

Student Journal of International Liberal Arts





Akita International University

Editor's Note

Welcome to AIU's Student Journal of the International Liberal Arts. Here you will find a variety of writings created by AIU scholars. The editorial board hopes to provide an opportunity to show AIU students' passion, efforts, and writing proficiency in their respective fields. We would like to express our gratitude to all those who submitted exceptional pieces of writing, as well as the staff members who made this publication happen.

As an editor, I have been involved in three issues of the AIU student journal. Being a part of the editorial team has been a wonderful experience. I believe that writing is a form of art, and that every piece of writing reflects the creativity, originality, and unique voice of AIU students. During my editorship, I had the opportunity to read fascinating papers, essays, and poems that inspired and enriched my growth as a writer. Currently, three lead editors are graduating this spring (Luis Daruiz, Rintaro Ikegami and myself). We are always welcoming new editors to step up. Why don't you join in and embark on this engaging creative journey?

This year, our AIU journal spotlights Yuko Taniguchi, the author of *The Ocean in the Closet*. AIU organized the 2022 Big Read in which students engaged in discussions and exchanged their opinions not only with their fellow AIU peers but also with high school students and our special guest author, Ms. Taniguchi. Throughout the events, AIU students developed their own understanding and interpretations of *The Ocean in the Closet*. We are pleased to announce that next year, we plan to focus on a variety of topics as usual, but will also reserve a special section of the journal for papers, poems, stories, and art on the 3.11 Disaster.

Once again, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the authors, editors, designers, and all the many contributors, including the AIU student artists who offered works they created last May in visiting artist Mike Litzau's "Speedy Cut Printmaking Workshop" for this issue's cover art. To all AIU scholars, we are always looking forward to your submissions for the next issues. Dear readers, we hope you enjoy reading this year's academic and creative works. May this AIU journal spark inspiration!

Enjoy your reading journey.
Nanami IGUSA, lead editor

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Academic Papers



Mao Kokubo

Mao Kokubo is a sophomore student in the Global Studies program. Her essay “Possibilities and Limits of Airbnb: Should Airbnb Be Restricted?” was written for Composition II under Professor Joel Friederich at AIU. Her research on the topic involved a visit to Airbnbs around the world and a study of real estate business. She hopes to continue researching vacation rental business to create places which people can retreat from busy daily life.

Possibilities and Limits of AirBnB: Should AirBnB Be Restricted?

Airbnb has grown exponentially since the day of its establishment in 2008. As reported by Dogru (2019), in the US, consumers spent more on Airbnb than they did on Hilton, one of the world's largest hotel chains. Airbnb is an online marketplace for lodging, primarily private accommodations for vacation rentals and tourist activities. Airbnb is also a representative of the sharing economy, which is "an economic system that is based on people sharing possessions and services, either for free or for payment, usually using the internet to organize this" (The Cambridge dictionary, n.d.). Other popular examples include Uber, TaskRabbit, or Liftshare and these new economic models impact traditional industries, such as cab companies or travel sectors. Today, Airbnb has approximately 5.6 million active listings in 220 countries and 150 million people use it for booking (Meyer, 2022). Users can book unique accommodations around the world via a website and the company's mobile app. They can rent not only hostels or cottages but also spacious and luxurious houses with swimming pools or even private islands and caves. Additionally, the opportunity to interact directly with hosts and to engage with locals also attracts many users. Despite these attractions, some people criticize Airbnb's lack of regulation and unfair competition. In recent years, Airbnb has been subject to regulations, and many cities are imposing new taxes and restrictions. However, does Airbnb need to be regulated? This essay discusses the need for regulations from three viewpoints: the economic impacts on the hotel industry, the impacts on the local community, and the effects on individuals, hosts, and guests. Considering these perspectives, Airbnb should be restricted to a certain degree to protect industry, local communities, and individuals, but not banned for a free market economy and for wider options for individuals.

First, I will discuss how the growth of Airbnb has affected the traditional hotel industry. Several authors believe Airbnb has devastating effects on the traditional hotel industry. Dogru

(2019) and his colleagues studied Airbnb's impact on hotel performance in 10 major U.S. cities. He attributes Airbnb's rapid growth to consumers' desire for affordable, authentic lodging experiences, to stay in people's real homes with less regulation. In fact, because of the typical regulations in the U.S., adding a new hotel to the market requires permits, compliance with safety standards, and more tax collections. Since Airbnb is not regulated by these restrictions, the conventional hotel industry is said to be affected enormously in terms of its revenue, price, and occupancy. In fact, one study found that for every doubling of Airbnb's supply, hotel revenues would decrease by 2%. In dollars, the total potential hotel revenue lost because of Airbnb in New York City could amount to US\$365 million in 2016 alone (Dogru, 2019). Zervas et al. (2017) also analyze Airbnb's entry into Austin, Texas, where Airbnb has the highest supply and impact on hotel revenues is in the 8%-10% range. This impact can be seen not only in economy hotels. Dogru (2019) has revealed that Airbnb has had a significant impact on luxury hotels. In other words, Airbnb has been successful in supplying consumers with a more luxurious experience by offering unique accommodations. These data show a decline in hotel revenues; however, is it true that Airbnb has a negative impact on the hotel industry?

Some argue that Airbnb has no impact on traditional hotels, and I am skeptical about the arguments by Dogru, Zervas, and others that Airbnb negatively impacts traditional hotels. Data collected by Airbnb Inc. (n.d.) shows that most Airbnb listings are based outside of major hotel districts. For instance, in San Francisco, 72% of Airbnb properties are located outside of the central hotel district. Not only in San Francisco, but also more than 70% of Airbnb listings in New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Edinburgh, and Sydney are located outside of the main tourist area or outside the central hotel corridor. But why do Airbnb consumers stay outside of hotel districts and tourist destinations? There is

a cultural factor that what consumers want from Airbnb is different from what they want from hotels: recently consumers seek a more local lodging experience. According to Hotel Business (2019), 96% of guests who booked Airbnb said that identifying a more local and authentic experience was a factor when booking on Airbnb. The attraction of Airbnb is the interaction between travelers and their hosts, who are locals. By communicating directly with hosts, guests can obtain information on recommended spots and restaurants that are not listed in tourist magazines. Airbnb hosts are adept at showing the undiscovered attractions of their cities. In short, the Airbnb sharing economy encourages tourists to support local small businesses as well as major tourist attractions. Thus, while some authors assert there are serious effects on the incumbent hotel industry revenues, others disagree with these impacts because most Airbnb sites are located outside of the main hotel district and guests of hotels and Airbnb have different demands each. In my opinion, hotels need to develop or create their own features that differentiate them from Airbnb to increase revenue.

Second, researchers further focus their effect on community standards. Some researchers have argued that Airbnb affects local property prices, while at the same time others have shown economic benefits to the local community. First, there are negative impacts on local property prices. Barker (2020) argues that the impact of the so-called 'Airbnb effect' on local housing markets is significant, particularly in terms of its impact on housing stock, prices, and communities. The Airbnb effect is similar to gentrification, which is the process whereby raising the value of the local property forces previous residents to leave. According to Barron et al. (2015), the overtourism promoted by Airbnb has a negative impact on house prices and communities in major cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, Edinburgh, and Los Angeles. The research shows that as Airbnb facilitates short-term rentals, some landlords may switch their properties from long-term rentals aimed at local residents to short-term rentals aimed at tourists. This trend will drive up rental rates over time, as the housing supply is limited. Specifically, Barker (2021) revealed that a 1% increase in Airbnb listings increases rental rates

by 0.018% and house prices by 0.026%. Although these effects may seem very small, they have a great impact, taking into account Airbnb's average year-on-year growth rate, which is approximately 44%. Thus, even though the rental rate increases seem small, the overall growth of Airbnb affects the increase in rents and house prices. Both authors agree that landlords are moving their assets from the long-term rental and sale market to the short-term rental market, which is driving up rents and land prices, thereby causing gentrification.

However, there are clear economic benefits for local economies. Airbnb recently conducted its own economic impact study, which revealed positive impacts on the local economy (Airbnb Inc., n.d). As already mentioned, one of the motivations for travelers to use Airbnb is that people want to experience a place as if they were local. As a result, Airbnb guests spend time in different neighborhoods throughout the city, which had not attracted many tourists before Airbnb was created. In fact, Airbnb guests spend more money than the average tourist. The research conducted by Airbnb revealed substantial benefits to the local economy (Airbnb Inc., n.d). In New York City, more than 400,000 Airbnb guests visited in 2012-2013, and Airbnb generated \$632 million in economic activity in the city during the year. Of that amount, \$105 million went to direct spending in outer boroughs, areas that do not normally benefit from tourism revenues. In addition, while hotel guests spend an average of 3.9 nights, Airbnb guests spend an average of 6.4 nights, and while the average New York City guest spends \$690 in New York City businesses, Airbnb users spend \$880. 82% of Airbnb listings in New York City are located outside of major tourist destinations such as Manhattan, and on average, Airbnb guests spend \$740 in the neighborhood where they stay. This trend can be seen not only in New York, but also in Paris, Berlin, London, and many other cities. In other words, Airbnb guests also tend to stay longer and spend more money than traditional tourists, bringing the economic benefits of tourism to neighborhoods and small businesses not typically visited by tourists. For this particular aspect of the economic influence of Airbnb on local communities, it seems

like a trade-off. Airbnb could be a factor of gentrification in local communities, but at the same time, it provides economic benefits to areas that are not the center of tourism. Overall, my view is, it depends on the specific local community. But, if there is a housing shortage, then it is better to restrict the number of Airbnb units.

Another typical argument that is offered by people who are pushing for restricting Airbnb's effects on the individual: property owners and guests. The negative aspects for hosts are that the market produces unequal opportunities and labor protection. And for guests, consumer protection is lacking. On the other hand, Airbnb provides new job opportunities for owners of vacant houses and rooms. In addition, it offers a variety of accommodation options at a lower cost to consumers. First, some authors mentioned that the platform is dominated by a small number of professional hosts and has become increasingly centralized over time. Törnberg (2022) examined 834,722 listings, 513,785 hosts, and 13,466,854 reviews. Through the research, he found that the majority of market revenues tend to be concentrated around 10% of hosts. While government regulation restrains this, it only temporarily slows down the growing dominance of a few large-scale hosts. Furthermore, the research revealed large gaps between gender and racial groups. Black hosts earn on average 22% less and women on average 12% less, with significant gender and race earnings inequalities (Törnberg, 2022). With regard to these inequalities, some people point out that Airbnb is a sharing economy, but does not actually 'share'. From guests' point of view, some researchers state that guests are clearly in a vulnerable position. According to William Audland (2020), a specialist in personal injury and package travel law, Airbnb positions itself as a "platform" offering short-term stay permits and denying liability for listings. Thus, consumers who are injured in accommodations provided through Airbnb have no recourse against Airbnb. It is difficult to pursue civil liability against a host, especially if the host lives abroad. Therefore, consumers should be protected by regulations since they are in a riskier position.

However, we cannot deny that Airbnb has given people opportunities to earn and save

money. In terms of hosts, thanks to the growth of Airbnb, many Airbnb hosts are now able to earn additional income. According to data collected by Airbnb (iGMS, 2018), more than half of hosts admit that they could not afford to stay in their homes if not for the economic income of Airbnb. In addition to these financial benefits, the hosts have gained valuable entrepreneurial skills and expanded their knowledge of customer service and marketing, which can be applied in nearly every business. From the guests' point of view, Airbnb is a much cheaper option compared to hotels. The price is especially cheap when they travel with a large group and also there are shared spaces such as living rooms, backyards, and pools. One of the main differences between an Airbnb and a hotel is food. Since Airbnb has kitchens, guests can save substantial costs for outside meals. And Airbnb's rates are flexible and negotiable. Guests can consult directly with Airbnb hosts before booking and can request lower rates, especially during the off-season or in locations where competition is high. It is true that the platform is not fair and lacks consumer protection, but it also provides economic benefits for both hosts and guests. Therefore, it is necessary to create a system that allows many people to compete in the market, regardless of race or gender, and regulations that protect consumers.

In conclusion, Airbnb should not be strictly banned for a free market economy and for wide travel and job options, but to be restricted to some extent to protect industry, local communities, and individuals. Although I support the system of Airbnb, it has negative impacts in certain parts of the world. Therefore, Airbnb should build a system to provide equal economic opportunities for hosts, and governments need to legislate consumer protection. In addition, local governments must control rent and land prices to prevent gentrification. With these kinds of reasonable limits in place, Airbnb can be a powerful opportunity to bring out new attractions in the community for both tourists and local people.

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Nanae Ikukawa

Nanae Ikukawa is a junior student in the Global Studies program at AIU. Her essay “Why Not be Ethical: Hurdles Keeping Consumers Away from Ethical Consumption” was written for Composition 1 under Professor Joel Friederich at AIU. Nanae became interested in ethical consumption during her experience working at Starbucks and learning about its sustainability efforts. After taking classes in environmental studies and sustainability, she also became interested in the relationship between these fields and business, and now continues to study corporate social responsibility and ethical initiatives.

Why Not be Ethical: Hurdles Keeping Consumers Away from Ethical Consumption

Abstract

Today, sales of ethical products continue to grow worldwide. However, ethical consumption in Japan lags behind many developed countries. This paper considers five reasons that may be barriers to ethical consumption in Japan: certification, access, price, consumer benefit, and education causing unfamiliarity. In order to examine these factors in more detail, and because ethical consumption is highly related to consumer behavior, a survey was conducted to see Japanese people's consumption behavior, their image and knowledge of ethical consumption, and their educational background on sustainability. The results showed that consumers pursue consumer-benefit such as price, quality, and safety first and that there is a lack of education on sustainability and understanding of the concept of ethical consumption itself. Increasing ethical consumption in Japan may require the development of ethical products that offer the consumer benefit with the support of the government and the increase in awareness among the Japanese people.

Keywords:

Ethical consumption, Consumer, Negative externality, Consumer-benefit, Consumer Image, Education

Introduction

Every item for sale around you always has its own story. For example, in what country, by whom, and for how much money, the product was created. As for food, what kind of farmer grew it in which environment and with what nourishment. This way, a complex story exists before a product reaches your hands. Carrier and Luetchford (2012) argue that the practice of considering this "moral nature" of products from environmental, economic, social, and political perspectives is called ethical consumption. Summers (2016) differently

explains it, claiming that it is the purchase or avoidance of goods on purpose, due to political, ethical, or environmental aspects. They all agree that ethical consumption is to be careful not to select products simply because they are cheap or convenient, since they may involve insufficient consideration for people, society, and the environment.

Ethical consumption is gaining worldwide attention year after year, and the value of ethical product sales is continuously rising. For example, according to Emma Bedford (2022), the sales of Fairtrade products, one of the leading ethical products, increased more than tenfold between 2004 and 2018, from €0.83 billion to €9.8 billion. Also, looking at the sales of Fairtrade products by country as reported by Fairtrade International (2018), we see that the United Kingdom ranks at the top with €2.0 billion, followed by Germany with €1.3 billion, and the United States with €0.99 billion, which indicates that the so-called developed countries ranked at the top. Unfortunately, however, Japan lags behind many countries, contributing only €0.09 billion to global sales. On a per capita basis calculated by Chiba University of Commerce (2022), Sweden tops the list with about €30 in 2017, followed by the United Kingdom with about €25, while Japan only pays €0.6 per capita for ethical products during the same year. Japan's "lag" in ethical consumption can be seen from other perspectives as well. According to the Consumer Affairs Agency's survey on ethical awareness conducted in 2020, the percentage of Japanese people who had ever engaged in ethical consumption was approximately 36.1%. They also found that in the first place, the term "ethical" was recognized by only 8.8% of Japanese people.

This situation leads us to this question: Why is ethical consumption not widespread in Japan compared to other countries, and what should be done by whom to overcome those

difficulties? This paper will investigate these questions, focusing on issues regarding the price, consumer benefit, access, unfamiliarity, and certification. Finally, it will also analyze the importance of mandatory education and government actions in encouraging ethical consumption among Japanese consumers.

Literature Review

Certification of Ethical Products: Hidden Negative Aspects

In order to make it easy for consumers to distinguish which products are ethical, various types of certification labels have been introduced. According to the Ministry of the Environment (n.d.), there are more than 100 labels in the environmental field in Japan alone. Moreover, some products have acquired labels that are issued by local organizations or international institutions. In addition, certification labels include not only third-party certification labels but also self-declaration type labels, which companies and organizations use to label products that meet their own standards.

They are aimed to boost ethical consumption sales, but unfortunately, they also have several negative effects on ethical consumption. Nakaniwa of the Cabinet Office (2007) says that consumers are unable to keep up with the many labels that continue to increase, and at first glance, they do not know what any of these labels mean. According to a survey he conducted, even the most recognized one, the ecolabel, was known by only 30% of the respondents, and most of the other labels were recognized by only 20% of consumers. This can be a major challenge for ethical consumption since without knowing the purpose and differences of each certified label, it is impossible to purchase the products they truly want to choose.

Another problem related to the certification label is its difficulty in obtaining it. For example, there are many costs associated with obtaining a fair trade label, including the initial certification fees, label usage fees, annual

certification fees, and additional fees based on sales

(Fair Trade International, n.d.). In addition, Dr. Ohmoto (2021), an Associate Professor at Tottori University, argues that there are many detailed and time-consuming steps to certification, making it too costly for small and medium-sized companies. However, there is a concern that the more this cost is reduced, the more common the certification label will be, and its ordinary value will be lost. In other words, it is difficult to balance the certification costs since it is related to both the incentive for companies to obtain it and the value of the certification itself.

The Lack of Access to Ethical Products

Another problem ethical consumption faces is insufficient access. Access to products is essential for consumption, and it seems that this accessibility is especially related to the consumption of food, which is needed by everyone on a daily basis. The analysis conducted by Marty et al. (2015) shows that consumers are looking for accessibility when it comes to food purchases, and as for ethical consumption, it is essential to offer convenient options in order to motivate consumers. However, Kiyono and Inaba (2019) point out that there are few stores around consumers that sell ethical products due to their small market size and limited target group. Although some manufacturers have secured places to sell the products through permanent or fixed stores, these are often located in large cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, making it difficult for consumers living far away to obtain them on a daily basis.

In order to overcome this problem, many companies are offering products online to deliver their products to consumers living far away from their stores, but there are many negative externalities involved in the delivery, including greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, Japanese delivery services have a problem with their excessive packaging, which was revealed by a survey conducted by the Cabinet Office (2014), which found that about 70% of

respondents felt that the boxes and cushioning materials of products purchased through the Internet were excessive. One of the reasons for this over-packaging can be related to Japanese culture, as Hendry (1995) discusses that wrapping is not only a means of protecting things but also a symbol of care for the recipient and politeness of the giver. Nonetheless, considering several negative aspects of delivery, it may no longer be “ethical” if products are purchased online. In these ways, ethical products have less accessibility, which makes it difficult to keep consumers motivated to buy them.

Negative Externality: Making Ethical Products Seems Expensive

Furthermore, the relatively high price of ethical products is also negatively related to ethical consumption. The best way to increase demand for ethical products is to keep the price down, as Mankiw (2017) states that demand generally increases when the price of a product drops. However, Dr. Kharrazi at Akita International University (personal communication, September 20, 2022) argues that prices of ethical products tend to be expensive due to “negative externalities.” According to Ziolo et al. (2019), negative externalities are air pollution, noise, smog, and other negative impacts that a product may have on other people and the environment before they reach the consumer. In fact, Dr. Kharrazi argues that currently there are no clear standards for accurately measuring such negative externalities and because no responsibility exists for them, the cheaper companies produce by any means, the more profitable it is for them. This resulted in many companies trying to cut the cost of products with unethical methods so that they can supply them at lower prices in intensely competitive markets. However, producers of ethical products still care about various ethical aspects, such as stable wages or fair trade with farmers, so even if these considerations should be guaranteed as a matter of course, they cannot be competitive in price with other companies that reduce the price by ignoring

those aspects. In other words, the price of ethical products “looks” expensive because other companies have been able to offer products at prices that were not possible with ethical methods.

In fact, it seems that the problem of externalities is further acute in the food industry because Japan’s food self-sufficiency rate is very low. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (2019) report, Japan’s food self-sufficiency rate is 38% in terms of calories, which remains low by global standards. Imported goods are brought all the way from overseas, so they carry a significant hidden cost or negative externalities. Indeed, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by imports and exports is so large, as the World Trade Organization (2021) reports that 20-30% of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions are caused by trade. It means that if companies try to produce ethical food, it is expected to use domestically produced foods as much as possible, although it is costly in Japan due to low self-efficiency. Thus, unless negative externalities are considered, ethical products seem priced higher than other products, which tends to lower the demand for ethical products.

Consumer Characteristics: The Pursuit of Self-Benefit and Anxiety about Ethical Products

In addition to the problems associated with ethical products, there are also problems associated with the consumers themselves. As we have seen, the aim of ethical products tends to be consumption behavior leading to better society rather than direct consumer benefits. Therefore, it can be difficult to encourage ethical consumption behavior for some consumers: materialistic ones especially. According to Richins & Dawson (1992), materialistic ways of thinking and living are spreading throughout the world with a growing desire for material possessions. However, unfortunately, Ryoo et al. (2020) point out that materialism is negatively associated with this ethical consumption, and it is believed

that materialistic consumers are less likely to purchase ethical products. It means that it is difficult for those who act for their own benefit to get their hands on ethical products.

Moreover, Japanese consumers may have anxiety about purchasing some ethical products, especially plastic-less products since Japanese people have positive images toward plastic. In fact, Japan produces a great deal of plastic, as the study by Ryan (2015) indicates that it produces almost the same amount of plastic as countries in Latin America combined as a whole. According to a report by the Ministry of the Environment (2016), Japan discards 9.4 million tons of plastic per year, the largest portion of which is packaging, to approximately 4.2 million tons. Catharina Kleinhis (2022), who is a research expert covering Japan argues that this is due to the safe and secure image that Japanese people have of plastic packaging. It implies that Japanese consumers' preference for plastic can be a major barrier for many ethical products with minimal packaging to be purchased.

Unfamiliarities towards Ethical Products: Education on Sustainability in Japan

Moreover, the lack of education on sustainability also has negatively affected Japanese consumer behavior. It is said that sustainability education leads to increased awareness and knowledge (US EPA, n.d.), and in fact, there appears to be a positive relationship between people's interest in social issues and ethical consumption. Chi (2022) states that consumer interest in environmental issues contributes to purchasing environmentally friendly products. He also argues that interest in political issues, as well as environmental issues, may encourage ethical consumption. In addition, Beki-Kiss and Menrad (2022, August) conducted a survey that revealed that consumer knowledge, values, or emotion on green consumption positively influences the consumers' intention to purchase fair-trade products. In short, both of them argue that consumers' own interests or feelings about social issues influence ethical consumption.

Conversely, it implies that ethical consumption can be difficult for consumers who have not been adequately educated about sustainability, which may lead to such interest and concern.

Unfortunately, in Japan, education on sustainability is relatively lagging behind, which leads to children's low awareness of social issues. Yuichi Kudo (2021), principal of Yokohama Soei Junior and Senior High School, points out the lack of awareness about social problems among Japanese children is caused by insufficient education on sustainability. Indeed, according to a survey conducted by the Cabinet Office (2018), the percentage of Japanese children who answered that they wanted to solve social problems was 42.3%, very low compared to 72.6% in the United States, 75.5% in Germany, and 68.4% in South Korea. It actually indicates that the lack of sustainability education in Japan causes low interest in social issues, which leads to low ethical consumption as a result.

Methodology

Guiding Question

Among the perspectives discussed in the literature review, consumers seem to play a significant role in ethical consumption. I conducted a survey to examine the relationship between consumers' image and knowledge of ethical products, and actual consumer behavior. It also aimed to find out other possible hurdles that may make it difficult for consumers to purchase ethically. My research question is how images and knowledge of ethical products are related to Japanese mandatory education and what other factors affect consumers' decision-making.

Setting and Participants

Participants in my survey were Japanese or had a Japanese background. Consumption behavior was assumed to be familiar to all, and no other special background was required to participate in this survey. Among the 88 participants, 68% were female, and

31% were male. About half were 20 years old, a quarter was 19 years old, and the remaining quarter ranged in age from 21 to 53. 82% of all participants were undergraduate or graduate students, and the occupations of the rest varied such as medical, clerical, cosmetology, construction, engineers, and freelancers. 43% of the participants lived in Akita Prefecture, 16% in Tokyo, 10% in Nagano Prefecture, and 8% in Aichi Prefecture, and the rest were scattered in various parts of Japan. This survey was completely voluntary and anonymous using Google Forms, and participants may withdraw from participation at any time.

Data Collection

This survey was open from November 19 through November 22, 2022, through Instagram or a link I sent to the group chat on LINE. It consisted of 16 closed questions, including basic information questions, and two open questions. The questions asked about participants' image and knowledge of ethical consumption, and their usual consumption behavior trends. Two of the questions were set only for those who had ever engaged in ethical consumption.

Findings

Factors that Japanese consumers care about in their consumption

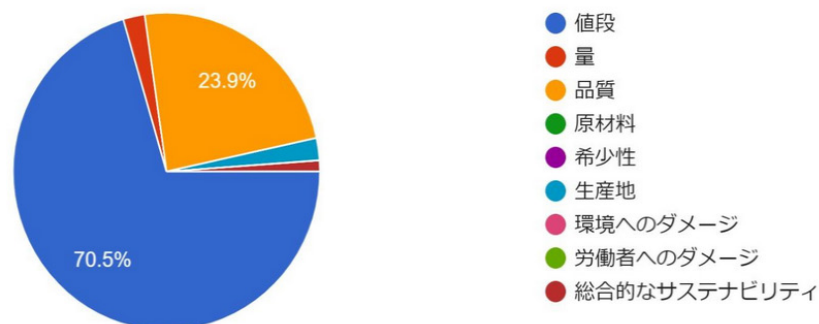
One of the survey questions asked what aspects of products participants usually pay attention to when they shop. They were required to choose from several options: price, quantity, quality, materials, scarcity value, place of production, damage to the environment or workers, and overall sustainability (Figure 1). Surprisingly, none of the 88 respondents said they were most interested in the damage to the environment or workers, and only one participant cared most about sustainability.

As the graph shows, 70.5% of the respondents were concerned about price the most, followed by quality at 23.9%, and both quantity and production area at 2.3%. When asked why they answered this way, many who answered price said it was because they wanted to save money. Many explained that they saved money because they were students, or it was the most beneficial for them. Another respondent said it was because of the family environment in which he/she was raised.

Figure 1: The most important thing for consumers when they select products to purchase

普段の買い物で商品を選ぶ際、どの点を最も意識しますか。一つだけ選択してください。

88 responses



Note. Translated question and answer selections: What aspects of products do you usually pay attention to the most when you shop? 1) Price, 2) Quantity & Quality, 3) Material, 4) Scarcity, 5) Production area, 6) Damage to the environment, 7) Damage to the workers, 8) Overall sustainability

Those who chose quality explained that it leads to safety, and they wanted to buy products that are good for their health. In addition, one of the participants explained that quality was the most important for him/her due to allergies. As a result, the most common reason for choosing price and quality was that it is the most profitable for them, although they differ for each person.

Education and Consumers’ Knowledge about Ethical Products

Another focus of the survey was to see the current status of Japanese education on sustainability, and consumers’ knowledge about ethical products. To investigate it, I first asked to what extent participants learned about sustainability at compulsory education institutions (Figure 2). Following that, I set questions to ask whether participants understand what ethical consumption means (Figure 3), and what images they have of ethical products (Figure 4). I included an “other” option to the last question so that participants could freely enter the answer when none of the options applied to their images.

When asked about education, merely 3.4% of the participants said that they learned deeply about sustainability during the mandatory education period, and most of them, 42%, said that they learned a little. Surprising-

ly, about half of the participants said that they did not completely learn about sustainability. 6.8% of participants did not even recognize what sustainability means. Although the content of education varies with the generation, the fact that many of the participants were university students or young people suggests that education on sustainability is not very popular in current Japan.

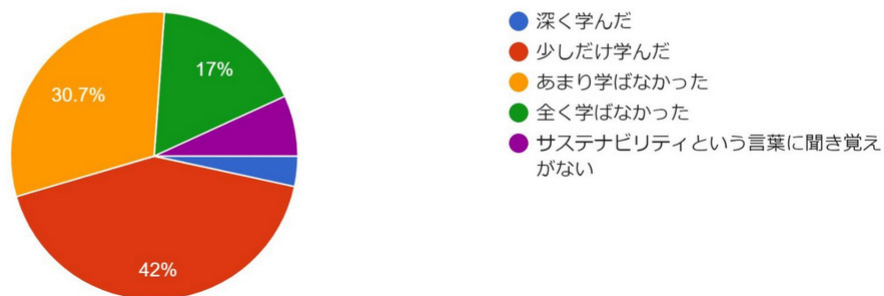
As for the recognition, few participants were familiar with the term “ethical consumption” with more than 70% answering that they are not at all or not very familiar with it. Indeed, those who responded that they clearly understood ethical consumption accounted for only 9.1% of all 88 participants. Based on the fact that sustainability education is not detailed in Japan, it is expected that ethical consumption is not taught in most compulsory education and resulting in this low recognition.

An important finding regarding positive images was that many people considered ethical products to be environmentally friendly products, rather than worker-friendly, animal-friendly, or social-friendly products. In fact, while 79.5% of all respondents thought that ethical products were good for the environment, only 28.4%, 22.7%, and 36.4% thought that it was good for workers, animals, and society, respectively. In short, a lack of

Figure 2: To what extent participants learned about sustainability at compulsory education institutions

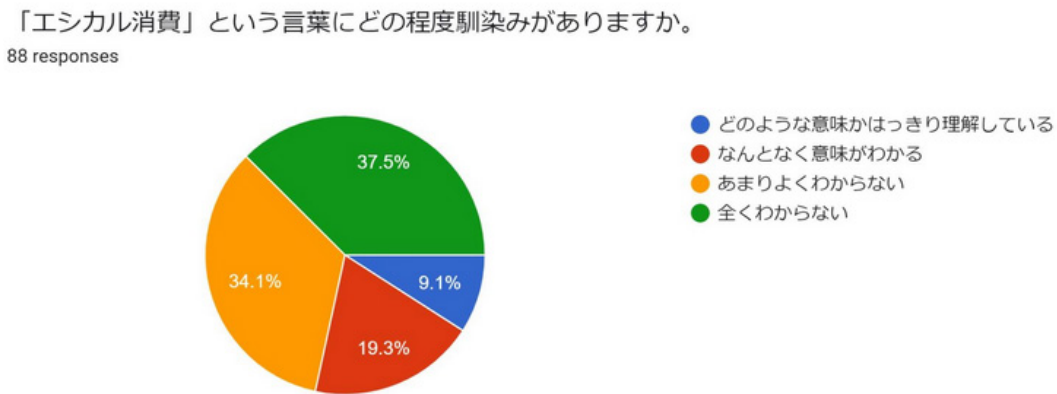
義務教育期間（小中学校）でサステナビリティ（持続可能性）について学びましたか。

88 responses



Note. Translated the question and options: To what extent did you learn about sustainability at compulsory education institutions? 1) I deeply learned about it. 2) I learned a little about it. 3) I did not really learn about it. 4) I learned nothing about it. 5) I have no idea what sustainability means.

