Making a Case for Decision-making Tasks in High-level Discussion Classes Within a Strongly Unified Curriculum

Jamie Lesley

International Christian University (ICU)

This paper reports on the design, delivery, and reflective evaluation of group decision-making tasks used in high-level discussion classes at a private university in Tokyo taught as part of a required general English curriculum program taken by all first-year undergraduates. The tasks were developed in response to a university policy change affecting students from the AY2017 intake onward that removed the ability to opt out of the course with a TOEIC placement test score of 900 and above. This change led to concerns that existing course content might lack sufficient challenge and value for high-level learners. Thus, modifications were made in the hope of making the classroom experience more meaningful, while staying in line with the program's strongly unified curriculum, which standardizes learning aims, course content, language targets, lesson methodology, and assessment criteria across all levels. Consequently, collaborative, decision-making tasks were piloted in the spring 2017 and 2018 semesters to help add complexity to group discussions in high-level classes. The paper highlights strengths and weaknesses of their application based on feedback from instructors and students, and finishes with recommendations for how decision-making tasks might be more formally structured into a future discussion-based curriculum.

Although it is difficult to find a commonly agreed-on definition of "tasks" (Ellis, 2003), most attempts cite a defined sequence of stages leading to an identifiable outcome (Skehan, 1996). Ellis (2003) described this sequencing as being comprised of *pre-task*, *during-task*, and *post-task* phases. In the pre-task phase, the task is introduced, the outcome is established, planning time is given, and a preparatory activity similar to the task is conducted. This allows for rehearsal and

strategizing between the first two phases. Complexity can be altered through the degree of language or content scaffolding. Timing in the pre-stage may also be changed as befits students' proficiency or needs.

In the during-task phase, students undertake the given task and attempt to achieve its identified outcome. These outcomes are typically pursued through collaboration, meaningful interaction, and use of specific language forms (Nunan, 2014). Variation can again be achieved by manipulating complexity, for example, by applying time pressure, by allowing or denying access to input material, and by introducing new or surprise elements that were not anticipated in the preparation (Ellis, 2003). However, balance must always be struck between language complexity and content demands (Robinson, 2011). Equally, cognitive and communicative loads must remain manageable (Candlin, 2009). Tasks should also be set within realistic time constraints and generate sufficient interest so that learners are willing to undertake them (Willis, 2009).

In the post-task phase, the teacher has options. For example, they may conduct reflection activities to encourage students to review their performance or evaluate task completion. A formative focus on form may be used to highlight strengths and weaknesses of language use, review errors, or raise awareness of specific communicative targets. The post-task phase is also an opportunity to repeat the task or conduct a similar one to address issues raised by the feedback or reflection. Improved performances can then be immediately pursued (Ellis, 2003).

With that in mind, this paper reports on the development and appraisal of decision-making tasks used in high-level English discussion classes at Rikkyo University, Tokyo. This context is described before an explanation of the tasks is presented and discussed alongside feedback from participants.

Teaching Context

Rikkyo University's Center for English Discussion Class oversees the English Discussion Class (EDC), a compulsory course taken by all freshman undergraduates as part of the general curriculum (Hurling, 2012). EDC is taught once a week in both semesters to approximately 4,500 students in more than 550

total classes. Upon matriculation, students are streamed by college into one of four levels based on TOEIC reading and listening placement test scores: Level I (TOEIC 680-999), Level II (480-679), Level III (280-479), and Level IV (less than 280). However, all students are subject to the same strongly unified curriculum. This strength rests in the standardization of all course content, materials, methodology, assessments, and learning aims (Brown, 1995).

EDC has two aims: to develop students' English speaking fluency and to develop their ability to discuss contemporary social and cultural topics, such as the environment and ethics. To help students discuss these effectively, target skills are practiced using a communicative approach that prioritizes student-to-student talk time and formative feedback to improve subsequent output. Most skills help students share, develop, and evaluate ideas in relation to set discussion questions. Some skills are organizational and facilitate speaking turns and topic selection, while others are used to convey attention and check understanding (Schaefer, 2018).

