Student Perceptions of Textbook Topics in a Discussion Course

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How learners relate to discussion topics has been shown to directly impact Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Understanding how students relate to a variety of topic types, therefore, can aid materials designers and teachers in the creation and presentation of content in speaking courses or courses with a speaking component. This study investigated students' attitudes towards 24 topics in course-specific textbooks for a compulsory English discussion class for first year students at a private university in Japan. Six times over the course of one academic year, a questionnaire that rated each topic along the four topic dimensions of interest, familiarity, difficulty, and importance using a four-point Likert scale was administered to 1,664 students. Topics related to university and student life ranked as the most interesting and familiar, while those pertaining to social issues were ranked as more difficult. Correlation analysis identified importance as having a medium correlation with interest. These findings imply that topics related to university and student life, as well as those which students find important to discuss, might be well suited to engaging students in speaking classes. However, teachers would likely also benefit from an understanding of how topics are presented and perceived in their individual teaching contexts.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) as an affective construct was first applied to second language communication in the mid-1990s, and since that time has proven to be a useful concept in both research on second language acquisition and language teaching more practically (Yashima, 2012; Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2018). MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels' (1998) heuristic model of variables influencing WTC proposed a hierarchy of six layers of variables that have an impact on a language learner's WTC. One such variable is the social situation, which MacIntyre et al. (1998) further parsed into five factors: "the participants, the setting, the purpose, the topic, and the channel of communication" (p. 553).

While language teachers cannot account for most of the variables in MacIntyre et al.'s model, they have some measure of control over those factors in the social situation created in the classroom, including the topic.

Topic interest has been found to directly impact language learners' situational WTC (Aubrey, 2010; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998), and Aubrey (2011) suggested that teachers gain an understanding of what topics interest their students in order to harness latent WTC. Kang (2005) also argued that topic familiarity is facilitative of WTC, and a number of other studies have found topic familiarity to have a positive impact on second language speaking performance (Khabbazbashi, 2017; Papajohn, 1999; Zuengler, 1993). Skehan (1998) posited that such impact is possible because greater topic familiarity lowers cognitive demands and thereby frees attentional resources for retrieval of other linguistic information.

Topic-based EFL textbooks are common on the market today and are utilized in a variety of teaching contexts. However, textbook topics might not always be well-suited to their assorted learning contexts. Kitzman (2016) asked 988 first- and second-year university students from seven Japanese universities to rank their interest in 20 textbook topics, as well as write in three additional topics that interest them. She found a general lack of definition across demographic lines, as well as a wide variety of write-in topics, suggesting that the textbook in question did not fit every context in which it was being used. Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) found in a survey of 112 students at three private universities in Tokyo and Shizuoka that course books and non-communicative teaching methods were the most significant demotivating factors at the high school level. As most of the participants in Kikuchi and Sakai's study were majoring in English literature or international relations, the researchers assumed their motivation to learn English to be high. In a comprehensive review of the relevant literature at the time, Kikuchi (2013) identified both students' dissatisfaction with subject area, as well as dissatisfaction with course books used in EFL classes, as demotivating factors in the Japanese context.

Wolf (2013) compared textbook-assigned and student-selected topics along four perceptual dimensions—interest, knowledge, importance, and difficulty—

among 101 second-year EFL students from the Department of Tourism at a private university in Japan. The students were from three classes spanning low, mid, and high proficiencies, with 31, 35, and 35 students in each class respectively. In total, they consisted of 67 females and 34 males. These participants completed a set of three questionnaires about 40 textbook topics sorted into eight thematic categories, as well as a fourth questionnaire about self-selected topics. Wolf found that the participants "perceived statistically significantly greater knowledge about and interest in discussing their own topics" (p. 59).

Participants in Siegel's (2014) study were four first-year Japanese students with paper-based TOEFL scores ranging from 407 to 483. These four students video recorded over 37 hours of their own peer-to-peer conversation in English with 30 different non-Japanese international students with whom they lived in an on-campus dormitory. These video recordings were then transcribed and analyzed by the researcher using conversation analysis to identify self-selected conversational topic frequency. Topics ($N = 162$) were identified and placed into 13 categories. The rates that each topic appeared in conversation were then compared against their frequency of appearance in 11 EFL textbooks. Siegel identified a mismatch in what topics are often presented to students in the classroom and what topics students actually prefer to discuss in English. Therefore, it would seem that understanding how students relate to a variety of topics, at least in a university setting in Japan, might help language program administrators and teachers alike make informed decisions about what materials to use or develop in speaking classes or classes with a speaking component.