Figure 3: How familiar consumers are with the term “ethical consumption”



Note. Translated question and options: How familiar are you with the term “ethical consumption”? 1) I clearly understand the meaning. 2) I get a sense of the meaning. 3) I do not really know the meaning. 4) I have no idea about the meaning.

education on sustainability might lead to low recognition of not only the meaning of ethical consumption but also its positive aspects.

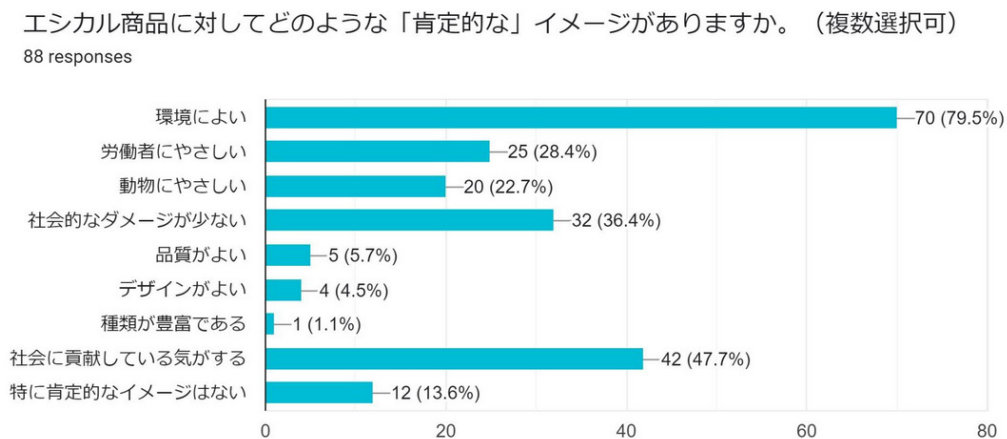
Sustainability vs. Self Benefit: Dilemma in Consumer Behavior

The next section of the survey attempted to investigate the image of non-ethical products and the relationship between participants’ consumption behavior and sustainability. This time, I focused on plastic packaging as one of the non-ethical products, which is a serious problem in Japan. The participants were asked to select from several possible images of plastic packaging including “others”

to match their own image (Figure 5). And I set a Likert-scale question (1/never - 5/always) to examine to what extent participants care about sustainability in their daily shopping (Figure 6).

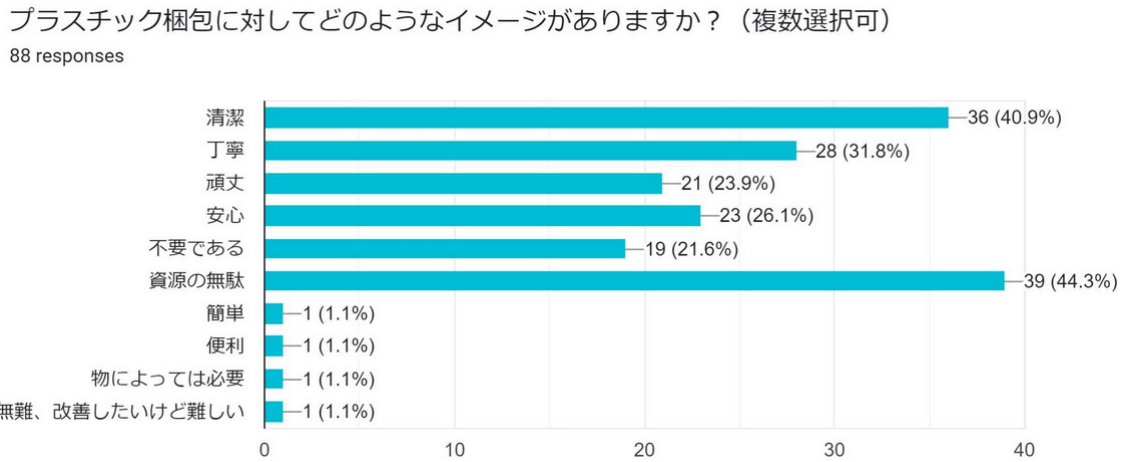
When asked about their image of plastic packaging, most participants had positive images of it. In fact, 40.9% and 31.8% answered that they thought it was clean and polite respectively. Moreover, around one-fourth of people responded that it was strong or safe. Surprisingly, on the other hand, a majority of the respondents, while having a positive image, also thought that plastic packaging was a waste of resources.

Figure 4: The positive images that participants have of ethical products



Note. Translated questions and options: What positive image do you have of ethical products? 1) Good for the environment 2) Worker-friendly 3) Animal-friendly 4) Less socially damaging 5) Good quality 6) Good design 7) Wide variety 8) I feel like I am contributing to society 9) I don't have any positive images

Figure 5: The images that participants have of plastic packaging



Note. Translated questions and options: What image do you have of plastic packaging? 1) Clean 2) Polite 3) tough 4) Safe 5) Unneeded 6) Waste of resource 7) Others: Easy, Convenient, Necessary for certain things, Normal, and difficult to live without

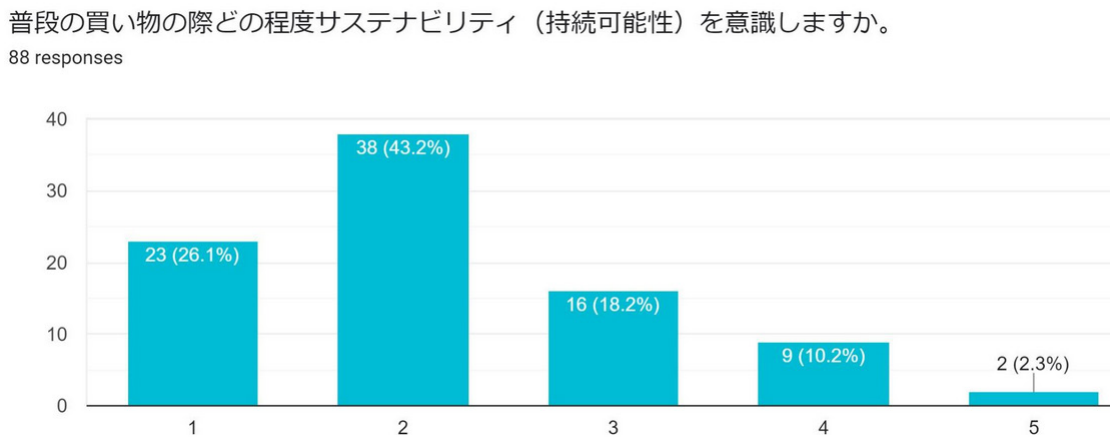
The second question revealed that many people do not care about sustainability when they shop in general. When asked to what extent they care about sustainability in their everyday shopping, 26.1%, or almost a quarter of all respondents, answered that they do not care at all, and 43.2%, which is about half of all participants, answered that they do not really care. In short, few Japanese shops with sustainability in mind. Considering that many people have both positive and negative images of plastic packaging, it can be said that

while consumers perceive plastic packaging as a waste of resources, they tend to prioritize their own benefits, in this case, the cleanliness or safety of plastic, over sustainability when making their own purchases.

Discussion

The results of the survey revealed Japanese people’s consumption behavior, their image and knowledge of ethical consumption, and their educational background in sustainability. The first finding was that the

Figure 6: How much concerned about sustainability participants are when they shop



Note. Translated the question and options: Do you care about sustainability when you shop? (1/never - 5/always)

price and quality were priority concerns by most consumers for self-beneficial reasons. In addition, the result revealed a lack of education on sustainability and an inadequate understanding of ethical consumption itself. Furthermore, the question about plastic packaging also showed that consumers pursue the benefits to them although they recognize the negative aspect of it, given that the few answered that they usually shop with sustainability in mind. Therefore, based on the data collected, the increase in ethical product sales in Japan may require the government's support for ethical products so that they can offer consumer benefits at the same time. In addition, the government should rethink the role and content of compulsory education, so that they cover ethical consumption itself, as well as its importance, and have more time to have students think about sustainability.

As discussed in the literature review, negative externalities, which means negative impacts that a product may have on other people and the environment before they reach the consumer (Ziolo et al., 2019), make ethical products appear more expensive. However, the survey results showed that people are most concerned about the price when shopping. In other words, in order to promote ethical consumption, the price of ethical products must be lower than other products. It may seem difficult, but it can be realized with government support for ethical products. For example, the government can make companies financially responsible if they produce goods with negative externalities. This increases the cost of producing non-ethical products and allows ethical goods to be competitive in the same market. Indeed, Hayashi (2022) states that environmental taxes, such as carbon taxes in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, succeeded and even provided a stimulus for environmental technology development. It means, since taxation increases the cost of production of conventional non-ethical methods, many companies have begun to focus on developing environmentally friendly technologies to make their products with minimizing

environmental harm. Thus, the government's emphasis on sustainability initiatives is the key to the expansion of the ethical product market.

On the other hand, the government can also give subsidies to companies that develop ethical products. For instance, it can financially support companies that have the equipment to reduce air pollution or ensure workers' rights and stable income, by certain amounts of tax exemptions. Providing benefits to products with certified labels can also create motivation for obtaining labels. The increase in the number of products that meet certain standards set by the certification label will lead to an improvement in the quality of ethical products, which results in an increase in the ethical products with consumer benefits, not only affordability but also quality.

Furthermore, the government purchase itself can be essential for the development of domestic ethical consumption. In fact, government purchase is one of the key elements in the GDP (Mankiw, 2017), which means that governments are buyers of a very large amount of goods and services in most countries. APEC (2020) states that in most economies, government spending accounts for about 20% of GDP. In other words, the government has the potential purchasing power to dramatically increase sales and expand the market for ethical products. This has already been done in several countries. For example, in the United States, the Federal Acquisition Regulation was established to require the provision of clarification regarding a contractor's business ethics and code of conduct when a contractor and subcontractor sign a government contract above a certain dollar amount (APEC, 2020). This means that the US government will only enter into large government contracts with vendors who have ensured an ethical supply chain. This would increase the amount of ethical consumption in the country and give companies an incentive to be mindful of their ethical supply chains.

The second finding of the survey was consumers' image of ethical products. There

is a lack of mandatory education on sustainability, and most of the participants did not understand the meaning of ethical products; they believed that ethical products are environmentally friendly, but not for workers, animals, or society. This may be related to the fact that the Cabinet Office survey (2007) indicated that ecolabel, which is for environmentally-friendly products, is the most recognized. In short, it may be hard for consumers to imagine the benefits to workers, animals, or society. Indeed, as mentioned in the literature review, according to the Ministry of the Environment (n.d.), various labels exist in Japan, but those are issued by the Ministry of the Environment and mainly address environmental issues. Therefore, it may be better for governments to create official certification systems and labels in another field of sustainability as well. In addition, in order to encourage consumers to understand ethical consumption from a variety of perspectives, it is necessary to provide more detailed mandatory education on sustainability.

Other than that, the question about the image of plastic packaging showed how consumers value consumer benefits although the majority of them also said that it was a waste of resources. Another question further revealed that few consumers usually shop with sustainability in mind. In other words, almost everyone realizes that plastic packaging is a waste of resources, but they still consume a lot of plastic for safety and cleanliness reasons that directly benefit them. The solution is to raise the priority of sustainability over self-benefit, which will, again, require more in-depth education to raise the awareness of consumers as a whole.

One of the limitations of this study is the lack of research on unexpected factors that emerged from the survey: the financial capacities of university students, the presence of allergies, and the impact of the family environment on ethical consumption. Therefore, further research is needed on the extent to which personal factors, such as income differences, allergies, and family environment,

may influence personal consumption behavior and how these barriers can be overcome. In addition, government spending was found to be a major force, but since the government budget is limited, it will also be necessary to figure out what would be a lower priority than ethical consumption.

Conclusion

There are five factors that make ethical consumption in Japan difficult: the difficulty of a certification system for ethical products, the lack of access, negative externality and higher price, consumers seeking their own benefits, and insufficient education causing unfamiliarity. Negative externalities in particular have a significant impact on price, making it difficult for most consumers to buy ethical products. It is also hard for companies because the more they worry about ethical aspects, the more costly it is to make products. In addition, the lack of sufficient education about sustainability makes it difficult for consumers to become familiar with the concept and gives less motivation to give up their own benefits for sustainable consumption. In order to promote ethical consumption, an economic responsibility will need to be imposed on non-ethical products, or conversely, support will be needed for companies working on sustainability. The government can also reconsider its own spending as it has enormous power to increase ethical consumption sales. Moreover, further education on social issues and sustainability will be needed to get consumers to value ethical consumption over self-benefit.

Sustainability-conscious consumption behavior will require not only the younger generations who will live in the future but also the older generations who have used resources irresponsibly up to now to cooperate and take this responsibility. The key is how each of us can make it relevant to us and take even a small step forward with doing what we are capable to do from today. The potential of ethical consumption is closer to you than you might think.

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Mareju Suzuki

Mareju is a sophomore student in the Global Business program at AIU. Her essay “Child Soldiers: Wars’ Effects and Mental Diseases” was written for Advanced Research Writing under Professor Lee Friedrich at AIU. Mareju used her knowledge from International Cooperation and Development class to write this essay. She has been interested in peace building and international cooperation since she went to Gulu, Uganda, to participate in a volunteer program and visited an orphanage built for former child soldiers. She is motivated to continue this study on child mental health in post-war societies to support vulnerable children through the lens of education in the future.

Child Soldiers: Wars' Effects and Mental Diseases

Abstract

Between 2005 to 2020, 93,000 or more children have been recruited by armed groups around the world. Although wars bring about negative effects on the mental health of anyone who experienced them, the traumas of child soldiers are relatively strong and last for a long time. Counseling is considered an effective medical treatment to cure Post Traumatic Stress Disorder caused by conflicts, but language gaps make it difficult to provide mental support as a part of international cooperation. Furthermore, social exclusion strengthens wars' negative impacts on their mental health. To find the solutions to these issues, I conducted an interview with an owner of an orphanage in Gulu, Uganda, who was supporting former child soldiers immediately after the civil war in Uganda. His answers revealed the lack of information and skilled therapists in post-conflict societies. It seems that training people to be mental care experts would help the children who experienced wars in armies to recover from the symptoms of traumas and let the citizens outside ex-soldier communities understand and accept them. In addition, offering vocational training for former child soldiers also enables them to get jobs, which raises acceptance to society. Based on the results of the primary and secondary research, I concluded that training and education could be keys to alleviating the mental depression of child soldiers. Providing educational opportunities is essential in international cooperation with post-conflict societies, rather than dispatching counselors to cure the diseases directly.

Keywords:

mental health, child soldier, war, peace building

Introduction

One of the most shocking events 2022 has witnessed was the Russia-Ukraine cri-

sis, which has forced more than 5.7 million Ukrainians to flee from their country (Operational Data Portal, 2022). Today, it is estimated by UNICEF (n.d., as cited in McVeigh, 2017) that 400 million or more children live in conflict zones. Although Russian attacks on Ukraine are reported almost every day, Ukraine is not the only country where citizens are suffering from military attacks. Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen are included in the list of nations under conflict, which was produced by the World Food Program USA (2022). In these regions, children are often victims, but sometimes, they can be perpetrators. According to UNICEF USA (December 22, 2021), 93,000 or more children have worked as child soldiers from 2005 to 2020. They have been forced to work for armed groups and witnessed serious violence. Haslam et al. (2017) define "conflict" as "tension between opposing views, interests, or wills" and give the definition of "war" as a conflict with "extraordinary violence" and "a situation when normal rules do not apply but special rules have been developed (as in international law governing warfare)" (pp 402-403). Throughout this essay, both the terms "war" and "conflict" refer to violent actions which are not under the control of laws, regardless of whether they occur within a nation or internationally.

Not only countries where conflicts are ongoing, but post-war societies also require international cooperation. Nebe and Kwarto (2021) list six significant factors of peacebuilding in post-war societies: infrastructure, logistics, communications and information systems, force protection, training and integration, and medical care. While medical care is regarded as one of the important points to support these regions, what Nebe and Kwarto suggested as examples of current medical support is relevant only to physical health, like procurement of pharmaceutical materials

and blood preservation. It does not seem that mental care is included in this context. Shoib et. al. (2022) also insist on the necessity of reinforcement of psychological aids as a part of peacebuilding. According to these authors, poor mental conditions are causing further physical diseases, however hard international organizations are working to provide medical support in terms of physical treatment. It seems that physical care is currently prioritized over mental care, but as Shoib et al. emphasize, the wars' negative effects on children's mental health can no longer be ignored. This paper will discuss the mental conditions of child soldiers and how they can be supported to overcome trauma as both victims and perpetrators from the perspectives of psychology and international cooperation.

Literature Review

Mental Condition of Former Child Soldiers

When people experience shocking events, they often develop symptoms of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), which is a kind of anxiety disorder (Kawamura, 2016). Kawamura explains that panic attacks, flashbacks, and exhaustion are among the main symptoms of this disease. It may seem that these symptoms do not directly kill patients, but this disease is often accompanied by schizophrenia and clinical depression, which may possibly prompt the patient to commit suicide. In actuality, a survey conducted in a region in Syria, where a civil war occurred in 2011 (Sinan & Gültekin, 2018), suicide rates among twelve-year-old children have been rising (McVeigh, 2017). According to UNICEF (n.d., as cited in McVeigh, 2017), in Syria, more than four thousand schools have been attacked since the war broke out. Consequently, more than 70% of children there have developed mental illnesses, and approximately 25% of children have the potential risk of showing symptoms of trauma. Considering the situation in this area, it can be said that although PTSD itself does not have the power to kill people, the patients are potentially at

risk of dying because of traumas. As Kawamura categorized witnessing violence as one of the causes of PTSD, the experience of committing war as a soldier can be as great a trauma as being hurt in war. In order to avoid physical illness and death caused by PTSD, protecting children from mental disorders before the symptoms develop seriously is needed.

Children who experienced war in armies are more likely to develop symptoms of PTSD than other children, and symptoms tend to be stronger in the children who acted as perpetrators than those outside armies. According to Kohrt et. al. (2016), who conducted research in 2007 in Nepal, 50% of former child soldiers had PTSD, compared to 20% of children outside the army. They also found that the symptoms were stronger among child soldiers based on 37 factors they prepared and asked about in the interviews. Their study proved that working as a soldier is a strong trauma, and there is a necessity to support these children mentally without blaming their cruel acts during wars. Moreover, this research conducted by Kohrt et. al. suggested that the effects of the war remain with them for a long time. Their study was conducted five years after the war finished, but there were clear differences between former combatants and other children who were not soldiers but witnesses to war. Koenen et. al. insist that the psychological damage produced by wars tends to last a particularly long time because war-times are long-term compared to accidents or disasters (2017, as cited in Bryant et. al., 2022). Sakurai (2021) also describes that the symptoms are liable to relapse. Hence, patients in conflict zones have to resist the symptoms for the rest of their lives.

Reintegration of Excluded Former Child Soldiers

In addition to the period immediately after the wars, long-term support is needed, and particularly, former child soldiers should be treated carefully. Ex-soldiers are often excluded from societies after wars regardless of whether they are adults or children. According to Masten and Osofsky (2010), their cruel

actions during the war, including murders, violence, and rape, cannot be accepted by the local communities even if they were forced to commit these actions. Additional violence and neglect towards them can worsen their mental condition. Moreover, child soldiers often show hostility or offensive attitudes towards adults, which lower their status in society. In addition, most of them do not have family, so no one can encourage them to go to school. Betancourt et. al. (2010) report that they drop out of school and try to place themselves in unsafe places, including armed groups. Santacruz and Arana (2002, as cited in Betancourt et. al., 2010) insist that the exclusion by society makes them think that these armed groups are their home despite the serious violence they are facing there. Their mental condition makes them show hostility to other people, but these attitudes make them more isolated from society. The children who are excluded seek homes where they can be accepted and place themselves in dangerous communities, which worsens their mental condition. Rescuing them from this vicious cycle and helping them go back to social activities is one possible solution to child soldiers' mental illness.

Former child soldiers need to be protected in safe places to alleviate their mental disorders and learn how to behave in society. Masten (2014) argues that reintegration is a key to curing mental disorders. Providing children with mentally and physically safe places like shelters and rehabilitating them to participate in social activities is required to support child soldiers. According to Martins (2013), there are child soldiers who do not think that killing other people is unacceptable because it was the only thing they were taught in the army to survive in the war. Considering this fact, education seems to be important to let them back into society. However, this author also argues that immediately teaching them that murder is something they should feel guilty for can cause further mental illness. As they understand how cruel activities they committed, they start to develop strong symptoms of depression. Therefore, it would take a long time to train them to be accepted by

outside society. In terms of education and training, long-term support is necessary to help ex child soldiers reintegrate themselves into society.

Necessity of Access to Education

One effective educational method in post-conflict society is ethical education. According to Gutierrez et. al. (2019), Humanity Education (HE) helps students in post-war society to learn sympathy, responsibility, forgiveness, trust, and peace. Aegis Trust (2014, as cited in Gutierrez et. al., 2019) conducted HE workshops in Rwanda, where two main ethnic groups clashed in 1994. Aegis Trust states that trying to teach peace based on developed countries' views is not a true HE, but it recommends letting children think of what peace is by themselves. By doing so, they can gradually understand how tragic the war was while it was usual for them in the past. It seems to be effective both for victims and perpetrators in wars. In actuality, HE was provided to Hutu, an ethnic group that caused genocide towards Tutsi, the other main group in Rwanda. Gutierrez et al. found that HE can alleviate the symptom of mental disease. Considering it, training child soldiers' abilities to think by themselves and make appropriate decisions based on their thoughts is very important.

Education can also solve the problem of keeping children from needing mental care. Sinan and Gültekin (2018) state that one of the biggest problems in the provision of mental care is the language gap between counselors dispatched by international organizations and the local children. Since counselors are expected to understand slight nuances of counselees' words, differences in native languages can be a big barrier to psychological support as a part of international cooperation. As Kawamura (2016) insists that keeping what is discussed in the consultation confidential is one of the significant principles of psychological counseling, hiring interpreters is not realistic. In addition to this, Kawamura also suggests that observing counselees' attitudes and facial expressions simultaneously

is important, which makes it more difficult to have conversations by using interpreters. Taking these facts into account, education and training seem to play a big role in providing appropriate counseling. Even in other fields of international cooperation and development, the language gap can often be an obstacle (Yamada et. al., 2010). In such cases, developing consultants have two options: hiring interpreters or training native speakers of local languages to engage themselves in certain fields of social contribution. When it comes to mental care, the second option could work well. Since the effects of traumas are long-term, training local counselors seems to be an efficient investment.

Thus, reintegrating former child soldiers would be an effective solution to their mental illness. In order to do so, there should be safe shelters to protect them and rehabilitate them to be accepted by outside society. To investigate the more concrete situation of children who worked for the army during wartime and the difficulties in the actual situations, I conducted interviews with an expert working for a facility that supports ex child soldiers. He owns and works in an orphanage in Gulu, Uganda, and immediately after Uganda's domestic conflict, which lasted for about 20 years from the 1980s, he was accepting former child soldiers in his facility. I asked him about the mental condition of the child soldiers in his facility and how they live after they graduated from it.

Methodology

Guiding Questions

The guiding questions of my interview with an expert who has supported child soldiers were as follows: how were the child soldiers' mental conditions just after the end of the war; how were they supported; and how were they reintegrated into society?

Participant and Setting

I conducted an interview with an expert in childcare, who has been running an orphanage in Gulu, Uganda, since 2006

and has supported child soldiers right after the civil war in the northern part of Uganda that started in the 1980s and lasted until the 2000s. His facility was accepting former child soldiers, and now, it is a normal orphanage because the former soldiers have grown up and left. Since he wishes to be anonymous in this paper to protect himself and the children in his orphanage, I use a pseudonym, Bitek, to refer to him. In Gulu, citizens' attitudes towards supporting former soldiers are not always positive because many people lost their family and friends because of the attacks by soldiers. He allowed me to share his answers in my project without providing his name or the name of the orphanage.

Data Collection

I first met Bitek when I visited Gulu in 2019 to participate in a volunteer program at a nursery school. My boss at the project introduced him to me, and we have kept in touch for about three years. To learn more about his experience of supporting former child soldiers, I conducted an interview via email. Because of the time difference, we could not have a Zoom interview. I sent him Interview Questions 1 to 4 on May 28, 2022, and he answered them on June 5, 2022. Based on the answers, I asked additional questions, which are Interview Questions 5 to 11, on June 27, 2022, and he answered them on the same day. The email interviews were conducted in English.

Findings

Finding 1: Children's Symptoms of PTSD

Bitek pointed out that in the 1990s and 2000s, many children who were in his facility were suffering from symptoms that can be considered to be results of PTSD, such as stomachaches, headaches, and nightmares. In addition, at least one child committed suicide. From this answer, I found that children can suffer from the effects of traumas during wars, and these effects can actually kill them by making them commit suicide. Considering this, there is a huge necessity to alleviate the psychological impacts of conflicts by offering

counseling services.

Finding 2:

A Lack of Professional Counseling

Bitek answered that there has been no professional counselor in his orphanage since the conflict finished, so the childcare staff in his orphanage is responsible for children's mental care. However, he pointed out that knowledge and information about mental diseases are not sufficient in his society. Particularly right after the war, he said that they should have had therapists with enough knowledge about mental treatments. Due to the war, which lasted for about three decades, many adults could not have an education in their teenage years. Thus, not only in the field of mental care but in many fields, there are few specialists with sufficient knowledge and skills in Uganda's post-conflict zone. Considering that lack of knowledge was preventing them from providing mental support for children, training local orphanages or other facilities' staff members to be able to provide counseling is needed in many post-war societies. His answer to this question implied that training is one of the significant solutions for obstacles of mental support as a part of peace-building.

Finding 3: Exclusion or Discriminations Against Former Child Soldiers

According to Bitek, the fact that these children were in the army prevented the children from participating in social activities. Regardless of which side the children belonged to, citizens showed negative attitudes towards them because their family and friends had been killed by soldiers. He insists that these children should be accepted by society because it was the only way for them to survive in the war. As he answered, citizens have psychological difficulties towards former soldiers' reintegration. In order to let citizens understand the child soldiers' situations, offering opportunities for ethical education seems to be a possible way. By teaching adults and children outside armies the importance of accepting former soldiers in their communi-

ties, the mental conditions of ex child combatants will improve.

Finding 4: What Do Former Child Soldiers Do After They Graduate From Your Facility?

Bitek insisted that the social attitudes towards soldiers are a large obstacle to the children. The children in his orphanage start working when they turn 15. The orphanage has been offering programs to train children to be tailors and engineers instead of letting them go to normal schools to learn with children outside their community. He said it is to protect them from discrimination. Although it is hard for them to get jobs, there were some child soldiers who succeeded in their careers. One of them is a man now working as a translator in Kenya. Taking Bitek's answer into consideration, acquiring skills to get a job is a way to integrate themselves into society outside the former soldier community. He said that by providing vocational training programs as a part of international cooperation in post-war societies, we can support children who have grown up and been educated in armies. So doing will reduce psychological depression caused by negative attitudes from other people in the society.

Discussion

By interviewing Bitek, I found that the civil war in northern Uganda triggered the symptoms of PTSD and other mental diseases among child soldiers, and these illnesses actually made a former boy soldier commit suicide. In addition to the traumas directly caused by the war, Bitek, the interviewee, insisted that the negative reactions and exclusion from society are also factors that trigger mental disorders among ex-child soldiers. To protect his pupils from such cruel reactions, he decided not to let the former child soldiers learn at schools outside his orphanage. However, education is essential to be accepted in society. According to this expert, his team's provision of vocational training was supporting children who grew up in the army to

reintegrate themselves into society. As Santacruz and Arana (2002, as cited in Betancourt et. al., 2010) suggested, the children who do not have a job are likely to be recruited by armed groups. To protect children not only immediately after the war but for the rest of their lives, his facility is providing vocational training. This interview also revealed the lack of professional mental caregivers who can provide proper support for children with mental illnesses, which highlighted the necessity of training people to be therapists. Therefore, training and education for both therapists and former child soldiers would be key factors to help ex-child soldiers recover from the effects of traumas in wars and reintegrate themselves into society outside the former-soldier community.

We need to educate people who have not participated in armies to understand the soldiers' situation and accept them. Bitek argued that people outside the ex-soldier community detest soldiers because their family and friends were killed by them, and it does not matter to which side the former soldiers belonged. Gutierrez et al. (2019) insist that trying to train people to understand other people's situations during war is among the methods adopted by Humanity Education (HE), which works to alleviate people's symptoms of trauma. The original purpose of HE is to avoid the recurrence of war, but it can be used for peace-building after wars. Providing education to communities about peace is significant to let former child soldiers live without being discriminated against.

The interviewee insisted on the necessity of proper information about mental treatments and specialists who can provide psychological care for former child soldiers. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which is known as Doctors Without Borders, is one of the organizations which is trying to contribute to post-war societies' mental health by dispatching counselors (Médecins Sans Frontières, n.d.). MSF points out that it provided 349,500 counseling opportunities in 2020. Although MSF requires its medical staff to have language skills, especially French, which

is widely used in the recipient countries of their aid (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2013), the language is still a serious difficulty in the field of counseling, as Sinan and Gültekin (2018) argue. In response to the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, MSF started offering lectures for Ukrainian psychiatrists to improve their counseling (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2022). This training has been conducted across Ukraine to solve the common symptoms among children who escaped from or who are still struggling in the war, such as fear of loud sounds, loss of appetite, and sleeping disorders. According to Cherry (2021), to become a counselor, people practice listening to clients' words without intervening too much and never denying them. Since patients who have mental disorders are sensitive, the therapists have to actually understand their mental condition and causes, not just pretend to be feeling empathy. To solve the problems the interviewee raised, which are lack of information and specialists in psychological treatments, offering vocational training to be therapists seems to be applicable to other post-conflict societies, including past Uganda.

Not only former child soldiers, but many people have a difficult time seeking jobs in post-conflict societies. Considering this situation, training people to be counselors seems to be a possible solution both to children's mental health and the economy in society. According to Branch (2013), the unemployment rate in Gulu, the city where the interviewee's orphanage is located, was highest (69%) from 2009 to 2010, when many soldiers, including children, were liberated from the armed group. Until 2011, this situation had not improved, and many people were having a hard time finding a job. Considering the situation in Gulu, offering training to be a counselor may provide positive effects both mentally and economically.

In this research, I could investigate the causes and symptoms of mental illnesses in child soldiers, and I also learned how to cure them and the limitations of the treatments. From the expert interview, I could find the

necessity of reintegration of the former child combatants. I believe that if I could focus more on how the social acceptance of child soldiers can positively affect their mental health, this research could be improved. As further research, I would like to interview people who have actually experienced war as soldiers when they were children. I believe that this research will be helpful for me to find a way to help children who have had a hard time in armies to spend the rest of their lives in a peaceful environment.

