helping them feel more relaxed when speaking.

In some cases, students' perceptions towards homework contrasted with those of teachers. Corwin (2016) reported that a majority of Japanese college students of English believed that homework should include revision, but were less certain whether it should include preparation, whereas most teachers believed homework should have both review and preparatory purposes. While vocabulary study was a preferred homework activity of many students and teachers, a large number of students also expressed a desire for homework activities requiring negotiation of meaning. However, teachers generally preferred to assign homework involving drills and practice. In a study conducted in Japanese senior high schools, Isaji (2009) reported that students recognised the importance of preparing and reviewing for class, but did not put as much effort into homework as their teachers expected. In addition, their homework activities were generally limited to translation and looking up new words, but not reading aloud the texts used in class, despite teachers' awareness of the importance of doing so. With students and teachers often holding different perceptions, Takahashi (2011) suggested tips for assigning homework, stating that "students' perceptions are as important as teachers' for making the classroom a productive place of learning" (p. 174).

Negative views towards homework have also been reported. Corwin (2016) noted that while Japanese college students generally understood the benefits of doing homework, many would rather not do it at all. Some students mentioned other demands for their time that conflict with doing homework, including commitments such as work and club activities, as well as other classes and tests. In addition, if students have a lack of understanding of the homework or find it too difficult, this can reduce their willingness to complete it (Brown, 2006; Corwin, 2016).

In the case of the cram school industry in Japan, research on homework is limited, which is a gap that this study sets out to explore. In order to gain insights from my own students, and with an awareness that their perceptions may be different to mine, I carried out a small classroom research project with the objective of learning more about my students' views on their homework, and how this could improve my teaching practices.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were 19 students in an English Program at a small cram school in Yokohama, ranging from 1st year junior high school students to 3rd year senior high school students. The program aims to train students to achieve high scores in English proficiency examinations by using reading passages from past examinations to strengthen reading ability and grammatical knowledge, and also to improve students' ability in the four core language skills for communicative purposes.

Homework is provided to students for each class. The reading passage for the following lesson and an audio file of the passage that I record are distributed to students a week in advance. The purpose is to help students prepare for the next lesson. Students are expected to listen to the audio recording, practice reading aloud, and confirm their understanding of the content of the text, so they become familiar with the passage.

After the class, a writing worksheet is given as homework based on that day's lesson. This consists of controlled exercises which require students to use the grammar point from the day's lesson, and a composition task in which students respond to a question by writing a short paragraph. Students are encouraged to use the grammar point in their composition, but also need to make decisions on the language they use. Students are provided with written feedback on the homework, which is returned a week after submission. The purpose is to reinforce what students learned in class and to strengthen their writing ability, by providing them with writing practice using the target grammar point acquired in class. It also provides an opportunity for students to retrieve previously acquired language when writing the composition.

My purposes in assigning the homework are influenced by what I believe are the benefits that students will gain, particularly being able to follow lessons more easily, retaining more of the lesson content, developing learner autonomy, improving the four language skills, and in the case of writing homework, having an opportunity to decide on the language they use.

However, I undertook this research to learn how students feel about the homework, the benefits they believe the homework has for their English learning, and whether their perceptions of the benefits reflect my own. I was also interested in learning to what extent students take charge of their own learning through the use of resources when doing homework. Importantly, the data I collected would allow me to be more informed when reflecting on my teaching practices. Students were asked the following questions:

1. What are your feelings on the homework?
2. What resources do you use to do the homework, and how?
3. What do you believe are the benefits for your English learning from doing the homework?

Instruments

A questionnaire containing three open-ended questions was used in order for students to give views on the homework in their own words, which would provide me with deeper insights than using close-ended questions. In order to receive informative responses for all homework given, students were asked to answer each question in relation to both the listening and reading homework, and the writing homework. Questions were translated and written in Japanese (see Appendix).

Procedures

Data Collection

As the participants in the study were under 18 years old, permission forms were provided to students' parents, asking for their signed consent for their children to participate in the research project.

Before delivering the questionnaire to students across different classes, I informed them in both English and Japanese that I was interested in learning their feelings and beliefs on the homework, as well as the resources they use to do it. I explained that their answers to my questions would help me to be better informed on the suitability of the homework I give them. Students were told to answer anonymously and in Japanese, and to place the completed questionnaire form into a box. The questionnaire was delivered at the end of the lesson, and students were given 15 minutes to answer.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the students was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and translated into English. Responses to questions 1 and 3 were examined together, as these questions related to students' perceptions on homework. Question 2, regarding resources students use was examined separately. Instances of similar responses in relation to different themes which emerged from the questions were then coded accordingly. Once these common themes were established, responses were entered into separate lists under the respective themes for analysis.

Findings

Students' perceptions on homework

Students' responses on how they feel about the homework, and the benefits that they believe doing the homework has for their English language learning are presented under the following five themes:

1. Improvement in language skills and knowledge
2. Reinforcement of classroom learning
3. Perceived future benefits

4. Classroom readiness and preparation
5. Personalisation of classroom learning

Figure 1 depicts the number of students who gave a response connected to each theme.

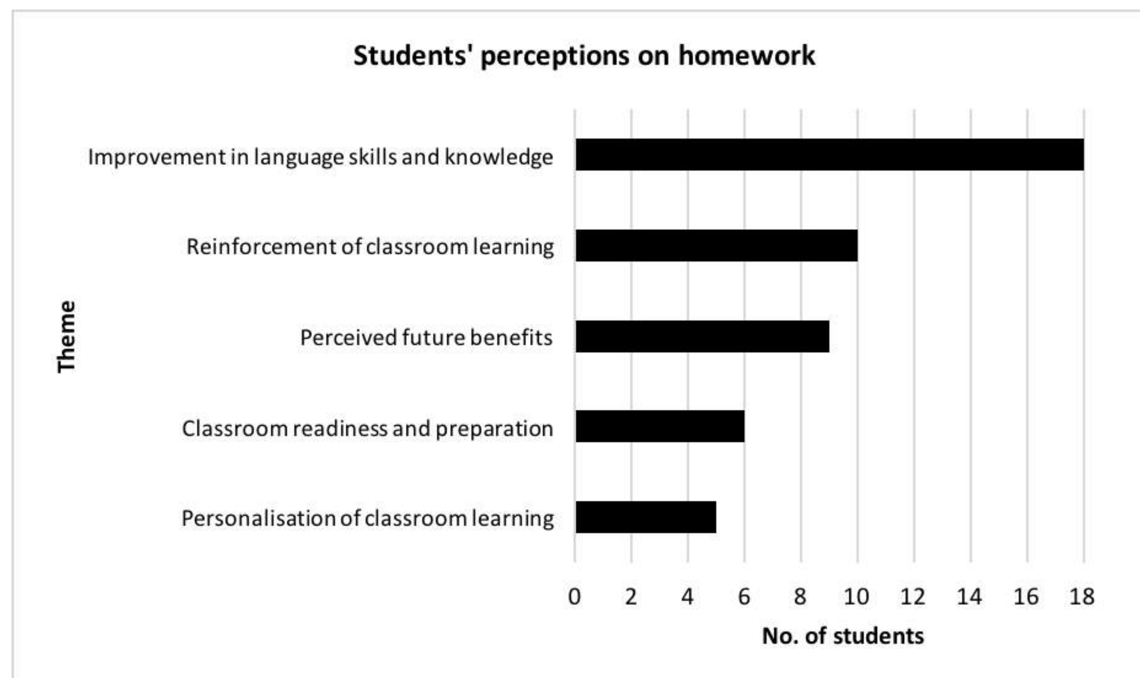

Figure 1. Students' perceptions on homework by theme (N=19).