It should be noted that differences in the number of participants limit the generalizability of previous relevant studies (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Siegel, 2014; Wolf, 2013) to the present study. Additionally, in the cases of Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) and Wolf (2013), it is not known how much class time the students in these studies spent preparing for or engaging in discussion in English, which is the sole focus of the teaching context in the present study. However, a previous pilot study surveying 98 students on topic interest in the same teaching context as the current study identified topics relating to university and student life as more interesting to participants than other topic categories represented in the

course-specific textbook (Young, 2016).

The current study was carried out with two aims in mind. The first aim was to learn how students in the given context view the topics in the course-specific textbook; this aim was related to program development and textbook revision. The second aim was to identify any correlations between the four topic dimensions of interest, difficulty, importance, and familiarity. As the majority of studies on topic and WTC deal predominantly with topic interest, correlation analysis was to be carried out with the hope that such analysis could provide insight into what topic dimensions beyond interest might relate to WTC, and in so doing inform future research. To this end, two research questions were posed:

1. How do students view the textbook topics in terms of interest, difficulty, importance, and familiarity?
2. What, if any, are the correlations between students' interest in, difficulty of, importance of, and familiarity with topics in a discussion-based speaking course?

Based on findings from a pilot study (Young, 2016) and relevant research (Siegel, 2014; Wolf, 2013), the following four hypotheses were made:

1. Topics related to university and student life will be rated more interesting and familiar to students than topics related to social issues.
2. Topics related to social issues will be rated more difficult and important to discuss than topics related to university and student life.
3. Interest will be positively correlated with importance and familiarity.
4. Difficulty will be negatively correlated with familiarity.

Methods

Participants and Teaching Context

Participants were 1,664 first-year students enrolled in a mandatory, discussion-based speaking course at a private university in Japan. This sample size ensured a margin of error below 2% with a 95% confidence level for the 4,500 to 4,700 students enrolled in the course each year. Classes meet once per week and are capped at nine students, though most contain only eight, with students placed into one of four proficiency levels based on TOEIC scores. The small class size

and lesson format create an ideal context for examining social situational factors relating to WTC (Aubrey, 2010; Cao & Philp, 2006; Yashima, 2012). The highest level students have a combined listening and reading TOEIC score of 680 or above, the second level between 480 and 679, the third between 280 and 479, and the fourth below 280. The number of students in each level varies slightly from year to year, with around 90% of students consistently being placed into the second or third proficiency levels. The remaining 10% or so of students fall into the highest and lowest levels in roughly equal numbers. Students from all ten of the university's departments are enrolled in the course, representing a wide range of proficiency and motivation to learn and use English. Classes were selected for the present study to represent the distribution of students by department and proficiency level, and only students within these classes participated in the study.

The course employs a functional-notional, theme-based syllabus delivered using a communicative approach. Students learn functional language delivered across 24 topics sequentially paired into 12 overarching themes. For example, the first and second topics are themed as "communication", while the third and fourth are themed as "education". As the overarching themes connecting paired topics often only tenuously represent the actual content of the lesson, topic categories were created by consulting the topic taxonomies of Wolf (2013) and Siegel (2014) before creating a unique taxonomy appropriate to the context (Appendix A). These topic categories were then used when formulating the first research question and the first and second hypotheses.

Classes in the current context maximize student-to-student interaction to meet the stated course aims of improving speaking fluency and preparing students to discuss a range of topics in English (Hurling, 2012). As course content is an integral component of the syllabus, a suite of textbooks—one textbook per semester for each of the four proficiency levels—was created specifically for the course. These textbooks are revised annually to better meet course aims, and the current study was undertaken in part to aid in this revision process. The content and discussion prompts are uniform across each level of the textbook, though language and task complexity are graded.

Each textbook unit is based around a specific topic, with an out-of-class

homework reading designed to activate existing schemata and further build topic familiarity (Young, 2016). In accordance with Nation's (2009) principle of combining meaning-focused input with meaning-focused output, in-class discussion tasks all relate to the topic and draw on information contained within the homework reading. Each 90-minute lesson follows a standardized format reflected in the textbook and contains between 50 and 60 minutes of pair and small group discussion tasks, the staging and sequence of which is delivered by the program's 42 full-time instructors in a strongly unified way.

