
Feature Article

Working to Meet Students' Needs with Optimal Topics

Alison Kitzman
Kindai University

Too often course content is determined solely by the text, teacher, or syllabus, disregarding learner needs and learning styles, which can stifle internal motivation and any meaningful learning that leads to communicative competence and life-long autonomous learning. This paper first looks at potential reasons for, and the encouraging of, diversity in the classroom and follows with a discussion of needs theory and classroom implications for addressing such diversity. To illustrate, a simple ranking survey of 20 topics was used to analyze which topics most interested 988 university students studying English in Japan. Results showed that there were some topics students uniformly liked and others they uniformly did not like, and there were minor correlations between gender, major, and school. The wide variety of interests gathered from the additional write-in section of the survey further proves the enormity of trying to personalize learning for every student. Accordingly, methods of choosing optimal topics and manipulating less popular topics need to be developed in order to make learning meaningful, to internally motivate students, to develop autonomy, and to encourage life-long learning.

"I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."

Albert Einstein

Learners and teachers often have differing needs, interests, and expectations regarding course content. However, teachers are not usually in a position to control course content in ways that optimally motivate learners. With a lack of needs analyses, it is the textbook, teacher, or syllabus that predetermines content. Ausebel (1963) argues that meaningful learning only takes place when an item is related to something that the learner already comprehends and with which the new item can be cognitively associated. Without a meaningful cognitive

connection, it is argued, students may be language learners but will never develop the independent skills and strategies to be functioning language users. After six years of structured English education, Japanese university students should have a solid foundation in the basics of English. As young adults, they are no longer at the stage where they need to be told what to do yet may not be mature enough to make responsible decisions. University educators must facilitate learning while not stifling opportunities for self-regulation and growth by imposing their own ideas. Furthermore, the interests of the teacher may not match those of the students, and though Japan is considered a relatively homogenous culture, individual students have disparate needs and interests making it important to involve learners and get them to reflect and voice their opinions on their learning. Regardless of how fixed the course content may be, teachers should find ways they can best negotiate and adjust instruction to be more student-centered, especially at the university level. A needs analysis can be indispensable in balancing the divergent needs and wants of learners and educators in a fairly objective, albeit self-reported, way.

Maslow, psychologist and “Father of Needs Theory,” studied human potential and argued that motivation was not mechanical. Instead, he felt people strive to do their best and want to become capable, provided nothing inhibits this. He proposed a basic hierarchy of human needs in which there were five tiers (Maslow, 1954). Levels are independent and correlate to stages of life. A higher level of need cannot be satisfied until the lower levels are, in the life-long process of psychological development. Later, in the field of language teaching, Brindley (1984) posited two types of need in needs analysis. *Objective needs* are determined by gathering a learner’s personal data about their proficiency and usage in relation to a targeted communicative situation, information useful for creating course content even in the learner’s absence. *Subjective needs*, on the other hand, are not easily determined by outsiders, as they encompass the learner’s unique wants and expectations. Nunan (1999) characterized *content needs*, or the selection and sequencing of topics, functions, grammar, and the like at the syllabus level, as different from *process needs*, the selection and sequencing of learning tasks and experiences at the classroom level. Nunan also differentiated

between somewhat static *initial needs analyses*, those beyond the control of the teacher and conducted before a course begins by curriculum designers, and *ongoing needs analyses*, which can be conducted informally by teachers during the course of a program to make it more dynamic and potentially satisfying.

It was specifically the interrelationship between needs and satisfiers that economist Manfred Max-Neef, and his colleagues Elizalde and Hopenhayn, explored (1991). They argued it is not enough to know what need is, but it must also be understood whether and how those needs have been effectively satisfied. They identified five types of satisfiers: *destroyers*, *pseudo-satisfiers*, *inhibiting satisfiers*, *single category satisfiers*, and *synergetic satisfiers*. More of something that dissatisfies than satisfies, *destroyers* fail to satisfy any need. For language students, these can include negative affective barriers, a lack of feedback, a lack of purpose or understanding of the purpose, or it may just be students simply do not like the teacher or the topic. *Pseudo-satisfiers* give a false sense of satisfaction. This sense may be brought on by too much group work or too many games not linked to needs. Students may have finished the dialogue in the text, for example, but they are aware they still cannot hold a free conversation. An *inhibiting-satisfier* may satisfy one need, but inhibits the satisfaction of others, which can be found in over-grading or peer pressure. Feeling forced to give one's opinions or have confrontational discussions, a common cultural expectation of native language teachers, may inhibit a student who is otherwise capable of conversing. *Single category-satisfiers* satisfy a single need exclusively. Teacher-centered classes and rote memorization activities are common examples of this in Japan. A student may have learned to speak about something, but it may not be applicable to the student's daily life. True satisfiers must simultaneously satisfy multiple needs; ergo, they are termed *synergistic*. This includes personalized learning that is of interest and possibly self-selected, that is understood to be useful in the future, and that has language autonomously created by the learner. Satisfying multiple needs like this can stimulate feelings of success, further interest, and motivation.