Conclusion

Wars can be a serious trauma for child soldiers, which causes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder accompanied by other diseases. These effects last relatively long, and even if they once seemed to be cured, the patients often have second attacks of the illness due to large sounds, bright lights, and any other factors. These symptoms cause physical effects on patients' bodies, and in the worst case, the patients commit suicide. Mental care is an im-

mediate necessity in society directly after the war, which can protect people, including child soldiers' lives. In order to understand children's mental condition in their direct words, training for local people to be counselors is a realistic method in post-war societies rather than hiring therapists from the outside. This solves not only the language problem in counseling but also the high unemployment rate in the societies that experienced wars. Even for the people who do not want to be a counselor, educating people outside ex-soldier communities to understand the soldiers' situation during the war and letting them consider how they can accept the children who were raised in armies in their communities can work positively for the former soldiers' mental health. One of the most surprising things that I found in the interview was that the expert on child care in Uganda did not know so much about mental health care. As a part of international cooperation and peacebuilding, providing sufficient information and proper education is required to let every child in post-conflict societies live peacefully.

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Yoko is a junior student in the Global Studies program at AIU. Her essay “The Double-Standard Refugee Admission Policy in Japan” was written for Composition 2 under Professor Joel Friederich. Yoko’s academic interest is forced migration studies, and she is currently researching the situation regarding Japan’s involvement in the global humanitarian crisis of forced displacement as a liberal democratic state. She is motivated to deepen her insight into this field and in the future, she hopes to contribute to solving the world issue of mitigation of refugees.

The Double-Standard Refugee Admission Policy in Japan: A Comparison of Treatment between Syrian Refugees and Ukrainian Evacuees

Abstract

Japan has persistently taken an intolerant policy regarding refugee acceptance in Japan. The Japanese refugee admission rate was around 1% over the last decade. However, in response to the forced displacement caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Japanese government promptly changed its previous stance and started to accommodate the Ukrainian evacuees in Japan proactively, and the majority of Japanese citizens are supportive of this policy. This paper aims to compare the Japanese people's perception of Syrian refugees and Ukraine evacuees to understand the potential factors that make people have distinct attitudes toward refugees of different origins. To deepen insight, this research investigated Japanese people's attitudes and understanding from the perspective of the political significance, racial and religious discrimination, and the effect of mass media and social media through a survey of 50 Japanese nationals. From the research, this study points out the lack of people's fundamental understanding of the problem of forced migration in the first place. Based on this finding, this research claims a strong need to raise awareness of the refugee problem. As a means to achieve this, the study suggests the increasing coverage of international affairs, especially that of the third world, in the mass media and the introduction of a more comprehensive international education curriculum in Japan.

Keywords:

Forced Migration, Refugee Admission in Japan, Syrian Refugees, Ukrainian Evacuees, Japanese Immigration

Introduction

Today, forced migration is one of the most acute humanitarian crises in this globalized world. According to the United Na-

tions (the U.N., 2022), as of May 2022, the number of forcibly displaced people reached 100 million worldwide. This number accounts for 1% of the world population, and it can be equivalent to the 14th most populous country on a global scale. Under a situation where global cooperation is urgently needed, Japan has kept a closed-border policy for asylum seekers for decades, and the public appeared to be silent or supportive of the stance. Experts of immigration policy argue that this is not only attributed to the Japanese society's indifference and poor political awareness of the international humanitarian crisis but also because there was a prevailing assumption that refugee acceptance leads to a negative impact on social order and security (Takizawa, 2018). Therefore, even acknowledging severe forced migration phenomena such as in Syria and Africa, Japan's refugee status recognition rate remains consistently at 1% for ten years (Japan Association for refugees, n.d.).

In contrast, in 2022, the Japanese government started hosting Ukrainian evacuees proactively soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the media has been reporting its situation on a daily basis. Moreover, the dissemination of social networking services (SNS) allows more spontaneous and grassroots-level exchanges of information about the war. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022), the public poll demonstrated that 63.7% of the Japanese responded that Japan should promote the acceptance of refugees from Ukraine to Japan. Reflecting on the past immigration policy, it seems legitimate to state that Japan treats Ukraine evacuees in a more privileged way, contrastingly to asylum seekers from different regions. Since politics lies in social interaction, such political outcomes can be traced to the citizen-level perception and will (Heywood, 2019). This essay will address the core question of what

makes Japanese society consciously or unconsciously differentiate their attitudes toward refugees of different origins and how that implication shapes the national refugee admission policy. By comparing the instances of Syrian refugees —as a representative of “ignored” asylum seekers— and the current Ukrainian evacuees’ cases by the use of qualitative data from the survey, this essay will analyze aspects that possibly distinguish refugees of different origins in Japanese people’s minds: the political significance, social discrimination and the effect of the means of information.

Literature Review

Japan’s History of Refugee Admission

Refugees are defined and protected by international law as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR, n.d., para. 4).” Though Japan is a member country of the 1981 Refugee Convention, the traditional attitude of Japan has been scrutinized as an “open wallet, closed door policy,” —donating funds to the United Nations while accepting few refugees and avoiding their permanent settlement in Japan—by the international society (Chung, 2014; Kalicki, 2019, p. 363). Japan has implemented a conspicuously restrictive definition of refugees, which systematically excludes average citizens who flee from indiscriminate violence from granting refugee status (Takizawa, 2018). Furthermore, Japan imposes a considerable burden of proof on refugee applicants themselves, who used to be average citizens with little legal knowledge. As a result, many applicants, including Syrian refugees, who would have received refugee status in other countries are less likely to gain the same protection in Japan. Therefore, Japan utilizes an “indirect path” to avoid refugees’ permanent settlement and avert international criticism. For instance, in the case of the Syrian civil war, Japan welcomed 150 Syrians as students to accommodate for five years, while

the refugee admission process for Syrians in Japan was still restrictive (Kalicki, 2019).

However, toward Ukraine evacuees, the Japanese government has been taking a different attitude following public support. Since Japan cannot grant refugee status to fled Ukraine people because the current interpretation of the law does not target people who escape from indiscriminate attacks, it announced establishing “quasi-refugee” status to provide necessary protection to the Ukrainians (The Mainichi, 2022a). Furthermore, Foreign Minister Hayashi announced that Japan’s firm will to accept as many evacuees as possible from Ukraine and voluntarily exploited the governmental plane to transport Ukrainian refugees to Japan (The Mainichi, 2022b). As these features illustrate, there is a clear distinction between the treatment of Ukrainian evacuees and Syrian asylum seekers.

The Impact of the Political Significance of the Refugees

Considering the fundamental reason that distinguishes Japan’s treatment of asylum seekers of different origins, the political significance of those people’s home regions to Japan can be a valid factor. The distinction can be vividly illustrated when comparing the political circumstances of Ukraine and Syria and their relation with Japan. First, for Japan, the political impact of current Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is tremendous because of Japan’s stance as the West Allie and its national security against Russia. The global affairs that surround conflicts between Russia and Ukraine are widely regarded as the continuation of the Cold War status (The Yomiuri, 2022). Since Japan has allied with the West, led by the United States, it is crucial for Japan to emphasize a coordinating attitude with the Western allies, including the protection and accommodation of Ukraine evacuees. Also, this conflict is critical for Japan when pondering its relationship with Russia. Japan and Russia have possessed a geopolitical dispute over the Northern Territories for the past decades. Since Russia is the hypothetical enemy of the Cold War and Japan has a strained relationship with Russia

over the territory, it is easy for Japan to take an antagonistic attitude toward Russia (The Tokyo, 2022).

On the other hand, the political relevance of the Syrian situation seems to be comparatively low in Japan. Though the Middle East is a crucial region for Japan in terms of energy supply, Japan has taken a relatively neutral policy in politics and military of the Middle East in order to maintain its moderate relationship both with the United States and the states in the Middle East (Miyagi, 2014). Also, Miyake (2012) argues that Japan's political response to the Arab Spring was conspicuously dull due to its lower political priority compared to other diplomatic affairs. Therefore, reflecting the national interests in the Middle East, it can be analyzed that the political significance of the Syrian conflict was relatively small, possibly leading to the small motivation for accepting Syrian asylum seekers in Japan. Hence, the diplomatic circumstances of the Japanese government may affect the acceptance policy of refugees from different regions and, more importantly, public attention.

The Impact of Japanese People's Social Biases and Discrimination

Secondly, citizen-level racism and religious discrimination can be raised as one possible reason for the distinctive treatment of Syrian refugees and Ukrainian evacuees. In terms of racism, Japan has entrenched socio-economic discrimination toward non-Japanese. As an illustration of this xenophobia, the Guardian (2017) reports that about one-third of foreigners have experienced discrimination, such as verbal remarks in Japan. Among different races, the Japanese are stated to view "whiteness" as a privilege compared with others due to its historical background of imperialism and supremacy of Western culture. Myslinska (2014) argues that, in Japan, "Caucasians became synonymous with power, modernity, and technological advances, considered the ultimate unassimilable "other," and thus often excused when making cultural faux pas (p. 7)." Therefore, reflecting the

entrenched Japanese stereotypes of race, it seems possible for Japanese people to draw a distinction between Ukrainian evacuees and Syrian refugees as "white" or not; this can be one factor that variates the treatment of asylum seekers in Japan.

Considering the religious aspect, Islam is relatively susceptible to prejudice in Japanese society because of Japanese people's stereotypes and unreasonable association with terrorism. This is attributed to the people's negative view of Islam due to the repeated reports of incidents involving Muslims abroad (The Mainichi, 2019). Therefore, by combining these two aspects, the different treatment of the Ukrainians and the Syrians is explained by the citizen's different perspectives on races and religions. Such discrimination based on ethnicity is not limited to Japan in terms of refugee acceptance. In recent instances, there have been several cases where non-white evacuees from Ukraine, such as African students or Indians, experience segregation and rejection to be treated like white Ukrainians (CNN, 2022a). Hence, racial and religious discrimination against asylum seekers can be argued as a common concerning feature that happens internationally.

The Diversification of the Means of Information and Its Effect: Mass Media

Turning on another perspective, the effect of media reports seems to possess significance in shaping distinct views toward refugees from different regions. Under the status quo, Japanese people are less likely to have a solid knowledge of foreign affairs, especially that of the Third World. According to Mowlana (1997), the media tend to focus on the neighboring regions in terms of the international news flow; the media frequently reports about the U.S. and the West, but not the situation of the third world. Considering the case of Japan, Global News View (2017) demonstrates that the Japanese media coverage ratio of international affairs is relatively low, and there is a clear gap between those being addressed in the media and their counterparts. To elaborate, the source shows that, regarding

the three Japanese primary newspaper agencies, The Asahi, The Mainichi, and The Yomiuri, their coverage ratio of foreign affairs is around only 10%. In addition, the data map of Global News Agency demonstrates the average word count of three major Japanese newspaper agencies that address specific countries. It mentions that while the U.S. is written about 1 million words on average, the word count for Libya is only 2018 in 2017. Since the refugee-generating regions are primarily located in developing areas, Japanese people are less exposed to information about the recent affairs in the Middle East and Africa, which potentially leads to a lack of knowledge about the backgrounds of inbound asylum seekers. On the other hand, it is possible to analyze that the current crisis in Ukraine seems to be well-informed to the Japanese public because the conflict is taking place in the western hemisphere, and Russia—the neighboring nation of Japan—is a central actor in the issue.

Furthermore, the way of story-telling by the media based on its bias may influence the public view. In contrast to refugees in the Middle East, western media are more likely to describe Ukraine evacuees as “victims” by associating people with whiteness and being Europeans. For instance, CNN (2022b) reports the cases where Western news interviewees and correspondents draw sympathy for Ukrainians by mentioning the aspects of “white,” “Christian,” “middle class,” “blonde,” and “blue eyed.” CNN also presents that such a circumstance is criticized as “the contrast between the coverage of Western victims versus Middle Eastern ones demonstrates a dehumanization of the latter (para. 7)”. Hence, it seems clear that the media treats refugees from different origins by reflecting their entrenched cultural bias toward certain ethnic groups.

The Evolving Role of Social Media in War Time

In the contemporary world, it is valid to state that the advancement and dissemination of social media seem to play a crucial

role when comparing Japan’s treatment of Syrian and Ukraine asylum seekers. The World Economic Forum (2022) explains that “social media improves reach, frequency, permanence and immediacy.” and enables “the interactive communication between people without spatial limits or time constraints and offers the opportunity to transfer the content of any messages under any form (para. 2)”. Today, along with its global dissemination, the use of SNS has become an ever-increasingly crucial part of human communication and information transmission, even in wartime. In terms of the 2011 Syrian war, TIME (2022) explains that social media was used to document violence and conflict. However, current Russia’s invasion of Ukraine shows social media’s strong aspect in the information stream of emotional events. According to Ciuriak (2022), this war is called the first “social media war” because social media transmit the situation of the war in small fragments, which promote external support and shape historical narratives (p. 2). In accordance with such aspects, as the receiver side, the utilization ratio of social media in Japanese society increased dramatically over the last decade. Particularly, comparing 2014, when the Syrian crisis was in upheaval, and today, the growth of social media is striking. According to ICT Research & Consulting (2022), today, 8,270,000 Japanese citizens, which accounts for 82 % of the Japanese population, use SNS. The percentage is 21% higher in contrast to 2014’s SNS utilization rate (ICT Research & Consulting, 2014). Therefore, the evolving role of social media and its penetration level in public may cause a certain degree of difference in Japanese people’s minds to perceive the different humanitarian crises. As a result, it is reasonable to state that the increased information flow in social media distinguishes between the treatment of Ukraine evacuees and Syrian refugees; the critical outlook in Ukraine which Japanese people received via social media may encourage them to be more supportive of them, while little attention has been to the Syrian asylum seekers over the last decade.

Methodology

Guiding Questions

To investigate the possible reasons behind the differences in Japan’s treatment of refugees of different origins, the research was conducted by online survey. The survey was created under the primary questions: How do the Japanese people perceive the refugee problem and humanitarian crisis in Syria and Ukraine, and what are the aspects that possibly shape Japanese people’s minds to distinguish refugees of different origins?

Settings and Participants

Since the primary focus of this research was to investigate Japanese people’s awareness and recognition of the refugee problem and to analyze the distinction in Japanese people’s opinion toward the humanitarian crisis in Syria and Ukraine, the target group of this research was set as people with Japanese nationality and currently living in Japan. This research was conducted with Google Forms, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. In total, the research collected data from 50 participants, including 38 females and 11 males, and one person who identified themselves as either male or female. Regarding the age group of participants, 66% were teens, 30% were in their twenties, and 4% were in their fifties.

Data Collection

With the aim of collecting as many participants as possible, the survey was distributed by the SNS accounts of the author, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Line. Though a large portion of participants is assumed to be students and graduates of Akita International University, some participants are outside of the AIU community since the posted accounts were also opened to non-AIU community members. Also, due to the author’s desire to gain the perspective of students of diverse backgrounds, the author shared the survey among the students of Saitama Prefectural University. The survey was composed of three sections besides the participants’ information section. There were 18 multiple-choice questions and 11 open-ended questions. While the multiple-choice questions were set as mandatory, the open-ended questions were not set as such.

Findings

Public Awareness of The Refugee Problem and Humanitarian Crisis in Different Regions

Before analyzing the public acknowledgment of the refugee acceptance from Syria and Ukraine, the survey measured the people’s awareness of the refugee problem in general. By asking “do you feel familiar with

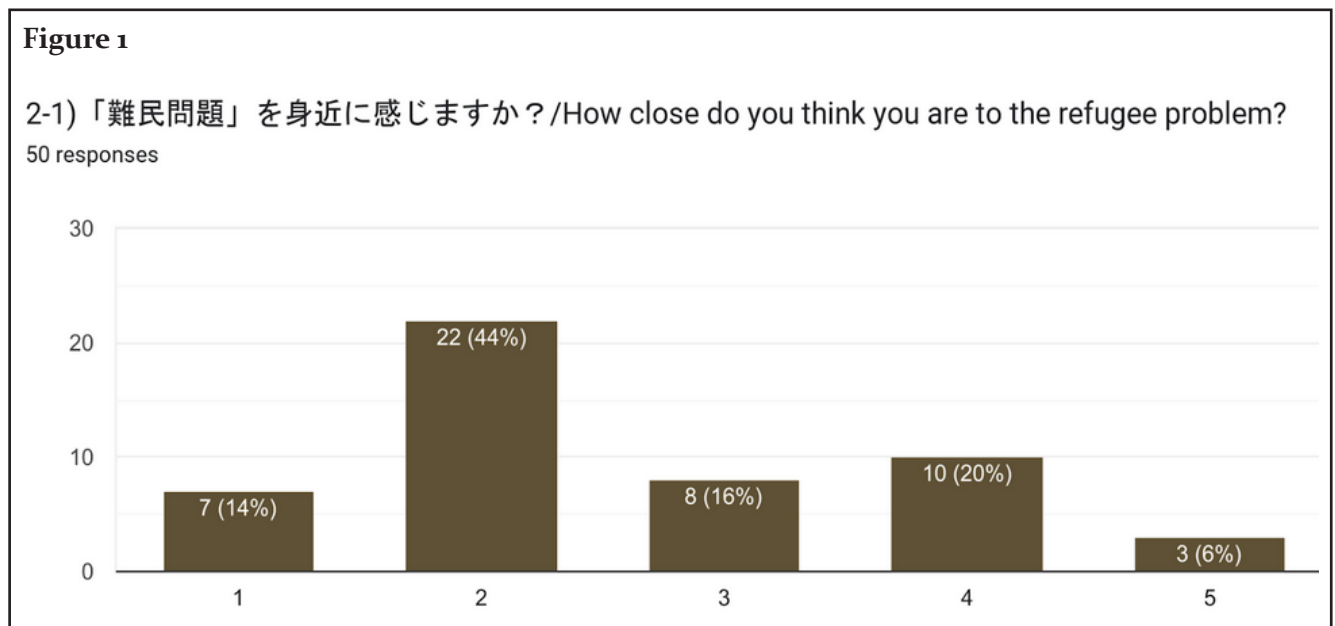
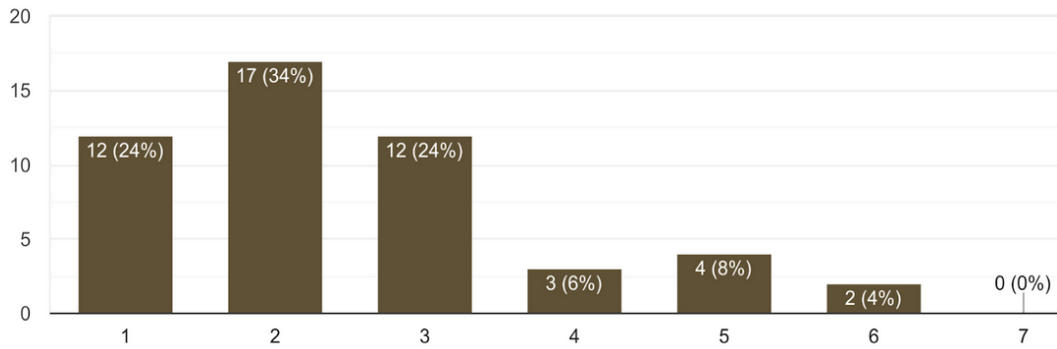


Figure 2

3-1) シリア難民についてどの程度の理解があると思いますか？ / How much do you think you understand about Syrian refugees?

50 responses



the refugee problem?” on a scale of 1(“I do not think so”) to 5(“I think so”), 44% marked the number 2, and the response that marked number 1 or 2 recorded 58% of overall responses. On the other hand, the percentage of those marked number 4 or 5 accounts for only 26%. Therefore, the survey result demonstrates that the number of people who do not feel familiar with the refugee problem is 32% larger than their counterparts [Figure 1].

The comparison between the public awareness toward Syrian refugees and Ukraine evacuees

Another focus is to assess the public perception toward the Syrian refugee and Ukraine evacuees and to compare how that recognition affects the people’s willingness

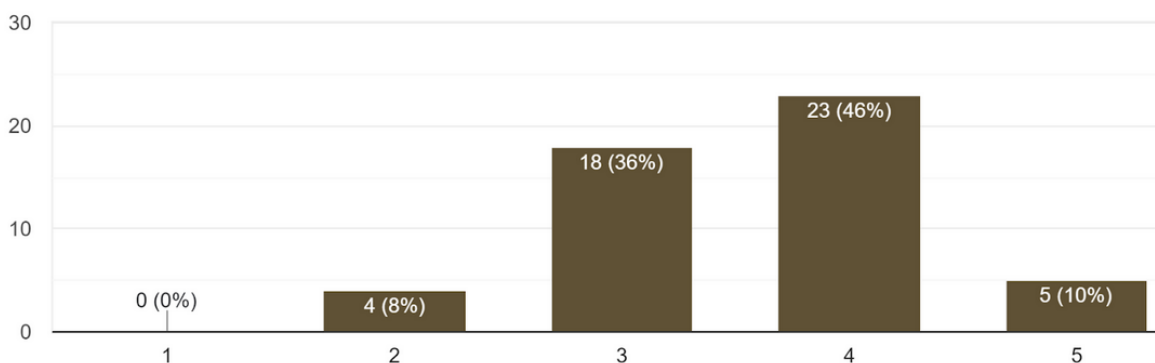
to accept them as refugees in Japan. In terms of the Syrian refugees, the survey first asked, “how much do you think that you understand about the Syrian refugees?” on a scale of 1(“I do not have any knowledge.”) to 7(“I have substantial knowledge.”). The result shows that 53% of respondents marked either 1, 2, or 3, which indicates that they feel that they have relatively poor knowledge on this topic to some extent. Regarding the public attitude toward the acceptance of Syrian refugees in Japan, the survey asked participants, “Do you think Japan should accept more refugees from Syria?” on a scale of 1 (“I do not think so.”) to 5(“I think so.”). To this question, 10% of people marked number 5, and 46% of people marked number 4 [Figure 2 and Figure 3].

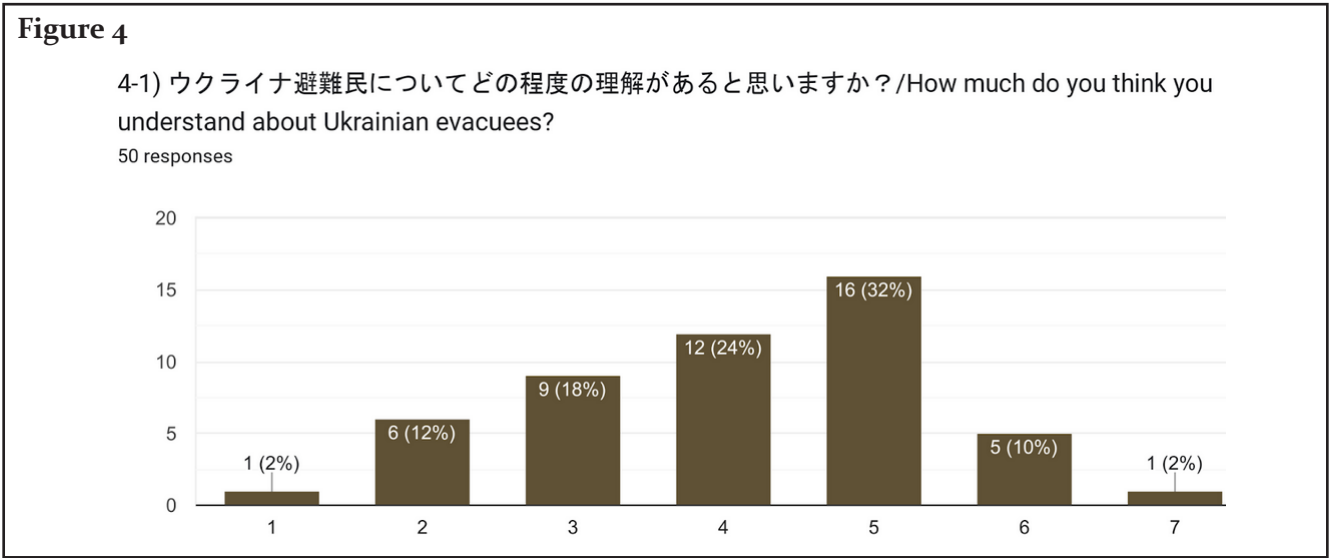
On the other hand, in terms of the

Figure 3

3-4) 日本はシリア難民を積極的に受け入れるべきだと思う。 / Do you think Japan should accept more refugees from Syria?

50 responses



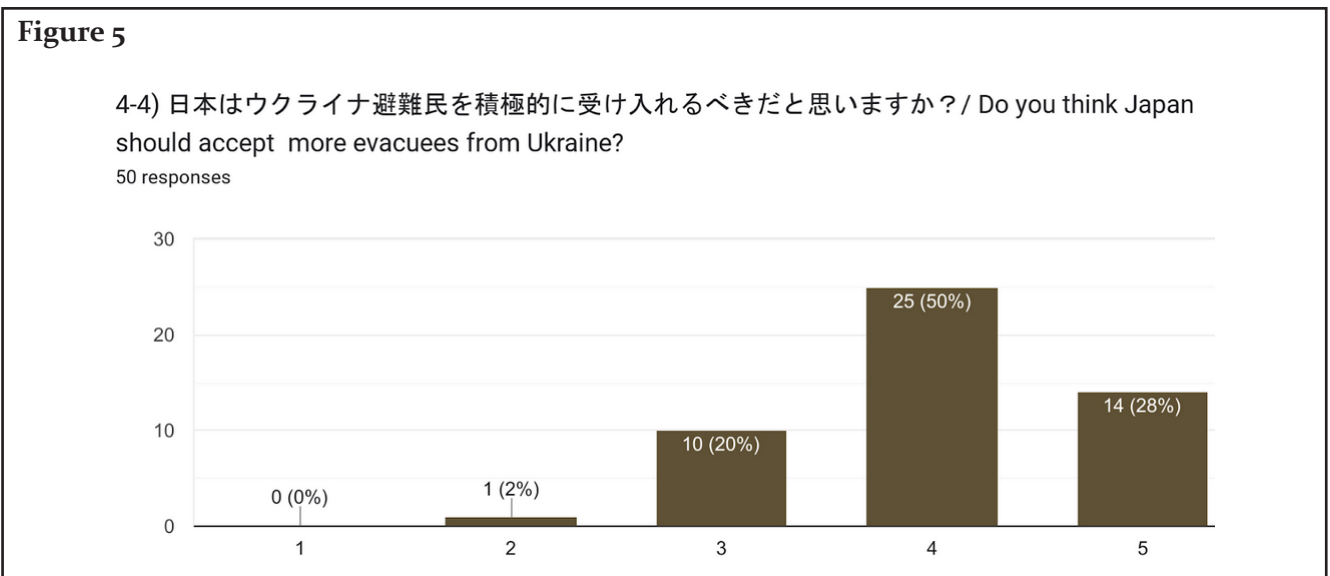


Ukraine evacuees, the survey asked the same set of questions to the respondents. First, the survey asked, “how much do you think you understand about the Syrian refugee?” on a scale of 1(“I do not have any knowledge.”) to 7(“I have substantial knowledge.”). The result shows that though 32% of respondents marked either 1, 2, or 3, which indicates that they feel they do not have enough knowledge on this topic to some extent, the percentage of people who marked either 4 to 7 was 68%. This shows the number of people who feel either “(relatively) knowledgeable” or “neither” exceed the number of their counterparts. Regarding the public attitude toward the acceptance of Ukraine evacuees in Japan, the survey asked participants, “Do you think Japan should accept more evacuees from Ukraine?”

on a scale of 1 (“I do not think so.”) to 5(“I think so.”). To this question, 28% of people marked number 5, and 50% of people marked number 4 [Figure 4 and Figure 5].

Discussion

The primary research demonstrated that, while Japanese people generally possess the willingness to protect asylum seekers in Japan, there is an apparent discrepancy in the levels of public understanding about different foreign humanitarian crises. Based on this, it may be possible to explain that, while Japan had persisted in its closed stance toward refugee admission, Ukrainian evacuees are receiving relatively more appropriate treatment in Japan because Japanese citizens support the governmental guardianship of the



Ukrainian evacuees based on their abundant knowledge of the critical situation in Ukraine. Though the effect of the raised four perspectives —political significance, religious and racial discrimination, mass media, and social media effect— seems to be admitted to some extent, the fundamental factor that distinguishes Syrian asylum seekers and Ukrainian evacuees lies in the amount of information possessed by Japanese people about each. Furthermore, the research result presented Japanese people's lack of familiarity with the issues of forced migration in the first place, which potentially seems to foster the existing closed-border policy in Japan. Therefore, to realize an equal and appropriate refugee protection policy in Japan, promoting the understanding of the refugee problem and the humanitarian crisis overseas is highly demanded. With the aim of effectively informing about this issue, this study emphasizes the significance of Japanese mass media and educational institutions.

The existence of a gap between people's sense of understanding of the crisis in Syria and Ukraine was revealed in the primary research. While 43% of respondents showed that they feel relatively knowledgeable about the Ukrainian evacuees, only 12% marked the Syrian counterpart. Another critical finding of this research is that there is an evident lack of people's understanding of the refugee problem and the Japanese government's policy in general. 58% of the respondents marked that they feel relatively unfamiliar with the refugee problem, and many of them only had a vague impression of the issue of forced displacement. As the reason for this, the survey received comments such as "a lack of sense of involvement" and "an event occurring apart from Japanese people." This result coincides with the data of Takizawa (2017) that Japan recorded a conspicuously low awareness of refugees among the 17 Asian countries because Japanese people are indifferent to forced migration. As the reason for this, Takizawa mentions the fact that Japan had never experienced governmental persecution or armed domestic resistance. Moreover, it seems pos-

sible to explain that this result is connected to the Japanese people's low affinity to the foreign regions where the refugees are mainly generated, such as the Middle East and Africa. According to the Cabinet Office (2018), 70.6 % of the Japanese population showed a low affinity to the Middle East and 65.5% to Africa. Therefore, increasing the awareness of the refugee problem and informing the humanitarian situation of the low-acknowledged regions can be argued as an urgent task.

Another significant finding of the collected data is the Japanese people's general agreement on protecting refugees in Japan, regardless of Syrian refugees or Ukrainian evacuees. In the research, 78% of relative agreement in terms of accepting Ukrainian evacuees, and 56% of respondents agreed to protect Syrian Refugees in Japan, which means more than 50% of respondents showed a supportive stance to accept refugees in Japan, either Ukrainian evacuees and Syrian refugees. Therefore, it is possible to analyze that the Japanese people share the consensus to protect refugees in need in Japan regardless of the knowledge level of different humanitarian crises. Still, under the status quo, the Ukraine evacuees are protected in Japan in a more privileged way with better public understanding and sympathy compared with the Syrian asylum seekers. Hence, in Japan, it seems unrealistic to negate the correlation between the group of refugees who receive better treatment in Japan and the higher level of people's acknowledgment and support toward those refugees.

From this rationale, to protect refugees from different origins fairly and legitimately, raising public awareness of the refugee problem and humanitarian crises happening in foreign regions is essential. This is because public indifference or lack of understanding hinders refugee acceptance from being discussed in the socio-political field due to the influence of agenda-setting power in politics (Heywood, 2019). Hence, this research strongly advocates for the necessity of the mass media and educational institutions to inform about foreign affairs and humanitarian issues

overseas. As discussed in the literature review, the Japanese media coverage of world news is comparatively small on a global scale (Global News View, 2017). Also, the covered regions in mass media are highly disproportionated; while issues in the Western Hemisphere are constantly reported, the news of the Third World, where forced displacement is generally provoked, rarely becomes the news agenda. Therefore, increasing the scope of foreign affairs coverage and informing the events in the third world would be necessary to promote the understanding of the causes of forced displacement.