This uniformity is achieved in large part through extensive teacher training, which includes a five-day orientation to the course's prescribed teaching methodology, annual professional development projects, and routine rater-norming sessions for both the regular lesson assessment rubric and the more formalized, criterion-referenced discussion tests (Lesley, 2018). In addition, instructors are subject to a regular observation procedure to ensure each component of the standard lesson is executed to standard. The progression to peer observations for teachers after their first year on the course, as well as a culture of collaboration within the program, help ensure mutual accountability among instructors. There is no deviation from aims, basic lesson structure, or content in any given lesson, as such deviation would bear out in the assessment forms, completed quizzes, and comments for students submitted by teachers at the end of each teaching day.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected via a set of six questionnaires administered by 19 instructors over the course of two semesters in the 2016 academic year. After lessons five, nine, and thirteen in each 14-week semester, students completed a questionnaire asking them to rate the previous four textbook topics on a four-point Likert scale, with 'a' being the least interesting, familiar, etc., and 'd' being the most interesting, familiar, etc. (Appendix B). The 'a' to 'd' scale was used to correspond with the bubble sheets on which students recorded their responses to each item. Mean scores for each topic were created by converting the alphabetic characters used on the bubble sheets to numeric values, with 'a' being converted to one,

'b' converted to two, and so on. If students were absent for a given lesson, they marked 'e' to indicate their absence for the corresponding items on the survey. These responses were then eliminated from the study, as were all of the responses on any incomplete or incorrectly completed surveys. While it would have been ideal to administer a questionnaire after every lesson, doing so three times per semester was the most realistic and reliable option due to a variety of logistical concerns related to the collection and treatment of data.

Though 1,664 students participated in the study, the number who completed a given questionnaire varied from 1,496 to 1,631 due to student absence, error, or to administrator error. The questionnaires were completed on bubble sheets that were then collated using an OMR scanner for subsequent calculation of averages and correlation analysis in SPSS.

It should be noted that comparing averages of a given dimension from topic to topic is problematic for a number of reasons. For one, individual student's interpretation of the Likert scale may have floated from survey to survey. Different students rating any given topic likely also had different interpretations of the scale. Furthermore, the number of responses varied somewhat due to student absence and student or administrator error. A general trend towards fewer respondents from questionnaire to questionnaire mirrors the decline in overall attendance over the course of the academic year. In combination, these factors could easily account for minor differences in averages when comparing topics within a single dimension.

Results

The first research question asked how students view the textbook topics in terms of interest, difficulty, importance, and familiarity. Mean scores and standard deviations for each topic across the four dimensions are displayed in Appendix C. Topics are listed in the sequence in which they appear in the textbook.

Of the 24 topics represented in the study, six pertain to university and student life. In other words, six of 24 topics could be said to relate directly to the experience of being a university student. These topics are, in the order that they appear in the textbooks, "Making Friends at University", "Why Go to

University?", "University Entrance Systems", "Students and Part-time Jobs", "Students and Social Pressure", and "Studying Abroad". Table 1 shows how the findings support the first hypothesis, as the top five most interesting topics pertain to university and student life, as do the top four most familiar topics. As only six of 24 topics relate to university and student life, their ranking relative to the other 18 topics in terms of interest and familiarity could be high enough to offset concerns around the floating scale and differences in response numbers between surveys.

An examination of Table 2 reveals partial support for the second hypothesis, which assumed that topics related to social issues would be rated more difficult and important to discuss than topics related to university and student life. Seven of the textbooks' 24 topics are centered on social issues, and five of these were rated as the five most difficult topics for students to discuss. Topics relating to university and student life generally ranked low in terms of difficulty. As for importance, however, those seven topics which pertain to social issues as well as the six relating to university and student life are evenly distributed throughout the rankings.