Understanding egocentrism and the stages of psychological development is also pertinent to understanding the needs and satisfiers of Japanese university students. In 1923, Freud (1990) described maturity as when a person becomes

capable of loving and working with others. This is achieved after experiencing increasing levels of both self-awareness and self-control. Modern social behaviorists continue to refine this, including Goleman (1995) who argued that five domains of personal and social competence, which he termed *emotional intelligence*, were vital to personal and professional success, possibly more than standard intelligence. Kitzman (2008) analyzed how the cognitive and emotional development of young Japanese adults affects their needs. Applying Maslow's Hierarchy (Figure 1) to the cognitive parameters of Japanese university students, it is shown that the basic Physiological and Safety needs are met. However, such young adults generally have not had the numerous independent and self-governed experiences that Goleman argues are necessary to gain the autonomous self-regulation and self-awareness that lead to self-actualization. Their needs are still at the Self-esteem and Belonging levels, thus highly concentrated on the egocentric development of self.

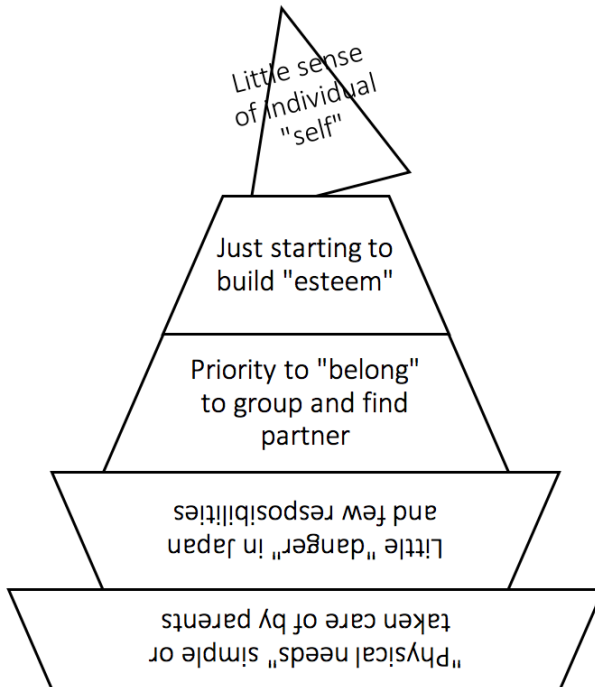


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy related to Japanese university students.

Modern needs theory has evolved, but issues still exist. It now recognizes that needs are not strictly hierarchical; they are culturally and socially dependent. However, methods of objectively and reliably measuring the development, traits, barriers, and intelligence bound to the premises elude researchers. There are no predictive values for those traits (Landy, 2005). Further, any statistics may measure conformity, not ability (Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001). Even if traits such as emotional intelligence were measurable, applying them effectively in the classroom is questionable. What is important is that teachers be aware of how they may impose their own preferences—learning style, cultural expectations, or other personal values—in ways that fail to satisfy and result in the demotivation of their students.

To mitigate this in a fixed-course context, teachers can spur motivation by playing to the egocentrism of the students. While covering mandatory academic materials, teachers can maximize student interest, thus involvement, by maximizing personalization. Tailoring topics may be the simplest way to achieve this. While research is ongoing to better determine optimal language learning methods and rationales, this paper intends to determine the following:

1. Are there topics that specifically interest Japanese university students?
2. Is there any correlation of topic to gender, major, school, or year in school?