In terms of education, Japanese education has a solid potential to assume the role of informing the refugee problem to the young generations. Today's Japanese international education lacks comprehensiveness in compulsory schools. According to the Ministry of Education (n.d.), even though the educational policy aims to enlighten the concept of the Sustainable Development Goals and to cultivate children's sense of responsibility and identity as a member of the international society, the current education lacks this aspect while focusing on English education. This may be the potential cause of the Japanese young generation's lack of knowledge and interest in foreign affairs. Indeed, only 33.9 % of the population disagreed that young Japanese people are "domestic-oriented" (The Nippon Foundation, 2019). From this data, it is possible to detect the need for a comprehensive approach to international education in Japanese schools. To increase the scope of international education in Japan, promoting the understanding of global problems, such as forced migration, is also an essential component. Therefore, this research suggests a revision of the existing international education curriculum and incorporating the programs to understand the refugee problem as one global issue.

This research pointed out the core problem of Japanese society regarding the low level of understanding about the cause of forced migration and refugee acceptance. Still, there was a limitation in highlighting the reason behind this fact in depth; it was impos-

sible to measure whether the current public opinion toward refugee acceptance derives from a lack of understanding or indifference, or both. Moreover, this research detected the impact of the four perspectives discussed in the literature review in shaping Japanese people's mindset toward refugees of different origins: political significance, racial and religious discrimination, mass media, and social media. However, the research faced the limitation in investigating whether such perspectives directly affect people's attitudes, such as the distinction between Syrian and Ukrainian asylum seekers. Also, the impact of the four perspectives in shaping the flow of information still needs to be elucidated. Therefore, in further study, it is crucial to deepen insight into the public perception of refugees in relation to the level of understanding and whether the four factors contribute to setting the amount of information flow about the refugee problem.

Conclusion

The existing double-standard refugee admission policy derives from the accumulation of socio-political dimensions of Japanese society. Under the status quo, a group of asylum seekers is receiving privileged protection, while most people who deserve refugee protection are systematically rejected from receiving the proper treatment by the Japanese government. To analyze the connection between such political decision-making and citizens' perception, this research compared Japanese people's attitudes toward Ukraine evacuees and Syrian refugees. Through the research, four factors were detected as the source of shaping Japanese people's mindset to distinguish refugees of different origins: the impact of the political significance of each region on Japan, the Japanese people's discriminatory view of race and religion, the disproportionate information flow by mass media, and advancement of social media. Above all, the primary research demonstrated the disparity in Japanese people's understanding of the humanitarian crisis in Syria and Ukraine. Also, it reveals the Japanese people's general consensus of protecting refugees in need

while not having substantial knowledge about the forced displacement issue in the first place. Therefore, to realize a more legitimate and fair refugee protection framework, this research concludes that raising awareness of the forced migration problem and promoting the understanding of humanitarian crises happening overseas is the first fundamental step to proceed. Hence, this research suggests the Japanese mass media increase and expand the scope of foreign affairs news coverage. Also, regarding Japanese compulsory education, the author emphasized the need to reform its international education curriculum to be more

comprehensive and introduce the concept of forced migration as one of the critical global issues.

To fulfill Japan's moral responsibility in international society, it is no longer allowable to proceed with the discriminatory policy toward asylum seekers of different origins. All asylum seekers should equally undergo the proper screening process and receive substantial protection as the Ukraine evacuees in Japan. To realize such an environment, raising public awareness of this issue is highly necessary to drive necessary political changes.

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Shusuke Kurokawa

Shusuke Kurokawa is a second-year student in the AIU global connectivity program. His essay “Japanese Whaling: Ban or Expand?” was written for Composition I under Professor Joel Friederich at AIU. The controversy which is often strongly supported in the Japanese society caught his attention to the debate and research whether it should truly be protected. He hopes to continue researching this topic to deeply understand the circumstance and the true value, plus the shortcomings of this cultural practice.

Japanese Whaling: Ban or Expand?

Plastic pollution, acidification, surface runoff: the impacts of human activities on the ocean are countless. In 2007, one documentary came into the spotlight. *The Cove* (2007) is a documentary film that depicts the Japanese culture of hunting and consuming marine animals such as whales and dolphins. While the documentary achieved an Academy Award for its reality that motivated people to raise awareness about abusing marine animals for human good, the film was criticized in Japan. Many pro-whaling organizations and media in Japan criticized the movie for creating anti-whaling “propaganda” (Milman, 2018). What can be analyzed from this conflict is the opposing views of whaling between Japan and powerful Western nations such as the US and Australia. Historically, whales were hunted by almost all major countries from the 1800s to the 1900s due to the demand for whale oil. Consequently, the whale population significantly decreased, and some species were cornered to a danger of extinction. Concerning this situation, the moratorium on all commercial whaling using factory ships was enacted by the IWC, the International Whaling Commission, in 1982. However, this moratorium had an exception. Currently, whaling in Japan is practiced in two ways. Firstly, whaling for scientific research, and secondly, whaling in the North Pacific and the Antarctic, where IWC regulation can not be applied (Morishita, 2006). The Japanese government defends their whaling by stating that whaling is an essential part of Japanese culture and industry. Furthermore, the Japanese government is trying to increase their whaling practice based on their conclusion that the whale population has grown enough. This essay aims to analyze both positive and negative aspects of whaling, and discover how Japanese whaling should be dealt with. In terms of this investigation, we need to explore the pros and cons of whaling through three perspectives: first, the effects of whaling on the environment; second, the economic benefit of whaling; and third, the cultural

value of whaling. Although I was pro-whaling a few years ago since I ate whale sashimi, after researching from these perspectives, I realized the lack of justification to increase whaling. Now, I argue that whaling should be limited only for scientific reasons in our modern society in Japan.

The effect of whaling in terms of the environmental perspective is crucial to understand when debating the future of whaling in Japan. Does Japanese whaling endanger whales? According to Professor Morishita of Tokyo University of Marine Science, “Humpback whales have shown evidence of strong recovery towards their unexploited size (which may have been 75,000-100,000 in total), with annual increase rates of about 10% being recorded” (Morishita, 2006, p. 15). Furthermore, a member of the Cetacean Research Institute of Japan, Tamura, has concluded that whales consume three to five times human fishing (87 million tons). Thus, the overpopulation of whales can lead to a fish shortage and ocean environment destruction (Tamura, 2010). Morishita further argued that anti-whaling countries and organizations need to focus on the scientific evidence that the number of whales is increasing and should prioritize science rather than emotional empathy toward whales when debating the allowance of whaling (Morishita, 2006). These scientific statements are strongly supported by the Japanese government and became the justification for increasing their whaling practices.

However, there is a controversy about whether whaling is positive from an environmental perspective. Aquatic ecologist Brierley questioned the increasing number of whales: “the statistical science of the number of whales behind Japan’s whaling activity has not passed a reasonable standard of peer review” (Brierley et al., 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, based on the research conducted by the University of Maine and British Columbia, “about 160,000 tons of carbon per year can be removed from the atmosphere if whale populations get restored

to pre-industrial levels.” (Pershing et al., 2010). This research underlines that whaling can intensify global warming by decreasing the mass of carbon whales inhale. Observing these two contrasting statements, it is clear that there are possibilities that whaling can both be harmful and positive for the sea environment. Both sides justify their position with scientific study, criticizing each other by pointing out the lack of scientific evidence and research.

One conclusion I come up with from arguments between anti and pro-whaling authors is the lack of scientific accuracy in whale science. According to environmental journalist Taylor Kubota, whale science often relies on estimation due to the difficulty of capturing a sample and because they can not be studied in captivity (Ishikawa, 2022). As explained by this statement, whale science has a limitation in accuracy. This way, conflicts can emerge between pro and anti-whaling countries and organizations even though they use both environmental perspectives and scientific evidence to support their positions. Thus, neither pro-whaling nor anti-whaling scientific arguments from environmental perspectives should be trusted over one another. My position on this issue is that the allowance of whaling should not be decided or concluded today, whereas whaling science is insufficient to conclude whether whaling should be completely abandoned or not. Japanese whaling should not be increased but limited only for scientific purposes. While Western anti-whaling groups claim to stop the entire practice of whaling, Japanese whaling for scientific purposes is necessary to enhance whale science accuracy to a sufficient level.

The economic value of whaling is another controversy among pro and anti-whaling organizations. The existence of demand should be primarily discussed to decide whether whaling has a monetary value to be continued. The Japanese Ministry of Fisheries explains on its official website that whale meat is a vital food resource for the Japanese (Dooley & Ueno, 2019). Additionally, the Japanese government is trying to increase the demand for whale meat by funding whale

restaurants and advertising whale products inside the country (Dooley & Ueno, 2018). In contrast, sociologist Ander Blok claims, “Whaling is not a publicly divisive issue within contemporary Japan, even as very few consumers nowadays eat whale meat regularly” (Blok, 2011, p. 2). The decline in whale meat demand is expressed here. Additionally, based on the data presented by the Japanese government, while whale meat was the primary source of dietary protein post-WW2, only 40 grams a year per capita, equaling a slice of ham, is consumed today (Leonard, 2019). It can be inferred that whale demands were a short-term necessity during the post-war period due to the lack of food sources, when Japan’s industries and fields were destroyed during WW2. Based on the research by the Japanese government, “Consumption is put at about 3,000 tons annually, including 1,000 tons of imports from places like Iceland and Norway. The difference ends up in cold storage, with around 3,500 tons warehoused” (Dooley & Ueno, para. 17, 2018). Two facts can be interpreted by combining these opposing arguments. Fact one; there is still a demand for whale meat in Japan of around 3000 tons. Fact two; the amount of whale meat that is hunted and supplied is more than the demand. Since around 3500 tons of whale meats are stored yearly, it is clear that whales are commercially hunted more than the demand. While pro-whaling organizations use this number as evidence to show the necessity of whaling, the anti-whaling organization claims this number represents the reality of how whaling does not benefit anyone. We can understand the different evaluations of the limited demand for whale meat that Japan still holds today.

Regarding this information, since the demand for whale meat is decreasing, Japan should not increase its whaling practice. The data on the amount of whale consumption declining after its peak during the 1950s explains that its demand was a short-term necessity during the post-war period when food resources were limited by the destruction of lands and industry by WW2. Thus, whaling should be limitedly practiced for scientific research,

which can also satisfy the limited demand in Japan. The supply of whale meat exceeds the demand, and thus whaling without scientific purposes, such as whaling in North Atlanta, should be banned. Although it is Japan's right to satisfy their own citizen's demand with their whaling, the supply of whale meat should be controlled according to the demand, and this formula should not be reversed.

Another point that we need to consider is the cultural value of whaling. Whaling in Japan began in the Edo era, around the 1670s, and continued being practiced until today (Milman, 2018). Morishita Joji, the Japanese representative for the International Whaling Commission, has said that "In Japan, the whale-eating custom is a symbol of respect for different cultures. Many people in Japan think it's not right for people from outside to impose food culture on other places" (Leonard, 2019, para. 19). In other words, criticizing whaling can trigger Japanese who value whaling culture and can hamper global relationships. However, according to the survey of Japanese citizens conducted by Julia Bowett and Pete Hay, this is no longer true. Bowett and Hay surveyed a Japanese group and split them according to their age, under 20 and over 20. Then they answered a series of questions relating to whaling practice and cultures from the range -2.0 (strongly disagree) to 2.0 (strongly agree). The average degree of approval for 20 and over was 0.5, while approval for those under 20 was 0.1 (Julia & Pete, 2017). From this data, it can be interpreted that the Japanese population is shifting from pro-whaling toward neutral. It can be said that the younger Japanese no longer value whaling culture as a justification for hunting whales.

What can be interpreted from these two opposing viewpoints is strongly related to previous points that I made about the economic value of whaling. The decrease in whale eating practices after the 1950s creates a correlation between age and their obsession with whale culture can be seen in Japanese society. Summarizing the two viewpoints, although whaling culture is evaluated as valuable for older generations, as Morishita has claimed,

the situation is slowly changing by the generation between whale-eating elders and young people who do not have any experience of eating whales.

I believe the Japanese government cannot justify increasing whaling with their history of whaling culture to expand whaling practice. Similar to the relationship between demands and supply, the act of conserving whaling culture should be done according to the people who value the whaling culture. With a limited number of people who value whaling culture, whaling should also be limited for scientific purposes. Moreover, in this globalized world where each country's actions possess a strong effect on each other, Japanese whaling justified as their "precious culture" can lead other developing countries to practice whaling without any regulation, and can cause a severe decrease in the whale population, and might even lead to complete extinction. Thus, Japan, as a leading nation, should not be using cultural values as a justification for increasing whaling practice.

In conclusion, Japanese whaling still has cultural and economic value. However, these are decreasing, anticipated to be more limited in the future, and thus should not be used as a justification for increasing whaling from the current situation. To distinguish an ideal relationship between whales and Japan, there is more we need to know about whales and the ocean environment. So, the question about whaling in Japan is "Ban or Expand?" I argue that the best answer is "Neither." Although whaling should be limited to avoid the risk of endangering certain species or deteriorating the ocean environment, samples and data which can be accumulated by scientific whaling methods can make a considerable contribution. By limiting whaling to scientific purposes, Japan can avoid global criticism and still supply whale meat for limited demand while maintaining traditional whaling culture. Whaling should neither be abandoned nor enhanced but limited only to scientific research. Following this conclusion, we can move forward to a future of a healthy relationship between the ocean environment and humanity.

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Wafiy Ashari MOHAMMAD KHAIRUR RIJAL

Wafiy is a graduate student from the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD), and was an exchange student at AIU in Fall 2022. In the author's own words, "I wrote this essay for one of my modules back in UBD, MODERN AND POSTMODERN ART AND DESIGN for my lecturer, Dr. Rui Lopes. Our topic was that we had to find a postmodern art movement and write about its manifesto. I always had an interest in Japanese Art in general, such as Ukiyo-e, so naturally, I had picked something Japanese to write about, Gutai. While researching, I had found that the founder of Gutai, Yoshihara Jisho, had done his own things after participating in the Gutai movement. So rather than only writing about Gutai, I decided to play around and write about the essence of Gutai and what it had done to a person in their journey to express themselves in an artistic way. This is probably one of the best papers I have written in my student life, I am grateful to know that people enjoyed what I had written so passionately."

The Circle of Gutai

One of Japan's widely practiced and known religions is Shinto or Shintoism- its native belief. A brief explanation of Shintoism is that "everything has a God residing within" or "everything has a spirit". In accordance, Jiro Yoshihara's Gutai manifesto follows this belief that materials contain spirit- two souls cooperating with each other to create one life form, that is art.

Before the attempt to understand Jiro Yoshihara, one must understand the manifesto he follows. The "Gutai" manifesto- is roughly translated to "embodiment" or "actualisation". A manifesto that gives form to the material that is used to create the art. "Gutai art does not falsify the material. In Gutai art, the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other" (Harrison & J. Wood, 1992). Gutai's objective is to present the material as it is; rather than manipulating the material, it is left as it is- bringing the object back to life rather than giving it a new one. It is also believed that revived material creates

the artwork instead of the artwork creating the illusion of spirit and life (Harrison & J. Wood, 1992). Yoshihara also acknowledged that Gutai may be mistaken and compared to Dadaism, but rather than presenting the absurdity of art, it presents the material's life. In other words, the Gutai manifesto believes in necromancy in its purest form- to bring something back to life, so to speak.

The understanding of The Gutai manifesto may be quite difficult to understand through explanation, but once a person has seen the works of Gutai artists within the Gutai group known as, "Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai" or the "Art Association of Gutai". One will fully understand the objective of Gutai.

A perfect example of an artwork to understand how Gutai does its necromancy is a demonstration piece made by one of the Gutai artists, Shiraga Kazuo, and his "Challenge To The Mud" performance in 1955 (Figure 1 below). According to Barcio (2016), Shiraga had thrown himself in mud and played around

Figure 1: Challenge To The Mud by Shiraga Kazuo, 1955. (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/kazuo-shiraga/challenging-mud-1955>)



Figure 2: Laceration of Paper by Saburo Murakami, 1956. (<https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/gutai>)



it, wrestling in the dirt and wet clay. At the conclusion of his performance, the result of Shiraga's mud dance was admired as an artwork. Along with the all-natural performance and canvas, the performance had accurately portrayed the words of Yoshihara's words on the manifesto, "In Gutai art the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other, even though they are otherwise opposed to each other.". This concept of distanced co-existence is what truly defines Gutai.

Another example of this concept of Gutai or embodiment would be Saburo Murakami's "Laceration of Paper" in 1956. Murakami prepares multiple sheets of paper onto large frames in a row, and he proceeds to rush through all of them, resulting in loud pops from each crash and finally, a row of torn and ruined paper canvases (Figure 2 below). This performance represented the scenario if both the human spirit and material were to meet and mix (Barcio, 2016). The interpretation of this performance can be seen as both negative and positive. The negative is where it is the unfortunate result of human interference with the material, and the positive is where it follows the concept of Gutai by breaking its

belief, further solidifying the message.

Referencing the two previous works of Gutai, there is no question that the manifesto still has respect for its creative freedom. This leads to Yoshihara's work under Gutai, "Please Draw Freely" in 1956. The artwork involves a huge piece of canvas, preparation of writing, and drawing materials such as pencils, pens, brushes, and the general public (Figure 3 below). This installation invites the public to write and draw as they like- to express their creativity. Some may argue that the use of these drawing mediums contradicts the manifesto, but Yoshihara is not the one staining the canvas, it is the people. In addition, this interactive installation mostly attracted children- the purest of souls; bringing out the purest form of creativity. This public exhibition displays the freedom of creativity from the public onto a canvas, showing the soul of freedom and creativity in art form. The artist has no control over what is being made. Thus, what is being made on the canvas by the public is the purest form of freedom and creativity of the human spirit. Yoshihara's spirit has only introduced the material, and it only interacts with everything else but him. The process of this creative freedom is a work of art itself.

Figure 3: Please Draw Freely by Jiro Yoshihara, 1956. (<https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/gutai>)



Along with Yoshihara's work of abstract artistic freedom within Gutai, he was also known for his Full Circle collection, a collection of his abstract artworks where he simply draws a circle within the canvas, mostly using oil on canvas. These circles vary in quality, thickness, and colour. Now one may question if Yoshihara had abandoned Gutai, but that is not the case. What Yoshihara is doing still has the essence of Gutai.

Yoshihara Jiro himself mentioned that he drew these circles only because it was convenient and it also relieved the burden of thinking about what to paint on the canvas (McCaffery, 2019). However, he had admitted his dissatisfaction with the circles he painted. On the other hand, this lack of satisfaction had led him to think, "At the same time, not being able to even draw a single line that satisfies me means that that is precisely where I must begin. And finally, I realize that in this single line, which I cannot draw as I wish, therein lies the infinite possibility, like a bottomless swamp." (Yoshihara, 1967). It is this way of thinking that allows the Full Circle collection to still contain the essence of the Gutai manifesto that Yoshihara had declared in 1954.

As mentioned before, Gutai's main objective is not to falsify the material; to present what is seen as it is rather than to represent the material as another object such as other mainstream abstract artworks. The exact concept is applied in Yoshihara's circle artworks. These circles do not represent anything, these are simply the results of Yoshihara drawing and painting a circle on a canvas. In addition to his comment, a circle can represent the infinite possibilities of anything, as it is a form without an end; a never-ending line with endless possibilities. Furthermore, the simplicity of this interaction between the artist and the material does not fuse, as art that is created is represented as it is, a simple circle.

In its essence, Gutai and Yoshihara's artworks reflect the simplicity and possibilities of creativity. This movement tries to promote what is lost in the art we see today, a deep appreciation towards what we truly see with our eyes; the representation of subjects has faded or diminished the spirit of these materials. In other words, these artists present the subject rather than represent a subject, so to speak. There was an enlightenment to present art as what it truly is, simple.



Red Circle on Black
by Jiro Yoshihara, 1965.
(<https://www.wikiart.org/en/jiro-yoshihara/red-circle-on-black-1965>)

Circle by Jiro Yoshihara, 1971.
(<https://www.wikiart.org/en/jiro-yoshihara/circle-1971>)



Untitled by Jiro Yoshihara, 1965.
(https://www.makigallery.com/artists_en/768/)



Jiro Yoshihara (n.d). (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/jiro-yoshihara>)

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Anthony Bertrand

Anthony Bertrand is a sophomore student majoring in Global Studies. His essay “Is it Really “Sex” Education: The Impact of the Lack of Sex Ed in Japan?” was submitted in the Advanced Research Writing course under the supervision of Professor Joel Friederich. Bertrand has been eager to learn about education, specifically in education about controversial topics such as sex, drugs, and religion. After watching a documentary on sex education in Europe, he became intrigued by the differences he experienced in his education in Japan, leading to the writing of this paper.

Is it Really "Sex" Education?

The Impact of the Lack of Sex Ed in Japan

Abstract

Sex education is an indispensable part of education and is absolutely necessary to live a life with safety and healthy relationships, ensuring one's well-being. Despite this, Japan's sex education is often disapproved of and notorious for its absence of practical information. This paper inspects the contemporary criticism and dangers regarding Japan's sex education by taking a deeper look into particular perspectives: the current shape of sex education around the world, the insufficiency of sex education in Japan, and how the digital age affects young teenagers. To further investigate these factors, a survey was conducted to identify the optimal solution for reforming sex education in Japan. The survey was analyzed by correlating sexual knowledge with various characteristics of participants. The results illustrated the overall lack of sexual knowledge among the youth, especially regarding information individuals could not attain solely from their own experience. Also, results showed that sex education should start from a younger age, teaching fundamental and foundational knowledge necessary for healthy relationships. As a result of this research, I conclude that sex education in Japan is immensely inadequate and should be refined based on UNESCO's Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) to provide students with adequate knowledge to live a safe and healthy life.

Keywords:

Sex education in Japan, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), Sexual knowledge, Internet and sexuality information

Introduction

Sex education is essential to have a lifetime of healthy relationships and to understand and gain knowledge about sexuality in general. UNESCO (2017) is currently

promoting a "curriculum-based" educational process to teach about sexuality, called "comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)" (p. 16). This guide on sexuality education is especially crucial in this age, with the unlimited amount of dangerous and delusive information accessible with just a single click. In fact, this program is widely accepted worldwide and is often used as a standard for national educational programs in various countries. This fact is not surprising because CSE has an abundant amount of research supporting and promoting it, proving its reliability and effectiveness. However, Japan has a different take on this topic. So far, research shows that Japan has made no effort to implement CSE into their education, but rather is deciding to stick with their traditional sex education program. Japan's sex education is often criticized, especially for the lack of useful information able to be attained through the classes. This is alarming since, without a proper foundation of sexual knowledge, students will be susceptible to false or misleading information, especially from the internet. This essay will examine how current researchers believe that sex education in Japan is not adequate and how it exposes teenagers to various dangers and risks. It focuses on the form of sex education in other countries around the world, the current lack of sex education in Japan, and how the digital age affects young teenagers.

Literature Review

CSE: A Complete Education with Exceptional Results

Comprehensive Sexuality Education does not focus solely on reproductive functions or abstinence but rather offers students extensive, honest, and varied information about sexuality, contributing to the increase of knowledge related to sex among teenagers

and the decrease of risky sexual behaviors and effects such as sexually transmitted diseases. According to UNESCO (2018), “Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality” (p. 16). In other words, CSE is about learning how sexuality is ingrained in various aspects of humanity and how to apply that sexuality effectively in your personal life. Also, according to 87 studies conducted around the world, CSE is correlated with benefits such as delayed sexual initiation, reduced risk-taking, increased use of contraception, and improved attitudes related to sexual and reproductive health (UNESCO, 2018). With the exceptional results that CSE has demonstrated, this program has been implemented in numerous national educational systems worldwide. In the official publication of “Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe” by the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) & WHO Europe (2010), CSE is mentioned several times, and the standards for sexuality education in Europe have a relatively similar approach to the guidelines of CSE. Taking a deeper look into Europe’s sexuality education, several countries have successful sexuality education programs similar to CSE. For example, in Austria, parents are involved in conferences and are given information about the material used during the lessons, and in Denmark, pupils can freely ask questions, and teachers can introduce topics regarding sexuality at any time, in addition to schools being able to “invite guest speakers such as prostitutes, homosexuals, and AID’s related persons to share their experiences” (European Parliament, 2013, p. 12, 16). Also, in The Netherlands, sexuality education starts from the age of 4, and before students enter secondary school, they should have had a total of 50 hours of sexuality education throughout their previous years of schooling (European Parliament, 2013, p. 25). In fact, according to a study conducted by Der Spiegel (2006, as cited in European Parliament, 2013), this way of sexuality education has been seen to bene-

fit the contraception usage rates of teenagers, with 97.0 percent of 15-year-old Dutch girls and 92.4 percent of 15-year-old boys declaring to be proactively using contraception. These examples clearly demonstrate that these countries provide extensive sexuality education, where much time is taken to fully provide useful knowledge to students while also creating an environment where students can genuinely take part in their sexuality education and acquire practical knowledge for their future life. These sexuality education programs in the EU, in addition to CSE, distinctly illustrate the benefits of extensive sexuality education where both the physiological and relational aspects of sexuality are taught, and students are actively involved.

Fundamental Functions, Rather than Anything About Sexuality

A number of experts argue that the Japanese education system does not provide students with sufficient sex education, resulting in a lack of reliable information on sexuality for students. Fu (2011), a professor at Aalen University of Applied Sciences, states that Japanese sex education focuses mainly on the “reproductive function of sex” (p. 2) and the prevention of “sexually transmitted diseases” (p. 2). He goes on to state that “as a result, young people are rarely provided with a comprehensive understanding of sexuality” (p. 2-3). Basically, students learn how sex works without actually learning about sex or how it happens. In fact, there are government-established curriculum guidelines for elementary and junior high schools that state that “the process of pregnancy shall not be addressed,” meaning that teachers are legally required to conduct a sex-education class without mentioning sex whatsoever (NHK, 2021). What is more, teachers are also required to teach students about sexually transmitted diseases and contraceptive and prophylactic methods such as condoms, even though teaching about sex is forbidden. These facts suggest how several experts have observed the confusing and contradictory nature of sex education in

Japan. Another component in Japanese society that just perpetuates the contradictions and confusion is the fact that the legal age for sexual consent in Japan is merely the age of 13, the same age students are, as so-called by the government, learning about sex. This means that young teenagers over the age of 13, who were sexually assaulted, have to explain in detail how they were assaulted or threatened and why they could not resist the assaulter, although they have not, and will never, formally learn about what sex is, or what sexual assaults are. These points prove how inadequate the content of sex education in Japan is.

Lack of Education on Communication and Consent

On top of the lack of sufficient information on sexuality, sex education in Japan fails to teach students a crucial part of learning about sex communication. Having good communication skills is an essential component of having healthy relationships in every human interaction we have, including sex. A study from Columbia University indicated that people who received education on how to refuse sexual advances were less likely to be sexually assaulted in college (Santelli et al., 2018). This data illustrates the importance of sexual communication and legitimate sexuality education and the fact that without it, we are an easy target for sexual assaults such as rape. Regarding sexual communication, consent is particularly crucial, and without it, sex can even be illegal. The FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program defines “rape” as “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019). In other words, this definition means that without consent, it is not sex but rape. Although the concept of consent is immensely crucial when it comes to sex, and is even mentioned 27 times in the “key concepts, topics and learning objectives” of the guidance for CSE (UNESCO, 2018, p. 34-80), there is no refer-

ence of it whatsoever in sex education in Japan, which does not teach anything regarding sexual communication. These factors demonstrate how sex education in Japan falls short of educating students about communication, especially consent, a pivotal topic to having healthy relationships.

Dangers and Risks of Unlimited Information

Paired with the lack of information on sex education in Japanese schools, the digital age has equipped teenagers with the power to gain any information they desire, leading to risky behavior and unhealthy relationships. The digital age has enabled anybody to gather information about anything they wish, including teenagers and pornography. According to research by Okabe et al. (2021), professors at Shinshu University and Hyogo University of Teacher Education, out of 150 college students in Japan aged 20–26 years, most male students (97%) and approximately one-third of female students (35.9%) used pornography at least once in the past month. There is a variety of porn that exists online, and some of it can certainly have benefits. Royalle (2012) states that pornography can revitalize a couple’s sex life, give you new ideas, or help you get in touch with what turns you on. Although several benefits of using porn exist, that is not the case for all porn. Ybarra & Thompson (2018) asserts that exposure to pornography is associated with harmful sexual behaviors in teenagers. It is unclear what kind of porn is associated with such behaviors, but most porn, including unethical porn, ranging from condomless porn to rape, is equally accessible, making it relatively easy for anybody to stumble upon something dangerous. In realization of this problem, Pornhub, the most popular pornography website in the world, deleted over 70% of videos uploaded on its website, in addition to making it impossible for unverified users to upload videos (Valinsky, 2020). However, in contrast to Pornhub, popular pornographic websites in Japan, such as Eroterest and Nukistream, blatantly showcase content

that would be illegal to display on Pornhub, including rape, groping, voyeurism, and child porn-like content. Not only do these websites shamelessly show these contents, but such videos are brazenly displayed on the homepage and “popular searches” tab, showing the popularity and prevalence of these explicit contents. Brown & L’Engle (2009, p. 5) state that “sexually explicit media in which the male sexual script is exaggerated and the typical female sexual script is subverted to eschew emotional commitment should lead both males and females to hold more permissive sexual norms and less progressive gender role attitudes.” This fact is concerning, especially when applied to Japan, where some popular pornography touch relatively risqué areas. This further illustrates the need for sufficient sex education for students to gain appropriate knowledge regarding sexuality to ensure their safety against the boundless information online.

Research Question

These three factors: 1) the importance of proper sex education and the benefits of CSE and other extensive sexuality education programs; 2) the insufficient content of sex education and the nonexistence of sexual communication education in Japan; and 3) the dangers of the infinite amount of information on the internet, lead to the question, “how knowledgeable are Japanese teenagers about sexuality?” PILCON (2016), an NPO fighting to provide sufficient sexual health education in Japan, provides an answer to this question with a survey they conducted with over 4,000 high school students about sexual knowledge. The results clearly show how little knowledge teenagers have about sex, with an average accuracy rate of 30%. In more detail, only 35% of students knew that “pulling out” is not an effective method of contraception, and a mere 19% of students knew that birth control pills are effective in improving menstrual cramps and irregular menstruation. Based on these factors, it is clear to state that there is not enough reliable and practical information

that is acquired in sex education in Japan, and students lack the knowledge needed to have a healthy sex life.

Methodology

Guiding Question

My research question is how sex education in Japan should be reformed for students to gain practical knowledge regarding sexuality to live safe and healthy lives. To find the solution for this research, I conducted a survey targeting university students who went through a Japanese education system, including sex education, asking them about their viewpoints on sex education in Japan and quizzing their basic sexual knowledge.

Setting and Participants

The participants of my survey are university students who have gone through Japanese education, namely sex education, in elementary and middle schools in Japan. Since my research focuses on sex education, especially in Japan, it is imperative to gather participants with such backgrounds. Among the 88 participants who received sex education in Japanese schools, around 65% of participants identified as female, and 32% as male, meaning that there were two times more females who voluntarily participated in this study. Also, although I set the age restriction for university students, there were 4 (4.6%) participants who were either in graduate school or had already graduated from university. This said, the rest of the participants were university students, with around 56% being freshmen. Out of all the participants, around 55% were AIU students, and 45% were from other universities in Japan. This survey was conducted on Google Forms, being completely anonymous and voluntary, and used exclusively for research purposes in this paper.