The second research question asked what, if any, correlations exist between students' interest in, difficulty of, importance of, and familiarity with topics in the course. An understanding of such correlation might offer insight into how the dimensions beyond interest relate to WTC. In other words, if interest has been shown to relate to situational WTC, then a dimension with a large correlation to interest may have a similar relationship. Spearman's rho (r) correlations were found to be statistically significant at $p < .001$ with the notable exception of the correlation between interest and difficulty (Table 3). Spearman's rho was selected to treat the Likert scale as ordinal and on the assumption that the relationship between the variables would be monotonic but not necessarily linear.

There is a medium correlation between interest and importance ($r = .440$), as well as small correlations between interest and familiarity ($r = .367$), and importance and familiarity ($r = .357$). The third hypothesis, that interest would be positively correlated with importance and familiarity, is therefore clearly supported. Additionally, there are significant but not important correlations

Table 1

Textbook Topics Ranked By Mean Interest and Familiarity

Rank	Topic	Mean Interest (SD)	Topic	Mean Familiarity (SD)
1	Making Friends at University	3.11 (1.01)	Making Friends at University	3.35 (0.87)
2	Why Go to University?	3.08 (0.97	Why Go to University?	3.25 (0.87)
3	Students and Part-time Jobs	3.06 (0.97)	University Entrance Systems	3.22 (0.92)
4	University Entrance Systems	3.05 (0.99	Students and Part-time Jobs	3.18 (0.91)
5	Studying Abroad	3.05 (0.94)	Face-to-face vs Online Communication	3.13 (0.86)
6	Money	2.99 (0.88)	Money	3.08 (0.85)
7	Japanese and Foreign Customs	2.97 (0.90)	Happiness	2.98 (0.81)
8	Face-to-face vs Online Communication	2.96 (0.93	Public Behavior	2.98 (0.82)
9	Happiness	2.95 (0.94)	Students and Social Pressure	2.98 (0.91)
10	English in Japan	2.95 (0.90)	Studying Abroad	2.94 (0.89)
11	Public Behavior	2.95 (0.83)	English in Japan	2.89 (0.81)
12	The Globalization of Japanese Culture	2.94 (0.90)	The Influence of the Media	2.87 (0.82)
13	Country versus City	2.93 (0.92)	Personality	2.83 (0.79)
14	Personality	2.92 (0.81)	Traditional and New Media	2.82 (0.82)
15	Students and Social Pressure	2.90 (0.92)	Learning Values	2.78 (0.86)
16	Gender in Japan	2.89 (0.81)	Japanese and Foreign Customs	2.77 (0.82)
17	How Can We Help Hikikomori?	2.88 (0.93)	Country versus City	2.76 (0.91)
18	Traditional and New Media	2.87 (0.83)	The Globalization of Japanese Culture	2.72 (0.85)
19	The Influence of the Media	2.86 (0.85)	Gender in Japan	2.71 (0.78)
20	Technology: Past, Present, and Future	2.84 (0.89)	Technology: Past, Present, and Future	2.67 (0.85)
21	Crime and Punishment	2.83 (0.84)	The Environment and You	2.67 (0.88)
22	Learning Values	2.82 (0.89)	Crime and Punishment	2.46 (0.83)
23	The Environment and You	2.78 (0.86)	Poverty	2.46 (0.87)
24	Poverty	2.76 (0.88)	How Can We Help Hikikomori?	2.02 (0.99)