Methods

Prior to making it a research study, this simple ranking instrument (Figure 2) was distributed to my second-year Oral English classes for several years to ascertain the interests of students. The survey was based on the then required textbook, *Let's Talk About It* (LTAI, Drayton & Gibbon, 1997), and it asked students to rank its 20 topics from one, most interesting, to 20, least interesting. Additionally, students were requested to write in three other topics of interests that were not on the list. Though instructions were given in both English and Japanese, 58% did not contribute original topics, and 29 subjects either did not rank all 20 topics or did not complete the ranking properly. Ensuring subjects used all numbers without skipping or doubling of subjects was quickly identified as a weakness in the instrument. Other issues included subjects not revealing their gender,

Let's Talk About It Topic Survey

Age: _____ Major: _____ Sex: Male Female

Please rank from 1 to 20 how these topics interest you.

1 = most interesting 20 = least interesting

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| _____ Food | _____ Sports |
| _____ Japan | _____ House |
| _____ Shopping | _____ Health |
| _____ Music | _____ Entertainment |
| _____ Transportation | _____ Animals |
| _____ The Salaryman and Work | _____ Weather |
| _____ Family | _____ The United States |
| _____ Travel | _____ Superstitions |
| _____ Europe | _____ Education |
| _____ Famous People | _____ Nationalities |

List three more topics that interest you.

Figure 2. Let's Talk About It topic survey.

colluding with a partner for opinions, and not knowing the word “superstition” until given the Japanese translation. With these flaws discovered and to get as broad an opinion base as possible, a convenience sampling for research purposes totaling 988 students was conducted with the cooperation of four teachers at seven Kansai-area universities in eight departments (Table 1).

Of the 90% who designated gender, female students accounted for 60% (532) and males 40% (357). Of the 969 who reported their year in school, first-years accounted for just over half (514) and the remaining were mostly second-years (400). Oral English is not generally required of third- or fourth-year students in Japan, so returns for these students were weak at six percent combined. Due to lack of availability, the eight majors and seven schools had uneven returns. English and English Literature majors (269, 27%) were combined into one major, as were 23 non-English foreign language majors (135, 14%) and four types of Liberal Arts majors (27, 3%). Kindai University had the majority of replies (Kindai, 591, 60%), followed by Osaka University (Osaka, 145, 15%), Kobe College (Kobe Jo, 83, 8%), Doshisha Women's University (Doshi Jo, 68,

Table 1
Let's Talk About It Survey Demographics

	Gender n = 889	Major n = 981	School n = 981	Year in school n = 969
male	357 (40%)	English 269 (27%)	Kindai 591 (60%)	1st year 514 (53%)
female	532 (60%)	Economics 162 (17%)	Shinwa 35 (4%)	2nd year 400 (41%)
unspecified	99 (10%)	Science 30 (3%)	Kobe Jo 83 (8%)	3rd year 39 (4%)
		Law 35 (4%)	Osaka 145 (15%)	4th year 16 (2%)
		Business 283 (29%)	Shoin 49 (5%)	unknown 19 (2%)
		Education 40 (4%)	Kyoto Jo 10 (1%)	
		Languages 135 (14%)	Doshi Jo 68 (7%)	
		Liberal Arts 27 (3%)		

N = 988

7%), Kobe Shoin (Shoin, 49, 5%), Kobe Shinwa Women's University (Shinwa, 35, 4%), and Kyoto Women's University (Kyoto Jo, 10, 1%).

Rank was calculated by a simple count. Each topic was given the numerical equivalent of its rank which was then totaled, with the lower the value, the higher the rank (Table 2). Average rank, median score, maximum and minimum rank, standard deviation, and correlations between topics and demographics were calculated. Due to the large and varying number of write-in topics, they were not ranked. Instead they were categorized into one of 50 general themes to which a number was assigned so they could be correlated to the demographic information. For example, "blood type," "horoscopes," "tarot," "magic," and

Table 2
Example of Rank Calculation

	Subject 1 ranking		Subject 2 ranking		Subject 3 ranking		Total count converted to rank
Food	1		3		5		9 to 1st
Japan	13	+	9	+	14	=	36 to 3rd
Shopping	4		11		15		30 to 2nd

“seeing my dreams” were grouped thematically under the number 42. Individual write-in interests were also loosely examined for uniqueness or trends.