Improvement in language skills and knowledge

Eighteen participants believe the homework helps them improve in at least one of the four core language skills of reading, speaking, writing and listening, or helps to increase their grammatical and vocabulary knowledge.

In regard to listening ability, 11 students feel that the voice recording is useful as they can listen to pronunciation carefully, improve their listening comprehension and become more accustomed to listening in English.

> Student 13: "Because I seldom listen to the pronunciation of real people, the listening is very useful."

> Student 17: "Because I can listen to the teacher's voice, I seem to become more accustomed to English."

Eleven students responded in regard to their writing ability. Several students feel that writing an English composition every week helps them acquire the ability to compose sentences or English compositions, or gives them increased confidence. Two students also stated having feedback provided on their writing is beneficial for improving their writing.

> Student 7: "By making sentences myself, I think I can gain the ability to put to use and combine together the words and grammar I have learnt until now."

> Student 17: "Because I normally have no opportunity to write an English composition, I don't have confidence. However, by writing every week I can get used to it."

> Student 2: "Because my compositions are properly corrected, I think it leads to an improvement in my writing."

Seven students responded in relation to their speaking ability. Students generally feel they can improve their pronunciation and become more fluent by listening to the recording, helping them get used to speaking and communicating in English.

> Student 7: "I think improving my pronunciation will lead me to be able to speak with foreign people."

> Student 14: "I became able to speak more smoothly than before."

Five students responded regarding their reading ability, with the reading homework helping them get used to reading or increase their reading speed.

> Student 4: "Through listening and shadowing, I think I am able to read faster."

Five participants mentioned grammar and vocabulary in their responses. Three students believe the acquisition of grammar is important, including for entrance examinations, while two students mentioned the homework allows them to learn new vocabulary.

> Student 18: "I think it is important to acquire English grammar. By repeatedly using it, I think I can firmly grasp the grammar."

> Student 3: "[The homework] is a good opportunity to learn new words."

Reinforcement of classroom learning

Ten participants mentioned that the writing homework helps to reinforce the content of the lesson. Several students feel that by reviewing the lesson content and writing sentences using the target grammar point, they can better remember and acquire what they learnt.

> Student 2: "Because the writing homework mainly deals with the grammar learnt in class, it leads to a deeper understanding of the lesson content."

> Student 13: "It is helpful to look back at the lesson again and confirm the points that I didn't understand. Also, receiving homework like this helps me to know how much I have to review."

> Student 17: "By writing using the grammar that I learnt in the lesson, I think I can remember that grammar."

Perceived future benefits

Nine participants stated future uses for English which they believe the homework can help them accomplish.

Seven of these students believe the homework will assist them in meeting success on future examinations by increasing their listening, reading, or writing ability, acquiring grammar, or reinforcing the lesson content.

> Student 12: "Because the impression in my mind becomes stronger, I won't forget it, and I can expect to get good scores in regular tests."

> Student 14: "By acquiring grammar firmly, I think it will become very advantageous for entrance examinations in the near future."

Four students recognised the concept of globalisation, and how acquiring aspects of spoken English will help them be able to participate in a global community. Other students mentioned being able to utilise English when travelling or working abroad, or at international events such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

> Student 15: "Because of globalisation, in order to communicate with foreigners when entering society in the future, I can acquire correct pronunciation and tone, and I believe I can deepen my involvement in the world."

> Student 14: "For anything in the future, English is necessary, and if I have an understanding, I think it can be advantageous to me compared to other people."

Classroom readiness and preparation

Six participants feel that the listening and reading homework helps them prepare for class. A common response was how preparation in advance helps the content of the lesson enter the students' minds, and thus makes the class easier to understand.

> Student 15: "Because I can prepare in advance, it is easy for the content of the lesson to enter my mind."

> Student 18: "I think it is good to be able to understand the sentences dealt with in class in advance. I think it is necessary because it is difficult to easily understand all the sentences just in the class."

Personalisation of classroom learning

Five participants recognise that the writing homework allows them to make active choices in what they choose to write about.

> Student 2: "I think [the homework] is practical because I often write my own opinion."
>
> Student 14: "Because I can write about my own things using my own words, [the homework] is very beneficial."

Students' use of resources

Students' responses on the resources they use to do the homework are presented under the following four themes:

1. Use of electronic devices for listening
2. Use of dictionaries
3. Receiving parental help
4. Use of other resources

Figure 2 depicts the number of students who gave a response connected to each theme.

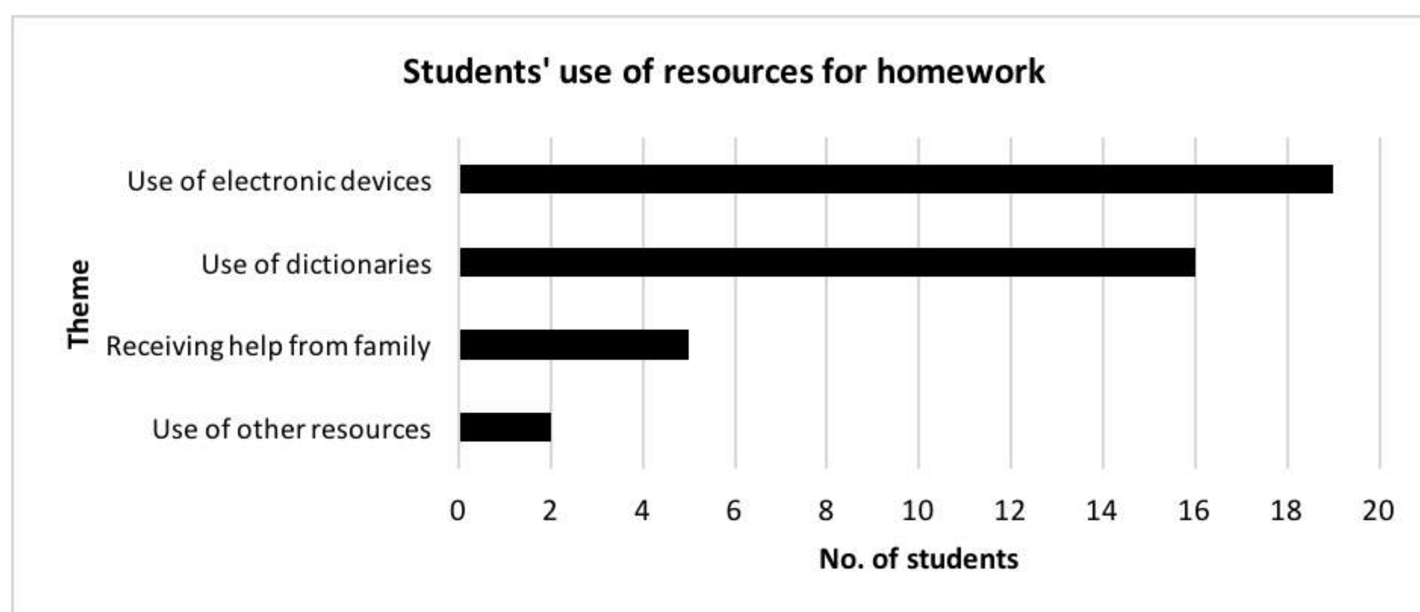

Figure 2. Students' use of resources for homework by theme (N=19).