Regular EDC lessons include two extended group discussions that together occupy the last 50-60 minutes of a 90-minute lesson duration (Hurling, 2012). Discussion 1 consists of three stages. The first is preparatory, in which students individually make selections based on input material (Appendix A) and then discuss these with a partner to generate content and practice target skills further. Students then regroup for a 10-minute discussion. A post-task feedback stage follows where aspects of performance are exemplified by the instructor based on notes taken mid-discussion. Selected instances are used to showcase use/non-use of target skills in reference to students' actual utterances to make the feedback clearer. Teacher-fronted feedback is typically mixed with self- and peer-reflection activities to encourage groups and/or individuals to self-appraise skills use.

Discussion 2 follows the same three-stage structure as Discussion 1, and the target skills remain a primary focus. However, the timing of each stage is longer, and the topic is typically more challenging (Appendix B). The discussion is also conducted entirely without instructor intervention to better judge uptake of target skills based on students' unassisted use. The instructor monitors and rates discussions against a grading rubric. Performance is again reviewed in feedback.

This process was scrutinized at the end of AY2016, when the university removed the ability for students with TOEIC placement test scores of 900 or above to opt out of taking EDC. This came into effect in AY2017 and coincided with concerns that existing course content was too simple to be meaningful for native/near-native English learners. The dilemma was therefore how to add complexity and interest to their discussions whilst staying within the boundaries of the program's unified curriculum. One suggestion was to adopt a more deliberately task-based learning approach.

Discussions as Tasks

A standard EDC discussion fulfils much, if not all, of the aforementioned criteria of a task. Firstly, it has clearly defined pre-, during-, and post-task phases. It is preceded by a preparation activity that replicates the topic and focus of the group interaction to which it is attached. The pre-task phase allows for strategic planning and rehearsal in advance of a group exchange that contains pre-determined questions and fixed time limits. These establish parameters on the during task phase leading to identifiable outcomes if students remain on-topic as instructed.

When asked for a classification, Ellis categorized EDC discussion as "open, focused, divergent opinion-gap tasks" (Lowe, Schaefer, & Turner, 2014). EDC discussions are *open* in that no non-linguistic outcome needs to be achieved, and the group interaction finishes only when the time allocation expires. They are *focused* because of instructions to use specific forms. They are *divergent* because opinions do not need to be in agreement for the task to be achieved. The *gap* exists until those opinions are shared and target skills facilitate that sharing. However, a simple exchange of opinions in an open, focused, divergent format is relatively simple for the average high-level speaker, and it was this criticism that raised the need for revisions to the course for Level I students.

Shift to Decision-making Tasks

To go beyond a mere open exchange of divergent ideas, it was decided to shift Level I groups away from opinions shared essentially without consequence, by requiring students to arrive at collaboratively reached decisions that must later be justified. This necessitated a revised approach to group discussions. Task

and content complexity were accordingly increased through pressure to reach a consensus within the time limit. It was also hoped that a reporting stage would promote greater ownership over the success or failure of the discussion, while the decision-making component might raise engagement without sacrificing skills use. Akin to Skehan's (1996) approach, the standard preparation > discussion > feedback stages were extended to preparation > discussion with decisions > reporting of decisions to preparation partners > feedback with formative practice or extension tasks.

Compared to regular EDC discussions, the pre-stage of decision-making tasks differs in the inclusion of a scenario to place students in (Appendix C). While this change is superficial, it is an attempt to heighten interest which, as Willis (2009) noted, is important if learners are to willingly participate. Selections from the preparation activity are still made and discussed with a partner as in the regular format, before everyone regroups for the discussion. However, in the revised set up, there is a two-item agenda instead of a pair of questions. The first item builds off the input material and is designed to be dealt with quickly, leaving the second item as the group's main focus. To allow for elevated complexity, and to ensure repeated use of target skills, 20-25 minutes are allocated to the discussion rather than the standard 16 minutes. Extra time is beneficial because the number of target skills increases incrementally through the course, and students are expected to not only use new skills but continue using previously taught ones. After the discussion, group members return to their preparation partners in the post-task phase to report and justify their respective decisions. This allows for further use of target forms and gives the teacher time to choose what aspects of task completion, skills, and content from each group's discussion to address in feedback.