Table 2

Textbook Topics Ranked By Mean Difficulty and Importance

Rank	Topic	Mean Difficulty (SD)	Topic	Mean Importance (SD)
1	Poverty	3.08 (0.84)	Why Go to University?	3.19 (0.85)
2	Crime and Punishment	2.95 (0.84)	Money	3.16 (0.79)
3	Learning Values	2.91 (0.88)	Poverty	3.15 (0.82)
4	Gender in Japan	2.75 (0.76)	Studying Abroad	3.11 (0.84)
5	Public Behavior	2.72 (0.79)	Gender in Japan	3.10 (0.77)
6	Personality	2.72 (0.76)	Public Behavior	3.08 (0.78)
7	Happiness	2.67 (0.88)	Happiness	3.07 (0.86)
8	Traditional and New Media	2.66 (0.78)	English in Japan	3.07 (0.82)
9	Students and Social Pressure	2.66 (0.88)	Crime and Punishment	3.06 (0.76)
10	The Influence of the Media	2.63 (0.76)	University Entrance Systems	3.05 (0.85)
11	Money	2.62 (0.84)	Face-to-face vs Online Communication	3.05 (0.82)
12	The Environment and You	2.61 (0.82)	Students and Part-time Jobs	3.04 (0.85)
13	Japanese and Foreign Customs	2.59 (0.78)	Japanese and Foreign Customs	3.04 (0.79)
14	University Entrance Systems	2.58 (0.90)	Learning Values	3.03 (0.86)
15	Technology: Past, Present, and Future	2.58 (0.81)	Students and Social Pressure	3.02 (0.87)
16	English in Japan	2.55 (0.80)	Personality	3.02 (0.77)
17	The Globalization of Japanese Culture	2.55 (0.77)	Making Friends at University	3.01 (0.89)
18	Why Go to University?	2.48 (0.86)	The Globalization of Japanese Culture	3.01 (0.80)
19	Studying Abroad	2.46 (0.82)	The Environment and You	2.98 (0.86)
20	How Can We Help Hikikomori?	2.46 (0.86)	How Can We Help Hikikomori?	2.96 (0.91)
21	Country versus City	2.38 (0.79)	The Influence of the Media	2.93 (0.77)
22	Students and Part-time Jobs	2.35 (0.81)	Traditional and New Media	2.92 (0.78)
23	Face-to-face vs Online Communication	2.35 (0.79)	Technology: Past, Present, and Future	2.88 (0.79)
24	Making Friends at University	2.18 (0.80)	Country versus City	2.75 (0.86)

Table 2

Correlations Between the Four Dimensions of Textbook Topics

	Interest	Difficulty	Importance	Familiarity
Interest	-			
Difficulty	.001	-		
Importance	.440***	.082***	-	
Familiarity	.367***	-.067***	.357***	-

* correlation significant at $p < .05$; ** correlation significant at $p < .01$; *** correlation significant at $p < .001$

between difficulty and importance ($r = .082$) and difficulty and familiarity ($r = -.062$). The correlation between interest and difficulty was shown to be insignificant ($p = .922$). Though the significant correlations were not large, they might warrant further and more focused research into what relationship, if any, familiarity and importance have with WTC. The fourth hypothesis, that difficulty would be negatively correlated with familiarity, is not supported by the current findings due to the size of the correlation, albeit negative.

Discussion

The biggest limitation of the present study was that it asked participants to rate the textbook topics every four weeks over two semesters, which allows for the possibility that raters' interpretation of the Likert scale evolved between questionnaires. Students might also have had difficulty recalling a topic from a prior lesson when completing each questionnaire, affecting their perception of that topic. Moreover, participants' internal understanding or interpretation of the topic dimensions, in particular importance and familiarity, may have differed from student to student. For example, one student may have interpreted familiarity as direct experience with the topic, while another may have interpreted familiarity to mean prior knowledge without direct experience. Such a discrepancy would have an impact on how students rate certain topics.

An additional limitation is that, though the course books are used in a strongly unified curriculum, there is still room for variation in how discrete

aspects of each unit are presented by instructors who use these materials. These limitations were hopefully mitigated by the low margin of error. Furthermore, as the second research question examined correlations between topic dimensions, it would be misguided to assume there is any causal relationship between these individual dimensions themselves, or that they have any impact on WTC, without the benefit of further research.

With respect to existing similar research, it is worth noting that Siegel (2014) found that topics which she categorized as "academic life" were the most frequently discussed, comprising 17.3% of the recorded talk. The findings of the present study could be viewed as consistent with those in Siegel's study insofar as the five most interesting topics are related to university and student life, though there is an obvious gap in sample size and methodology. The current findings do not concord with those in Wolf's (2013) study, which also used a Likert scale to rate textbook topics across the same four dimensions as in the present study, allowing the dimension of familiarity in the current study to be compared to the knowledge dimension in Wolf's. This lack of agreement might be due to a variety of differences in teaching context (e.g., class size, proficiency level, and syllabus design), as well as differences between the textbooks being used therein. Such differences might therefore suggest that topics and topic sets are context dependent, and that the findings in the current study have implications most useful for teaching contexts similar to those in which the present study was conducted.