Data Collection

The survey was posted on Facebook for about two weeks, from November 12th to November 24th. Answers were also collected via

Instagram twice, on November 17th and November 20th. In addition to this, on November 22nd, messages were sent through LINE to 47 individual persons, asking for their participation and help to distribute the survey to their friends. All the participants via Facebook are persons related to AIU, and participants from Instagram and individual messaging consist of an array of persons, including AIU students and students from other universities. The questions consist of a mixture of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Participants were asked about their thoughts on sex education in Japan and where they primarily got information about topics regarding sex. In addition to this, participants were quizzed on their sexual knowledge, with 12 true or false questions that tested basic sexual knowledge.

Findings

Results of the Quiz

The quiz that was executed at the end of the survey was a replication of the research conducted by PILCON (2016), mentioned in the end of the Literature Review of this paper. When compared to PILCON’s data with an average accuracy rate of 30% (figure 1), having an average accuracy rate of over 75% (figure 2), the results of the quiz seem high, but this indicates that around one-fourth of the participants’ answers were not correct. Also, when taking a deeper look into individual questions,

it can be argued that the results for question 2 (Too much semen can be harmful to the body) and question 5 (The pill is an almost certain contraceptive if a woman takes it correctly) are more troubling than PILCON’s data. This is because, although the accuracy rate for this survey was higher for both questions, the rate at which participants chose the incorrect answer was 40% compared to 12% for question 2, and 46% compared to 21% for question 5 (figure 3). Basically, this means that in replace of a majority of participants being unsure of the answer, a large population of participants falsely believes in the incorrect one. These findings indicate the lack of sexual knowledge among the graduates of Japanese compulsory education.

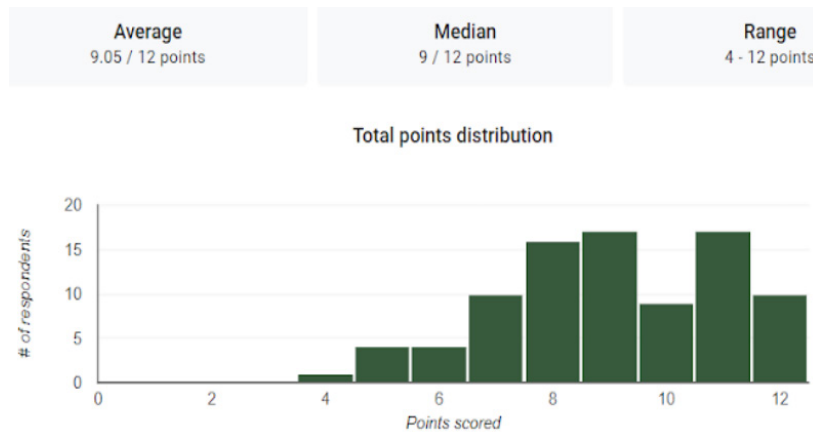
Sex and Sexual Knowledge

To examine the correlation between sex and sexual knowledge, the sex of participants was collected. Out of 88 participants, 28 identified as male, and 57 identified as female. When the quiz results were separated by sex, on average, male participants scored 9.04 out of 12, and female participants scored 9.07 (figure 4). This seems to conclude that sex is not a factor that affects sexual knowledge. However, when each question was analyzed individually, the results illustrated a completely different conclusion. Regarding questions 2 (Too much semen can be harmful to the body), 3 (The withdrawal method (pulling out) is an effective

Figure 1: Data from PILCON’s survey (2016)

高校生の性知識の正答率		
問題 (正解)	正答率	わからない
(1) 排卵はいつも月経中に起こる (×)	18%	65%
(2) 精液がたまりすぎると、体に悪影響がある (×)	24%	64%
(3) 膈外射精は有効な避妊法である (×)	35%	52%
(4) 月経中や安全日の性交なら妊娠しない (×)	38%	52%
(5) 低用量ピルは女性が正しく服用することでほぼ確実に避妊できる (○)	17%	62%
(6) 低用量ピルには月経痛や月経不順の改善の効果がある (○)	19%	71%
(7) 避妊に失敗した時、72時間以内に使える緊急避妊薬がある (○)	21%	68%
(8) ピルでは性感染症を予防できない (○)	36%	57%
(9) 女性は30歳でも40歳でも同じくらいの確率で妊娠できる (×)	50%	42%
(10) 性感染症にかかっても必ずしも症状は出ない (○)	23%	51%
(11) 性感染症を治療しないと不妊症になることもある (○)	40%	56%
(12) 保健所では、性感染症の検査を無料・匿名で受けられる (○)	35%	59%

Figure 2: Results of the Quiz



tive contraceptive method), and 12 (Health centers offer free and anonymous testing for sexually transmitted diseases), male participants had higher average scores, while with questions 4 (Intercourse during menstruation or on a safe day will not cause pregnancy), 5 (The pill is an almost certain contraceptive if a woman takes it correctly), 6 (Pills can reduce the pain of menstrual cramps and irregular menstruation), and 10 (Sexually transmitted diseases do not always have symptoms), female participants scored higher (figure 5). For example, from the results for question 6, while it can be seen that 89% of female participants were correct, only 61% of male participants chose the right answer. This data denotes that around 40% of men who answered the survey did not know that the pill can be used for improving menstrual cramps and irregular menstruation. Similarly to this question, in other

questions that have topics concerning specific sexes, such as semen or pills, the opposite sex did comparably worse. In other words, participants were able to correctly answer questions about their own gender to a greater extent than they were able to correctly answer questions about the opposite gender. This data can be interpreted as participants gaining knowledge more often than not through experience rather than education. From this data, it can be concluded that sex is correlated with the personal sexual knowledge of university students in Japan, meaning that education does not provide adequate knowledge regarding both the male and female body.

Opinions on Sex Education and Sexual Knowledge

To examine the correlation between opinions on sex education and sexual knowl-

Figure 3: Comparison Between Rate of Incorrect Answers

Question	Correct (%)	Incorrect (%)	Not sure (%)	Correct (%)	Incorrect (%)	Not sure (%)
1	18	17	65	73	12	15
2	24	12	64	38	40	22
3	35	13	52	76	13	11
4	38	10	52	93	4	3
5	17	21	62	47	46	7
6	19	10	71	80	12	8
7	21	11	68	82	4	14
8	36	7	57	89	3	8
9	50	8	42	85	2	13
10	23	26	51	84	8	8
11	40	4	56	85	2	13
12	35	6	59	74	1	25

Figure 4: Quiz Results in Comparison by Sex

M Average	F Average
9.04	9.07
M Number	F Number
28	57
M Score	F Score
253	517

Notes. M - male, F - female, Number - number of participants, Score - total points for the quiz by M or F.

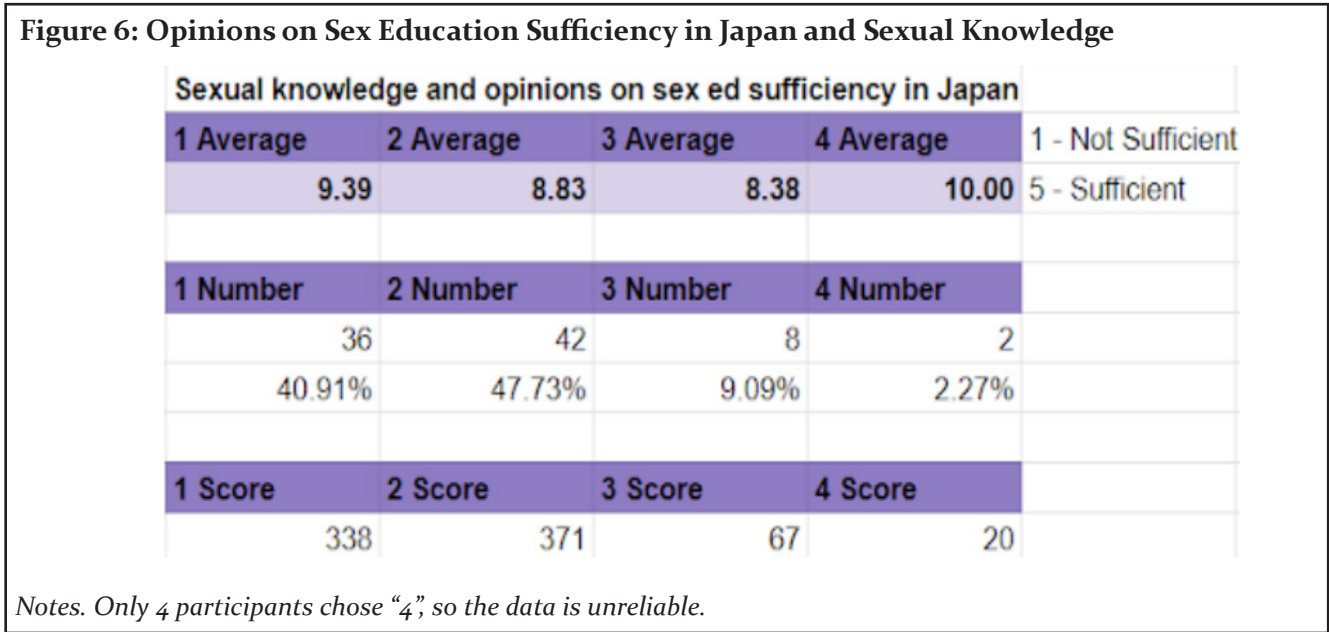
edge, the following questions were asked. 1; “Do you think that sex education in Japan is sufficient?” and 2; “From what age do you think that sex education should be conducted?” For question 1, participants who felt that

sex education in Japan was insufficient (1) scored an average of 9.39 on the quiz. Interestingly, the average quiz score of participants decreased as the number of how sufficient they thought sex education in Japan was, increased (figure 6). This means that the more participants thought Japan’s sex education was sufficient, the worse they did on the quiz. The same pattern can be seen in question 2. Participants who thought that sex education should start at kindergarten had an average score of 10.56. However, as the starting age of sex education the participants felt was most appropriate rose, the average score of their quizzes fell (figure 7). From this data, it can be concluded that participants with the opinion that “sex education in Japan is more or less sufficient” and that “there is no need for sex education to be conducted from younger ages”

Figure 5: Individual Question Results in Comparison by Sex

Q1 M Average	Q1 M True		Q7 M Average	Q7 M True
71.43%	20		78.57%	22
Q1 F Average	Q1 F True		Q7 F Average	Q7 F True
75.44%	43		82.46%	47
Q2 M Average	Q2 M True		Q8 M Average	Q8 M True
53.57%	15		92.86%	26
Q2 F Average	Q2 F True		Q8 F Average	Q8 F True
29.82%	17		87.72%	50
Q3 M Average	Q3 M True		Q9 M Average	Q9 M True
92.86%	26		85.71%	24
Q3 F Average	Q3 F True		Q9 F Average	Q9 F True
68.42%	39		85.96%	49
Q4 M Average	Q4 M True		Q10 M Average	Q10 M True
85.71%	24		71.43%	20
Q4 F Average	Q4 F True		Q10 F Average	Q10 F True
96.49%	55		89.47%	51
Q5 M Average	Q5 M True		Q11 M Average	Q11 M True
32.14%	9		85.71%	24
Q5 F Average	Q5 F True		Q11 F Average	Q11 F True
52.63%	30		84.21%	48
Q6 M Average	Q6 M True		Q12 M Average	Q12 M True
60.71%	17		92.86%	26
Q6 F Average	Q6 F True		Q12 F Average	Q12 F True
89.47%	51		64.91%	37

Notes. M - male, F - female, True - number of correct answers. Colors; Blue - male participants with a higher average, Red - female participants with a higher average, Yellow - male and female participants with similar averages.



do not have sufficient sexual knowledge. This demonstrates the need for better sex education starting from younger ages in Japan.

Source of Sexual Information and Sexual Knowledge

To examine the correlation between primary sources of sexual information and sexual knowledge, the question, "Where did you primarily get information about topics regarding sex? Choose up to 3 answers," was asked. Out of all of the participants, for those who selected 1 (Education) or 2 (Teachers) as one of their primary sources of sexual information, the average scores for their quizzes were notably lower than other sources of information (figure 8). Basically, this means that participants who feel the sex education they

received from school contributed to their current sexual knowledge did substandard on the quiz. This fact demonstrates how sex education in Japan is not sufficient and is a contributing factor to the lack of sexual knowledge among the Japanese population.

Discussion

The survey result revealed the reality of the sexual knowledge of students who received sex education in Japan. An average of 25% of answers were wrong, with a large gender gap regarding particular questions, especially questions dealing with topics related to specific genders. Another finding is that students who think that sex education in Japan is sufficient or that sex education should

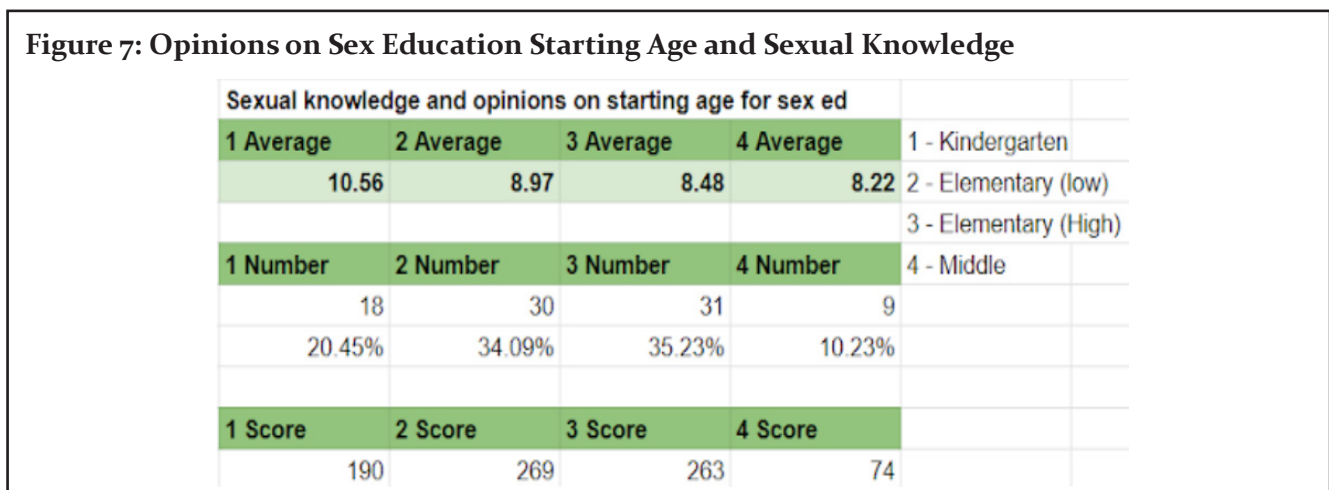


Figure 8: Source of Sexual Information and Sexual Knowledge

Correlation between sexual knowledge and source of sexual information						
1 Average	2 Average	3 Average	5 Average	6 Average	7 Average	1 - Education
8.80	8.11	9.38	9.05	9.13	10.00	2 - Teachers
						3 - Parents
1 Number	2 Number	3 Number	5 Number	6 Number	7 Number	4 - Siblings
46	9	13	56	79	23	5 - Friends
52.27%	10.23%	14.77%	63.64%	89.77%	26.14%	6 - Internet
						7 - Games, books, manga
1 Score	2 Score	3 Score	5 Score	6 Score	7 Score	8 - Doctors
405	73	122	507	721	230	
405	27	70	204	82	0	
0	46	52	275	298	28	
0	0	0	28	320	161	
0	0	0	0	21	30	
0	0	0	0	0	11	

Notes. Answers 4 (Siblings) and 8 (Doctors) were not included due to the lack of participants who selected them.

not start from younger ages had extremely low sexual knowledge compared to students with the opposite opinions. Also, students who relied on schools for sexual information tended not to have adequate sexual knowledge in contrast to students who received sexual information elsewhere. Therefore, the reformation of the contemporary educational program to a more pragmatic and inclusive educational program is necessary for students to gain sufficient sexual knowledge to live healthy, safe lives. The following section discusses 1) how sex education needs to accurately provide students with practical information, especially about opposite sexes, and 2) why it is necessary for sex education in Japan to start earlier.

As indicated in the literature review, for university students who have experienced sex education in Japan, one's sex is significantly correlated with personal sexual knowledge. The survey results proved this point since questions that comprised topics concerning specific sexes were mistakenly answered to a greater extent by the opposite sex of the question topics. This is dangerous because although people can somewhat learn about their own sex through experience, without proper education, learning genuine knowledge regarding the opposite sex is problematic due to the extent of false information online, and having stereotypes becomes inevitable. Moreover, 6 participants in the survey wrote

that a portion of their sex education was conducted in gender-split classes, with boys and girls learning separate content. The Western Australia Department of Health mentions the importance of comprehensive understanding regarding sexual knowledge regardless of the students' genders, stating that even if gender-split classes are conducted, both boys and girls need to know about all of the information, and there should be no bias between information provided to the different classes (n.d.). These factors illustrate the importance of conducting accurate and equal information to all students, no matter their sex.

The survey results demonstrated that participants who think that sex education should start at an early age had a drastically higher score on the quiz than participants who feel that it should start later. This means that participants who have adequate sexual knowledge believe that it is wise for children to have sex education from a younger age, mainly starting from kindergarten. UNESCO backs this data up with its educational program teaching about sexual knowledge, CSE, recommended being started from the age of 5 (2018, p. 34). Also, UNESCO states that the "concepts for younger students typically include more basic information, less advanced cognitive tasks, and less complex activities" (2018, p. 34). For example, for the topic of "Consent, Privacy, and Bodily Integrity," stu-

dents in a younger age group (5-8) would learn about the idea that “everyone has the right to decide who can touch their body, where, and in what way,” which provides them with the foundational knowledge to learn about sexual consent in the future (UNESCO, 2018, p. 56). Other than CSE, educational curricula ongoing in Europe also support this data, with countries like The Netherlands starting sexuality education from 4 years old (European Parliament, 2013, p. 25). From these factors, it can be concluded that sex education should definitely be commenced from an earlier age to provide students with a solid foundation of fundamental knowledge that is necessary for them to live safe and healthy lives.

Some limitations of the survey were: 1) participants were mainly from AIU and other prestigious universities in Japan, meaning the educational level of students, in general, is higher than other people of the same age; and 2) data regarding how urban or rural the participants’ schools were, was not able to be collected sufficiently. Thus, in my further research, I would like to expand the scale of the survey, incorporating people with a more diverse range of backgrounds and current occupations, also asking more specifically about how rural or urban their school was.

Conclusion

Japanese sex education is inadequate because it does not extensively or actively educate students with sexual knowledge, as CSE or school programs in the EU clearly do, but instead informs students with impractical information, useless in practice. This leads to students only gaining knowledge from their own experiences, which varies drastically and often results in students not gaining knowledge regarding their opposite gender. Also, the lack of education about sexual communication, especially consent, in addition to the exaggerated and distorted information online, leads to students having biased perspectives and further illustrates the need for reformation of Japanese sex education. Therefore, it is required that sex education provides accurate and equal information to all students and commences sex education from an earlier age for students to gain comprehensive and practical sexual knowledge that will assist them in living safe and healthy lives. Sex education is not all about sex and definitely does not encourage sexual behavior. It is simply a tool that empowers students to “understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives” (UNESCO, 2018, p. 16).

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Anna Matsutake

Anna is a sophomore student in the Global Connectivity program at AIU. Her essay “Low English Communicative Proficiency of Japanese Students: Need for English Class to Implement Communicative Activities” was written for Advanced Research Writing under Professor Friederich at AIU. Being able to communicate in English is crucial in this globalized world, yet many people have difficulty when it comes to speaking, which is why Anna became interested in its reasons and decided to look into this topic. Her research involves a survey asking about experiences in learning English in school, which reveals the causes of low English communication skills. She hopes education in Japan will take a step to change its style to encourage students to engage in communication in English.

Low English Communicative Proficiency of Japanese Students: Need to Implement Communicative Activities

Abstract

English established its status as a global language, and English competency is required to be successful in this globalized world. Despite this situation, Japan ranked low on the English proficiency test. People, including students, are incompetent, especially in terms of English speaking competency. This paper examines the factor why Japanese students' English speaking ability is low by looking into several perspectives: Linguistic differences between English and Japanese, psychological barriers, and competition inherent in English education in Japan. To further identify and analyze the crucial factors, a survey was conducted to find out the relationship between the level of high school and the content of English classes. It also examines the level of anxiety people feel when having conversations in English. The result showed that the content of English classes put emphasis on entrance examination-based learning when the high school ranked high in terms of academic achievement. As for anxiety levels, people felt more confident when they got more opportunities to be exposed to English communication. As a result of this research, I conclude that introducing English communication activities in class are effective in relieving the students' anxiety, encouraging them to get used to speaking English, and improving their speaking proficiency, which is crucial in the globalization period.

Keywords:

English education in Japan, Anxiety, Native speakerism, Entrance examinations, In-class communicative activities

Introduction

English is essential in this globalized world. According to Crystal (2012), approx-

imately 1.5 billion people in the world were competent in English by the early 20th century, and the number is steadily increasing. As the world has come to be globalized, the English language established its status as a global language. Nuttall (2019) indicates that low English proficiency can lead to limited opportunities to do business on a global scale. In Japan, English is also regarded as an essential language to be successful. However, Japanese people have relatively low English proficiency. Waniek (2022) reports that Japan ranked 78 out of 112 countries in English proficiency in the ranking by the EF Education First based in Switzerland in 2021, which is extremely low given that Japan is a developed country. Among various elements of English, Japanese language learners especially have been struggling with communication skills in English. According to Takeichi (2020), more than half of Japanese business people do not have confidence in their English speaking abilities because of their fluency and pronunciation. This is not just the case with adults, and students' proficiency is also low, especially in communication. In schools, it is mandatory for students in Japan to take English classes in their junior and senior high schools. In the new course of study, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology (2018) had set the goal of English classes to nurture English communicative skills which students can use to understand information and explain it in their words. Contrary to this sophisticated goal, McNeill (2022) states that he was surprised to communicate with university students who could not understand simple sentences even though they had been learning English for about ten years. As for high school students, according to the MEXT (n.d.), less than half of them possess the A2 level or higher in the Common European Framework of Reference

for Languages (CEFR), which means more than half of Japanese students are basic users or less. All of this leads us to an interesting problem or question with English education for Japanese students, especially senior high school students: Why do Japanese students have low competency in English communication despite the fact that English is mandatory for at least six years in senior and junior high school? This paper will investigate why Japanese students have low English proficiency in terms of communication. It focuses on linguistic differences between English and Japanese, psychological barriers, and barriers within the Japanese education system. Finally, this paper will analyze the relationship between Japanese students' low English proficiency and educational competition in Japan.

Literature Review

Linguistic Differences Between English and Japanese

Understanding and adapting to the linguistic differences between English and Japanese are one of the difficulties that Japanese people have when learning English. A language family is a group of languages that share the same origin (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Oxford University Press mentions that English, French, German, and Greek all belong to the Indo-European language family, and they have correspondence and similarities in terms of language structures. On the other hand, according to Vovin (2017), the family that Japanese belongs to has long been controversial but has recently been categorized as Japonic since it is an isolated language. From the research, one can understand that English and Japanese have completely different origins, which is closely connected to differences in the structures of languages. Researchers point out some key differences in grammar and structure between English and Japanese; the concept of singular and plural and word order (Senzaki et al., 2019; Lohmann and Takeda, 2014). Senzaki et al. explain that the English language requires to differentiate between singular and

plural nouns, such as cat and cats, whereas the Japanese language uses the number without changing the form of the noun to express the plurality. Word order is another example that is different between English and Japanese. In the article of Lohmann and Takeda, it is reported that there are differences in ordering words and phrases as they describe that shorter phrases are placed before longer ones in English, while Japanese show the opposite tendency. Lohmann and Takeda explain that English try to make a verb and their argument close to each other while Japanese does the opposite. As research indicates, English structure and that of Japanese are very different, which is partly because they belong to different language families. Due to this aspect, concepts that exist in English do not apply to Japanese, such as singular and plural and word order. Simmura and Bateson (1999) report that linguistic differences may interrupt the interpretation of conversation since people try to understand the target language through the norms of their native language, which makes them misunderstand the intentions of each other. Simmura and Bateson also state that if the listener misunderstands the speaker due to linguistic differences, it takes time to realize the communication breakdown. In this case, even though they believe they understand each other, it is possible that they have received completely opposite intentions. Therefore, the linguistic difference makes Japanese people struggle to get accustomed to English and is one of the barriers that they face when learning English speaking skills.

Psychological Barriers: Native Speakerism, Anxiety and Hesitation, and Cultural and Historical Attitude

The lack of understanding of World Englishes is another aspect that makes it difficult for Japanese people to communicate in English. English is spoken globally by a large number of people in many different countries in their own ways. In Japanese schools, however, most students learn English only from so-

called native speakers (Houghton and Rivers, 2013). Houghton and Rivers even state that the Japanese education systems “are looking specifically for native speakers” (p. 204). This situation is tightly connected with native-speakerism. Native-speakerism is an English Language Teaching (ELT) ideology that “those perceived as native speakers of English are considered to be better language models and to embody a superior Western teaching methodology than those perceived as non-native speakers” (Holliday, 2005, cited in Lowe and Kiczkowiak, 2016). Morrow (2004) reported that in Japan, few teachers are from countries other than English-speaking countries such as the U.S. or the U.K., even though non-native teachers can be positive role models for Japanese students. By learning with teachers from different countries, students can realize that English does not necessarily belong to native speakers. According to Houghton and Rivers, 2013, when non-Japanese people apply for ALT teachers, they have to show their passports to prove that they are native speakers of English. Even though non-native speakers are very fluent in English, they will have fewer opportunities for English teaching jobs just because they are not native speakers. This employment system well reflects that native speakerism is prevalent in Japan.

The lack of English variety appears not only in teachers but also in the materials. Galloway and Rose (2018) state that even though the world Englishes concept began to spread in the world, the teaching material fails to recognize the variety of English. To be specific about Japan, Morrow (2004) reports that the English as Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks published in Japan use standard American English or British English as a model. Although English is spoken in the world, and there are many different varieties, English education in Japan persists in native-speakerism, which prevents students from perceiving the concept of World Englishes. It is essential for students to know there are various kinds of English since people with whom they communicate in English are not necessarily native speakers who are from

countries such as the U.S., the U. K., and Canada. This limited opportunity to be exposed to a variety of Englishes causes students to feel a sense of inferiority that they are unable to communicate as native speakers do (Lowe and Kiczkowiak, 2016), which can be a factor that unmotivates them from learning English.

Psychological pressures such as anxiety and hesitation also cause learners to be less proficient in English communication. According to Sartaj and Syed Razaq (2020), not only low English proficiency but also low self-confidence, hesitation, and anxiety lead to low fluency in English communication. Sartaj and Syed Razaq also mention that fear of assessment or correction is the main reason that creates anxiety in students. Parra et. al. (2014) reported that students are afraid of making mistakes since they do not want to be embarrassed or labeled as foolish by peers. To be specific about Japan, Mahoney (2020) reported that students in Japan tend to be too afraid of making mistakes because of low self-confidence and think there is only one correct answer. Thus, unless they can find an obvious answer, they hesitate to speak up. Those studies suggest that students pursue to be perfect, and this causes them to feel pressure when speaking English, which eventually prevents students from practicing conversation or communication.

One further perspective on the issue of low English proficiency among Japanese students relates to the historical and cultural attitude toward English in Japan. Many people believe English is not essential for success. Okazaki (2020) explains from a historical perspective that because of *sakoku*, the self-isolation policy in the Edo period that lasted over 200 years, the movement of people and products was limited. The author states many people in Japan consider Japan a “homogeneous country” with a single language, which leads to the assumption and practice that English is not the element of one’s success. Chevasco (2019) even states that in Japan, one can be successful without English competency. This idea is related to the *Nihonjinron*, “an attempt

to construct the parameters of a distinctive Japanese cultural and national identity.” (Lid-dicoat, 2008, p.34). He explains that Japanese people had excluded people who were not originally from Japan based on this concept. Moreover, Reesor (2003) reports that English in Japan had long been regarded as a means to gain knowledge from outside Japan rather than to exchange opinions and communicate with non-Japanese people. It means Japan has put emphasis on the reception of knowledge and culture, not on introducing or articulating Japanese ideas to the world. As discussed, English communication had not been regarded as essential in Japan for a long period. While it may be questionable whether cultural and historical attitudes establish a part of the psychology of Japanese language learners, these traditional ways of thinking surely have a crucial impact on the low English proficiency of Japanese students.

The Competition Inherent in Japan’s Education System

English education has a great impact on English proficiency. One identified issue in the English education system in Japan is the memorization-based learning style for entrance exams. In Japan, the entrance examination is highly competitive. Goodman and Oka (2018) introduce a term that expresses this competitive situation as *Juken Jigoku*, which means ‘examination hell’. The competitiveness derives from the categorization of students using entrance exams. James and Benjamin (1988) state that entrance examinations categorize students into hierarchical groups based on their academic achievement, which tends to last permanently throughout their lives. They can proceed success route if they can pass the entrance exam and vice-versa. The competitive entrance examinations have an impact on what students learn in high school. According to Davis (2019), entrance exams in Japan are only about reading and listening, and they do not test writing and speaking ability. Because of this, Davis argues, the focus of the English classes is placed on reading and

listening, and students are required to memorize difficult phrases and vocabulary to get higher scores in the Japanese-style entrance examinations. James and Benjamin (1988) also state that the focus of the curriculum is on what materials are used and the quick recall of facts or information that is learned to win the entrance exams. Waniek (2022) describes English taught in Japan as *juken eigo*, in which the focus of English education is not on learning a communicative language but on acquiring a foreign language as a subject of entrance examinations. As those studies show, emphasis on entrance exam-based learning in English classes prevents students in Japan from having enough opportunities to learn practical English and practice conversation.

In addition to entrance examinations, the teaching style of English is the other factor that limits the opportunities to practice conversations. Nuttall (2019) criticizes the teaching style of Japan’s English class as “repressing and squeezing any hopes and extracting any independent thought and creativity” (p. 75). As Nuttall explains, English classes in Japan limit students’ ability to communicate in English and think creatively about their learning by focusing on examinations and theoretical elements such as grammar and translation. The education guideline by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been trying to overcome such learning styles in English education. MEXT (n.d.) explains in the curriculum guidelines that English education in high school should foster students’ speaking and writing abilities as well as reading and listening abilities to fully understand, express, and convey their thoughts or information. However, Nuttall (2019) indicates that this guideline is “full of contradictions and ambiguity” (p. 76) and a “one-dimensional one-size fits all approach” (p. 77). Waniek (2022) also states that even though the MEXT attempts to implement a communication-based approach in English classes, it persists in protecting national identity, and because of this, English classes remain providing activities that are test-orient-

ed. These studies show that even though the Japanese government creates policies to improve the English communicative skills of students, the attempt fails to cultivate students' English speaking ability due to less developed policies and persistence in fostering the identity of students as Japanese.