Design Variations

Several variations to task structure and focus can alter their complexity (Ellis, 2009), and these were considered when designing decision-making tasks for the EDC. One such variable is time. By reducing it, we add pressure and/or difficulty to the preparation or discussion stages. By extending it, we provide scope for

increased use of target language and greater depth for analysis that precedes the group's decisions. However, there is a point at which time extensions or reductions are counterproductive, by making tasks too hard or long-winded.

Variations can also be made to the number of items discussed and decided, or their difficulty. For example, simply asking group members to select one or more things from a list of many is likely easier than asking them to decide what to do with those same things. Ranking several items is more challenging than just nominating them, while making a single-item selection is easier still.

Other variations can be made to the amount of guided or unguided support provided in planning stages. Input may offer many items or ideas, or few to none. Alternatively, students can be asked to generate their own ideas to supplement what is already given, or they can start from nothing and be told to think of everything themselves. This blank slate option can be risky if students are unfamiliar with a topic. As such, it is better suited to more commonplace subjects (Appendix D).

Further variations regard pre-task versus online planning, which differentiates planning in advance from planning done during the discussion itself. When situated online, the removal of rehearsal makes matters more difficult and therefore suits stronger students. An example of this might be to decide what happens to something after it has been chosen, such as how to implement a given strategy once the group has agreed to its selection.

Final variations are possible through roles like timekeeper, facilitator, and minute-taker, or by assigning students to teams with unique aims and interests. This can add realism to discussions and may increase interest. However, the practicality of such variations also depends on learner proficiency, motivation, and the type and number of target skills required to complete the task.

Research Questions

To determine how successful the decision-making tasks were perceived to be, surveys were given to students and instructors to help answer the following enquiries:

For students:

1. How interesting was each decision-making task to complete?
2. How difficult was each decision-making task to complete?

For teachers:

1. How often did teachers use decision-making tasks?
2. What perceived impact did use of decision-making tasks have on a) use of target language, b) student motivation, c) topic engagement, d) lesson timing, and e) feedback?

Methods

Participants

At the beginning of AY2017 and AY2018, instructors had been encouraged to experiment with decision-making tasks in their Level I classes, but doing so was not obligatory. For this study's purpose, it was therefore decided to focus only on classes that had been exposed to decision-making tasks consistently. Consequently, three classes from the spring semesters of two academic years were selected totaling 21 students in AY2017 and 20 students in AY2018. The students came from four colleges: Psychology in AY2017, Intercultural Communication in AY2018, and Law and Business in both years. All students were first-year undergraduates.

The teacher survey was given to all instructors that taught Level I classes: 15 in AY2017 and 20 in AY2018. All had taught EDC for a minimum of one year. As any instructor only ever teaches two Level I classes per week, exposure to these types of classes is always fairly limited. Use of decision-making tasks was also not compulsory. Some teachers used them, while others did not. Despite this, all Level I instructors were asked to give feedback at the end of each semester.

The purpose and format of the student surveys were explained to all classes in week 12 of the course. Informed consent was obtained from everyone. Thereafter, the surveys were conducted in week 13. All Level I instructors were asked to take the teacher surveys as part of continuing quality control conducted every semester by program managers. Consent to retain the responses for the possibility of a formal write-up was again obtained. Anonymity was maintained in all cases.

Materials and Procedures

A 12-item survey was created to appraise the interest and difficulty of each decision-making task and to determine students' general reflections on the overall format and purpose (Appendix E). Due to minimal changes to course content from AY2017 to AY2018, it was possible to use the same tasks with all six classes and therefore administer the same survey to both year groups.

All six classes in this study used decision-making tasks in Lessons 2-4, 6-8, and 10-12, for nine regular lessons in a 14-week course. The first nine items addressed each task with a content description and two separate four-point Likert scales, one for task interest and one for task difficulty. Three general items 10-12 were included to appraise tasks as effective for practicing discussion skills, for the format of opinion-sharing with decision-making, and if such tasks should be used with future Level I intakes. An open section for respondents to add optional feedback was also part of the survey's design.

The instructor survey was deliberately kept very simple and created using Google Forms. It had two sections: the first to confirm frequency of use and the second to address task impact on other aspects of the lesson. Both sections used an open text-box format.

The student survey was paper based and was conducted in class. Students were given copies of each of the decision-making tasks they had used in each lesson to remind them of their focus and purpose. Instructors completed their surveys online at the end of each semester.