Use of electronic devices for listening

All 19 participants mentioned that they use electronic devices, such as smartphones and computers, to listen to the voice recording before class, with some listening multiple times. Several students also reported using shadowing.

> Student 18: "I put the listening audio on my smartphone and repeatedly listen."
>
> Student 4: "I listen to the voice while speaking along."

Use of dictionaries

Sixteen participants said that they use dictionaries to check the meaning of new words, while one student also checks the pronunciation of words.

> Student 1: "I use an electronic dictionary to look up words I don't know."
>
> Student 9: "I check phonetic symbols using a dictionary to learn the pronunciation of words."

Receiving help from family

Five students said that they ask family members for help.

Student 13: “When there are things that I can’t do by myself, my mother helps me.”

Use of other resources

Two students reported using Google Translate, with one also using grammar and vocabulary books.

Student 7: “After I have finished making sentences, I enter them into Google Translate to make sure they are right.”

Discussion

Based on the results of this study, it can be seen that students clearly perceive the homework in a positive way, which reaffirms the value of assigning homework on a weekly basis. Many of the benefits that students feel the homework provides show consensus with my own beliefs, and also reflect various student perceptions outlined in the literature review (Brown, 2006; Provenzano & Yue, 2011).

It was encouraging to observe that many students feel listening to the voice recording helps them to become more accustomed to listening to English and acquire correct pronunciation. This supports my belief that providing students with an audio of the passage is worthwhile, helping them feel more confident about their listening ability, and for some students their speaking ability in turn. I was also pleased to see some students notice the benefit in transferring their classroom learning into situations where they actively choose what to write about, while practicing the grammar point from the lesson. In addition, most students indicated that they check the meaning of unknown words using dictionaries, a positive point which shows a degree of learner autonomy (Gairns & Redman, 1986).

The responses in the category of perceived future benefits showed that students may perceive important long-term aims that do not immediately relate to my primary goals of assigning homework. Some students believe the homework will help them when taking examinations in the future. In addition, other students mentioned situations in the future where they feel being able to communicate in English would be advantageous, such as using English in a globalised world.

Implications

As all students gave positive perceptions on the homework, the study confirms the benefits of my current practices. However, on reflection several points emerged that I intend to investigate further to better meet students’ needs.

At present, when assigning homework, I ask students to read the instructions out loud to check their understanding, provide examples on the handout, and then do the first question of the homework with them. However, I believe a suggestion from two students to spend additional time on homework in class would be beneficial. Nation (2013) comments that doing this while providing guidance and feedback can help ensure that homework is completed successfully by students at home.

While all students can see benefits in doing homework, and some of these benefits suggest they are quite motivated to learn, it does not necessarily mean that all students are motivated about their homework or learning. It is also possible that students may hold perceptions on what kind of homework would be better suited to them. One student thought that the homework would be better “if it was a little more difficult”, while another student expressed a desire for a wider “variety of topics to write about”. One student also expressed a preference for writing homework only, stating that they feel “a sense of accomplishment” when completing it, a feeling that they cannot experience from doing the listening homework.

In order to maximise student engagement and motivation, Harmer (2015) suggests involving students in discussions about homework, and even getting students to say what kind of homework they would like to do and believe would be helpful, as “student choice is a powerful motivator” (p. 107). Therefore, in response to this study, I plan to conduct further research where I will ask students the following questions:

- How do you believe the homework can be improved?
- What would you like to do for homework? How will this be valuable for your English learning?

I am also interested in knowing how the students use their dictionaries when doing homework, as responses indicated that most students use dictionaries for checking new vocabulary, but only one mentioned checking pronunciation. Based on my observations, it seems that students usually check the meaning of unknown words and translate them into Japanese. However, students often do not know how to pronounce the words, which could indicate that they seldom check the pronunciation, a common finding in previous research (Alhaisoni, 2016). Therefore, I intend to find out how students use their dictionaries, and discuss with them the best methods to look up and learn new vocabulary.

Limitations

This study was undertaken with a small number of students. Although the study was made to be as anonymous as possible and students were asked to write their feelings and beliefs honestly, students may not have felt entirely anonymous when answering the questionnaire. Therefore, some students may have avoided answering in a negative way that they felt may offend their teacher, and instead wrote what they perceived the teacher would like to hear. A question for future consideration could ask what students do not like doing as homework tasks.

In addition, participants in the study were across a range of grades at school, however due to the small class sizes and students of different grades being in the same classes, a comparison of the responses could not be made between students from different grades. The age of the students could also have influenced their perceptions, with older students possibly having more internalised adult views about homework (Xu & Yuan, 2003). It is also possible that although some students did not indicate a particular perception with regard to all themes, this does not mean that they do not hold these views if they were asked.

Conclusion

This study examined the feelings and beliefs of 19 students in regard to their homework, as well as the resources they use when doing the homework, in the context of an English program at a Japanese cram school. Analysis of the responses indicated that overall, students had positive perceptions on the homework, believing that they benefit in terms of improving language skills and knowledge, reviewing and preparing for lessons, using what they learn in class to express their own meanings, and also perceive long-term advantages. It was valuable for me to gain insights into students' perceptions, confirming but also informing my assumptions on the benefits of the homework I assign.

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Appendix

Questionnaire form in Japanese

1.宿題についてどう感じますか？

[授業の前に行うリスニング（聞く）やリーディング（読む）の宿題について]

[授業の後に行う英作文の宿題について]

2. 宿題をする際、何をどのように使いますか？（宿題をするのに、役立てているものや人など）

[授業の前に行う、リスニング（聞く）やリーディング（読む）の宿題について]

[授業の後に行う、英作文の宿題について]

3. あなたの英語学習において、宿題をすることでどんな利益が得られると考えていますか？

[授業の前に行うリスニング（聞く）やリーディング（読む）の宿題について]

[授業の後に行う英作文の宿題について]

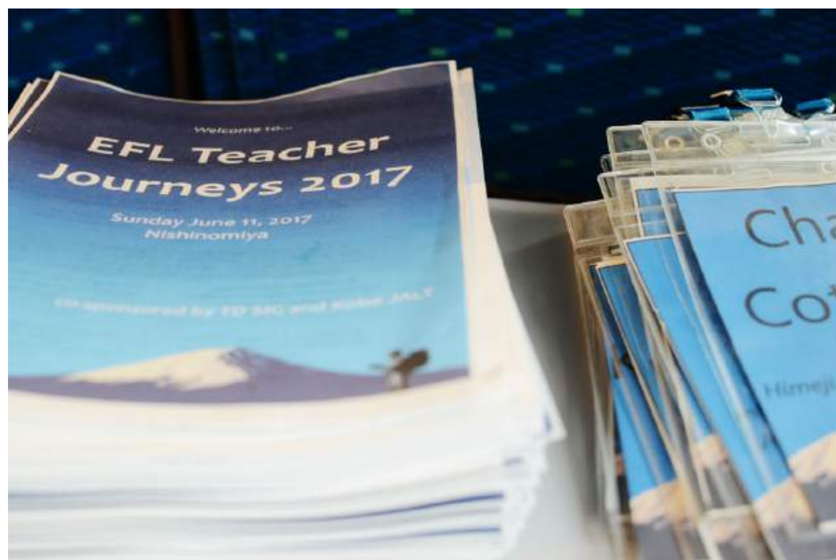
Bio: Ewen MacDonald is a student in the MA TESOL Program at Kanda University of International Studies in Tokyo, Japan. He currently teaches students in an English Program at a cram school in Japan, having previously taught at a junior high school in Japan, and at universities in China. His research interests include teacher cognition, second language acquisition, corrective feedback, and vocabulary.