Methodology

Guiding Question

Among the topics discussed in the literature review, educational competition seems to have a strong connection to the low English proficiency of students. I conducted a survey to discover the relationship between the level of school and the content of English classes, whether their classes focus on entrance examinations or not. Some questions also asked how anxious people feel toward English communication when they are in high school and the present to examine if the amount of exposure to English communication relates to gaining confidence in English speaking. My research question is, "How do education systems in Japanese schools that focus on competition affect the English proficiency and confidence level of students in English communication?"

Setting and Participants

The participants of my survey are people who graduated from high schools in Japan. Since my research focus is on English speaking competency and English education in Japan, it is important to ask people who completed high school English education in Japan. Among the 42 participants, about 86% graduated from the general course of high school, and 14% graduated from the international course in Japan. Although I do not limit the age of participants, all of them are university students. About 31 people are AIU students, one person is a university student in English related department, and ten people are neither of them. This categorization by universities is necessary since it can reveal the relationship between the amount of exposure to English and the difference in confidence levels when

they are in high school and in university. The age of participants ranged from 19 to 22, with more than half of them aged 19. This survey was implemented completely anonymously and voluntarily with Google Forms.

Data Collection

The survey was posted on Facebook for about a week, from June 29 to July 5, 2022. The answers were also collected via Instagram from July 8 to July 9. All the participants via Facebook are AIU students, and participants from Instagram consist of both AIU students and others. The questions consist of several multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. The participants are asked about the level of their high school, which is called Hensachi. The questions also asked about how confident they were in English communication when they were in high school and university and the reason for the change in confidence level.

Findings

Activities in Class and the Level of High Schools

To disclose the relationship between competition and English class activities, I asked two questions. One was hensachi of high schools, and the other was the activities in class. Participants were asked to choose three activities that best describe their English class from a series of choices. Overall, more than 60% of participants chose grammar, translation, and preparation for entrance exams as what they mainly did in their English classes. When examining each response, 18 people selected the combination of these three activities, and nine people chose two of those. Two people experienced only preparation for entrance exams. From the result, it can be said that 29 people out of 42 experienced exam-based classes to some extent. In order to look at this tendency more in detail and find relationships with competition, I also asked hensachi of participants' high schools. Hensachi is "a norm-referenced test score stand-

ardised to have a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10” (Goodman and Oka, 2018, p. 581). People reference their hensachi to decide which schools to apply to in the entrance examination. When looking into hensachi and class activities, there are 24 people who were in high schools whose hensachi were more than 66, which is usually regarded as higher-level high schools. 20 of them chose

the combination of two or three elements of grammar, translation, and/or preparation for entrance exams as their class activities. Two people who answered that preparation for the entrance exams is all that they did in English classes belonged to high schools with hensachi of more than 71. Among 29 people who experienced exam-based classes, 20 of them went to high-hensachi high schools. From this result,

Figure 1: Hensachi and the activities in English classes

1	What is Hensachi of your high school?高校の偏差値を教えてください	What did you do in your communication English class? Please select 3 choices that best describe your English class in high school. コミュニケーション英語の授業ではどのようなことをしましたか?もっとも当てはまるものを3つ選んでください。
2	66~70	discussion ディスカッション, presentation プレゼンテーション, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
3	66~70	discussion ディスカッション, presentation プレゼンテーション, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
4	56~60	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
5	71~	discussion ディスカッション, presentation プレゼンテーション, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
6	71~	translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
7	56~60	discussion ディスカッション, presentation プレゼンテーション, essay writing エッセイ
8	61~65	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
9	~50	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
10	66~70	translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
11	61~65	presentation プレゼンテーション, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
12	51~55	translation 日本語訳, discussion ディスカッション, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
13	66~70	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
14	66~70	preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習, presentation プレゼンテーション, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
15	71~	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
16	71~	translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
17	61~65	debate ディベート, essay writing エッセイ, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
18	66~70	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
19	61~65	discussion ディスカッション, presentation プレゼンテーション, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
20	~50	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
21	71~	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
22	51~55	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, discussion ディスカッション
23	~50	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
24	71~	preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
25	61~65	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
26	66~70	grammar 文法, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習, essay writing エッセイ
27	51~55	grammar 文法, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
28	51~55	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
29	71~	preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
30	71~	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
31	66~70	grammar 文法, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習, discussion ディスカッション
32	71~	discussion ディスカッション, presentation プレゼンテーション, debate ディベート
33	61~65	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
34	66~70	translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
35	66~70	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
36	56~60	grammar 文法, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習, 日記, ディクテーション, シャドウイング
37	71~	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, Communication activity 英語でのコミュニケーションアクティビティ
38	66~70	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, essay writing エッセイ
39	71~	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
40	66~70	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
41	51~55	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
42	66~70	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習
43	56~60	grammar 文法, translation 日本語訳, preparation for the entrance exams 受験のための演習

Note. Pink highlightings show the hensachi of more than 66 on the left and the class activities that consist of grammar, translation, and/or preparation for entrance exams.

Figure 2: The confidence and anxiety level of participants and the reason for the change (Green is for less confident and blue for more confident.)

1	What level of anxiety did you have in English communication when you were a high school student? 高校時代、英語でコミュニケーションをとるとき感じる不安の度合いはどれくらいでしたか?	How do you rate your confidence in English communication now? 今、英語でのコミュニケーションにどれくらい不安(自信)がありますか?	What cause you to be more confident or less confident if your confidence level changed? 上の2つの質問で自信の度合いが変わった人はその理由を教えてください。
2	2	2	
3	5	3	
4	1	2	大学の入学式し英語でコミュニケーションをとる機会が増えたから、しかし同時に同世代の周りのレベルの高さもより感じたので不安はまだ多い
5	5	1	できる人が周りにいっぱい
6		1	2 英語を使う機会(慣れる機会)が大学入学後に大幅に増えたから。
7		4	4
8		1	2 普段の英語
9			
10	3	3	1 自分と同じ年代で英語が流暢に話せる人とたくさん出会ったから。
11	3	2	
12	2	4	4 大学で実用的な相違などを学んだり、AIUはお互いを理解し合おうという雰囲気があるので、コミュニケーションがしやすくなった。
13	2	3	3 英語でコミュニケーションをとる機会が圧倒的に増えたから。
14	2	4	4 英語でコミュニケーションをとる機会がかなり増えたから。
15	2	3	3 AIUで成長したから
16	2	3	3 英語で話す機会が増えたから
17	1	4	4 AIUに来て外国人と英語のみでコミュニケーションすることが多くなったので
18	1	3	3 AIUで4年も勉強しているから
19	3	4	4 aiuに来て日常的に英語を使うようになり、拙い英語でも伝えられるという経験を重ねたから。
20	2	3	3 AIUで英語の授業を切り抜けたから。
21	2	3	
22	2	4	4 英語力が上がったと思っているから
23	4	2	2 周りの英語力のレベルが変わったので以前より自信がなくなった。
24	2	1	1 AIUに入ってから英語をツールとして流ちょうに話せる人に沢山出会ったから。
25	3	4	4 Because I've gotten more opportunities to speak in English since I entered AIU.
26	1	2	2 AIUの授業でディスカッションなど英語を使ってコミュニケーションを取ることが増えたから。でもできる人との差を見てまだ不安に感じます
27	1	2	
28	2	2	
29	4	2	2 大学に入ってから、周囲がとても英語ができて自信がなくなった。
30	2	3	3 大学になり英語を話す機会が増えたから。
31	2	2	
32	4	4	
33	3	4	4 AIUで実践的英語をディベートやプレゼンを通して養われたから
34	2	2	
35	3	3	
36	5	4	4 AIU生は英語ネイティブの人や英語ができる人が多いから。
37	3	3	
38	1	1	
39	1	3	3 大学で、英語で話す機会が増えたから
40	2	2	
41	3	3	
42	1	1	
43	2	3	3 大学で英会話を始めたから。(大学の英語支援課のプログラム)

Note. I translated the responses and reorganized them into categories; people who became more confident and people who lost confidence.

I can identify the tendency that high hensa-chi high school put emphasis on the entrance exam-based knowledge and implement the classes so that students can acquire knowledge to win examinations.

Anxiety and Confidence Level of Participants in High School and the Present

To examine the change in confidence levels and the reason, I set two Likert-scale questions (1/anxious - 5/confident) and asked about the confidence level when participants were in high school and the present. I also asked the reason for those who experienced a change in their confidence by using an open-ended question. Among 42 people, 13

people experienced no change in their confidence level. 21 people answered they are more confident now than when they were in high school. As the reason, they raised the amount of exposure to English. Most people responded that they have more opportunities to talk in English in universities or in their daily lives, and there, they have learned more practical English. On the other hand, some people feel less confident due to their exposure to English. 8 AIU students answered that they are less confident because there are many people around them who can facilitate English better than themselves (Figure 2). Exposure to communication-based English can positively affect the confidence level of students, but it can also make them feel anxious about communication. Regarding anxiety, a question was asked to disclose the reason why participants hesitate to speak up in class. They were provided with choices, and they selected all the elements that apply as reasons. The major reason was that they were less confident. Participants also chose shyness and fear of making mistakes in front of peers (Figure 3). Those answers can relate to what Mahoney (2020) reports. Mahoney states that Japanese students tend to think there is only one correct answer. This way of

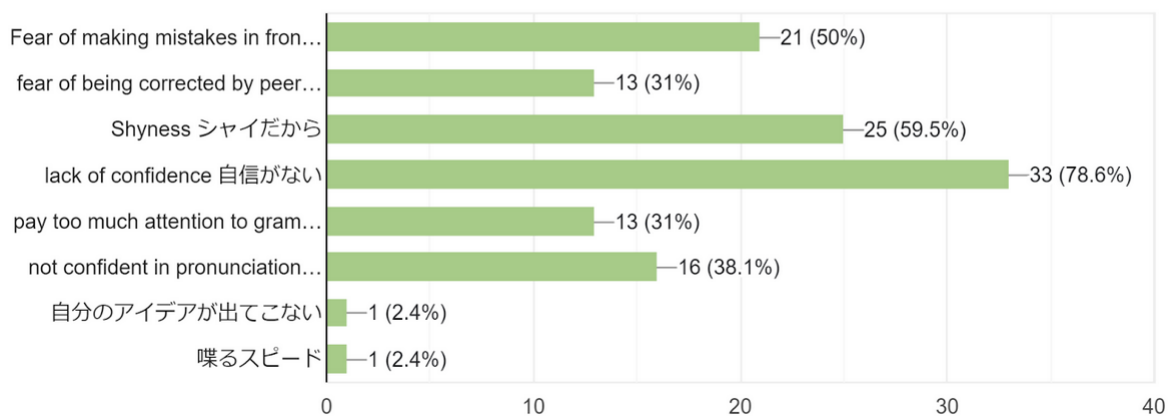
thinking leads to fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence when they attempt to speak up in class.

Reasons that participants became more confident:

There is more opportunity to communicate in English. I still feel anxious because people around me can communicate very well. After entering university, I had much more opportunities to use English and get used to it. Daily use of English
In university, I learned practical English. People in AIU try to create mutual understandings, which makes it easier to communicate in English.
There are much more opportunities to communicate in English.
The opportunities to talk in English increased. I made progress at AIU.
I have more opportunities to talk in English. The opportunities to talk only in English with international students helped me after entering AIU.
I have studied for four years at AIU. I use English daily at AIU. Through communication, I realized that I could make myself un-

Figure 3: The reason for hesitating to speak up in class

What is the reasons that prevent you from speaking up in class? Please select everything that applies. あなたが授業で発言をするのをため...ありますか？あてはまるものすべてを選んでください
 42 responses



Notes. Translations of the last two choices since the participants chose “other” and stated their own opinions in Japanese: 1) I cannot come up with my own ideas. 2) The speed people speak is too fast.

derstood even though my English is not perfect. I survived the classes conducted in English at AIU.

I think I am more competent in English.

Because I've gotten more opportunities to speak in English since I entered AIU.

I have more opportunities to communicate in English through discussions in classes at AIU. I still feel anxious when meeting people who are very proficient in English, though.

I have much more opportunities to talk in English.

I learned practical English at AIU through debates and presentations.

I have more opportunities to talk in English at university.

I started the English conversation practice through a program offered by the university.

Reasons that participants became less confident:

There are many people who can do better than me.

Because I met people of the same generation who are very fluent in English.

I got less confident due to the change in the English proficiency of people around me.

After entering AIU, I met people who use English as a tool for communication and facilitate it very well.

I got less confidence after entering AIU since people around me were so good at English.

Discussion

The survey result revealed the correlation between the hensachi of high schools and the activities in English classes. What students learn in high schools with high hensachi has a strong connection with knowledge or preparation for entrance examinations. Another finding is that although exposure to English communication can lead to creating anxiety, it can contribute to students gaining confidence in English communication. Therefore, implementing practical communicative activities in high school English classes is necessary to nurture students' English speaking proficiency.

As discussed in the literature review, the curricula of schools emphasize the memorization of knowledge to be successful in the entrance exams. The survey results proved this point since the focus of English classes in high hensachi high schools is on knowledge-based learning such as grammar, translation, and preparation for examinations. According to Goodman and Oka (2018), being successful in entrance examinations and entering top universities in Japan have ensured employment opportunities for large companies. Goodman and Oka also report that people accept this system because they believe anyone can succeed if they make enough effort in memorization-based exams. This norm of regarding educational background as an important element of future career success is derived from historical context. LeTendre et al. (2006) explain that in the Meiji period, the focus of education is producing elite workforces that lead others toward modernization. The quality educational background itself, therefore, can lead them to quality jobs and financial security (LeTendre et al., 2006). These studies show the importance of succeeding in entrance examinations and entering top universities in order to have quality future careers. This way of thinking makes high school English classes less practical by applying a memorization-based approach to entrance examinations.

The survey results indicate that people gain confidence through opportunities to use English. Participants who gained confidence answered that they have much more opportunities to communicate in English at university than at high schools. Hutabarat and Simanjuntak (2019) report that limited exposure to English-speaking environments creates anxiety, and anxiety can cause students to lose confidence and be discouraged from participating in class activities. Moreover, Waniek (2022) states that young English learners encounter few environments where English communication is required. These studies relate to the survey results. The lack of confidence is the most popular reason that makes students hesitate to speak up in class. In addition to this, 39

out of 42 participants of the survey answered that Japanese students do not have enough opportunities to be exposed to English outside the classes (see the 9th chart in Appendix 1). Thus, it can be concluded that the lack of communication opportunities in English makes students less confident in English communication and prevent them from gaining English speaking competency. Even though exposure to English communication is crucial, we should also note that some AIU students have lost confidence because of such exposure. As a result of communicative activities in class, they lost confidence after realizing that students around them were better at English communication.

For Japanese students to be more proficient in English communication, implementing practical communicative activities is essential. Mainichi Japan (2022) reports that more companies have been adopting English as an official language by following Rakuten Inc., which decided to use English as their official language in 2012. English communicative skills are not vital in entrance exams but are crucial in this globalized world. Cultivating high school students' English communicative skills benefits them in terms of their future success. As discussed, English classes in Japan lack opportunities to practice communicative English due to the emphasized importance of entrance examinations. Integrating communicative activities in English class, thus, can contribute to students being more competent in English communication. When doing so, paying attention to students' psychological pressure is important. As the survey result shows, some students feel anxious because of a sense of inferiority. Inada (2021) argues that students who are not confident in their abilities might hesitate to speak up, being afraid of making mistakes or not being understood. Language learning anxiety is not what students need to deal with by themselves (Andrade and Williams, 2009). Andrade and Williams argue the necessity of teachers to be aware of situations that can cause anxiety and attempt to minimize the negative effects of the anxiety. To encourage students to be more proficient in

English speaking, providing communication activities as well as supporting those who feel anxious are important.

The limitation of this study is the lack of investigation of the challenges or effects of incorporating communicative activities in English classes. Since the importance of entrance exams is emphasized and regarded as significant for a future career, some students, parents, and teachers are not willing to accept this suggestion. Therefore, in my further research, I would like to examine issues in introducing communicative activities into English classes and how they should be dealt with or find balance with classes based on entrance examinations.

Conclusion

The reason why Japanese students are not proficient in English speaking is because of linguistic differences, psychological barriers such as anxiety, native speakerism, and attitudes toward English, and the barriers within the education system. Among those factors, competition for entrance examinations and students' anxiety are very problematic. The higher the *hensachi* is, the more the English classes focus on entrance exam-based learning, which focuses on knowledge of grammar and translation or preparation for the entrance exams. Exposure to English communication and practical use of English can contribute to relieving the anxiety of students, but excessive exposure can cause them to feel more anxious by comparing each other's competencies. Therefore, the English class should introduce more communicative activities to encourage students to be more proficient in English speaking. There might be people who disagree with this idea because English communication skills have nothing to do with entrance examinations. In this globalized era, however, the ability to communicate in English is significant due to the status of English as a global language. This is the exact time to take gradual steps to support the future working generation to be competent in English speaking for them to be successful in this globalized world.

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Nanako Akiyama

Nanako graduated from the Global Studies program in March 2023. Her essay “Characteristics of Foreign Language Learning in Japanese University Students with Asperger Syndrome or High-functioning Autism: What Strengths or Weaknesses Do They Tend to Have?” was written for ‘Seminar in Transnational Studies’ under Professor Satoko at AIU. Because of her own experience of studying abroad in France, Nanako became interested in the topic of foreign language learning in people with Asperger Syndrome (ASD). Her research on the topic involved interviews with 7 ASD students at universities in Japan. Few studies have been done in this research field, so she believes that her research revealed various new and important findings that could be helpful for ASD students and their educators.

Characteristics of Foreign Language Learning in Japanese University Students with Asperger Syndrome or High-functioning Autism: What Strengths or Weaknesses Do They Tend to Have?

Abstract

Existing research explains that children with Asperger Syndrome or high-functioning autism tend to be troubled in communication. However, as researchers admit, the characteristics of their foreign language learning have not yet been fully explored. This study investigates Japanese university students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who have various language backgrounds. The purpose of this study is to understand the features of foreign language learning in Japanese university students with ASD, aiming to give appropriate advice to them and their educators. Japanese university students who are diagnosed with ASD participated in an interview. The interview questions were about their ASD diagnostic backgrounds, language backgrounds, their strengths and weaknesses in foreign language learning, satisfaction with special academic support, and so on. The findings indicate that ASD students are more likely to have trouble in tasks in groups and listening exams while having strong memory and word analogy abilities. Interview participants also talked about their fears that people who are in charge of their support might lack understanding of their disorders. Some of the participants even experienced discrimination, which hinders them from receiving special academic support. The findings imply that ASD students tend to require support, especially regarding group work and listening tasks. The author finally emphasizes that it is a most important point that educators provide support based on a solid understanding of developmental disorders and each individual's traits.

Keywords: Asperger Syndrome, ASD, developmental disorder, language acquisition, learning strategies, Japan, university students

Introduction

Today, there are various tools to help people with physical disabilities. For example, in school, we see several students wearing glasses, and no one wonders about it. What about those with developmental disorders? People with developmental disorders are sometimes not recognizable just by appearance alone. Therefore, necessary cares and supports are often unavailable for people with developmental disorders. Let me describe my own experience as a foreign language learner with Asperger Syndrome. I evaluate myself to be good at foreign language learning in general since I learn more complicated content than my friends of the same age with the same amount of learning. When I was a junior high school student, I was capable of reading English sentences for entrance examinations to universities. However, I gradually realized that my foreign language abilities were inconsistent. I had higher reading and writing skills and lower listening and speaking skills. At the age of twenty, I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome Disorder (ASD). After listening to explanations about my disorders from a doctor, I started considering that some of my difficulties and talents in foreign language learning might be attributed to ASD. For example, when I was studying French in my study abroad program in France at the age of 21, I struggled a lot to improve my French listening skills. I surmise that it was partly due to a lack of communication skills and abilities to process auditory information. In contrast, I achieved the highest scores in the class in all the sectors except for listening, which is inferred to be because of my strong interest and concentration in the foreign language (I have studied six foreign languages, English, French, Latin, Provence, Russian and Spanish). From my experience, I thought it would be useful to

study the tendencies of foreign language skills of people with ASD who have unusual characteristics in their skills, which motivated me to conduct this research.

Asperger Syndrome, or high-functioning autism, is a disorder that causes individuals to experience hindered communication. Possible mechanisms of why they tend to struggle in communication have been studied by various researchers. However, regarding foreign language learning of people with ASD, there are positive findings. One study suggests that ASD children tend to be capable of succeeding as bilinguals (Delage & Durrleman, 2015). In contrast to research on communication problems in individuals with ASD, fewer studies have been done to investigate foreign language learning in people with ASD. Furthermore, even the limited number of studies in this field tend to focus on children, and teenagers or adult language learners are less likely to be investigated, which implies the academic significance of investigating them. Regarding the case of Japan, although it has a higher rate of individuals with ASD compared to the global data, Japan seems to lack special academic support for students with ASD, so it is essential to seek for ways to provide meaningful supports for them.

For all these reasons, it is essential to study the foreign language learning traits of Japanese people with ASD. This paper examines what strengths and weaknesses in foreign language learning Japanese university students tend to have. Based on the literature review, I hypothesized that ASD students tend to struggle in speaking and listening tasks because of a lack of communication skills. To examine this hypothesis, I interviewed seven Japanese university students with ASD who learn different foreign languages. I asked about their ASD diagnostic backgrounds, language backgrounds, purposes, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses in foreign language learning. Based on the interview findings, I gained insights into the foreign language learning traits of students with ASD. The research intends to give consequential advice to

their supporters.

The next section explains the literature review on research about communication and foreign language skills of people with ASD. This section is followed by a method section, which explains data collection and seven interview participants. The section is followed by findings, which is about their strengths and weaknesses in foreign language learning and their satisfaction with special academic support from universities. The final section concludes the paper by summarizing the main findings and discussing them. The section also includes the limitations of my research and implications for future research.

Literature Review:

Research on communication and foreign language skills of people with ASD

Definition and characteristics of Asperger Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Asperger Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder that causes individuals to have impaired language and communication skills. Lorig (2010) defines ASD as, in short, a life-long disorder that affects individuals through delayed social development, which includes atypical verbal and nonverbal communication. Individuals with ASD also tend to have “repetitive or restrictive patterns of thought and behavior” (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2022). That is, they are likely to think or behave repeatedly in a specific way. According to Harvard Health Publishing (2014), people with this syndrome find it difficult to understand social conventions, read social cues, and therefore, make friends although they have “normal or sometimes superior intelligence.” Harvard Health Publishing (2014) introduces a definition of Asperger’s disorder suggested by the American Psychiatric Association (2000), which is the following:

“Definition of Asperger's disorder: In a child

or adult with no deficiencies in overall intellectual development, self-help skills, or language,

A. At least two of the following:

1. Difficulty using gaze, facial expressions, gestures, and body posture normally in social interactions.
2. Failure to develop appropriate relationships with others the same age.
3. Apparent lack of spontaneous desire to share interests, achievements, or pleasures with others.
4. Failure to reciprocate, socially or emotionally.

B. At least one of the following:

1. Abnormally intense preoccupation with any single interest, or preoccupation with an abnormally narrow interest.
2. Rigid insistence on certain seemingly pointless routines or rituals.
3. Stereotyped and repetitive movements.
4. Preoccupation with parts of objects.”

Delage and Durrleman (2015) denote that 1 in 68 children is estimated to have ASD, which is equivalent to approximately 1.47%. In the case of the United States, under federal law, students with developmental disorders, including ASD, have the right to receive an individual education plan that meets their needs. For instance, teacher's aids, tutoring, a special curriculum, or special schools are available.

The current status of ASD in Japan

Japan has a higher percentage of people diagnosed with ASD than the global data. According to Sasayama et al. (2021), it is reported in three recent studies that the prevalence or incidence of ASD exceeds 3%. The authors calculate that in Japan, in the decade between 2009 to 2019, the number of ASD diagnoses increased, which alludes to the increasing necessity to support those with ASD (p. 2). Kanai et al. (2014) also state that lately, in Japan, there is an increasing number of adults with devel-

opmental disorders, and especially those with ASD are showing a remarkable increase.

Research on communication characteristics of individuals with ASD

Since the main symptom of Asperger Syndrome is impairment in communication, the majority of research on the language skills of people with ASD focuses on their communication skills. Researchers suggest possible reasons why individuals with Asperger Syndrome or high-functioning autism tend to have trouble in daily conversation. Lorig (2010) reports that individuals with Asperger Syndrome and high-functioning autism tend to face difficulties in understanding the pragmatic meaning of a speech, although they have an average IQ and average language abilities. In other words, language proficiencies alone are insufficient for leading smooth communication. She provides the following three possible explanations for their deficits. First, they are likely to continue to speak when they are supposed to stop. Second, they are less capable of keeping focused on the relevant contextual facts, which makes them deliver inappropriate statements. Third, they have a poor ability to understand other people's beliefs or knowledge. Delage and Durrleman (2015) also reveal that people with ASD experience hindered communication because of a lack of ability to take on the perspective of others, which is explained as the “theory of mind”. These researchers imply that, in short, people with ASD often fail to make use of relevant information and lack mind-reading abilities, which makes it difficult for them to communicate with others. While these research results are provided, it is necessary to consider the deficits on the basis of individuals because each autistic person is different from another, as Lorig (2010) emphasizes in the conclusion part. In addition, Gordon (2007) signifies that even one individual with autism can have multiple elements that contribute to their difficulties. In other words, their difficulties in communication are caused by various factors.

Research on foreign language skills of individuals with ASD

Although research on their communication features perceives ASD as a negative factor in their language, research regarding their foreign language abilities provides different perspectives. Delage and Durrleman (2015) investigated the relationships between bilingualism and Asperger Syndrome. The subjects of their study were 54 children, 23 of whom are bilingual, and the rest monolingual. They live in Guangzhou in, China and the average age is five years old. They speak one or several of the following languages: Mandarin, Yue, Hakka, Xiang, and Southern Min. As a result of the research, the authors concluded that bilingualism does not negatively affect the linguistic development of ASD children. Moreover, it is inferred that their exposure to two languages has an advantage in their pragmatic competencies in those languages (Delage & Durrleman, 2015). Nevertheless, there is a systematic report that parents of bilingual and multilingual children with ASD are advised not to keep bilingual or multilingual environments at home, for which the effect is not proven (Delage & Durrleman, 2015). They finally confirm that, at least according to the present knowledge, ASD children tend to be capable of flourishing as bilingual or multilingual.

Missing points of existing research, the importance and uniqueness of my research

As mentioned above, in contrast to the research on the communication skills of people with ASD, there is a limited number of studies that focus on their foreign language skills. In addition, among all research concerned with ASD or autism, research on adult subjects with ASD is quite rare. Howlin et al (2015) insist that in almost all ASD research, the focus is on children. Murphy et al. (2016) also denote that there is a shortage of health services research for adults with ASD, such as “identification of comorbid health difficulties, rigorous treatment trials (pharmacological

and psychological), development of new pharmacotherapies, transition and aging across the lifespan, sex differences, life skills, consideration of the views of people with ASD, and cost and efficiency of services” (p. 1669).

Existing research reveals a great deal about the communication obstacles that people with ASD tend to face, the possible reasons for them, and the prevalence of ASD in Japan. However, it lacks research on tendencies in foreign language learning of individuals with ASD and helpful information or advice for them. For this reason, it is vital to investigate the features of foreign language proficiencies of Japanese university students with ASD, which is the main theme of this paper. Based on the literature review, I hypothesized that students with ASD are more likely to struggle in improving their speaking and listening skills in foreign languages because of their incapacity to communicate with others. To examine this hypothesis, I interviewed seven Japanese university students with ASD. The research is significant because it sheds light on the strengths and weaknesses of foreign language learners with ASD, possibly allowing them to receive meaningful support and recommend language learning strategies especially dedicated to them. The paper also suggests what kinds of support educators are expected to provide for individuals with ASD learning foreign languages.

Methods

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews, which took one to three hours each, were conducted with 7 ASD students at universities in Japan who were willing to participate. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with three participants who lived near my residence, and interviews with the other four participants were conducted via Zoom. These interviews took place in Japanese. The purpose of conducting interviews was to gain a deep understanding of participants' experiences, characteristics, and thoughts regarding their foreign language acquisition and developmental disorders.

Participants

Seven of the survey participants participated in an interview. All of them are Japanese university students with ASD studying at universities in Japan. They go to different universities in different prefectures in Japan. They will be called participants A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. Detailed descriptions of each interview participant regarding their ASD traits and language backgrounds are given in the next chapter.

Findings

Participants' background: Process up to diagnosis, difficulties in life and school-work

Before analyzing the characteristics of interview participants' foreign language skills, their ASD diagnostic background and educational backgrounds are described in this chapter.

Participant A was diagnosed with ASD three years ago when she was a freshman at a university. She took tests for developmental disorders at the recommendation of her parent. Her current main difficulties are that she cannot get along with people and that she cannot understand connections between one thing and another. Looking back on her past, she feels that she used to be bad at getting along with her friends since she was in nursery school. She also used to be insensitive to changes in the outside temperature and had trouble regulating her body temperature. She went to a public elementary, junior high, and high school. Her high school focused on preparing students to get into high-ranking universities. When preparing for entrance examinations to universities, she tended to spend more time on what she wanted to study, not on what she was supposed to study. In other words, she sometimes had trouble planning her studies by considering her priorities. When she was a sophomore and junior, she used to take all the courses online because of COVID-19. She occasionally had to complete tasks in groups for English classes, but for oth-

er classes, her tasks were mainly submissions of reports. She used to take a French course at university, but she does not continue learning it.

Participant B is 23 years old and has not been aware of her ASD traits until recently. She got an ASD diagnosis this year. She has no difficulties in talking with people when there is a clear objective, as she did when having this interview. However, she thinks that she is not good at talking with people when there is no objective, so it is especially difficult for her to chat in a group. She went to a public elementary, junior high, and high school. Before entering university, some specific things in life were difficult for her, but she used to think that she was just not good at them and that it was not necessary for her to see a doctor. Her mother was also unaware of her ASD traits since she had had no trouble in her studies at school. After entering university, she did not fit in with the people around her and decided to take a leave of absence from the university. At that time, she had symptoms of depression and started to relate her difficulties to ASD, which was why she went to a hospital. At university, her classes are basically lecture-style, but some classes include group discussions or group research. In addition to English class, she used to take a Swahili class and made more effort than students in the same class.

Participant C received a diagnosis of ASD and ADHD when they were a 15-year-old high school student. They went to a hospital because of symptoms of an adjustment disorder and sleeping disorder, not because of symptoms of developmental disorders. They did not even know the concept of developmental disorders at the time they were diagnosed. Parents and teachers did not notice their ASD traits because they used to be an easy-going child with good grades. However, looking back on their childhood, they were often incapable of understanding other people's feelings. When they received a diagnosis, they felt relieved to know that "they were not inhuman, but were one type of human with this kind of characteristics". The diagnosis was also

useful to learn the reasons and mechanisms for their difficulties. Although they recognized their disorder in a positive way, their parents had a poor understanding of it, which made them disappointed. For example, their parents hoped that their ASD traits will recover in the future. They went to a public elementary, junior high, and high school. When they were a high school student, they often talked with their ALT during break time. At university, they take classes about Japanese literature and gender in Japanese society in English because they are basically for international students. They understand approximately 60% to 70% of the content of those two classes. Other than them, they take all the classes, including a German class, in Japanese. They had chances to consult about their gender identity in English.