Data and Analysis

Data from the student surveys were coded and converted into numerical values across the Likert scales. For task interest, covered by items 1-9, responses became: $a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, d = 4$. Task difficulty responses became: $e = 1, f = 2, g = 3, h = 4$. If students indicated absence from a lesson, this was coded accordingly: $i = 0$. For the general reflection items 10-12, the cline running from strongly disagree (SD) to strongly agree (SA) became: $SD = 1, D = 2, A = 3, SA = 4$. Mean scores were then calculated to create an easy comparison. With the four-point scales used, the midway point of task interest, task difficulty, and general agreement on

use of tasks was 2.5. Thus, with scores above 2.5, topic interest would be more interesting than not, task difficulty would be more difficult than not, and general reflections would have more agreement than not. Standard deviations were also calculated to show the relative spread of responses in relation to each mean score.

Students' comments in the optional feedback sections were considered qualitatively; however, very little was gleaned from these as few students used them, and those that did simply expressed gratitude for taking the course. As such, those data are excluded from the following discussion. For the teacher surveys, in section 1, responses to the frequency of use item were calculated into simple percentages. In section 2, responses to the impact of tasks were reviewed qualitatively with common themes and key points highlighted.

Results and Discussion

Student Feedback

Topic interest and task difficulty in relation to specific tasks are dealt with before a general consideration of task format and overall effectiveness. Mean scores with standard deviations from each year set are presented for a year-to-year comparison of topic interest and task difficulty (Table 1) and then general reflections (Table 2).

Task Interest. The first research question aimed to find out how interesting students perceived each decision-making task to be. It seems evident from the mean scores that all tasks across both years were deemed more interesting overall than not. Standard deviation findings also show that the 2017 students' responses were more closely distributed than those obtained in 2018. Some tasks were consistently interesting in both academic years, such as those in Lessons 2-3, while others were interesting in one year, but less so in the other, as with Lessons 4, 6, 8, and 11. However, given the small sample sizes, the impact of mere personal taste cannot be ignored. These tasks were generally interesting to these specific students but may not have been for other students in other classes.

Task Difficulty. The second research question tried to discover how difficult students perceived the decision-making tasks. Overall, it seems that the tasks were generally viewed as more difficult in 2018 than 2017, but in both years,

Table 1

Students' Perceptions of Topic Interest and Task Difficulty Levels, AY2017 – AY2018

Lesson. Task Topic (AY2017, AY2018)	Interest		Difficulty	
	AY2017 M (SD)	AY2018 M (SD)	AY2017 M (SD)	AY2018 M (SD)
2. Campaign to help hikikomori (n = 21, n = 18)	2.86 (0.64)	2.89 (1.15)	1.95 (0.72)	2.00 (0.94)
3. Guide to making friends at university (n = 21, n = 20)	2.90 (0.88)	3.10 (1.04)	1.90 (0.75)	1.90 (0.83)
4. Alternatives to university (n = 19, n = 20)	2.79 (0.69)	3.35 (0.91)	2.11 (0.72)	1.70 (0.71)
6. Deciding where to live in Japan (n = 19, n = 20)	2.79 (0.77)	2.85 (0.91)	2.05 (0.83)	2.55 (1.02)
7. Eco-friendly policies for Japan (n = 20, n = 20)	2.70 (0.90)	2.65 (1.15)	2.33 (0.94)	2.75 (0.99)
8. University students' independence (n = 20, n = 20)	2.60 (1.02)	2.95 (1.02)	2.29 (0.82)	2.10 (1.09)
10. Online vs in-person event planning (n =17, n = 18)	2.71 (0.89)	2.72 (1.09)	2.00 (0.84)	2.28 (0.87)
11. Future technology investment (n = 15, n = 16)	2.87 (0.81)	2.56 (1.27)	2.73 (1.00)	3.06 (0.97)
12. Values to promote at university (n = 20, n = 17)	2.75 (1.09)	2.76 (1.06)	2.85 (1.01)	3.18 (0.98)

Notes. 1 = not very interesting / not very difficult; 4 = very interesting / very difficult.