Teacher Journeys Conference Proceedings June 2017

Mike Ellis, Co-Program Chair, TD-SIG

We were absolutely thrilled to bring Teacher Journeys back to Kansai on June 11, 2017. This was the sixth annual Teacher Journeys Conference, and our first collaboration with Kobe JALT. The conference took place at Konan University's CUBE campus in Nishinomiya, just outside Kobe. We began with a featured presentation by Dr. Atsuko Watanabe of Bunkyo University. Atsuko encouraged us to consider the meaning and purpose of reflective practice, setting the perfect tone for the rest of the day. In total there were sixteen presentations across four sessions. In particular, topics such as building a "second skin" to protect against challenges in the classroom and learning to teach within constraints resonated deeply with me personally. In the afternoon featured presentation, Dr. Ken Tamai of the Kobe City University of Foreign Studies shared observations throughout his own career on the promotion of reflective practice in Japan. In total, there were about 50 attendees, and all seemed to leave the conference stimulated and even energized for Monday morning. We'd like to express our gratitude to Kobe JALT for making this conference a success, and to Konan University for graciously hosting us. Check out further updates from TD SIG about Teacher Journeys 2018, which will take place in Tokyo at Rikkyo University this June 3. We hope to see you there!

Conference Web site: https://sites.google.com/site/teacherjourneys/



From top:
EFL Teacher Journeys programs and name tags; Kobe Port Tower view; Presenter Anna Loseva; Presenter Robert Lowe; Plenary speaker Atsuko Watanabe; Plenary speaker Ken Tamai

Writing Center Tutor Journeys

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Writing centers have become increasingly popular on university campuses in Japan. There are at least 13 writing centers located throughout the country (The Writing Centers Association of Japan, n.d.). These writing centers are all slightly different, but they share a common goal of improving student writing in the target language. Depending on the needs of the institution, writing centers may be staffed by faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, or international students. This type of collaboration leads to both student and tutor learning and development. The present study aims to discover what international student tutors learned through their experiences tutoring in a writing center at a foreign language university in Japan.

The effects of peer tutoring on writing center tutors

The Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project (PWTARP) is a survey research project designed to study what peer tutors learn from their writing center tutoring experiences (Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail, 2017). The original researchers, Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail (2010), found that undergraduate tutors who had worked in writing centers in the United States gained a variety of skills and abilities from tutoring. Responses from 126 former tutors from three different writing centers pointed to the usefulness of these skills and abilities in their current professional and personal lives. The results of their research show that "From their education and experience as peer tutors, alumni developed a new relationship with writing; analytical power; a listening presence; skills, values, and abilities vital in their professions; skills, values, and abilities vital in families and relationships; earned confidence in themselves; and a deeper understanding of and commitment to collaborative learning" (Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail, 2010).

The PWTARP is designed to be adapted and used by other researchers and research has been replicated at various universities throughout the United States. Dinitz and Kiedaisch (2009) at the University of Vermont found that peer tutors developed communication skills, writing skills, teaching skills, and cognitive skills from working at the writing center. Zucker and Evertz (in Hughes, 2011) discovered that peer tutor alumni emphasized the development of communication and collaboration skills from their writing center work.

Research on the effects of peer tutoring on tutors has been primarily conducted in the United States. This research investigates the effects of peer tutoring on international students who tutored Japanese students in a university writing center in Japan. The purpose of this study is to investigate two research questions:

1. How much do tutors feel they improved certain skills and abilities by tutoring in the writing center at a Japanese foreign language university?

2. How much do tutors feel the experience of tutoring in the writing center at a Japanese foreign language university affected their future work or study plans?

Method

Participants

The participants were international undergraduate students who have worked as tutors in the writing center at a Japanese foreign language university. The tutoring staff members were students studying Japanese language and culture for

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one or two semesters at the university. They came from home universities in countries all over the world, including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Philippines, Argentina, and Singapore. The tutors had a variety of majors, interests, experiences, and backgrounds. The writing center assisted Japanese undergraduate students who were completing writing assignments in English for language or content courses. Japanese students could also receive guidance for internship applications, study abroad applications, and job interviews. Each semester, approximately 1000 tutoring sessions were conducted. Although most of the writing center tutors' time was spent tutoring students individually or in small groups, some tutors performed other tasks, such as assisting with workshops, materials development, and the training of new tutors.

Instrument

The Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project Survey (Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail, 2010) was adapted to fit the context of the study (see Appendix). It is a combination of Likert-scale responses and open-ended questions. In May 2015, electronic surveys were sent to 50 writing center tutor alumni from 2012-2014 and 27 responses were received (54% response rate). The tutors had worked in the writing center for one or two semesters. At the time of completing the survey, some former tutors were still enrolled at their home universities, but some had graduated and were in graduate school or the workforce.

Results

Research question 1: How much do tutors feel they improved certain skills and abilities by tutoring in the writing center at a Japanese foreign language university?

The first question asked participants to rate from 1 (not improved) to 5 (greatly improved) how much working in the writing center helped them to improve a variety of skills and abilities. The items with the highest means were intercultural communication skills (4.48) and the ability to analyze writing (4.37). The means for other items were as follows: confidence (4.07), knowledge of grammar, mechanics, and documentation (4.04), patience (3.96), and interest in teaching or tutoring (3.89), writing skills (3.67), and social or personal life (3.59). The two items with the lowest means were job application skills (3.48), and public speaking skills (3.30). The results are listed below in Table 1.

The two skills that were rated the highest for improvement were intercultural communication skills (4.48) and the ability to analyze writing (4.37). A possible explanation for higher means in these skills is that tutors would likely use these skills during every shift at the writing center. All tutors were international students and almost all tutees were Japanese students, so tutoring sessions provided the opportunity for intercultural communication. Furthermore, because writing center tutors and supervisors came from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, communication between staff members also provided a chance to develop skills in this area. Regarding the ability to analyze writing, the main activity for writing center tutors was to consult with students individually and assist them with improving their writing assignments. As a result, tutors had the opportunity to analyze student writing during each shift.

The two skills that were rated the lowest for improvement were job application skills and public speaking skills. One possible explanation for lower means of these skills is that not all writing center tutors engaged in activities that might have provided them with clear opportunities to improve these skills. The service of assisting Japanese students with job application and interviews did not begin at the same time the writing center opened, but two years later in 2014, with only certain tutors specializing in this area. Fewer tutors engaged in this writing center activity. Regarding public speaking skills, a likely explanation can be found in the percentage of tutors who engaged in activities that would have helped them to develop in this area. According to question two on the survey, "How much did these writing center activities help you improve these skills and abilities?", 15 of the 27 respondents did not give a writing center tour or presentation to groups of students, nor did they participate in the presentation event (a semesterly public speaking event where international students gave presentations in Japanese and Japanese students gave presentations in English). Furthermore, 20 of the 27 respondents

did not give a presentation about the writing center to faculty or at a professional conference. Therefore, most tutors did not engage in writing center activities related to public speaking, and this skill was rated the lowest in terms of improvement.

Table 1. Mean for how much working in the writing center helped tutors to improve the following skills and abilities

Skills and abilities	Mean (n=27)
Intercultural communication skills	4.48
Ability to analyze writing	4.37
Confidence	4.07
Knowledge of grammar, mechanics & documentation	4.04
Patience	3.96
Interest in teaching or tutoring	3.89
Writing skills	3.67
Social or personal life	3.59
Job application skills	3.48
Public speaking skills	3.30

Research question 2: How much do tutors feel the experience of tutoring in the writing center at a Japanese foreign language university affected their future work or study plans?