Popularity Ranking of LTAI Topics Results

It was immediately apparent that students had rather strong and somewhat uniform opinions regarding the LTAI topics (Appendix). The top three LTAI topics of interest “music” (213), “food” (127), and “shopping” (126) were chosen as number one by almost half the subjects and were so tightly grouped that each had held first place at various points of data input. Their median scores out of 20 were three, four, and four respectively. Their closest contender, fourth-ranked “travel,” garnered a median six. Standard deviations averaged 4.96. Second-ranked “food” had the tightest standard distribution at 4.05 showing subjects consistently ranked it high. Proving its popularity, “food” had only a single subject rank it at 20. Every topic had at least one subject rank it in first place and one in 20th place. “Sports,” with a median eight and the widest standard deviation of 5.55 showing subjects ranked it both high and low to a greater variance, and “family,” also with a median eight but somewhat tighter standard distribution of 5.29, rounded out the top six LTAI interests. Fewer than ten subjects ranked popular “travel” (4th) and “shopping” at 20th.

At the unpopular end of the spectrum, “education,” “transportation,” “nationalities,” “work,” and “superstitions,” were as close in their low ranking as the high-end choices were with their high ranking. “Superstitions” garnered last place with a median 16, while the other four had a median 15, and all received less than eleven first-place rankings. “United States” (14th), received only three

number one rankings though it manages a median 13. "Superstitions" was likely lowest due in part to students not knowing the meaning of the word. Seeming to be of little particular interest to any student, the remaining topics, from highest to lowest, "entertainment," "Japan," "animals," "health," "famous people," "Europe," and "home," grouped around median ten.

Minor correlations between genders were indeed noticed, though ten percent of subjects did not reveal their gender. The strongest correlation was -0.25 , indicating 11.4% of the 536 females chose "shopping" as number one, while only 2.1% of the 357 males did so. Females also preferred "food" (-0.20), "family" (-0.20), and "travel" (-0.14) more than males. Males on the other hand, favored "work" (0.26), "sports" (0.25), and "transportation" (0.19). Both top ("music," 10.1%) and bottom ("superstition," 0.6%) choices garnered a similar number of votes regardless of gender.

Preferences by major were also considered. Due to convenience sampling, most of the 981 subjects were either English Language or Literature (269, 27%) or Business majors (283, 29%). Science and Engineering (30), Law (35), and Education (40) accounted for less than five percent each, an n-size too small to be useful. The highest correlation to major (-0.22) was with 18th placed "nationalities," which was attributable to Foreign Languages majors. Both "shopping" and "family" showed minor trends of 0.10 and 0.09, respectively, but this might stem instead from there being five all-girl schools.

School showed a slightly stronger possibility of trends, but the category is beset by the same imbalance of subject numbers. Kindai had 60% of all subjects (591), but only 1% (10) were from Kyoto Jo. Both Kindai and Kobe Jo subjects chose "music" as number one at almost 25%, and there was a minor correlation of 0.33 to indicate school mattered. However, every school ranked "music" highly, so deciding which schools are more inclined to like music was not necessary. Kindai is well known for its sports, so it was easy to understand why 15% chose "sports" first. It is not so clear why Shinwa students preferred "food" (31%) or all universities except Shinwa (3%) preferred "travel" around 10%.

Year in school was the final demographic point considered; however, only freshmen and sophomores were well enough represented, so statistics are moot.

Future analysis could try to ascertain whether or not older subjects have a greater affinity, first, toward less self-centered topics, and second, with a broader outlook to create a wider range of unique and original topics of their own. The latter is suggested by the few 4th-year student rankings, which are quite dissimilar from other years’.

Write-in Topics Results

While certain trends were observed among the 20 pre-chosen topics, the diversity of write-in topics is quite noticeable. Only 58% (572) of all subjects wrote in additional topics of interest not already on the list. Twenty subjects rewrote listed topics. Males accounted for 33% and females for 67% of the 1,528 total write-in answers. The majority contributed the three outside topics as directed, with the average being 2.4.

Education majors had the highest overall write-in response rate at 92.5%. Law had the lowest at 10.4% and contributed the fewest additional interests (four). English and English Literature majors were most verbose with 131 (61%) adding four write-in interests. Science, Liberal Arts, and Business only contributed around half of the time.

Freshmen responded at 67.1%, with 76.4% contributing four original topics to total 368. Sophomores had a lower response rate (49%) with fewer total additions (196).