However, different perceptions of superficially similar topics across like studies help illustrate how important topic presentation and framing is to its perception. For instance, Wolf's (2013) topic category of "food health" was rated the second to least interesting out of eight topic categories appearing in a course-assigned textbook. However, the topic of "food" in Kitzman's (2016) survey was ranked as the second most interesting among 20 topics in a different textbook. In the same study, "health" was ranked number 13. As Kitzman's study only ranked these topics in relation to one another rather than rating their interest to students in isolation, it cannot be said with any degree of confidence that the participants indeed found the topic of "food" to be interesting, only that

it was the most interesting (or the least disinteresting) of the available options. Similarly, the topic category of "punishment" in Wolf's (2013) study was the second most interesting of eight, while the topic of "crime and punishment" in the present study was ranked 21 out of 24 in terms of interest.

It seems reasonable to argue that it is not the topic in isolation that students find interesting, difficult, important, or familiar; how the topic is presented is just as, if not more so, important to topic perception than the topic category itself. For example, the questions *What is your favorite food?* and *How can people become more aware of additives in processed food?* may both be categorized under the topic heading "food", but each will rate differently in terms of interest, familiarity, importance, and difficulty within a given sample of students. For purposes of textbook revision, noting unexpectedly high or low rankings can help inform how textbook content is presented in future editions. In the current study, particularly low ratings for certain topics spurred close examination of how these topics were presented in the relevant edition of the textbook and informed their revision. "How Can We Help Hikikomori?", for instance, was revised in an attempt to make the topic more familiar. Similarly, "Poverty" was revised to be somewhat less difficult, and "Country versus City" to be somewhat more difficult.

Before teachers know what topics will best engage their students, favoring topics that relate to university and student life might be a good initial choice, at least for the context of tertiary EFL in Japan, when selecting or designing materials for a speaking course or a course with a speaking component. This suggestion is based on the relatively high ranking of such topics in terms of interest and importance in the present study, and on the medium correlation between these two dimensions. Furthermore, as difficulty appears to have no significant correlation with the other dimensions, teachers and materials writers should feel free to focus on interest, importance, and familiarity without worrying whether or not a topic is too difficult for students. Even if students find a topic to be difficult, they might still be willing to communicate about it, especially if the topic is regarded as interesting, familiar, and important to discuss. However, teachers should still be aware that difficult topics may carry with

them additional cognitive burdens that have the potential to negatively impact speaking performance. Once teachers gain an understanding of what topics their particular students would prefer to encounter in their English studies, they can select or design materials based on that understanding. Ongoing needs analysis can then inform how those materials are modified to present each topic in such a way that maximizes student engagement.

It is important to remember MacIntyre et al's (1998) five factors of the social situation, as the participants, setting, purpose, topic, and channel of communication all interact with each other to help determine a learner's WTC in any given social situation, in addition to more fixed, trait-like factors such as personality. The interplay between relatively stable learner characteristics and dynamic learning contexts is only just beginning to be understood (Yashima et al., 2018). A follow-up study on how students view the same topic when presented in different ways, and accounting for a range of situational and fixed factors, would contribute greatly to this line of inquiry. A more thorough investigation could include Rasch analysis to identify and control for variation in scale interpretation between survey administrations and from student to student, as well as investigate variables such as students' proficiency level or faculty. Additionally, further research could examine how the topic dimensions of familiarity, importance, and difficulty do or do not impact situational WTC.

Conclusion

The present study identified small-to-medium correlations between students' perceived topic interest, familiarity, and importance. Additionally, the strongest single correlation was between importance and interest. Among the topics investigated here, those related to university and student life were generally the best received in terms of interest and familiarity. The current findings also indicate that difficulty may be a poor indicator of how interesting, familiar, or important a topic might be to students. As such, teachers and materials designers should feel comfortable challenging students to engage with potentially difficult topics with the confidence that such topics can be presented in ways that are interesting, familiar, and important. Still, having a broad idea of how students may perceive a

topic is only a starting point to harnessing latent WTC.