Question 6 asked former tutors to rate from how much their experiences as a tutor affected their choice of future work or study. The scale ranged from 1 (did not influence my choice of future study or work) to 5 (greatly influenced my choice of future study or work). There were 24 responses received and the mean was 2.71. Student comments indicate that the writing center experience did not change their future professional or educational goals, but rather deepened their commitment and understanding of their plans.

Sample student answers to Question 7, “Please explain your ranking for number 6. What jobs or educational experiences have your pursued? Why have you pursued these since finishing your tutoring experience?” give insight into this ranking. Two former tutors who are pursuing careers in education answered that the experience of working in the writing center deepened their interest in their already chosen professions. One respondent wrote, “I intend to become a professor of Japanese. I had intended this prior to working at the writing center, but tutoring there proved to me that I feel most fulfilled when I am teaching.” Another said, “I got to learn about a different aspect of linguistics, ESL and applied linguistics. This, in turn, was able to help me select what field of linguistics I wish to study.”

Two former tutors who are employed in areas outside of education gave the following explanations. One wrote, “Since being a tutor, I have since gone into the field of mental healthcare. I currently work as the team leader for a program that provides direct care for children 6-12 with significantly behavioral issues and trauma. While not directly related, my tutoring experience taught me that I was happiest when working one on one, when I can teach different skills, and when I am doing work that makes a significant impact.” Another responded, “My major is Japanese Language and Culture, my work experience is primarily in web, photography, videography, and marketing. I'm currently doing the latter employed at my alma mater as the staff Web Developer. If anything, it has given me a better sense of how to train and assist others in

learning new things, such as helping new student workers." Although some former tutors do not work in areas related to teaching, they perceive the skills and abilities that they learned from tutoring as valuable in their current work environment.

Discussion

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is related to the participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and former tutors who had good experiences as tutors were probably more likely to complete the survey, and this may positively affect the results. Furthermore, the relatively small number of participants limits the generalizability of the results. The second limitation is related to the survey design. Former tutors are asked to rate how much they feel they have improved their skills and abilities from working in the writing center. This is subjective with participants basing their answers on their own frame of reference.

Despite these limitations, the study did provide insight into the writing center tutor experience which was useful at the university level. Tutor comments point to the benefits of working in this writing center. The international student tutors can have experiences that they otherwise would not be able to have during study abroad. One tutor stated, "I think it was one of my more positive experiences in Japan as it let me connect with faculty whom I never met, international students I may not have known, and allowed me to help others learn my language while they were helping me learn theirs." Another tutor said, "There are so many things a Japanese person will write about themselves, their country, and their culture in a class assignment that they would never discuss in casual conversation. Working at the writing center taught me so much about Japanese culture from an insider's perspective that I couldn't have gotten any other way."

Studies that continue to investigate writing centers as places of learning for not only students but also tutors will be important additions to the growing body of writing center research in Japan.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Pamela Suriyachai for delivering this presentation with me, Dr. Lisa Miller for her help with the initial stages of this research, and all the writing tutors and supervisors who made this project possible.

Appendix

Writing Center Tutor Survey Adapted from Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project Survey (Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail, 2010)

1. How much did working in the Writing Center help you to improve the following? Rate from 1 (not improved) to 5 (strongly improved).

Confidence
Intercultural communication
Ability to analyze writing errors and patterns
Patience

Interest in teaching or tutoring
Social or personal life (meeting new people, developing new friendships, etc.)
Job application skills
Public speaking skills
Writing skills
Knowledge of grammar, mechanics, documentation, etc.

2. How much did these Writing Center activities help you to improve these skills and abilities? Rate from 1 (not improved) to 5 (strongly improved).

Tutoring students individually
Tutoring students in small groups
Assisting with workshops
Giving tours or presentations about the Writing Center for groups of students
Delivering presentations to faculty or at professional conferences
Working or presenting at the Presentation Event
Developing writing center materials (handbooks, guides, presentations, etc.)
Training new staff members

3. Please relate a memorable or valuable experience you had while working as a tutor in the Writing Center.
4. How did your Writing Center tutoring experience affect your study abroad experience? Rate from 1 (not improved) to 5 (strongly improved).
5. Please explain your ranking for number 4. How did working in the Writing Center affect your study abroad experience?
6. How much did your experience as a tutor affect your choice of work or study after finishing your study abroad? Rate from 1 (not improved) to 5 (strongly improved).
7. Please explain your ranking for number 6. What jobs or educational experiences have your pursued? Why have you pursued these since finishing your tutoring experience?
8. If there is anything else you would like to add about your experience as a writing center tutor that was not included in this survey, please add your comments below.

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Teacher's Journeys From the Laboratory to the ESL Classroom: Training Students in Peer-Assessment

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We will relate how we have structured our academic writing workshop assessment model for third year university students, based on incentives used to train interns in a molecular biology laboratory; a former workplace for one of the teachers involved.

Background

The Academic Writing Workshop at our university is a third year elective course that was originally aimed at higher intermediate and advanced students. There was a TOEIC 450 or higher requirement for enrollment. However, because of administrative problems and scheduling issues, that requirement was eventually dropped. This resulted in a very mixed-level class. We had people who needed a lot of work with punctuation and spelling alongside students who were already familiar with the basics of process writing and could construct longer and more complex passages.

To make the matter more complicated, the class was scheduled at a popular time and often as many as 32 students would sign up. This made it difficult to effectively monitor everyone, and it felt like we were teaching two or even three classes at the same time. The lower level students felt overwhelmed, while the more advanced level students felt frustrated and bored. Taking a closer look at the assignments throughout the semester, it was apparent that the students were repeating the same mistakes again and again, and there was no evidence that learning was occurring.

Because the higher level students had already been introduced to the basics of process writing, we thought it would be a good idea to pair them with the lower level students, hoping that they will help and learn from each other. Prior to doing this, we did a review of the academic literature, to see how others had conducted group work and peer-assessment in particular.

Van Zundert and collaborators conducted a literature review and concluded that because of the wide methodology employed for conducting peer assessment, it is hard to draw any overarching conclusions (Van Zundert et. al, 2010). However, their meta-study narrowed down the following factors: 1) training and experience of peers; 2) students are shown to develop domain-specific skills through peer-assessment based revisions; 3) prior training has a positive impact on students' thinking styles and academic achievement, and 4) students develop a positive attitude towards carrying out this collaborative task as fostered through training and practice.

A look at the literature revealed different methods employed for training in peer-assessment. Some utilized emulation: a DVD was shown to the students where a group of peers were engaged in peer-assessment. Other studies utilized hands-on

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practice sessions monitored by the instructor, while some investigators introduced the concept of peer-assessment, followed by discussion of interaction strategies, and appraisal criteria formulation for guidance.

The types of errors that should be targeted by peer-assessment also varied among studies. Truscott has argued that correcting grammar errors in the writing workshop is not only ineffective, but also harmful for learners because it detracts from a new and complex task that the student is trying to master; that of process writing (Truscott, 1996). According to Truscott, assessment should be focused on issues of styles, content, and organization in process writing. Other researchers have categorized errors into different levels, such as lexicon, syntax, spelling, and style. Diab (2016) has narrowed down the error correction criteria to reducing pronoun agreement and lexical errors. Allen and Mills created a coding scheme for suggestions for surface errors and text errors (Allen and Mills, 2016).