School offered the most compelling differences. While factors were similar, there were two noticeable outliers. First, more than half (52.4%) of Kindai write-in respondents contributed four original topics. Second, Doshi Jo had a 100% response rate. Kyoto Jo and Shinwa each had low total numbers of subjects (10 and 35, respectively) reported due to a lack of time and or teacher supervision of the survey.

What was interesting about the difference in schools was not the rate of response but what was written in (Table 3). Every university had some common popular topics such as movies, fashion, or free time. One teacher’s name was especially popular at all schools polled. Kindai alone had some unique topics showing a possible lack of self-motivation and self-regulation skills indicative

Table 3
Sample Write-in Topics

Common Write-in Topics	Kindai Topics	Osaka Topics
movies, TV, video games	money (monkeys?)	immigration, discrimination
fashion, beauty, clothing	sleeping	politics, religion
friends, lovers	drinking	sexuality
nature, the environment	pinking?	nuclear ~
art, science, business	figure speaking?	child labor
cars, driver's licenses		AIDS in Thailand
[teacher's name]		

of immaturity, with many saying “sleeping”. Others undecipherable topics like “figure speaking” (possibly “figure skating”), and “monkeys” (from a class that had several “money” answers, which could be put down to misspelling). Osaka, on the other hand, included a wide range of social, political, and environmental issues, such as child labor, showing both personal and social competence. Some topics were unique to one or two individuals, such as the television show Kidzania or the singer Aiko (Table 4). Most topics, however, were twists on the themes already in the text (Table 5). For example, though there was a chapter on sports, specific sports, such as “baseball” or “soft tennis,” were LTAI added. All in all, most additional topics covered the spectrum of gender, major, and year in school.

Table 4
Unique Write-in Topics

Common write-in topics	Kindai Topics	Osaka Topics
Tarot	noh	galaxies
grasses?	race horses	Disney
jumping	airplanes	cosmetics
	Hanshin Tigers	new flavor drinks

Table 5
Self-personalized Write-in Topics

Chapter Topics	Personalized Chapter Topics
Education	school life, study abroad
Work	part-time jobs
Animals	pets, turtles, cats
Food	beer, sweets
USA, Europe	sightseeing, China

Discussion

With 20 topics, getting repeatable, valid, and reliable statistics focusing on one topic based on any demographic is not likely. However, even though gender, major, year, and school were not equally represented here, trends existed to indicate some strong interests and disinterests alike, and the large n-size gave a broad enough view of a typical first- or second-year Japanese university student to indicate both research topics were true to some extent. The lack of definition of other topics and the variance of the trends based on demographics suggest it would behoove teachers to create interest surveys of their own classroom materials.

Compelling results were found in the write-in interests which revealed the population to be at the stage where they are only beginning to become self-actualized. The majority of original interests were inward looking, so “animal,” became “my pet” (an extension of ‘me’). Even otherwise low ranking topics were personalized; “education” became “school life”, and “work” became “part-time job.” Other topics, such as “party” and popular “friends,” spoke to a sense of belonging and the development of the social competencies of empathy, persuasion, and effective communication common at this stage. Except for a few Osaka Prefectural University students, there were few outside interests that did not relate directly to the students’ immediate sense of self. Unmentioned topics included the following: learning English, other college classes, career goals,

learning needs/issues, personal responsibilities, and needed job skills.

Current events and global issues that refer to the needs of others were rare write-in interests. Other than “part-time job” and “driver’s license,” there was little mention of personal responsibility. Save for “job-hunting,” “family,” or if a sport is contextualized to be training in it, indications of the future or long-term interests were also rare. Not a single student wrote an interest in learning English for English’s sake, other classes, or other learning issues, though the survey was distributed in English language class. Possibly a result of the researcher’s cultural expectations, having taught in other countries, it read as a general lack of awareness or responsibility in the students’ learning. A reminder that teachers need to check themselves and their expectations of what university students ‘should’ be. A larger polling of older third- and fourth-year students might reflect greater concern for the future, personal goals, and needs as students mature and the end of university and job-hunting loom.