assumed difficulty rose as the course progressed as shown in means of 1.95 (2017) and 2.00 (2018) for Lesson 2 versus 2.85 (2017) and 3.18 (2018) for Lesson 12. However, while perceptions of difficulty increased over time, they did not reach the point of being deemed impossible to complete. To a certain extent, this progression was anticipated, as topics are deliberately more challenging towards the end of the semester. The number of target discussion skills also increases, and by Lesson 11 students have six speaker-side skills (e.g., *Giving*

Table 2

Students' General Reflections on Use of Decision-making Tasks, AY2017 – AY2018

	AY2017	AY2018
Item (AY2017, AY2018)	M (SD)	M (SD)
10. Completing tasks in group discussions was an effective way to practice discussion skills. (n = 21, n = 20)	3.38 (0.58)	3.00 (1.05)
11. Combining opinion sharing with decision-making tasks is a good discussion format. (n = 21, n = 20)	3.19 (0.59)	2.95 (0.97)
12. Decision-making tasks should be included in future Level I English Discussion Class courses. (n = 21, n = 20)	3.19 (0.59)	2.90 (1.14)

Note. 1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree.

Opinions) and six listener-side skills (e.g., *Asking for Opinions*) to contend with. Hence, these results are not unexpected. Although, further investigation might confirm whether that perceived difficulty was a consequence of the increased target skills or the design and/or delivery of the tasks themselves.

General Reflections. In terms of students viewing decision-making tasks as an effective way to practice discussion skills (Item 10), mean response rates in both years suggest sizeable support for the new approach at 3.38 (2017) and 3.00 (2018). Responses to the opinion-sharing with decision-making format (Item 11) were equally positive at 3.19 (2017) and 2.95 (2018). Lastly, the suggestion that such tasks should be retained in future Level I courses (Item 12) was also well received at 3.19 (2017) and 2.90 (2018). Such results are very positive, despite the 2018 students being a little less enthusiastic than their 2017 predecessors and their responses typically more dispersed according to the standard deviation findings.

Differences across the two-year groups might be explained by students coming from different colleges, which sometimes coincides with variations in motivation for learning English. But, the fact that the data is drawn from only 41 individuals cannot be underestimated, and no wholesale conclusions can be accurately drawn from such a small respondent pool. Ultimately, however, feedback suggests that students endorse this type of task, and as such, the EDC

program would do well to explore their potential to help engage and challenge higher-level students.

Instructor Feedback

The third research question was designed to confirm how often teachers used decision-making tasks in their Level I classes. Results indicated that in AY2017 the majority of teachers used decision-making tasks at some point in the semester but not consistently so. Out of 15 Level I instructors, 11 indicated that they sometimes used decision-making tasks, three used them rarely, and one instructor never did. However, in semester one of AY2018, task use was less easy to quantify accurately due to a significantly lower response rate with only nine of 20 instructors responding to the survey. From these nine, only one instructor almost always used decision-making tasks, two sometimes did, and one did so on a rare basis, while five did not use them at all.

The final research question intended to uncover what impact teachers perceived decision-making tasks to have on use of target language, student motivation, topic engagement, lesson timing, and feedback. Generally, there were a mix of positive and negative findings that were analyzed qualitatively based on recurring themes and common findings related to materials creation, uncertainty in application, learner proficiency and motivation, timing, skills use, and feedback.

Overall, teachers felt that creating a good task was not always easy and that some topics lent themselves better to that purpose than others. As mentioned before, each instructor only had two Level I classes a week leading to a certain trial-and-error approach in how to administer each task and improve it if need be. This was further complicated by differences between the two Level I groups because students across classes typically differ in proficiency, motivation, and interest. That said, instructors who used tasks did note perceived gains in motivation, but this was at times accompanied by an unwelcome drop in target skill use. Several also felt that lesson timing was negatively affected by the need to set activities up in new and unfamiliar ways. Content-based feedback also seemed to increase owing to a need to cover the particulars of the decisions each

group had made in more detail than usual. Evidently, then, there are clear areas to improve in the design and execution of decision-making tasks from instructors' point of view. There is also more preparation and support required from a program management perspective in getting more instructors to willingly and consistently use such tasks in their Level I classes.