Researchers have also argued about the most effective way for providing corrections: Should they be explicit and direct, or indirect (Chandler, 2003)? While students prefer direct corrections because they are faster to incorporate and lead to more accurate revisions, students actually learned more from indirect corrections (their errors were underlined, but not explained).

Application of peer-assessment

The training consisted of correcting texts with errors in groups of two or three peers. A coding scheme was created for errors and students were shown how to apply it to texts. Throughout the semester we monitored the students to make sure that the coding scheme was used correctly and that the students revised the errors. Overall, the students received three training sessions.

The coding scheme we used included grammar errors (e.g. singular vs. plural, subject-verb agreement, verb tense), mechanics (text formatting, capitalization, spelling), register related changes (change but to however, use of academic vocabulary, etc.), and stylistic errors (correct topic sentences, logical progression of ideas). We used this coding scheme because some of our students needed basic training in proper sentence writing first. We introduced more items for process writing into the coding scheme later, as we progressed through the course.

We faced several problems in the beginning. Mainly, the students were reluctant to engage in peer-assessment and criticize each other. The lower level students seemed intimidated by higher level students, and the higher level students were frustrated with the lower level students, who weren't giving much input. The lower level students were also less likely to revise and incorporate error corrections successfully.

At this juncture we decided to use something Cristina had seen in her previous job as a technician in a biology lab. The interns in the Hematology lab had also engaged in peer-assessment, but the stakes were much higher. The interns had three months to design an experimental protocol based on the techniques they had learned. They worked in groups of four: two college kids and two high schoolers. The four students had to help and critique each others' designs. The best design won a scholarship for the next academic year. The students kept a log of their meetings and the suggestions they had received from peers, and these logs were also used in deciding which student was the most deserving.

The laboratory interns were highly motivated, and most of them had never met their peers before, and would most likely not have had to interact with the other interns on a daily basis after completing the internship, so they were not reluctant to engage each other in feedback. The Japanese students however were pretty familiar with each other, having studied at the same university for the two previous years. Therefore, we decided to add an element of extrinsic motivation to the interaction. We changed the curriculum so that the advice given to peers was not just part of the grade, but a highly significant part of the grade (i.e. 40%).

We also tested different types of interactions: a) oral feedback from writers at the same proficiency level (Expert-Expert, Novice-Novice), b) oral feedback from mixed proficiency levels with at least one Expert, and c) anonymous written comments via a software program from unknown peers. For the last option we secretly set up mixed proficiency groups to

see if the lower level students would be more likely to interact with higher level students if they were not aware of who their peers were. The software we used was WinBird, which allowed us to control which users could access and share data.

We then surveyed the students to see which method of collaborative feedback they preferred. As you can see from this table, the higher level students, or the Experts in this case, indicated that they found face to face feedback with other Experts to be most useful. The lower level students, we called them Novices, seemed to find the anonymous feedback via computer to be most useful. It also appeared that the Novices were more likely to correctly revise errors that they were advised about in this interaction. Additionally, the Novices gave more comments in the interaction via computer. It is hard to make any generalizations from such a small sample of students, but for this particular class, we decided to continue using the anonymous mixed level groups utilizing the computers to give feedback.

There is an art to setting up successful interactions, and so many things can affect quality. According to the Socio-Cultural Theory of Human Learning, which was developed by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, it is best to give corrections to a learner that are appropriate to their knowledge and ability (Vygotsky, 1934). Think of a learners' knowledge and ability as a range. Vygotsky called this range the Zone of Proximal Development.

So how would this theory apply to our peer groups? Imagine a Novice, a lower level student who is struggling with punctuation and spelling. This student is paired with an Expert, a higher level student who is mainly giving him corrections on writing proper topic sentences. Even if the advice is spot on, the Novice may not understand it and it would be very unlikely that it would lead to him changing his topic sentence.

To avoid this situation, we started with a very simple error correction guide, which was built onto gradually as new concepts were introduced during the course. We also trained the students to focus strictly on the particular points being introduced in our lessons. Even for the Hematology lab interns, we found it impractical to keep pairing up the high school students with the college students. Initially, the medical doctor running the lab had imagined that the college students would act like mentors to the high schoolers, but as we later realized, most of the younger interns simply lacked the knowledge and training needed to successfully participate in the collaborative feedback groups.

It took over two years of tinkering with the way we taught the course to get to a point of satisfaction. We started introducing training in peer-assessment earlier on, in second and even first year communication and reading & writing courses, to make it easier for the students to engage in this activity in their third year.

Conclusion

Overall, we think it has been a worthwhile effort to implement peer-assessment into our academic writing classes. Over the course of these years we've noticed certain trends that are very encouraging. Firstly, after receiving training in peer-assessment in their second year, a large proportion of higher level students were then able to successfully engage in collaborative feedback without training or prompting from their instructors in their third year writing workshop.

Another success, in our opinion, was tying peer-assessment to their final grade. We noticed that after basing 40% of the course grade on the comments they gave to peers, the frequency and quality of the feedback comments increased significantly. This took quite a bit of effort on the instructor`s part, and it took a lot of drafts and revisions for the students to begin to understand what was required of them. After one year of continuous training and constant monitoring, a good number of students were more likely to correctly identify errors and make meaningful suggestions for corrections. The lower level students were still less likely to revise their stylistic mistakes (write good topic sentences, use a guide for the introduction, etc.); however, a good number of them got better at using correct punctuation and made fewer grammatical errors.

Based on our findings, we believe further detailed research into student improvement following implementation of peer-assessment programs is required to fully understand the effectiveness of such a system. Also, we believe there is room to further streamline the implementation and teaching process. Possible changes could include a written guide for students, including Japanese translations, and implementation of the system into a specialized software application to more accurately monitor student progress.

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Reflecting on a Professional Teacher's Path: An Autobiographical Account

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Each aspiring teacher undergoes a journey to develop as a professional. Some decide to become a teacher at an early age and later achieve that goal; others go through complex processes to obtain a teaching job. By reflecting on their trajectories, teachers can reset themselves and accelerate their self-development. However, teachers have insufficient opportunities for sharing their journeys in narrative accounts. Presenting real voices encourages teachers as it includes "a complex combination of description, explanation, analysis, interpretation, and construal of one's private reality" (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 490).

On June 11th, 2017, the Teacher Journeys Conference 2017 was held at the Nishinomiya Campus of Konan University. I attended the conference and presented my background as an English language teacher. By presenting my journey as a teacher, I had an opportunity to reflect on my work history. I am a professor at a four-year private university in Japan, but my road to becoming an English teacher was not straight. Rather, it was more complicated and circuitous. This paper illustrates snapshots of my journey to becoming an English teacher and concludes with a suggestion for reflective study using an autobiographical narrative approach.

An English Teacher's Journey

Prompt to Think About a Teacher's Career

My journey to becoming an English teacher was complicated and arduous. In my early years at the university, I was majoring in International Economics in the Department of Business, and my minor was foreign languages (mainly English). Looking back on my university years, my intention to become an English teacher began to crystallize when I started to work part-time as a tutor at a local supplementary school. Students could not earn a certificate to teach English at my university, but I became interested in teaching English. During my junior year, I joined a study abroad program in England for three months as an exchange student. This essential event was a catalyst for my preparations to become an English teacher. The English class for the exchange students was invigorating. While I was taking the English class, I often thought about how I would teach English. I often thought, "If I teach English, I will do it like this," or "This activity would be appealing if I did it like this." By the end of my senior year, I had decided where I was going after graduation. To experience teaching English, I decided to teach at a supplementary school.