Teaching Implications

That students may simply not be interested in such removed, overly introspective, or boring topics begs the question of what topics are deemed appropriate for university English classes. Instead, we should ask how teachers can mitigate effects on motivation while providing content students can actually use. The text may have a nifty chapter on directions, but most people nowadays have GPS and mapping applications on their smartphones, so the lesson may not be deemed worthwhile. A teacher may like obscure blues songs, but unlike their younger counterparts who are used to being taught at or older counterparts who may have better external social-management and coping skills, young adults might literally tune out such unrelatable material. Taboo topics, such as religion, gender issues, lovers, or discrimination, may be tempting to talk about in higher level, deeper discussion or current event classes, but need to be considered for cultural and age appropriateness. In a position of power, teachers may inadvertently impose their values and culture. Silva and Wiz (2013), however, argue there are no taboo topics, just inappropriate ways of approaching them (as illustrated in their Two Teachers Talking podcast *Episode 42: Missionary?! Me?*, “I’m here to teach you

how to express your opinions – not give you mine.”). Ultimately, it is the teacher who regulates topics, but if students are not engaged, they will not achieve that synergistic satisfaction level which allows them to create the internal motivation necessary to strive autonomously. Teachers should periodically toss old-fashioned or low interest topics and adjust others to make them more relatable and applicable to the students’ future.

The methods, expressions, cultural differences, and critical thinking skills useful for communicating in English can be taught without the teacher prescribing every topic. Furthermore, students become involved in their own learning and gain an understanding and appreciation of where their language fits into the bigger picture. Guiding them through the process of choosing appropriate topics gives them the metacognitive skills necessary to clearly and efficiently comprehend, state, and satisfy their needs. It allows them to become independent thinkers more able to solve problems, set realistic personal goals, and give them power and control over their own learning. One may consider choice of topic to be too simple to matter, but it is precisely that simplicity that makes it an easy solution for increasing motivation.

Topics can be made flexible even within a rigid structure. Program coordinators and material writers first need to create topics that can be personalized, but there are many possible in-class adaptations (Table 6). If a text’s content is not reliant on the order of the chapters, a first-day survey can illuminate which chapters are of interest, then they can be done in order of popularity. If possible, skip exercises, pages, or chapters not pivotal to assessment. Allow students to choose their own graded readers, presentation topics, or roles

Table 6
Method of Personalizing Topics

Too Narrow Topic	Personalized Topic	Helpful Subtopics
The USA	interesting places	my dream trip, places I’ve been, places I’d not go
Work	my part-time job	describing my work, my coworkers, team leaders

to play within a provided framework. Input may be fixed, but personalize output. Occasionally, set aside time to do an activity outside the text.

While students' individual subjective needs are important to address for motivation, a needs analysis can be adjusted to assess more than interest. One student lament is being pressured to "do their best" when they are already at their maximum cognitive level. Gardner (1983) posited that there are nine types of intelligences of which verbal-linguistic is only one (Table 7). Similarly, learners have been shown to have a dominant learning style that may not be well suited to the predetermined method of instruction (Table 8). With such diversity among students, the task of personalizing learning is daunting yet essential to the learning process. Cultural barriers and expectations, fears and other personal affective barriers, or differing communication styles between languages might retard a teacher's understanding of any issues. Long (1997) argued that if no needs analyses exist from which individual learning styles and preferences can be diagnosed, then the resulting content covers either too many unnecessary or not enough of the specific skills, language, or topics needed, which leads to inefficient class time and students becoming demotivated. In this way, needs analyses do more than create learner-centered courses and ease the selection of course content; they can also fine-tune methodology and raise teacher and program evaluations by meeting students' needs more fully.

Finally, in my almost 20-year teaching tenure in Japan, there seems to be a lack of will to give up the power that contributes to learner autonomy. Proficiency testing, as opposed to diagnostic testing, has contributed to a one-size-fits-all, teacher-centered, teach-to-the test education system in Japan. Coordinated programs, generally teach to assumed norms using uniform materials and or methods regardless of learning styles, proficiencies, or needs. Material and syllabus writers become caught in this conundrum. Busy, inexperienced, or lazy teachers may fall into a habit of completing every exercise in the text without variation, allowing them to successfully finish the material, but potentially causing mechanical repetition by bored students who have no meaningful connection to or understanding of how the materials relate to them. It is important that writers, administrators, and teachers, at all levels of