Looking to the future, consideration must be given to concerns raised about decreased skills use. To this end, decision-making tasks need to be carefully crafted to not unduly detract attention from target forms. It would therefore be useful to confirm through statistical analysis what specific effects, if any, different types of decision-making tasks have on students' skill use. As a first step in this process, EDC investigated students' skills use when completing decision-making tasks under discussion test conditions compared against their skills use under regular discussion test conditions (Lesley & West, 2019). Findings suggest that students continue to use target forms, albeit with reduced skills output with the revised format. This is a shortcoming that clearly needs addressing.

Beyond this, matters related to regular lesson grading and test assessment also warrant further investigation. If the university formally includes decision-making tasks as part of the Level I curriculum, questions about the kinds of rubrics and testing instruments that best capture performance need to be answered. How to judge successful task completion in EDC is also yet to be explored. The prospect of adding a task completion criterion to the grading rubric is desirable, but it is not a simple process to reliably create and validate its use. This is, of course, a target for a separate study but one that could reap rewards for the program and its Level I students if pursued.

Conclusion

This paper began by describing the teaching context at Rikkyo University's Center for English Discussion Class, where concerns about the need for more challenging types of discussion tasks were raised following policy changes that made the course compulsory for all students regardless of proficiency. To help meet the needs of a relatively small but significantly more proficient student intake, complexity was added to the standard group discussion format via

decision-making and post-task reporting requirements. These modified tasks were trialed over two semesters of two academic years, and overall they found success in the limited number of classes that used them consistently. However, challenges remain in making this revised approach a time-effective and attractive option for teachers, an engaging undertaking for students in different colleges, and an aspect of curriculum development that receives due attention and support from program management.

References

Brereton, P., Lesley, J., Schaefer, M. Y., & Young, D. (2018). *What do you think? Interactive skills for effective discussion 1, Book 1* (8th ed.). Tokyo, Japan: DTP Shuppan.

Brown, J. D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development.* Boston, MA: Heinle, Cengage Learning.

Candlin, C. N. (2009). Towards task-based language learning. In K. Van den Branden, M. Bygate, & J.M. Norris (Eds.), *Task-based language teaching: A reader* (pp. 21-40). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (2009). The differential effects of three types of task planning on the fluency, complexity, and accuracy in L2 oral production. *Applied Linguistics, 30*(4), 474-509. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/amp042

Hurling, S. (2012). Introduction to EDC. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning English Discussion, 1*(1), 1.2-1.10.

Lesley, J., & West, T. (2019). Assessing the effects of increased task complexity on high-level students' academic discussion performance. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning English Discussion, 7*, 298-319.

Lowe, R., Schaefer, M., & Turner, M. (Producers). (2014, November 5). The TEFLology Podcast. [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from: https://teflology-podcast.com/2014/11/05/tefl-interviews-3-rod-ellis-on-task-based-teaching-and-second-language-acquisition/

Nunan, N. (2014). Task-based teaching & learning. In M. Celce-Murcia, D.

M. Brinton., & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed.) (pp. 630-648). Boston, MA: Heinle, Cengage Learning.

Robinson, P. (2011). Task-based language learning: A review of issues. *Language Learning, 61*(S1), 1-36. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00641.x

Schaefer, M. Y. (2018). Communication skills for strategic competence. *New Directions In Teaching and Learning English Discussion, 6,* 273-279.

Skehan, P. (1996). A framework for the implementation of task-based instruction. *Applied linguistics*, *17*(1), 38-62.

Willis, T. (2009). The TBL framework: The task cycle. In K. Van den Branden, M. Bygate, & J. M. Norris (Eds.), *Task-based language teaching: A reader* (pp. 227-242). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Author Bio

Jamie Lesley *is an instructor at International Christian University's English for Liberal Arts department. He holds an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL. His professional experience and research interests include English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), language testing, and professional development in teacher education. jslesley2001@yahoo.co.uk*

Appendix A

Example of Regular Format Discussion 1 Materials

Discussion 1: Talking to Friends and Family

Preparation

❖ *Below are four problems. For each problem, decide which is better – talking to friends or family.*

1. You are interested in **studying abroad** but don't know where to go.

   (friends / family)

2. You can't decide which **university clubs or circles** to join.

   (friends / family)

3. **University classes** are too difficult. You need help.