Participant D was diagnosed with ASD and ADHD at the age of 22. He started to think of the possibility of having ASD by himself after entering university, but before that, he was completely unaware of it. He thinks that it was because of fewer social interactions, which did not allow him to know what other people used to think about him. He does not even know whether people around him used to be aware of his ASD traits or not. When he received a diagnosis, he was relieved because he could start trying to deal with his difficulties. He went to a public elementary, junior high, and high school. At university, he is majoring in foreign languages and is learning English, Russian, Latin, and Chinese. He has a few lecture-style classes. Most of the classes require him to complete group works that are often discussion and presentation tasks.

Participant E always used to feel that he had different senses and preferences from students of the same age since kindergarten. He had a strong interest in mathematics and history. He knew the multiplication table before he entered elementary school, so he was always bored with math classes at elementary class. When he was a junior high school student, he was learning college-level history. His

mother took him to see a pediatrician when he was bullied in the fifth grade at elementary school but did not receive a diagnosis at that time. He was diagnosed with ASD and ADHD when he was a first-grade student at junior high school. According to him, his main symptoms are incapacity to grasp the sense of distance with people and hypersensitivity to bright light. According to a result of the IQ test he took at a hospital, he is not good at working with his hands but has excellent logical and verbal skills. He went to a public elementary, junior high, and high school. In high school, he was bullied again and had to transfer to a correspondence high school that allowed him to gain credits without attending classes in a classroom. He now attends a correspondence university that offers most courses online. When he was in junior high school, he learned Korean a little but does not continue it anymore. He studies English at university and is interested in the Ainu language as well. When Participant F was two years old, his grandmother realized that he was a difficult child to raise. For instance, he could not go home from nursery school when he was told to do so. When he was 6 years old, his parents decided to take him to a hospital. He was informed of ASD and ADHD when he was ten years old, but he guesses that he had already gotten a diagnosis at the age of six because he started taking medication at that age. Although he has never been in special needs class, there was always a teacher in charge of him other than his homeroom teacher since he was 9, which was sometimes unacceptable for him and made him irritated. He always used to feel implicit pressure from his parents to adjust to society, so he has a strong belief that he is the one who needs to make effort to fit into society, which is why he never considered receiving special academic support from the university. Because of this belief, he has read a lot of books about developmental disorders and tried to deal with his difficulties on his own. For example, he has a strong awareness that he can never enter conversations during drinking parties with multiple people

because, from his experiences, he thinks that he cannot speak the way that is expected in that situation. He went to a public elementary and junior high school and dropped out of correspondence high school. After that, he studied the contents of high school education all by himself and entered a correspondence university. At university, his tasks are mostly summarizing the contents of books sent by the university and writing reports about them rather than doing his own research. Only a small number of courses require him to engage in interpersonal tasks such as discussions. He does not continue learning English anymore, but he reads English theses in a field of his interest only when it is necessary. In parallel with his studies, he currently works as a freelancer using his filmmaking skills.

Participant G was advised by his homeroom teacher to see a doctor due to suspected developmental disorders when he was a fifth-grade student at elementary school. He placed great importance on moral correctness and was bitterly opposed to those who did not conform to it. For instance, he was about to punch his friend for cheating during soccer time. He was diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) when he was in elementary school, which made him associate his difficulties with ADHD and laid the foundation for the belief that it was not ASD. He used to have a high language ability since his childhood, which could be another reason why people around him did not notice his ASD traits. As a moderator of class meetings, he played the role of impromptu speaking, summarizing the conclusions of discussions, and respecting the opinions of each student. He went to a public elementary and junior high school and entered a public high school. He did not get along with people at high school, and had a complicated home environment at that time, which was why he had to transfer to a private correspondence school. He did not fit in with the environment of the new school, so he transferred again to a public correspondence school. At the high school, he established his own strategies of language

learning. He self-studied other subjects as well because the level of his high school classes was not good enough for university entrance exams. He entered a public university mostly through self-study, so he thinks that he is relatively talented in language learning. At university, a teacher in charge of his research paper realized that he was having trouble living and recommended for him to see a psychiatrist, which led to an ASD diagnosis at the age of 19. He is traumatized by being denied personality by university students and staff who lacked understanding and is less willing to talk about his developmental disorders to people at the university. He took English and Russian classes at university and studied Korean and Chinese by himself.

Eight categories to analyze characteristics of foreign language learning of ASD participants

In the process of investigating responses about the features of foreign language learning of the interview participants, I recorded quotes from the responses. The quotes are coded into eight categories that are skills or abilities regarding: “retention/memories”, “attention to details”, “word analogy”, “communication”, “listening/auditory information processing”, “contextual understanding”, “verbalization” and “concentration”. “Retention/memories” refers to their skills of memorizing vocabulary in foreign languages. In the section about “attention to details”, participants’ tendency to pay attention to small details when learning grammar is described. “Word analogy” is about the analogy ability that all the interview participants utilize to memorize new words. The “communication” section features participants’ hardships in participating in group work, including discussions and presentations. “Auditory information processing” is mainly about listening exams, which participants tend to struggle in. In the section about “contextual understanding”, participants’ incapacity to understand the whole meaning of texts is explained. “Verbalization” is separate from “communication”, which is interactions

with others, and means their skills to express themselves in writing and speaking. “Concentration” seems to be deeply connected with their interests in topics of foreign language learning. These eight categories were further classified into three groups that are “strengths of foreign language learners with ASD”, “weaknesses of foreign language learners with ASD”, and “ASD traits that can be both positive and negative in foreign language learning”. The eight categories are classified as follows.

Strengths of foreign language learners with ASD:

“retention/memories”,
 “attention to details”,
 “word analogy”;

Weaknesses of foreign language learners with ASD:

“communication”,
 “listening/auditory information processing”,
 “contextual understanding”;

ASD traits that can be both positive and negative in foreign language learning:

“verbalization”,
 “concentration”.

Strengths of foreign language learners with ASD

[Retention/memories]

Participants A, B, D, F, and G answered that they are good at memorizing vocabulary in foreign languages. Participant A remembers getting a high score in a section of words in an IQ test called WAIS. She thinks that she is simply good at memorizing not only foreign languages but also any subject. Participants B, C, D, F and G also used to be good at memorizing words not only in language learning, but also in other subjects.

[Attention to details]

Participants B, C, D, E and G tend to pay attention to small details regarding grammar acquisition in foreign languages. Partici-

pant B likes to read all the way through grammar books when learning foreign languages. She tends to look up how idioms and words were formulated, even when she knows that they are not necessary to learn at that stage of learning. When Participant C learn about tenses in English and Germany, they want to separate tense and aspect, whose differences are not experienced by any teacher or textbook. They asked their German teacher a question about grammar, but their teacher answered that they should not stick to grammatical strictness at the beginner stage. Nevertheless, participant C believes that their tendency to stick to grammatical details makes their learning more effective, which is why they prefer using strict grammar books and checking all the exceptions in grammar when there are.

In addition, participants B, C, and G spend more time on homework for foreign language classes, seeking perfection. When Participant B was in a Swahili class for beginners, she used to spend several hours longer than her classmates to complete the same translation assignments. According to her, there are few Swahili dictionaries that correspond to Japanese speakers, which was why her classmates used to give up when they could not find a good translation. In contrast to them, participant B often utilized English-Swahili dictionaries or Swahili-Swahili dictionaries to find natural translations in Japanese. While knowing that it was going to make a trivial difference, she continued to seek translations which she got really satisfied with for every single word.

[Word analogy]

All the interview participants (A, B, C, D, E, F, and G) make use of their high analogy ability when learning foreign languages. Participants C and E are talented at guessing what the texts want to tell when there is a lot of vocabulary that they do not know. Participant C is capable of guessing the meaning of words from contexts and spellings. Participant E does not even have to use a dictionary when

learning foreign languages because he utilizes his strong analogy ability. Participant D memorizes words, events, and phenomena by associating them with common terms, regardless of subjects. When he learns vocabulary in foreign languages, he effectively remembers similar words by grouping and patterning them. He even experiences a “quicker absorption of vocabulary and grammar when learning languages derived from the same language.” Like Participant D, participants A, B, F, and G are also good at memorizing new words by finding logic, such as similarities or patterns in vocabulary.

Weaknesses of foreign language learners with ASD

[Communication]

Participants A, B, C, D, and G have a strong sense of weakness in communication, which they consider to be one of the main reasons why they struggle with improving their speaking and listening skills. Participant A often speaks on the premise that information that only she knows is already shared with the people she is talking with. She also feels that she cannot make appropriate responses to questions. Because of these struggles, she has a negative attitude toward improving her speaking and listening skills. She said, “I am not capable of communicating even with Japanese people, so I do not think that I can succeed in communication with foreign people”. Participant B prefers studying foreign languages individually rather than with other people. It is difficult for her to improve her speaking ability in foreign languages because she needs someone else to practice with. Participant C shared their experience in English classes at elementary school, which seems to have been caused by her inability to understand nonverbal communication. They said, “no one should be able to understand what the ALT teacher was saying, so I did not understand why everyone was laughing, which was totally strange and scary for me”. When Participant C was in high school, they also had trouble participating in group work in language

classes because it was scary and painful for them to talk with people. Participant G often has group work in English classes, but he does all the tasks individually without discussing them with his group members because of one painful experience. When he was explaining his opinion in a discussion class, his classmate said that he had a “difficult personality”. He was finally told by his instructor that he was “running out of control” and was prohibited to speak up in class. This experience hinders him from participating in group activities in any classes, including discussions and debates in English classes.

[Listening/auditory information processing]

Participants A, C, D, F, and G experience difficulties when taking listening tests because of their ASD traits. It is deduced that they have two weak points. Participants A, C, E, F, and G are not good at multitasking. Therefore, it is difficult for them to take memos while listening to audio. Participant A mentioned that she does not write anything while listening because it is almost impossible for her to multitask. Participant G also gave up taking notes and tries to visualize what he listens to in his head. Participants C, D, F, and G are not capable of concentrating on listening tasks when the exam lasts long. Participant G mentioned that he starts thinking about different things while listening.

[Contextual understanding]

It is difficult for participants A, F, and G to grasp contexts or the global meaning of texts. Participant A got a low score on perceptual reasoning in an intelligence test named WISK. Regardless of the subjects, she tends to try to memorize individual contents by taking advantage of her high memory rather than trying to understand connections. She can understand each sentence or each phenomenon but is not good at understanding what a text wants to tell her as a whole. Therefore, in reading and listening tasks in foreign languages, she feels difficulty in answering questions

that require an overall understanding of the contents. It is also difficult for her to summarize or explain long texts in short sentences. Participant F also mentioned his difficulties in organizing and grasping an entire text. In addition, he cannot keep in his memory general information about each character even when he completely understands every sentence. These findings infer that they have higher abilities in understanding the details and have trouble grasping the whole.

As a countermeasure, it seems to be helpful for them to visualize what they read and understand from each sentence. Participant A tries to make a note after reading each paragraph and read them to answer questions. Participant F read the whole text several times, making chronologies and taking memos to show the causal relationship of things. Participant G also prefers to visualize the contents.

ASD traits that can be both positive and negative in foreign language learning **[Concentration]**

Participants C and D have strong interests in foreign languages and, therefore, higher concentrations when learning them. Participant C can concentrate on reading tasks in foreign languages regardless of topics because they are intrinsically interested in how logical constructions differ according to languages. Participant D used to enjoy learning English pronunciation, prefixes, and suffixes in high school. He later became interested in what they are like in other languages of the same language family. He also wanted to deepen his objective understanding of Japanese of English by learning other languages, aiming to refine his expressions in those two languages. By learning Russian, Latin, and Chinese at university, he realized that each language has a different way of saying things. According to him, parts that are emphasized differ depending on languages, and the range of what he wants to convey increases by the number of languages he learns. He mentioned, "My lack of interpersonal communication skills is

deeply related to my motivation to improve my language skills. It is based on my desire to convey my opinion to others in an easy-to-understand manner".

In contrast to them, it seems that regarding participants E, F, and G, there is a strong correlation between their concentration and interests. In other words, they struggle to keep constant concentration when learning foreign languages. When Participant E was in junior high and high school, he never listened to English classes, never read any English textbooks, and never took any English tests. The contents of the classes and textbooks did not interest him at all, and it was hard for him to concentrate on things that he is not interested in. He mentioned, "What is the significance of translating textbook contents from English into Japanese? What is interesting about that?". Instead of studying textbook contents, he tries to enjoy foreign cultures in English to improve his English proficiency, which he calls an "English nutrition intake". For instance, he read books written in English and watch foreign movies or dramas in English. He especially likes to listen to and sing songs of the Beatles because he likes music. At university, he tries to touch on topics that interest him in English. He is now motivated to read English texts about history that he has always been interested in. In this way, he thinks he can concentrate on learning English, but it is still difficult for him to memorize English words that are related to topics he is not interested in. According to participants F and G, their scores on reading tests in foreign languages depend very much on their interests in text contents. When a text is out of his interest, participant F tends to include his arbitrary interpretations, which significantly lowers his scores.

Regardless of the contents, participants C, D, and F struggle to keep their interests when taking reading and listening tests. It is difficult for Participant F to keep his focus on the line he is reading when he sees many sentences in his sight. His consciousness is brought to focus on the sentence he wants to

read, so he cannot devote his brain to understanding the contents. Therefore, he cannot understand the global meaning of a sentence at once and needs to read it several times. He imagines that using a machine that shows texts line by line would help him stay focused and concentrated, but he thinks that it is not realistic to have it.

[Verbalization]

Participants B and D often suffer in verbalization with speaking while having no problems with verbalization by writing. Participant B belonged to a club to interact with international students at university but quit it because she could not communicate with them at all. However, she now enjoys learning English with an application name Hello Talk, which allows her to chat with anonymous foreigners. Participant D feels that he tends to start speaking before deciding on what he is going to say, regardless of language. Usually, he gradually finds out what he wants to say by answering questions. When it comes to speaking tasks in English, it is especially difficult for him because the conclusion comes first in English grammar. However, when he practiced English debate in high school, he was able to give constructive speeches by preparing scripts.

Satisfaction levels of special academic support: What is working and what is not

Participants A, C, and E receive special academic support at universities. Participant A was recommended by a doctor to receive academic support at university and now has regular meetings with a teacher specializing in support for students with developmental disorders. She is somewhat satisfied with the support, but she struggles to recognize what she is not good at and what she needs support for. Therefore, she wants her supporter to help her understand them. As additional support, she wants teachers of her courses to replace group work with other tasks. She is generally not reluctant to talk about her disorders to those with understanding but does not want

a teacher in charge of her graduation thesis to know about her developmental disorder. According to her, the teacher does not seem to be capable of understanding her difficulties. She fears that she will be labeled and that everything she cannot do will be blamed on ASD.

Participant C searched for universities with a track record of supporting students with developmental disorders when choosing a university. They are allowed to use noise-canceling earphones during classes and to leave a classroom when they have hard times with loud volume or bright projector light. They occasionally receive extensions of deadlines for assignments because they cannot deal with a lot of assignments. In addition to consideration during class, they can consult their supporter at any time. They are now strongly satisfied with the support from their university but are not satisfied with their German teacher. The teacher refused to respond to their questions about grammar, saying that it was not necessary to learn at their stage of learning. Although they had gotten an A grade in the previous semester, learning German became painful for them, and they finally failed the course. They said that “refusal to ask questions with high grammatical strictness hinders my intellectual curiosity”. For them, compatibility with teachers is essential in foreign language learning.

Participant E searched for academic support after entering university because he thought that it was necessary for him. He now does not expect any support from the university and tries to deal with his problems by himself because a staff member in charge of him is overbearing and lacks understanding. He thinks that he should “stay away from people who do not understand his personality and force him to confirm”. Although he is not good at communicating with others, he has fewer problems regarding communication because he takes most of his courses online.

Reasons for not receiving special academic support

Participants B and F know the exist-

ence of special academic support at their universities, but they do not receive it and do not plan to. Participant B had painful experiences when she attended face-to-face classes, but she thinks that she no longer needs any support because she takes all the classes online under the influence of COVID-19. Participant F does not think that he is worth receiving academic support due to his strong belief that he has to make effort by himself to adapt to “ordinary people”. If he cannot finish solving all the problems in an English test in a given time, he would think that it must be due to a lack of his English skills, not his developmental disorders. Moreover, regarding university studies and freelance work, he does not dare to work on tasks out of his capacity, which is another reason why he does not require reasonable accommodation from others. Participant G did not know the existence of special academic support at the university until I asked him questions about it. He would like to apply for exemption from group work or replacement with other tasks, if possible. However, he is reluctant to apply for support because he has experience of being labeled with discriminatory words. He mentioned that “There are too many people who think that people with developmental disorders are not able even to speak or to communicate, so they say that I lie that I am disabled”. At Participant D’s university, special academic support does not exist. He mentioned that he wanted advice from his teacher to take tests for developmental disorders that could connect to a diagnosis. He thinks that, because of the system of the university, teachers are not close enough to recognize his ASD traits.

Conclusion

This paper investigated seven Japanese ASD students at universities in Japan. From the findings of the interviews with them, it is inferred that they tend to have trouble completing specific tasks such as group work and listening exams. In contrast, they have relatively higher memory and higher skills to pay attention to details and to guess the meanings

of foreign words. Some of them seemed to take advantage of these strengths, but others did not. For example, a participant with a tendency to pay attention to details in grammar learning was refused by her German teacher to ask high-level questions about grammar. As a result of these findings, it is implied that they required special academic support for tasks in groups or listening tests. In addition, academic support should try to help students with ASD take advantage of their ASD traits in foreign language learning. However, some of the participants were less willing to disclose their disabilities since they are afraid of being discriminated against or not being able to gain proper understanding from people who are supposed to support them. Therefore, I would like to emphasize that the most important thing is that educators make effort to understand the traits or difficulties of each student. This research has limitations. First of all, the number of participants was not enough to represent the whole Japanese university students with ASD. Research with a larger number of participants could enforce the credibility of the research findings. Secondly, the research could produce more meaningful findings by including participants who were not targeted this time, such as students with ASD in master’s and doctor’s degree courses or working people with ASD. By including those participants, the research could further broaden the perspectives and expect more contributions. However, the author believes that the research could make a significant academic contribution and real-world contribution. As mentioned above, foreign language learning of students with ASD has not yet been fully researched, so this research on seven Japanese university students reveals various new and important findings that imply the strong necessity of appropriate support by educators.

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Himawari Saito

Himawari is a Junior student in the Global Connectivity program. Her magazine “Video games and Learning” was written for DGT200 Learning and Technology under Professor Irina Kuznetcova at AIU. Himawari learned and got interested in the power of video games in learning situations during lectures in this DGT200 course. This is because modern people, including her, seem to be strongly motivated to engage in playing video games. She explored this topic involving an online survey asking open-ended questions to various people and interviews with two gamers at AIU. She hopes to continue investigating this topic to raise awareness of the effectivenesses of video games on learning.

**Vol.
001**

**DGT200
Himawari SAITO**

Spring Semester 2022

Video Games *And Learning*

10+ COTS Games

A introduction of recommended commercial off the shelf (COTS) game which can contribute to children's learning

Psychology of Video Games

Learning Transfer





INTRODUCTION:

As a gamer, I wrote a magazine about video games to eliminate people's (including my parents!) prejudice against video games. I believe in the power of video games in learning situation. Video games are one of the technologies that modern people are strongly motivated to engage in. I don't think people need to be restricted from playing video games.

To demonstrate video games' effectiveness in learning, I have selected video games that are popular with commercial success in the world and wrote articles about those game titles.

This magazine is not only for gamers who love video games but also for adults who oppose playing video games. I hope you read this magazine and realize how video games can help people learn. (Please consider that this version is the excerpt of the original magazine for the student journals. Here is a [Link](#) for the full version!)

AUTHOR: Himawari SAITO
Photo credit: @mc_kenchiku_com

COTS Game

COTS game is an abbreviation for "Commercial Off-the-Shelf Games," which refers to commercial video games that are distinguished from games for learning (G4L) (Becker, 2017).

A survey was conducted

to expand my knowledge about video games and learn how people learn in video games. I asked open-ended questions to various people online and received 45 answers.

The participants were mainly from Japan, and some were from overseas, such as Russia.

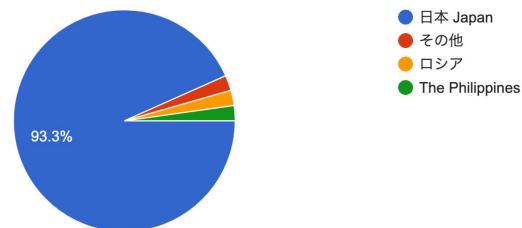
Answers were collected anonymously, and the articles in this magazine were created based on the collected answers. Participants gave me their recommendations of video games and their own experiences with video games and learning.

Participants ranged in age from 15 to 47 years old and it enabled me to know various opinions from adults' opinions to students' opinions. Also, the frequency of playing the game also varies from participant to participant, with various types of participants ranging from non-gamers to enthusiastic gamers.

AUTHOR: Himawari SAITO

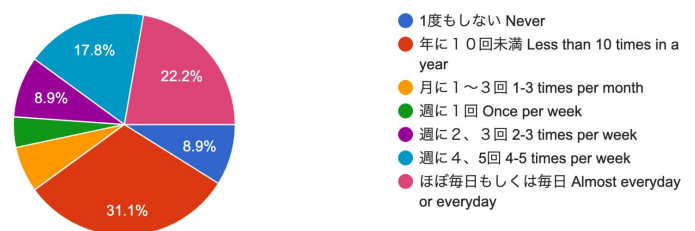
(2) 出身（生まれた国） Where were you born (country)? If you are not from Japan, please write your country name.

45 responses



(5) ビデオゲームをプレイする頻度 How often do you play video games?

45 responses



UNFAMILIAR THINGS

Momotaro Dentetsu is a long-running board game-style video game series in Japan. Players travel by rail, ship, and airplane, attempting to acquire wealth through business transactions buying properties, and dealing with rival entrepreneurs and nemeses such as the God of Poverty (Wikipedia).

Many participants answered that they learned about the geography of Japan, such as the city names and rough positional relationships, and the special products of each prefecture. I also remember devoting all my free time during the winter vacation with my family to this game. My parents, who are against playing other video games, said that this game would enhance my study of Japanese geography, which is important for entrance exams.

In 2021, even a study book called "桃太郎電鉄でわかる都道府県大図鑑(Prefectural Encyclopedia with Momotaro Electric Railway)" was published. It introduces the characteristics of 47 prefectures; industries, famous places, specialties, and traditional culture while enjoying the style of "Momotaro Dentetsu." The significance of learning knowledge of Japanese geography in this game is that students can confirm and easily understand what had been learned in school once again in a completely different place than the textbook (Moto Sappix Koushi, 2021). This study book, in collaboration with Momotaro Dentetsu, may be easier to motivate students rather than a normal geography textbook.



桃太郎電鉄 MOMOTARO DENTETSU



Another participant answered,
 "After playing for 100 years, I was completely exploited by my father and learned the importance of accumulating in business management and how to use my brain strategically."

<https://prtimes.jp/main/html/rd/p/000000225.000050711.html>

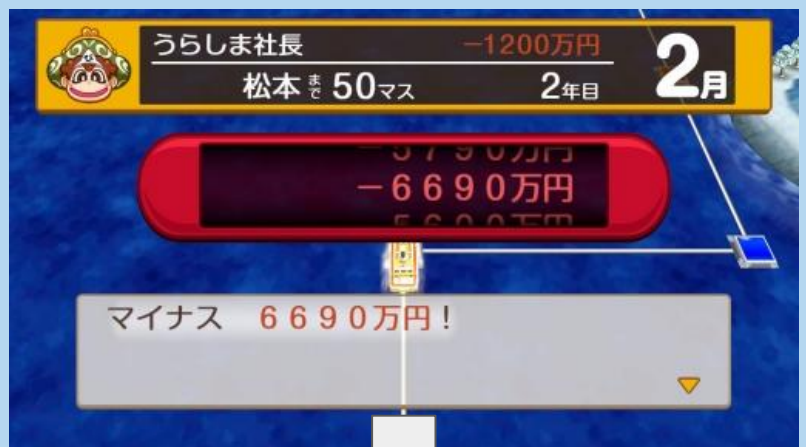
Players must learn how to develop a strategy to finally become the top in total assets. My younger brother is frugal, and he doesn't want to lose money. So he was more focused on stopping at the blue squares where money was given and the yellow squares where he could get cards rather than arriving at his destination earlier than other players. Then, the God of Poverty was always behind him, and he suffered more losses due to the god's prank. With many mistakes, he learned the importance of focusing on the final outcomes far in the future rather than on immediate gains and losses.

Then he implemented the following strategies:

- In summer, when there is little loss, he stops at the red square, which reduces his money, and aims for his destination in the shortest possible time.
- At the property purchase station, buy agricultural and forestry properties that the God of poverty cannot prank.
- Buy properties with an emphasis on profitability.

He is the youngest member of the family at the age of 10, but now he has achieved upper results in my family.

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<https://www.4gamer.net/games/476/G047655/20210212054/>

MINECRAFT

Minecraft is a sandbox video game where players explore a blocky, procedurally generated 3D world with virtually infinite terrain and may discover and extract raw materials, craft tools and items, and build structures, earthworks, and simple machines. Depending on the game mode, players can do various things.

Players can do various things.

In adventure and survival mode, players fight computer-controlled mobs, as well as cooperate with or compete against other players in the same world. Particularly in survival mode, in which players must acquire resources to build the world and maintain health.

On the contrary, in a creative mode, players have unlimited resources and access to flight. Players can modify the game to create new gameplay mechanics, items, and assets. (Retrieved at Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minecraft>)

This game does not provide a tutorial and doesn't specify particular goals. So players are free to live in this in-game virtual world of their will. Minecraft has four main attractions; adventure, mining, stock farming, and building. Each attraction has effects on players learning.

1. Adventure

In the world of Minecraft, terrain and climate areas (biomes) are set. Players can explore the endless world that the game automatically creates. For example, in the ice biome, polar bears peculiar to the area appear, and no trees grow. But in the jungle biome, peculiar trees (jungle trees) that grow cacao and ivy grow crowded, and wildcats and parrots live there. The desert biome is mostly composed of sand, and the only plant is the cactus. As you walk through the endless sandy ground, lucky players may discover pyramids that protect the treasure chests.

One participant commented he learned about biomes in Minecraft, and the memory of that helped his study in science class in school. As you can see, players will learn about the characteristics of various biomes and the types of trees and animals in that place while they explore the vast world in this game.



All from: <https://game8.jp/minecraft/222277>

4. Building

In creative mode, players can concentrate on "building" to create a building by combining blocks of various colors and textures. They can enjoy various creations, such as building a house that you imagined and devising the interior, or creating historical buildings, railroads, amusement parks, towns, etc.

However, as mentioned earlier, Minecraft doesn't tell players how to build an ideal home. However, Minecraft is a very popular game, so there are many fellow players. We can find endless architectural advice from other players on the internet, not just commentary books but also YouTube play videos, blogs on the internet, and online communities like social media and Reddit.

In my experience, I wanted to create a hot spring facility that looks like a Japanese castle, so I searched the Internet for other players building Japanese-style buildings. Then, I learned how to reproduce the shape of Japanese roof tiles with blocks and learned how to make a system to generate steam. However, I learned not only the in-game construction method but also the structure of the actual hot spring facility. I explored the inside of the real hot spring facility during a family trip and observed and learned the structure of the actual building. There is a wide range of things to learn to build in Minecraft, and learning won't stop in the game.

e.x.) Sayama Prefecture

This is a picture of the fictional Japanese modern city "Sayama prefecture" created in the world of Minecraft. Like other Minecraft architecture, each one is made up of blocks. You might not believe it because it's too real, right? Of course, cooperation with other players is essential for such a detailed and dynamic architecture. About 160 people currently belong to the Discord server of this Sayama prefecture project. Players may not only develop their imagination by building but also improve their communication skills through cooperation with other players. And the good thing about Minecraft is that it provides an environment where you have equal access to these amazing building materials (blocks) and can try building of the same quality if you want to. And you can take advantage of Reddit's Minecraft building community to share your work with other players.



https://twitter.com/Sayama_City/status/1033721648422117376

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_%28Minecraft%29



The Minecraft environment seems to provide an ideal environment for education where students can try a variety of things from exploring worlds to creating buildings. The procedure of playing Minecraft can be applied to Dewey's (a famous American philosopher) three Stages of Teaching and Learning in the Networked Environment.

(1) Stage 1: Learning by doing

Students enter the world of Minecraft independently, and each is free to interact with the world. Unlike traditional classrooms, teachers and game developers do not specify how to play. Students learn by trying various things and find each goal.

(2) Stage 2: Learning by communicating

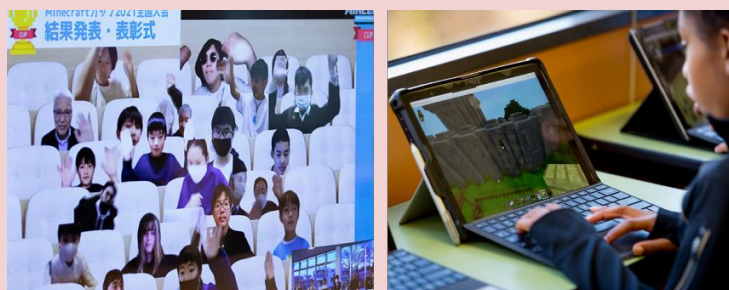
Students are no longer dependent on teachers in stage (ii) situations. Dewey stated students should be expected to be more resourceful and self-reliant, find others to assist in solving problems and answering questions, and use online resources like tip sheets, videos, online courses, digital reference works, and academic research. As I mentioned before, Minecraft activates player communication. Players work together on architectural projects and discuss various things in the Minecraft players' online community.

(3) Stage 3: Learning Organized Subject Matter

Players may get lost because Minecraft doesn't have tutorials. However, there are an infinite number of guides created by players online such as Minecraft Wiki. If you get lost, please visit a website like this or rely on another player. You can also contact me! I will do my best to help you :)

In Minecraft, there is a block called "Red Stone." With this block, players can learn computer logic circuits "AND circuit," "OR circuit," and "NOT circuit." For example, automatic doors. By laying red stone under the block and placing a door or pressure-sensitive plate on it, you can create a mechanism that switches on and opens when a person stands in front of the door! You can even build a machine that automatically cuts sheep's hair and a terrifying machine that automatically produces yakitori (fried chicken) to collect materials efficiently.

As you can see, in the world of Minecraft, players can do various things that aren't possible in reality. This allows Minecraft to maximize the enthusiasm, energy, and creativity of its players. This can be supported by the fact that the total number of sales of all versions, including the PC version, smartphone version, and dedicated game machines, has exceeded 154 million as of October 2018, making it a globally popular game (Kamiya, 2018).



<https://minecraftcup.com/>

Players can also participate in contests such as the Minecraft Cup National Tournament to get feedback. It is a tournament that uses the educational version of Minecraft to recruit worlds created according to the theme from all over the world and compete for content (The Minecraft Cup National Tournament, 2022). Prior to this contest, workshops will be held during the summer vacation where players can learn about building and programming at Minecraft. The theme of this contest is "House / Town where creatures, people, and nature are connected -Let's protect biodiversity-" Participants have to include elements of biodiversity conservation in to their world that can achieve two of the goals of SDGs. Through such contests, students can consider modern challenges like the SDGs and at the same time participate in Minecraft's vast online community. With Minecraft, students can learn for themselves in an environment where players work together even without a teacher.