Table 7
Gardner's Traits of Multiple Intelligences

Type	Gardener Intelligence Type	Traits
Introspective	Visual-Spatial	good with pictures, diagrams, and study charts learn by seeing the information visually and visualizing it again later in their mind
	Intrapersonal	good with self-reflection learn best by using their own intuition.
	Existential	good at understanding philosophical relationships learn best through self-reflection
Interpersonal	Bodily-Kinesthetic	good at physical activities learn by hands-on experiences and by moving their body
	Verbal-Linguistic	good with words learn by traditional methods of reading and writing as well as listening and speaking
	Interpersonal	good at social experiences learn by interacting and discussing information with others
Analytical	Logical-Mathematical	good with numbers and abstract reasoning learn by problem-solving (IQ tests most measure this)
	Natural	good with the natural world learn when they can learn outdoors in the "real world"
	Musical-Rhythmic	good with rhythms and tones learn through singing or other auditory formats

the education system, regularly reassess their expectations and role, too. Teachers of children may take on a mother-knows-best role, but at university students are best served by a facilitator who develops self-esteem, personal growth, and a sense of belonging.

University students are still developing psychologically and are for the most part egocentric, immature, unaware of their needs, and focused more on

Table 8
Common Learning Preferences

Learning Style Preferences	Manner of Learning
Visual	seeing words, note-taking, alone with a book
Auditory	hearing words, reading aloud, teaching others, discussion
Kinesthetic	experiencing a task, being physical, role-play, combined input
Tactile	doing a task with materials, hands-on, experiments, writing notes
Modality	medium of learning (e.g., e-book versus paper book)
Group	interacting with others, group discussion
Individual	working alone, using own materials and notes

immediate wants than on long-term goals. They can be easily dissatisfied and give up on learning. Their motivation is not mechanical. Acknowledging young adults in their learning and encouraging their personal ideas lead to a greater chance for life-long autonomous learning. In summary, teach to balance both needs and wants by using broad personalized topics, choose materials and methods that allow for flexibility, get student involvement in course design, and think young. Optimally chosen topics can be fulfilling to the diverse population of learners in tertiary education.

References

- Ausubel, D. (1963). *The psychology of meaningful verbal learning*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Brindley, G. P. (1984). *Needs analysis and objective setting in the adult migrant education program*. Sydney: Adult Migrant Education Service.
- Drayton, C., & Gibbon, M. (1997). *Let's talk about it*. Hong Kong: Pearson Longman.
- Freud, S. (1990). *The ego and the id*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence - Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.

- Kitzman, A. (2008). The influence of need: Analyzing the needs of Japanese university students. *Gogaku Kyoikubu Kyo*, 8(2), 127-151.
- Landy, F. (2005). Some historical and scientific issues related to research on emotional intelligence. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 411-424.
- Long, M. H. (1997). *Focus on form in task-based language teaching*. Retrieved from <http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/foreignlang/conf/option1.htm>
- Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Max-Neef, M., Elizalde, A., & Hopenhayn, M. (1991). Development and human needs. In M. Max-Neef (Ed.). *Human-scale development - conception, application and further reflection* (pp. 13-54). London: Apex Press.
- Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Roberts, R., Zeidner, M., & Matthews, G. (2001). Does emotional intelligence meet traditional standards for an intelligence? Some new data and conclusions. *Emotion by the American Psychological Association, Inc.*, 1(3), 196-231.
- Silva, T., & Wiz, C. (2013, December 21). Missionary?! Me? [Episode 42]. *Two teachers talking*. Podcast retrieved from <http://www.twoteacherstalking.com>

Author bio

Alison Kitman received her MA TESOL from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and created a private conversational EFL program in Russia before coming to Japan. Since 1997 she has worked at Kindai University teaching Business English, creating curricula, and writing materials. Her research interests include learning inhibitions, needs theory, and pronunciation. abkitz@bus.kindai.ac.jp

Received: April 3, 2016

Accepted: April 26, 2016

Appendix

Complete Results Chart Topics 1-10

Topics 1-10	1. Food	2. Japan	3. Shopping	4. Music	5. Transport	6. Work	7. Family	8. Travel	9. Europe	10. Famous People	
n	988	979	975	973	975	967	969	973	978	969	970
Count	5178	8913	5644	4710	13656	13767	8403	6402	10506	10375	
Average	5.28	9.09	5.75	4.86	13.92	14.03	8.57	6.53	10.71	10.58	
Rank	2	8	3	1	17	19	6	4	12	11	
Median	4	9	4	3	15	15	8	6	11	10	
Place ranking	(number of times each topic was at this rank)										
1	127	40	126	213	8	10	87	86	19	14	
2	155	37	143	147	14	19	49	92	36	28	
3	136	46	106	148	9	13	52	116	44	32	
4	121	54	125	94	11	15	63	86	42	32	
5	79	71	93	66	10	20	74	89	44	48	
6	79	62	52	66	30	20	64	98	36	48	
7	60	67	53	42	32	32	63	79	43	65	
8	46	77	42	41	34	34	54	64	58	65	
9	25	75	51	27	26	31	66	52	68	82	
10	30	72	37	21	35	41	52	42	62	81	