Acknowledgments

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Author bio

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Appendix A

Table of Textbook Topics by Lesson and Category

Semester and lesson number	Textbook topic	Topic category
Spring 2	How Can We Help Hikikomori?	Social issues
Spring 3	Making Friends at University	University and student life
Spring 4	Why Go to University?	University and student life
Spring 5	University Entrance Systems	University and student life
Spring 6	The Environment and You	Environment
Spring 7	Country versus City	Environment
Spring 8	Students and Part-time Jobs	University and student life
Spring 9	Students and Social Pressure	University and student life
Spring 10	Face-to-face versus Online Communication	Media, technology, & communication
Spring 11	Technology: Past, Present, and Future	Media, technology, & communication
Spring 12	Happiness	Social issues
Spring 13	Learning Values	Social issues
Fall 2	The Globalization of Japanese Culture	Culture
Fall 3	Japanese and Foreign Customs	Culture
Fall 4	English in Japan	Language
Fall 5	Studying Abroad	University and student life
Fall 6	The Influence of the Media	Media, technology, & communication
Fall 7	Traditional and New Media	Media, technology, & communication
Fall 8	Poverty	Social issues
Fall 9	Money	Money
Fall 10	Gender in Japan	Social issues
Fall 11	Personality	Self
Fall 12	Crime and Punishment	Social issues
Fall 13	Public Behavior	Social issues

Appendix B

Questionnaire Sample (Semester 1, Topics 1-4)

Instructions: Read and think about each question carefully! Your feedback is important to us. Please write your student ID number and mark your answers on the test card provided. There are 16 questions in total.
学生からのフィードバックは，英語教育ディスカッションセンターのプログラム開発と発展のためにとても重要なものです。各質問をよく読んでから、丁寧に回答してください。配布されたマークシートに学生番号を記入し、該当する回答をマークしてください。質問は全部で 16 問あります。

How interesting was each topic to discuss? (Choose the letter that best describes your degree of interest in each lesson topic on the left. "a" is the least interesting; "d" is the most interesting. If you were absent for a particular lesson, please answer "e".)
以下のディスカッショントピックに対するあなたの関心度はどのようなものでしたか。（左側にある各レッスンのトピックに対し，あなたの関心度に最も当てはまる記号を選び，マークしてください。例えば，"a" は「全く関心がなかった」、"d"は「とても関心があった」になります。もし，該当するレッスンを欠席していた場合は，"e"にマークしてください。）

	INTEREST 関心度				
	Not Interesting 関心がなかった		Very Interesting 関心があった		Absent 欠席
1. Lesson 2: How Can We Help Hikikomori?	a	b	c	d	e
2. Lesson 3: Making Friends at University	a	b	c	d	e
3. Lesson 4: Why Go to University?	a	b	c	d	e
4. Lesson 5: University Entrance Systems	a	b	c	d	e

How difficult was each topic to discuss? (Choose the letter that best describes the degree of difficulty of the lesson topic on the left. "a" is the least difficult; "d" is the most difficult. If you were absent for a particular lesson, please answer "e".)
以下のディスカッショントピックはどのくらい難しかったですか。（左側にある各レッスンのトピックに対し，あなたの難易度に最も当てはまる記号を選び，マークしてください。例えば，"a"は「全く難しくなかった」、"d"は「とても難しかった」になります。もし，該当するレッスンを欠席していた場合は，"e"にマークしてください。）

	DIFFICULTY 難易度				
	Not Difficult 難しくない		Very Difficult とても難しい		Absent 欠席
5. Lesson 2: How Can We Help Hikikomori?	a	b	c	d	e
6. Lesson 3: Making Friends at University	a	b	c	d	e
7. Lesson 4: Why Go to University?	a	b	c	d	e
8. Lesson 5: University Entrance Systems	a	b	c	d	e

How important do you think each topic is to discuss? (Choose the letter that best describes the degree of importance of the lesson topic on the left. "a" is the least important; "d" is the most important. If you were absent for a particular lesson, please answer "e".)
以下のディスカッショントピックはどのくらい議論する重要性があると思いますか。（左側にある各レッスンのトピックに対し，あなたの重要度に最も当てはまる記号を選び，マークしてください。例えば，"a"は「全く重要でない」、"d"は「とても重要」になります。もし，該当するレッスンを欠席していた場合は，"e"にマークしてください。）

| | IMPORTANCE 重要度 | | | | |
	Not Important 重要でない		Very Important とても重要		Absent 欠席
9. Lesson 2: How Can We Help Hikikomori?	a	b	c	d	e
10. Lesson 3: Making Friends at University	a	b	c	d	e
11. Lesson 4: Why Go to University?	a	b	c	d	e
12. Lesson 5: University Entrance Systems	a	b	c	d	e