   (friends / family)

4. You don't know what kind of **part-time job** to get.

   (friends / family)

❖ *Discuss your ideas with a partner.*

Discussion

1. Which is better – talking to friends or family about...
   - studying abroad?
   - university clubs or circles?
   - university classes?
   - part-time jobs?
2. Which way to solve problems is better – talking to someone or solving problems alone?

Appendix B

Example of Regular Format Discussion 2 Materials

Discussion 2: Helping *Hikikomori*

Preparation

❖ *Below are eight things that can help* hikikomori. *For each, decide if it is effective or not effective.*

1.	Eating with family	*(effective / not effective)*
2.	Doing a part-time job	*(effective / not effective)*
3.	Talking with a counselor	*(effective / not effective)*
4.	Starting a new hobby	*(effective / not effective)*
5.	Doing exercise	*(effective / not effective)*
6.	Writing a blog or diary	*(effective / not effective)*
7.	Chatting to other *hikikomori* on the internet	*(effective / not effective)*
8.	Meeting other *hikikomori* face-to-face	*(effective / not effective)*

❖ *Discuss your ideas with a partner.*

Discussion

1. What are some effective things that can help *hikikomori*?
2. Is learning communication skills important for *hikikomori*?

Brereton, Lesley, Schaefer, & Young, 2018, p. 11

Appendix C

Example of Decision-making Task Materials

Helping Hikikomori

Pre-Task: Members of a local government are meeting to discuss a new campaign to help hikikomori. Below are eight strategies for them to consider. For each, decide if it is effective or not effective. Then, discuss your ideas with a partner.

Strategies	
1. Eating meals with family	(effective / not effective)
2. Doing a part-time job	(effective / not effective)
3. Talking with a counsellor	(effective / not effective)
4. Starting a new hobby	(effective / not effective)
5. Doing exercise	(effective / not effective)
6. Writing a blog or diary	(effective / not effective)
7. Chatting to other hikikomori on the internet	(effective / not effective)
8. Meeting other hikikomori face-to-face	(effective / not effective)

Meeting Task: Decide in your group…

1. a) What strategies are *effective* at helping hikikomori?
   b) What strategies are *not effective* at helping hikikomori?

2. Which strategies can help hikikomori *the most*?

Rank the strategies you selected in 1a from *most* to *least effective*: _____

Post-Task

Report on your group's discussion to your pre-task partner. What did your group decide?
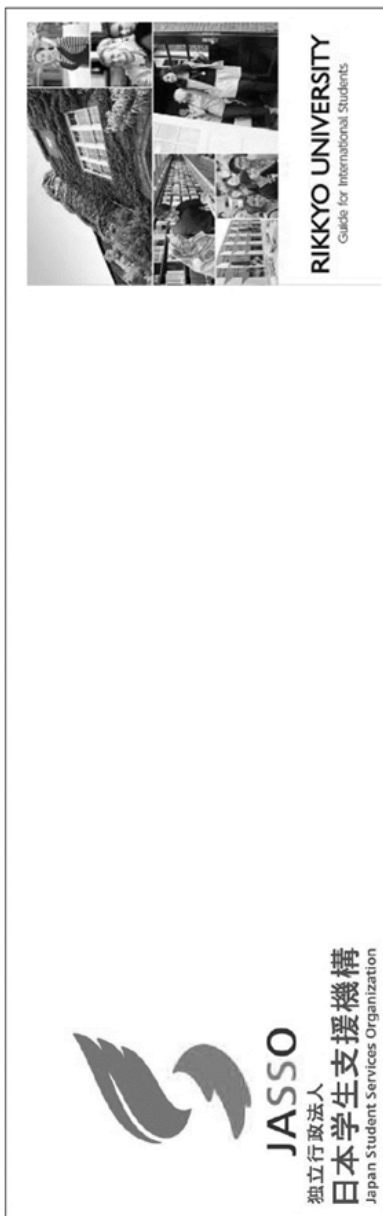
Appendix D

Example of Decision-making Task Materials with Less Guidance

Spring 2018 Lesson 3: Supporting Opinions

Making Friends at University

Pre-Task: *The Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) is creating a new welcome guide for international students at Rikkyo University. The guide will include a leaflet with advice on making new friends at university. What information should be included in the guide? Write some ideas below. Then, discuss your ideas with a partner.*

RIKKYO UNIVERSITY
Guide for International Students

JASSO
独立行政法人
日本学生支援機構
Japan Student Services Organization

Meeting Task:

Introduce your ideas to the rest of the group and decide together what information should be included in the guide.