Topics 1-10	1. Food	2. Japan	3. Shopping	4. Music	5. Transport	6. Work	7. Family	8. Travel	9. Europe	10. Famous People
11	32	77	25	20	35	33	60	28	59	64
12	17	65	22	8	49	56	51	28	64	67
13	16	50	18	14	62	50	51	30	63	52
14	17	45	9	11	90	51	22	24	65	51
15	9	37	21	7	89	57	37	16	55	52
16	8	22	15	11	66	74	36	12	57	47
17	5	27	9	13	78	85	25	11	52	48
18	7	20	8	6	97	70	26	15	43	33
19	9	15	10	4	103	88	18	5	39	30
20	1	16	8	15	89	170	23	5	20	31
Max	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Min	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
STD	4.05	4.74	4.52	4.41	4.95	5.35	5.29	4.40	5.19	4.94
Gender	-0.20	0.01	-0.25	-0.03	0.19	0.26	-0.20	-0.14	-0.09	-0.05
School	-0.05	0.04	-0.12	0.33	-0.14	0.26	-0.02	-0.04	0.18	0.03
Dept	0.11	-0.07	-0.08	0.16	0.01	-0.14	-0.07	-0.05	-0.05	-0.07
Year	0.08	0.05	0.26	-0.05	-0.08	-0.17	-0.07	-0.18	-0.23	-0.06

Complete Results Chart Topics 11-20

Topics 11-20	11. Sports	12. House	13. Health	14. Entertainment	15. Animals	16. Weather	17. The USA	18. Superstitions	19. Education	20. Nationalities
n	977	968	969	974	968	969	966	965	968	968
Count	8113	11346	10152	8894	9846	13446	11969	14036	13651	13665
Average	8.27	11.57	10.35	9.07	10.04	13.71	12.20	14.31	13.92	13.93
Rank	5	13	10	7	9	15	14	20	16	18
Median	8	12	10	8	10	4	9	4	3	15
Place ranking	(number of times each topic was at this rank)									
1	109	8	28	45	28	4	3	11	8	9
2	72	19	24	69	31	4	12	8	11	20
3	55	27	36	43	51	5	13	18	16	11
4	60	34	33	68	43	16	32	9	18	16
5	74	31	44	62	58	14	39	20	31	19
6	58	48	69	67	61	22	35	23	23	20
7	58	54	57	57	51	35	44	27	33	24
8	68	55	74	78	64	31	36	22	21	20
9	57	60	66	47	82	43	42	21	21	32
10	46	64	64	60	61	42	52	37	41	54
11	43	50	54	56	58	55	73	47	47	47
12	40	68	59	51	51	75	62	40	51	40

Topics 11-20	11. Sports	12. House	13. Health	14. Entertainment	15. Animals	16. Weather	17. The USA	18. Superstitions	19. Education	20. Nationalities
13	34	56	70	58	57	62	77	40	59	46
14	31	78	55	45	41	79	85	56	41	69
15	34	64	57	22	42	68	97	73	63	75
16	29	41	52	31	45	91	65	83	94	77
17	30	72	39	26	36	85	59	90	88	80
18	24	56	42	37	53	87	57	83	90	102
19	31	52	31	34	23	71	46	131	103	106
20	24	31	15	18	32	80	37	126	108	101
Max	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Min	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
STD	5.55	5.07	5.01	5.28	5.26	4.62	4.82	5.19	5.39	5.14
Gender	0.25	0.09	0.00	0.08	-0.06	0.10	-0.03	0.05	0.06	0.08
School	0.06	-0.01	0.21	-0.08	-0.03	0.13	-0.01	0.15	0.07	0.31
Dept	-0.03	-0.19	-0.10	-0.04	-0.04	0.22	0.05	0.15	0.13	0.24
Year	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	-0.10	0.01	-0.09	0.01	0.15	0.00	0.18