Before each lesson, how familiar were you with each topic? (Choose the letter that best describes the degree of familiarity with the lesson topic on the left. "a" is the least familiar; "d" is the most familiar. If you were absent for a particular lesson, please answer "e".)
レッスンを受ける前，以下のディスカッショントピックは、あなたにとってどのくらい馴染みのあるものでしたか。（左側にある各レッスンのトピックに対し，あなたの馴染みの度合いに最も当てはまる記号を選び，マークしてください。例えば，"a"は「全く馴染みがなかった」、"d"は「とても馴染みがあった」になります。もし，該当するレッスンを欠席していた場合は，"e"にマークしてください。）

| | FAMILIARITY 親近感 | | | | |
	Not Familiar 馴染みがない		Very Familiar 馴染みがある		Absent 欠席
13. Lesson 2: How Can We Help Hikikomori?	a	b	c	d	e
14. Lesson 3: Making Friends at University	a	b	c	d	e
15. Lesson 4: Why Go to University?	a	b	c	d	e
16. Lesson 5: University Entrance Systems	a	b	c	d	e

Appendix C

Table of Total Mean Scores for the Four Textbook Topic Dimensions

Topic	Interest		Difficulty		Importance		Familiarity	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. How Can We Help Hikikomori? (n = 1627)	2.88	0.93	2.46	0.86	2.96	0.91	2.02	0.99
2. Making Friends at University (n = 1627)	3.11	1.01	2.18	0.80	3.01	0.89	3.35	0.87
3. Why Go to University? (n = 1627)	3.08	0.97	2.48	0.86	3.19	0.85	3.25	0.87
4. University Entrance Systems (n = 1627)*	3.05	0.99	2.58	0.90	3.05	0.85	3.22	0.92
5. The Environment and You (n = 1615)	2.78	0.86	2.61	0.82	2.98	0.86	2.62	0.88
6. Country versus City (n = 1615)	2.93	0.92	2.38	0.79	2.75	0.86	2.76	0.91
7. Students and Part-time Jobs (n = 1615)	3.06	0.97	2.35	0.81	3.04	0.85	3.18	0.91
8. Students and Social Pressure (n = 1615)*	2.90	0.92	2.66	0.88	3.02	0.87	2.98	0.91
9. Face-to-face versus Online Communication (n = 1631)	2.96	0.93	2.35	0.79	3.05	0.82	3.13	0.86
10. Technology: Past, Present, and Future (n = 1631)	2.84	0.89	2.58	0.81	2.88	0.79	2.67	0.85
11. Happiness (n = 1631)	2.95	0.94	2.67	0.88	3.07	0.86	2.98	0.81
12. Learning Values (n = 1631)*	2.82	0.89	2.91	0.88	3.03	0.86	2.78	0.86
13. The Globalization of Japanese Culture (n = 1542)	2.94	0.90	2.55	0.77	3.01	0.80	2.72	0.85
14. Japanese and Foreign Customs (n = 1542)	2.97	0.90	2.59	0.78	3.04	0.79	2.77	0.82
15. English in Japan (n = 1542)	2.95	0.90	2.55	0.80	3.07	0.82	2.89	0.81
16. Studying Abroad (n = 1542)*	3.05	0.94	2.46	0.82	3.11	0.84	2.94	0.89
17. The Influence of the Media (n = 1550)	2.86	0.85	2.63	0.76	2.93	0.77	2.87	0.82
18. Traditional and New Media (n = 1550)	2.87	0.83	2.66	0.78	2.92	0.78	2.82	0.82
19. Poverty (n = 1550)	2.76	0.88	3.08	0.84	3.15	0.82	2.46	0.87
20. Money (n = 1550)*	2.99	0.88	2.62	0.84	3.16	0.79	3.08	0.85
21. Gender in Japan (n = 1496)	2.89	0.81	2.75	0.76	3.10	0.77	2.71	0.78
22. Personality (n = 1496)	2.92	0.81	2.72	0.76	3.02	0.77	2.83	0.79
23. Crime and Punishment (n = 1496)	2.83	0.84	2.95	0.84	3.06	0.76	2.46	0.83
24. Public Behavior (n = 1496)*	2.95	0.83	2.72	0.79	3.08	0.78	2.98	0.82

Note. Asterisk refers to week of survey collection on current and previous three weeks' topics.