Post-Task:

Report on your group's discussion to your pre-task partner. What did your group decide?

Appendix E

Student Survey

Instructions: Your feedback is important to us. Read and think about each question carefully. Please circle your answers directly on the sheet. 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。回答はシートに直接丸で囲んでください。

- How interesting was each task to complete? (Choose the letter that best describes your degree of interest in each lesson's task on the left. "a" is the least interesting; "d" is the most interesting. 以下のディスカッション課題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；
- How difficult was each task to complete? (Choose the letter that best describes the degree of difficulty of the task on the left. "e" is the least difficult; "h" is the most difficult. 以下のディスカッション課題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課題に対し，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，"e"は「全く難しくなかった」，"h"は「とても難しかった」になります。
- If you were absent for a particular lesson, please answer "i". もし，該当するレッスンを欠席していた場合は，"i"にマークしてください。

	INTEREST 関心度				DIFFICULTY 難易度				Absent
	Not Very Interesting 関心がなかった			Very Interesting 関心があった	Not Very Difficult 難しくない			Very Difficult とても難しい	欠席
1. Lesson 2: Helping Hikikomori Task: Members of a local government are meeting to discuss a new campaign to help hikikomori. Discuss 8 strategies: a) Which strategies are effective? b) Which strategies are not effective? Rank the strategies in a) from *most* to *least* effective	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
2. Lesson 3: Making Friends at University Task: The Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) is creating a welcome guide for international students at Rikkyo. The guide will include a leaflet with advice on making new friends at university. What information should be included in the guide?	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
3. Lesson 4: What to do after High School – Alternatives to University Task: A mentoring group is discussing four high school students' plans for after high school *(world travel, vocational school, full-time job, go to university)*. Decide on the best advice to make each plan successful.	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
4. Lesson 6: Eco-friendly-policies Task: The Ministry of the Environment are meeting to discuss six eco-friendly policies that have been successful in cities around the world. Decide if other cities in Japan should introduce the same policies	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i

(Please turn over) [裏に進んでください]

5.	**Lesson 7: Eco-friendly-policies** Task: The Ministry of the Environment are meeting to discuss six eco-friendly policies that have been successful in cities around the world. Decide if other cities in Japan should introduce the same policies.	a	b	c	d		e	f	g	h	i
6.	**Lesson 8: University Students and Independence** Task: Rank four university students from 1 (the most independent) to 4 (the least independent) based on the information given about them. Decide how each student could improve their relationship with their parents.	a	b	c	d		e	f	g	h	i
7.	**Lesson 10: Organizing a Party – Online versus In-person** Task: Organize an end-of-semester party for 100+ university club members (choosing a venue, promotion, inviting guests, music, collecting payment, catering, buying prizes). Decide what should be done online and what should be done in-person.	a	b	c	d		e	f	g	h	i
8.	**Lesson 11: Investing in Developing Technologies** Task: A venture capitalist group is discussing six developing technologies (self-driving cars, artificial intelligence, cloning, drones, 3D printers, space tourism). Decide if the technologies are good or bad investments. Choose 1 or 2 to invest in.	a	b	c	d		e	f	g	h	i
9.	**Lesson 12: What Values Are Important?** Task: A university's board of directors is discussing next year's prospectus. Which values should the prospectus promote (being polite, on time, hardworking, patient, respectful, open-minded, responsible, generous)? Choose the 3 most important values to promote. Decide how to make the values appealing to readers.	a	b	c	d		e	f	g	h	i

General use of Tasks – Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.	SD = Strongly Disagree	D = Disagree	A = Agree	SA = Strongly Agree
10. Completing tasks in group discussions was an effective way to practice English discussion skills.	SD	D	A	SA
11. Combining opinion sharing with decision-making tasks is a good discussion format.	SD	D	A	SA
12. Decision-making tasks should be included in future Level I English Discussion Class courses.	SD	D	A	SA

Additional Feedback (Optional)

Thank you! ご協力ありがとうございました！