A Professional Teacher's Path

After finishing my bachelor's degree, I got what I wanted: I became a full-time English instructor at a private supplementary school. Even though I mainly taught English for entrance exams, this job was important because I was actually teaching English. I found joy in teaching and using trial and error to develop my teaching skills. However, I sometimes felt inexperienced while teaching. My teaching methods were insufficient, which made it difficult for me to provide adequate guidance to students. After teaching for only a year, I entered an MA TESOL program at a state university in the United States. Cultivating a new area of expertise while studying abroad was quite challenging because I had no prior knowledge of the field of linguistics and education. I always struggled to follow the courses. At the beginning of the MA

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program, I thought that I would acquire the professional skills and knowledge of English teaching and quickly find a teaching job in Japan. However, that shallow thought disappeared little by little. I gradually developed an interest in a particular research area, second language (L2) writing, and became involved in research. This interest sparked a desire to cultivate leadership abilities and acquire research skills. I spent two and a half years in the MA program, completing my MA thesis as an optional course, developing specialized knowledge, and improving upon myself.

Discursive Positioning as an English Teacher

Even though I finished the MA degree, I had trouble getting a full-time job in the field of education. All my applications to colleges or universities were rejected. I applied to private junior and high schools, but I was unsuccessful because I was not a certified teacher. I found some part-time work, at a supplementary school and an English conversation school, and started an English teaching certificate program through a correspondence course. I felt frustrated when I just taught "test-oriented" skills because I could not guide my students using my own knowledge and experience of teaching English. In addition, I had a stubborn pride, asking myself, "What am I doing? Will I continue teaching test-taking techniques even though I studied abroad?" This was a stressful and agonizing period during my journey to becoming a teacher. After completing the teaching certificate program, I finally got a full-time position at a private high school. I savored the joy I felt when I received my acceptance letter. It was a small thing, but at that moment I had accomplished one of my goals: becoming a professional, full-time English teacher.

It was quite meaningful work for me to teach English at a high school. Unlike teaching at a supplementary school, I could try various teaching approaches that I learned in graduate school. I thought that I would accumulate teaching experience until I approached the age of 40, and then, if possible, I would start a Ph.D. program. While I was teaching in high school, I found that I had little time to do research or follow the current trends in the field. As I mainly taught students who wanted to attend college, I spent a lot of time preparing for classes, holding making-up classes, and teaching individually. As my contract renewal date approached, I was at a loss which to choose: continuing to teach high school or starting afresh in higher education. Eventually, I applied for a full-time position at a university. To be honest, I was uncomfortable because I felt that I was drifting from one job to the next. Besides, I had nothing to do if I could not get a job. I went for a few hiring interviews and fortunately gained a full-time position as an assistant professor at my current institute.

I have been teaching at my current workplace for 12 years. Many people have said to me, "Are you happy with your present status?" Even though I am a professor, my teaching journey has been ongoing and will continue. I am still not satisfied with my teaching ability or my research progress. I have reflected on my teaching methods and developed a teaching style that suits the learning environment and students' level. Furthermore, I need to continue my strong commitment to my research. I need to publish more research papers and present them at both domestic and international conferences. For these reasons, my journey as an English teacher is unique and unfinished.

Coda

This paper narrates my journey to becoming an English teacher, progressing from a supplementary school instructor to a university professor. Using autobiographical narratives has been applied in research as a practical approach in the area of L2 education. By doing so, actual experiences and personal realities can be elucidated to explore language teachers' identities and emotionality through their professional lives in different contexts (Barkhuizen, 2017). Teachers' autobiographical narratives are a relevant research tool for L2 teacher education. Reflecting on teacher journeys with a narrative approach encourages open discussions through a qualitative approach to pursuing self-development as a language teacher.

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Column: Teacher Reflections
What I wish I could tell my students

by Amanda Yoshida

Have you been contemplating something about your teaching or classroom experiences? In this column, we invite anyone to share their reflections with us. Please contact the editor if you would like to contribute an installment or if you just have an idea you would like to run by her. We look forward to the next installment of "Teacher Reflections."

I wrote this piece while I was working on my grades last week, and I would like to share it here. I think this could be useful, if translated into Japanese, for students at my current university and for students at other schools. So many teachers I know struggle with these kinds of issues in their classes.

I think my students need to learn some basic study skills and class culture skills. Quite a few students have told me that they "didn't attend high school" or they "quit high school", but got into my current university by taking the entrance exam. I think that many of them have trouble adjusting to the expectations of being a student, being members of a class, etc. If the following guidelines could be communicated to them, it might save some heartache at the end of the year.

If there weren't a language and cultural barrier, and I could really get through to my students with these simple pieces of advice, here is what I would say to them:

It is possible to get an A or even an A+ in my class. Every semester, there are at least one or two students who get an A. In most classes, there are several A grades ... believe it or not.

Coming to class and being on time are not optional. You would not be late for your part-time job. If you were, you'd get a warning, and then next time, you'd get fired. Classes are the same way. Every time you saunter in late, you are docked in points. It may come back to bite you at the end of the semester because those lost points add up.

Homework is not an option. It's a requirement. If I assign homework, it's because I actually expect you to complete it and then...wait for it...submit it. I am a softie. I will even accept late work...to a point. I won't accept it AFTER my own grading deadline, but I will accept it up to our last class. Go ahead. Try me.

About this optional homework thing, let me remind you, it's not optional. You follow the instructions, you complete it, you submit it. You ask me or your classmates if you don't understand something. No excuses.

If you feel you are in danger of failing or getting a low grade, do whatever you can to increase your points in other ways. Attend classes. Submit all homework. Do well on your essays or presentations. Go over and above.

Asking questions is a positive thing. I won't think you're stupid. I won't feel like you are wasting my time. I became a teacher because I like people, especially young people. And, I like helping them. So, I will sit next to you and help you with whatever you need. You just have to ask. I cannot read your mind.

One more thing about asking questions. Curious students are students who care. Students who care about learning, about improving, about their grades are looked at with great awe by us teachers. We will commit ourselves to you.

Attending class alone is not enough. You also have to participate in the lesson, write stuff down, ask and answer questions, do homework, etc. That is called being a student.

I know this will surprise you, but there may be some students who were absent 4 times, yet they still managed to get an A or B in the class. It's because they fulfilled all other requirements for the class, and they did them well. (This is rare but it DOES happen.)

I think this will also surprise you. Some students attend every single class (or almost every class) and they can still only manage to get C or D. Why? Maybe they never handed in their homework. Maybe they were never ready to do their presentations, and then refused to do it when called upon. Maybe they were always playing video games on their phones and never seemed to know what

was going on. Just because you are present does not mean you are actually learning anything in the class.

While it is true that you "get to have 4 freebie absences", it doesn't mean you should try to be absent 4 times. In fact, I would not recommend missing more than 1 or 2 classes. Coming to every class is, of course, going to ensure that you get all the information you need to pass the class.

In the same vein, even if you miss a class, for whatever reason (sports, family issues, illness, skipping, etc.), you are still expected to submit homework, perform presentations, make arrangements for missed quizzes or tests, etc. Seriously. Don't just walk into the next class and say you didn't know about today's presentation that was announced 3 weeks ago. Don't just forget about the test you missed. It will come back to bite you when I calculate your grades.

Missing all four of your freebie classes right at the beginning of the semester is probably not a good idea. Why? Because it is likely that some bad luck will come to you towards the end of the semester. You might actually become ill, a family emergency might come up...you just never know. Better to play it safe.

If you know you will be absent in the near future, don't hesitate to tell me. I will still mark you absent, but at least I won't be worried about you not knowing when the next quiz, presentation date or essay deadline is. I'll still expect you to do the work.

If you know you are running late, it's very courteous of you to email me and let me know. However, you're still late and you should have taken an early bus or train, especially if this is a weekly occurrence.

If being late is common for you, you should try to fix that. Take an earlier bus or train that day...every week...so you can get to my class on time. It's not rocket science!

I think of college students as adults. They don't need to be reminded about assignments and deadlines because they keep track of everything in a planner. They also keep their papers neatly in a file folder so they never lose things. It is not my job to chase after students and beg them to turn in assignments. So, if...at the end of the semester, you receive a low grade, it might be because you are the type of student who expected to be reminded several times a week.

That said, even when I have reminded certain students about their assignments, well-past the deadlines, they often smile sheepishly at me. They tell me that they "forgot it at home", or they "forgot all about it but will do it TONIGHT!" But usually nothing ever comes of these promises, so it's really not worth my time to chase after anyone. Students who want A's or B's will do the assignments, and they don't need reminding.

It is not hard to figure out what your teacher wants from you. Of course, every teacher is different, so it takes time to figure this out. Observe your teacher closely. What kinds of things does she praise students for? What is the purpose of her class? What can you do in this class to ensure an A or a B? Once you figure this out, you should be able to follow through with it. If you remain confused, you probably haven't been listening or watching closely enough. (Yes, stop staring at your phone.)

Finally, teachers are human too. They like to be thanked for their hard work. They like to feel somewhat appreciated. If a teacher hands back your homework to you, say thank you. She probably stays up late every night scoring loads of homework for all her students...and she still manages to get to work on time.

So, if you ever wondered how to be a student, these guidelines should help. If you really think about it, being a good student is not that hard. It all comes down to showing that you care about learning, and that you want to learn more. If that means showing up for class on time, asking and answering questions, writing some stuff down on paper, handing it in to your teacher, among other things, then just do it. Pretty soon you will be in the real world and you will long for your student days when life was so simple.

Bio: Amanda Yoshida has taught English at both the secondary and the tertiary levels in Japan for 15 years and holds an MA in TESOL. She will soon be joining the English Language Institute at Kanda University of International Studies. Her research interests include collaborative teaching and learning, classroom-based assessment, and reflective practices. Amanda is also the mother of two elementary school-age kids and a dog. She is happiest when she is digital scrapbooking, watching Netflix alone, and drinking coffee.

Column: Conference Reflections ExcitELT

by Matthew Turner

Have you attended any conferences that were especially inspiring? Would you like to recommend a conference to our members? In this column, contributors can share information about specific conferences, presentations they attended, or helpful logistical information for those of us who have not stepped out of our comfort zones yet. Please contact the editor if you would like to contribute an installment or if you just have an idea you would like to run by her. We look forward to the next installment of “Conference Reflections.”

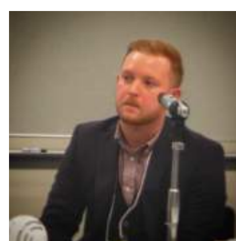
On Sunday June 4, 2017, the independent ExcitELT conference was held at Rikkyo University, Tokyo. This conference followed on from the inaugural edition that took place in Seoul the following year. The conference is an independent venture started by a teacher based in Beijing. Unlike many larger academic conferences, ExcitELT is not sponsored or affiliated with with any organisations, but is devised and carried out by a small group of volunteers. Last year’s event generated over 40,000 yen, with this sum going to iTDi (International Teacher Development Institute) scholarships and the Educating Girls of Rural China charity.

The day saw a variety of talks and workshops around the conference’s theme of ‘Unchartered Territories.’ Invited speaker Chia Suan Chong started the day by exploring things that teachers should not be afraid to say to students, with Michael Griffin challenging the audience to think about what it means to attend and participate in conferences. Katy Simpson got people thinking about pronunciation for global communicators, with other speakers focussing on the use of technology for teaching and learning, such as social media safety, and podcasting for professional development. Additional topics of the the day included creativity, reflection, and emotion. Invited speakers included Mike Hogan, Ted O’Neill, and Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto.

Features of the event very much reflected the ethos of the conference theme, as well as the organiser’s intention to create a friendly, inclusive, and participant-driven day. Plenary sessions were limited to brief, but punchy 10-minute slots, meaning speakers delivered simple and salient points to engaged audiences. And, aside from invited speakers, anyone could also apply to give a plenary presentation, allowing the chance for an emerging group of professionals to get their ideas across. There were also ‘hangout’ sessions, where the emphasis was on facilitating informal discussions amongst participants. Demo classes were also held too, in which participants would get the chance to experience teaching approaches from the perspective of being learners. There were lots of chances to interact with and get to know everyone, with the day

culminating in all attendees and speakers coming together to discuss and share their thoughts on the day. A number of speakers and attendees brought along their children and family members, with volunteers on hand to offer support.

ExcitELT will return again this year on Sunday, May 8, with the theme being 'Things Nobody Tells You about English Language Teaching.' In similar fashion to last year, the event will be taking place at Rikkyo University. There will be sessions from locally invited educators including Atsuko Watanabe and John F. Fanselow, with Scott Thornbury delivering an online session. Proposals for sessions are being accepted online at https://www.excitelt.tokyo/call/ from now until March 4th. This year's event promises to be another exciting day of professional development, interaction, and new insights.



Bio: Matthew Turner is a lecturer in the faculty of International Tourism Management at Toyo University. He holds an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL, as well as a DipTESOL. His professional interests include Teacher Development, Reflective Practice, support for SEN learners, Continuing Professional Development, and Cooperative Development. His personal interests include comedy, craft beer, and live music. He is co-founder and co-presenter of the TEFLology Podcast, and occasional blogger for iTDi.

excitELT
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About

What is excitELT?

excitELT is an English language teaching conference that strives to be friendly, inclusive and more participant driven.

Date: May 6th, 2018

Location: Rikkyo University, Tokyo

Theme: Things Nobody Tells You about English Language Teaching

Cost: To be decided. Proceeds from the conference will be donated to education-related good causes. Last year we raised over 40,000 yen for ITDI scholarships and Educating Girls of Rural China. Subscribe to our mailing list now to receive a discount code for advance conference registration.

Teacher Development

JALT TD SIG

The JALT Teacher Development SIG is a network of foreign language instructors dedicated to becoming better teachers and helping others teach more effectively. Active since 1993, our members teach at primary and secondary schools, universities, language schools, and in various other contexts. New members are always welcome to join our conversation and share their experiences with other teachers. (Please note that the name was officially changed from Teacher Education & Development SIG in early 2016.)

Become a TD SIG Member

Joining:

TD is a special interest group (SIG) of the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT). To join TD, you must be a JALT member. Information on joining JALT is available on the JALT web site (jalt.org).

If you are already a JALT member, you can also add a TD SIG membership to your existing JALT membership. Please see the JALT membership page for information on joining in the TD conversation.

Benefits:

Joining TD connects you to a network of teacher colleagues who are interested in growing professionally. Members receive the most current issue of TD's Explorations in Teacher Development (ETD) Journal by email (and in print if requested), and can participate in our mailing list.

TD also sponsors and co-sponsors events throughout the year to help teachers gain experience in mentoring and presenting.

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