LEARNING HISTORY: DETENTION 返校

Detention is a 2D atmospheric horror side-scroller set in 1960s Taiwan under martial law. Players learn how Taiwanese people were oppressed seriously and lots of Taiwanese culture such as folk beliefs and Taoism.

This video game mainly focuses on the **White terror**, massive suppression, murder, and imprisonment of political dissidents or anyone who the Kuomintang (KMT), known as Nationalists in English, perceived as a threat to its one-party rule (Shattuck, 2017).

One participant answered, "Shamefully, playing this video game made me discover the history of Taiwan's bloody horror for the first time. Then, I searched Google for the unfamiliar words 'white terror' to deepen my background knowledge. And I was shocked to find that this incident continued even though my parents were alive and it was finished only about 40 years ago."

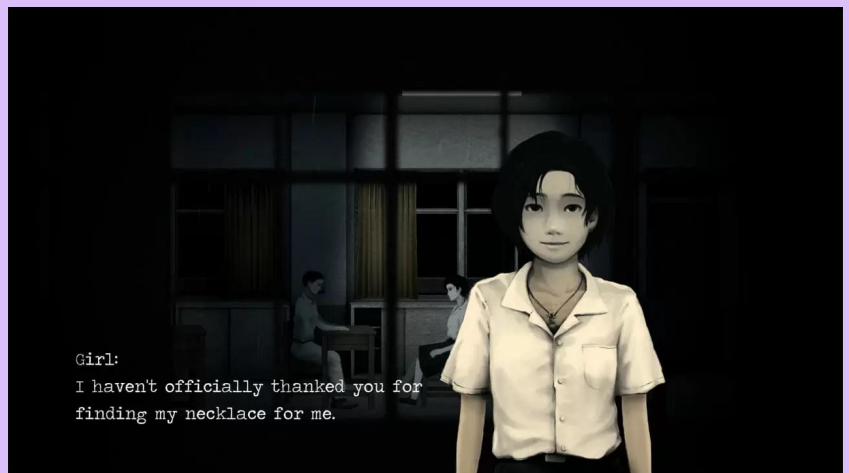
This video game was made not only for Taiwanese people but also translated into Japanese and English. It resulted in a worldwide hit and even became a movie. When the movie was released in Taiwan on September 20, 2019, the box office revenue reached NT \$ 6.77 million (about 235 million yen) in just three days, and finally, it was the best hit movie in 2019 Taiwanese movie. It made many people aware of the tragic events in Taiwan and created a significant social response (tnhr, 2021).

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All from <https://news.denfaminicogamer.jp/interview/210729b#i-2>

According to Yao Shun-tin, the producer of the game company Red Candle, which produced the original game "Detention," "White terror robbed memory of our grandparents' generation because they experienced the most severe crackdown and still feel the fear of white terror. So no one can touch their memory of it. Even the history textbooks in Taiwan didn't tell students in detail about white terror.

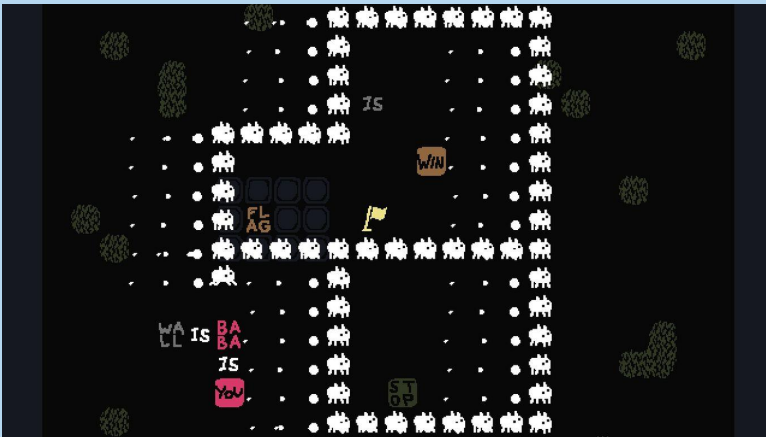
That's why this video game became so popular. I think this video game made a big change in people's ideas about the history of Taiwan."



**VIDEO GAMES
and LEARNING**



<https://hempuli.com/baba/>



<https://superparent.com/article/583/baba-is-you-a-superparent-review#:~:text=Baba%20is%20You%20is%20tough,your%20full%20attention%20and%20brainpower>

Baba Is You is a puzzle video indie game where the rules players have to follow are present as physical objects in the game world. By manipulating the rules, players can change how the game works, repurpose things they find in the levels and cause surprising interactions (Baba is You, n.d.).

One participant answered, "Baba Is You's game mechanics is very educational, especially for game developers, as it demonstrates how to think outside the box and use different combinations of words to change the rules of the game itself. It gives a whole new perspective and opens up a lot of possibilities for designing my own game."

General simple two-dimensional maze games like Mario Bros. will not allow players to break game rules, such as if players' characters fall into a hole, they would lose one hit point and "die" once. Unlike such a normal 2D action game, Baba is you allows players to break the rules to achieve goals.

For example, if players shunt any of the words out of alignment and push a different word into the sentence ('BABA IS YOU → 'ROCK' IS YOU), they will find themselves controlling any rocks that are on-screen. If players knock the last word off "WALL IS STOP," Baba can walk through walls as if they're not there.

"Certainly for kids interested in Computer Science, the fact that the game is built around manipulating and understanding rudimentary forms of Boolean logic – "if X then Y" – means that kind of problem-solving soon becomes second nature. It's the sort of game that leaves you feeling smarter!

Baba Is You is best enjoyed by those who prefer a stiff challenge and don't expect to glide through levels without straining themselves. If that applies to you and your kiddos, then even just a handful of the hundreds of mind-boggling puzzles contained in this game will give you hours of head-scratching entertainment (Whitehead, 2019).

LEARNING STRATEGY:

Baba is You

<https://steamcommunity.com/sharedfiles/filedetails/?id=2128428304>



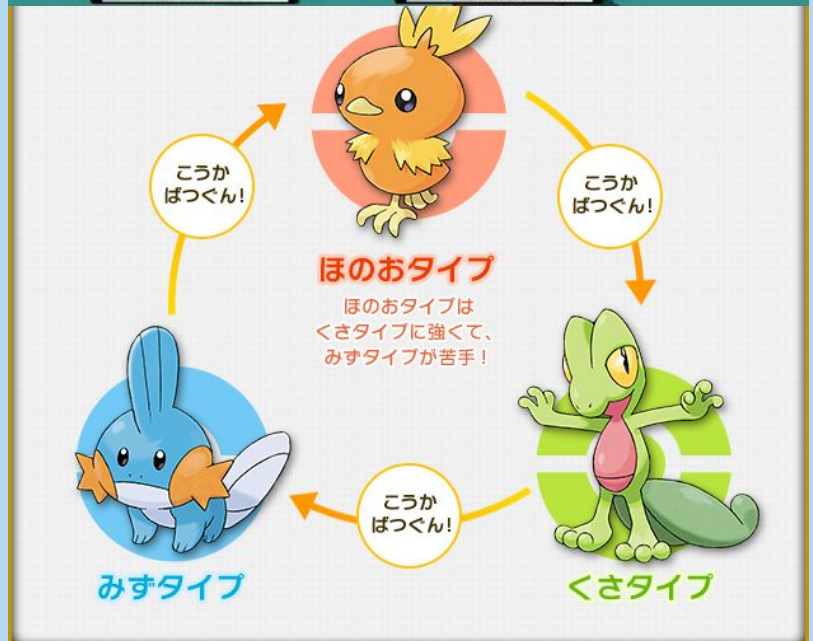
POKEMON

The "Pokemon" series is a role-playing game (RPG) in which the players themselves become the main character and advance their adventure with mysterious creatures called Pocket Monsters (abbreviated as Pokemon).

One of the big features of Pokemon is that players can not only enjoy the story alone but also exchange Pokemon and fight against each other with their friends. There are "types" of Pokemon and techniques that Pokemon can remember. Depending on the type of Pokemon of the opponent and the type of technique used, it may cause great damage or reduce the damage to the opponent's Pokemon (The Pokemon company, n.d.).

Several participants recommended Pokemon because they can develop their ability to consider various things, such as how to plan training Pokemon and how to formulate strategies when playing against other players. While playing this game, players learn and try to remember many kinds of Pokemon and work their brains to win Pokemon battles.

AUTHOR: Himawari SAITO





A research paper on Pokemon was published in the academic journal *Nature Human Behavior* in May 2019. Researchers have found that Pokemon players who played Pokemon enthusiastically during their youth have developed their own brain regions that specialize in distinguishing hundreds of Pokemon species. In the experiment, Gomez and colleagues gathered 11 "Pokemon Masters" (average age of 29.5 years) and 11 participants who had never played Pokemon. When participants were presented with images of human faces, animals, cartoons, bodies, words, cars, passages, and Pokemon in fMRI, the Pokemon masters responded more strongly to the Pokemon characters than non-players of Pokemon.

Researchers analyzed this data and, as hypothesized, most Pokemon players had a new part of the brain that was specialized in identifying Pokemon. In childhood, the ability to discriminate human appearance, words, and numbers develop.

According to this research, it seems that playing Pokemon can develop that ability in a more special way. In addition, Pokemon is a very mental-challenging game, such as thinking about strategies to stand in advance of the Pokemon battle.

Researchers argue that these factors have also been found to be very effective in the development of the child's brain. "Most of the Pokemon players I did brain scans had a Ph.D. or worked for a big company like Google. No evidence is given that playing Pokemon has any side positive or negative effects. However, each Pokemon master succeeded in their own life," says Gomez (Ouellette, 2019).

AUTHOR: Himawari SAITO

“I really like how simulation games stimulate my brain.”

Momoka is an enthusiastic gamer who loves simulation games. Especially, she really recommends “Tropico,” where players make their own island. The player becomes El Presidente, the leader of the Caribbean island nation “Tropico,” and governs the island. Thus, her virtual identity is the president of the island.

She said that it's interesting changing the policy of the nation at her will. Here's what we can do in this game;

- Transportation network maintenance
- Creating primary industries such as agriculture, mining, and fishing
- Creating a secondary industry such as rum distillation, shipbuilding, cigars, and canning
- Building abundant facilities such as tourism, military facilities, entertainment facilities, etc.
- Resolving domestic dissatisfaction and maintaining a government approval rating
- Earning profits from diplomatic strategies and trade
- Issuing R & D, constitutional enactment, and ordinance

That's a lot! Isn't it? However, surprisingly, she said these were just a few of what we can do with Tropico.



<https://store.epicgames.com/ja/p/tropico-6>



Players become El Presidente:

<https://gametyrant.com/news/tropico-6-review-its-so-good-to-be-presidente>

Interview with Momoka: Taken by me (Hlmawari)



LEARNING TRANSFER: Interview with Momoka



<https://guides.gamepressure.com/tropico-6/guide.asp?ID=49160>

Virtual Identity: El Presidente

For example, she made plans to produce cars intensively and make them the island's main industry (because cars sell well). Then there was a need to increase rubber and metal production and build more factories. For that reason, she proclaimed a law that reduced the construction cost of vehicle factories by half for a limited period of five years to develop the primary industry of raw materials for automobiles.

STEAL *Statue of Liberty*

For another example, players can plunder tourist attractions from other countries and make them their own island tourist attractions. "I wanted to loot the Statue of Liberty from the United States." She carried out friendly diplomatic strategies to America, such as actively trading with the U.S. and doing America favors. By doing so, she could avoid a serious relationship with the United States even if she looted the Statue of Liberty.



<https://www.pcgamesn.com/tropico-6/tropico-6-raids-statue-of-liberty>



History settings Expand what players can do

Tropico had four era settings: the colonial era, world war era, Cold War era, and modern era. For example, in the colonial era, she could build farms to grow sugar, but in the modern era, electronic equipment factories could be built. She had to manage the island at a higher level with evolving contents of domestic affairs and diplomacy. Thus, she learned about the history and experienced what she learned about each era as a president in this game.

1. Colonial Era:
https://www.reddit.com/r/tropico/comments/bauk5r/colonial_era_plantations_the_start_of_puerto_nuevo/
2. Modern Era:
https://store.steampowered.com/app/205630/Tropico_4_Modern_Times/?l=japanese

Tropico

As you can see, in Tropico, she got involved in politics to develop the island's economy. Unlike other city simulation games, putting buildings on the island in a scenic manner is not the only thing players do. They also have to act as a president according to their own policies to improve the economy is necessary.

“It is pure fun to develop my island in Tropico.”

She said she kept playing this game for a year. What motivates her so much? What is the difference between studying economic mechanisms and politics in civics classes and learning those things while playing Tropico?

Unlike the classrooms where she just listened to the teacher, in this game, she can learn about politics while she gets involved in politics by herself. Originally, in her student life, she found it difficult to input what she was taught by listening to the teacher's lecture in her mind. Rather, she was a self-educated person who was better at reading textbooks and understanding herself. Thus, she realized that simulation games such as Tropico fit her style of learning because she can learn about civics for herself while considering what is effective for the development of her island. The policy of her choice would develop or decline her island. Tropico has a fulfilling game system that enables her to check the results of what she did as detailed data after conducting domestic affairs and diplomacy.

<https://guides.gamepressure.com/tropico-6/guide.asp?ID=49226>



You can see a wide variety of data;

- Domestic faction status and popularity rating
- Friendly relationships with other countries
- National income and expenditure resource overview
- Transitions in the number of tourists
- The happiness rate of each citizen.

When she faced difficulties while playing Tropico, she was trying to learn how the actual society works, rather than searching video game cheat sites. It may be easy to complete the mission if she could know the game system itself. However, she keeps her mind focusing on learning the real social system because Tropico is based on the real world, such as diplomacy with actual countries such as the United States. Her experience would be a good example of how video games could motivate players to learn outside the video games.

Therefore, from her case, video games seem to be able to keep players motivated to learn and even give them the opportunity to learn and explore outside of the world of video games.



If you are interested in Tropico, I recommend you to watch this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq-UBcx-ajw>)
A famous economic expert in Japan, Morinaga Takuro, will explain the goodness of Tropico from the perspective of economics.

PSYCHOLOGY OF VIDEO GAMES:

-The reason why many people have motivation for playing video games

According to my survey, **75.6%** participants agreed that video games motivate them to learn something. To investigate the reason why majority of people feel motivated to learn while playing video games, I provided several choices and "other" and ask what do they think is the most appealing aspect of video games.

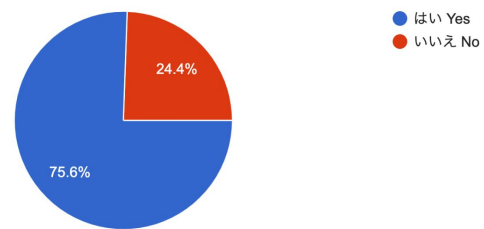
- Fascinating story
- Visual rewards
- Social interactions
- Easy to learn through trial and error
- Attractive goals (e.g. beating the boss and saving the world)
- Other

And many participants answered they were fascinated by the story and the goals they wanted to achieve in video games.



(12) ビデオゲームは何かを学びたいというモチベーションを感じさせると思いませんか? Do you feel video games would motivate you to learn something?

45 responses



(11) 以下のうち、ビデオゲームの1番の魅力はなんだと思いますか? Which of the following aspects of video games do you find the most appealing?

45 responses



To investigate why video games are motivating more, I interviewed Alex, an avid gamer, for about an hour.

Like Momoka, he also loves video games and has learned many things from video games. He started playing games at the age of four to have fun. He's such a passionate gamer that he has a Youtube channel to upload videos with accordion covers of video game songs, and he wants to work for a game company in the future.

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND STORIES



<https://dengekionline.com/articles/33136/>

In "Megami Tensei," on the contrary, the main character who survived in the devastated world where 99% of humans have been killed contracts with the devil and defeats his friends to survive the world. He said that in the process of becoming the center of the world and creating a new world as the main character, he had more opportunities to consider choices he made based on philosophy, such as whether to make a utopia or dystopia. He learned that even relationships could be sacrificed to achieve his goals.

His motivations for playing video games are **social interaction and fascinating stories** similar to literature. He learned how to build better relationships by playing the main character (in other words, he has many virtual identities in video games) and interacting with other characters.

For example, "The Legend of Heroes: Trails in the Sky" has a system that expands the range of things players can do if they cooperate with other characters. There is also an ending story that enables even enemy characters to become happy, so he feels positive feelings. He learned that there were no worthless people in the world.



<https://topics.nintendo.co.jp/article/bc560ccd-caa1-4aae-b505-69c499ec5436>

Other Motivation Factors

There are several other factors in his motivation for video games;

Good quality **video game music** is one of his motivations, as he covers some game music on his Youtube Channel with the accordion. For example, in the action game title "Devil May Cry," music does not transfer from the bridge part to the high part unless the player rank in battle rises to S rank.

"If you search "Devil May Cry Motivated " on the Internet, you'll find many memes about the character Vergil and motivating his theme songs."

Also, both he and I agreed that Undertale original soundtrack is all great and exciting, especially "MEGALOVANIA" and "Hopes and Dreams"! Great games come with great music.



<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/vergil>
<https://soundcloud.com/user-710776981/megalovania-sans>

**VIDEO GAMES
and LEARNING**

Another motivation is to **expand his ideas to the world through video games**. By considering the story of the video game, he wants to tell the message that the game creator wants to convey to other players. According to him, there is a significant number of videos that review and introduce video games to audiences who are considering buying overseas. Rather, he wants to create new value in the video game by teaching those who have already played a deep interpretation of the story that would not be noticed. He plays the video game to find the hidden message by himself and tell that to other players.

Also, one of his motivations is **the attractive game system itself**, such as visual rewards and the sense of accomplishment of defeating the boss. When he struggled to finish the game story, same as Momoka, he tends to try to solve the problem himself. He says he first approaches the video game logically, understanding its mechanics and what it wants players to do, and trying to come up with any solution. For example, when he loses many times at a boss fight in the RPG game. Then, he changed or strengthened the combination of characters of his party and pieces of equipment with them. It is because the effective characteristics of characters and weapons differ depending on the type of boss. Then, try to put his idea into practice in the video game. If that doesn't work, reflect and adjust. He unknowingly practiced "the reflection practice circle," which is important in learning while playing video games!

Step 1: Prove the visual world (do something)

Step 2: Based on reflection while probing and afterward, form a hypothesis about what something might mean in a situated way (evaluate your action)

Step 3: Reprobe the world with that hypothesis in mind, seeing what effect you get (do it again in a corrected way)

Step 4: Treat this effect as feedback from the world and accept or rethink the original hypothesis (reflect the new hypothesis and learn)

If it doesn't work over and over again, he will leave the game for days or weeks and come back with a new feeling. He believes in himself and his intuition. He sleeps and refreshes not only when he gets stuck in the video game but also when he can't focus on the assignment. If he can't finish the game story no matter how many times he takes a break unfortunately, he would finally look for the cheat manual online.

As you read, he has been motivated by many factors and plays video games. But he said, **"Above all, what the best thing video games did was that they made me got interested in the meaning of life and inspired me to think about what I wanted in this life."** Six years ago, he had a lot of free time, so he spent most of that time playing games to have fun. And as he stated in the example, he learned the joy of social interaction through video games. Then, he visited Japan three years ago and realized the joy of social interaction in the real world. He wanted to get involved with his real friends like the main character in video games, and he used what he learned in the game to get involved with people. His meaning of life has changed from the video game itself to social interaction outside the video game.

It doesn't mean that he graduated from playing video games because it is meaningless for him. Rather, thanks to video games, he learned the joy of interacting with other people. (He still loves video games and plays video games 2-3 times per week!) He said, "Video games aren't the ways of escaping from real life; they provide you an opportunity to experience many other lives." For him, video games are not a way to escape from reality but a way to have multiple virtual identities and enjoy various life in parallel.

Reflective practice cycle:

**PROVE → HYPOTHESIZE → REPROBE → RETHINK
→ TRY AGAIN**



Dark Souls meme:
<https://gamerant.com/dark-souls-hilarious-you-died-memes/>

"Video games aren't the ways of escaping from real life; they provide multiple life choices."

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**"Maaan, If You Waste Your Time Doing Something You Enjoy,
Then You Don't Waste Your Time."
- Pascal (Animal Crossing)**



Creative Writing



Pyry Hakala

Pyry is a 25-year-old exchange student from Tampere, Finland. He loves experiencing, discussing, and creating stories. Studying at Akita International University has been the best time of his life, and it has also fueled his creative writing.

See more of Pyry's creative writing at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/pyry>

The Anthill Bustle

Rapid movement in the anthill,
Folk tumbling about,
Crashing, connecting,
No rest for the intoxicated

Ant colliding with ant,
Hugging, kissing,
Losing more control each second,
In the tunnels across the anthill

All in the service of their personal queens,
Pleasure, substances, money
The past, the future
Hopes and dreams

Inside it is warm and soft
Never mind the stench
Of liquid and broken people
For this is the best night of the ant

No space for the quiet ones
For the anthill bustles
The bright night dependent on the ideal
Of a fun party with fun ants

And the anthill never stops
The party eternal
Worker ants trapped in the cycle
Created by their hedonistic monarchs

Michael Byrne

Michael's a 21 year old student who spent August - December 2022 in Akita International University.

Michael is an outgoing person who tries to find the positive in the challenges that face him, and during his time in Japan he faced plenty of challenges. He broke his Jaw in the second month during a rugby game, he got stranded on a mountain for 5 hours when a car tire popped with no phone signal, he got lost in Tokyo with a friend for an entire night (typical), had a snowball (which was more like an ice ball) that had him sleeping for the next two days straight. But still Michael found all the positives in these situations and looks back at them thankful for the experience.

Michael's writing focuses on a mixture of romance and random creative moments he thought would be interesting to write about. Michael has been writing for a few years now, but his primary focus was screenplays. This semester he tried poetry for the first time and explored his emotions and ideas through a variety of micro stories.

See more of Michael's creative writing at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/michael>

Sendai

The cold air spread through my lungs and each breath I took reminded me of that feeling. I was sitting with my drunk friend, the smell of tobacco deeply ingrained into his skin, he was rambling about something but my mind was elsewhere. I was watching this couple. They were sitting opposite us, about 20 meters or so away. The girl had his coat tightly wrapped around her like she was experiencing comfort for the first time. Their eyes communicated with each other and their smiles were consistent. It's hard not to smile with them, although it would look extremely weird if I was to, so I looked back to my drunk friend Matt. His eyes wouldn't be able to communicate with anyone for at least another 4 hours. I haven't known him very long, it's been about 2 months since we met and 1 month since we've been good mates. He reminds me of a friend I used to have back home, I think that's why we get on so well. The bond between us grew quickly and I've made memories with him that I'll keep with me for life. Matt looks terrible at the moment, even in this cold weather his sweat slowly drops down his forehead. The sky begins to change colour as the morning runners come out, we need sleep, but my mind is stuck on this couple and thoughts of the past. After looking back up, they were off.

Walking away with her head tucked neatly under his arm. That feeling creeps in closer and closer. It's never a damaging feeling, in fact, I always find it intriguing, I assume everyone feels it. That sense of loneliness in a place where loneliness shouldn't exist. How can one feel so alone in a world crowded with 7 billion people? But my main thought this time was if that couple ever felt this feeling. I've not experienced this feeling, I've always felt alone even when I'm not supposed to, but they were engrossed in one another. They were in their world. Together.

It's always been hard for me to fall in love. I've worried about it before but it's always most prevalent in times like this. I've never been one to search for Love, I've always just gone with the flow but maybe that's why I've never felt that blissfulness that couple seemed to have felt. I know it's a feeling you shouldn't avoid. It's a feeling to pursue, to chase, to crave. The feeling is celebrated worldwide, even fantasised about, yet it's a form of self-harm that's inevitable to most. So what's the fucking point? What's the fucking point of building and building this feeling over and over again for someone or something to come and slowly or furiously destroy it? Everyone must think this at some point in their life, it's exhausting. It must have been 10 times more exhausting for him, yet he hid it from us all so well. I miss him.

It was 2019, We were sitting on his bed, the white lights were abusive to my eyes but we were too engrossed in conversation to care about the scenery, as it was to be our last. His name was Lachie. We had known each other for 3 years, meeting through work. We clicked almost instantly, talking shit about the boss, and making fun of his walk, it was a perfect first shift of a new job. Since then we did a lot together outside of work, just typical teenage boy shit. Over time I got to see him less and less, he was sick, so he wasn't allowed out very often or when he could he got tired extremely quickly. Which was okay to me because we didn't need to go anywhere to enjoy our time together, he still got tired from laughing though which we tended to do a lot of. Our last conversation will stay with me forever. It started with us discussing the funniest moments we had shared. We knew these moments would mean very little to others and wouldn't have been funny at all, which is what made them so special to us. The conversation grew deeper as the minutes flew past. We were squeezed onto his hospital bed, the handle dug into my side but I didn't want to move. The room was white, wires and noises surrounded him

daily but he never seemed bothered. He always seemed rather chirpy when I saw him as if what he was going through didn't affect him, just everyone around him. We continued to talk, straying away from funny moments with all the girls he had been with. Lachie was better at love than me, he had better luck with the girls since he was young. He had brilliant charisma and he knew how to work his sickness, which he called his benefit when it came to getting girls. Lachie was bald when I first met him and stayed bald until he passed away. The girls were always so intrigued and he loved it. Lachie went quiet after this discussion. It took him a while to talk again and his tone had changed.

"Do you think I will be missing out on love?" Lachie asked me. We have had deep conversations before about life, death, and all the in-betweens but never love. It felt taboo. I remember searching the room for an answer, what could I say in a moment like this; oh no you won't miss out at all, you will get to experience it again. But I knew he would see that as a lie and hurt him more than help. He had a long-term girlfriend before but they broke up a while back as he thought it to be for the best for her. He did love her, he truly loved her. The day he broke up with her was painful to everyone, so for him to ask me if he would miss out on love, I knew he meant if he would miss out on Kayla's love. But I couldn't think of a response quickly enough before he started talking again.

"I want you to experience it." He said quietly before pausing and turning his neck to look at me. His pale skin and bright blue eyes were inches away from me, an image I carry with me when I think of Lachie.

"You have to just fucking go for it. Look at me lad, as cringe as it is, life is too fucking short" he said with a smile.

He died a few days later. It was my first experience of death. Although he left us with a smile, I will always think about what his life could have been like.

As Matt throws up next to me I get snapped back into reality. I laugh, I know I am not supposed to in a time like this and I usually wouldn't, but with Lachie fresh in my memory, all I can do is smile. He wipes his mouth, sits up straight, and begins to drunkenly laugh with me. I see bits of Lachie in Matt and I think that's why we click so well. I stand up finally and help Matt up with me. "C'mon lad, we gotta find a place to sleep," I say as I wrap his arm around my shoulder carrying most of his body weight. So we headed off.

Emily Preston

Emily is a 21 year old exchange student from Virginia in The United States, here at AIU only for the fall semester of 2022.

She finds herself inspired by art and other people. “Art imitates life imitates art” has always been her perspective of the world. She is constantly looking for the beauty and magic in the small things.

See more of Emily’s creative writing at this link:
<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/emily>

Hidden In The Human Condition

Encased in stale acrylic walls, oily red splotches drip and dry;
A lingering pool of viscous maroon escapes
Slowly in a growing circle.

A long arm reaches out, metal stained with the past;
Where remnants of thousands of eyes
Watch on from a distance.

The whirl of the machine, “dancing”, “spinning”, “bowing”;
Where its performance had been frantic then
Appears slow and sluggish now.

A metal fan brushes the liquid scarlet under the heavy base;
Its decaying face dragging along the floor
Leaving losing streaks in its wake.

Sisyphus’ dilemma, a means to an infinitesimal end;
A creation built to withstand its own collapse
The cruel creator’s novelty.

This struggle is life in the same vein that it is death;
Imprisoned in this exhausting performance,
But I Can’t Help Myself.

Yuma Stefan Vlaicu

Yuma Ștefan Vlaicu was a sophomore student at Akita International University in 2022 November. Studying and loving philosophy, literature criticism, and creative writing. The only certain stances were moral nihilism and moral objectivism.

See more of Yuma's creative writing at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/yuma>

Dormant

When I fell asleep, something inside my body breaks down, collapses, and goes away. I remember the days when I had a lecture and sudden darkness. Just after sight was recovered, I realized what I saw, like going to my cousin's bar -- nothing was sold but Mountain Dew -- was an illusion with strange colors. There is always a terrible thirst and taste for something but I cannot know what it is ever. And something drops away again. I tilt my neck and see the splendid view of a decayed town, silver buildings, houses of complete bricks, and heavily accumulated clouds. Why does nothing change? Why there is no revival? I breathe and close my eyes, and there is a big monitor of an oscillator. I walk into the room and see myself lying on a sofa. Lying like a cast in horror movies who are not assigned to any roles but to remain lying. Cheap sounds of a high pitch repeat. The severe line on the black screen extends straight. This might be me. This should be a reality, I thought. I see the white ceiling and my body lying on the couch. The skin barely attaches to thin bones. Something went away from my body again.

Research

Feeling the teeth-grinding air outside, something in red covers my sight and goes blurry. I look at the road, and there is a red leaf with a bug bite. I wonder, blankly. But I just position my neck back and keep walking, facing straight.

The road feels waggly. An uncomfortable pair of toes and heels and aloof tiles of stones match forthcomingly. Like my skin is peeled out and the vivid muscle appears with courage.

Glass fragments.

I go to meet a man in the remote back alley at night. I prefer a complete night vanishing me in dark smog but he calls me, yet the night is dim bright. I run and white air clings to me. At the time I arrive at his place, he disguises me. Everything disappears and melts. It is always a long night. I do not know where I am and how long I'm disappearing from the world. But I come back, like people suddenly come and pass beside me. I bump into their shoulders. Their checked jackets with gray and black flicker like snow.

I paste them, together, with opaque tapes.

He never tells me about his job. He was out of the world. Like me. He was special. I think he lives in a totally different... something so different, but everybody thinks that is usual. That is straightforward and normal. I put on cherry red lipstick and meet him. Imperishable night, again. And forever bright morning. He touches my long hair every time I meet him. I faintly punch his back with a fist. He coughs. I secretly giggle as if the noise goes to silence in a city. Traffic lights repeat beeps. Stamps of people clank. I sit down and mop my head with my hands. Shadow overlays me. The siren becomes close. Big white men surround me and take me somewhere.

Strings sawn on a piece and become ugly stitches.

He is sharp. He is so sharp that I'm almost carved and taken out of the inside. I had a physical relationship with him. Every time I meet, something inside is gone. I feel so. That is so gradual. I thought all of my insides will be gone one day. I almost break down crying. He said it doesn't matter, don't worry. I will fill you in. A long time passes. Something flows in and moves through-out my whole body and flashes out. I become lighter and lighter every time I meet him. I lose something inside, but I don't care, even when in a wilderness of tall blocks, in a lonely room of white, in front of the door he didn't come, and in a field of crops. At the time of putting my cheek on plastic, sighing out white gas in the middle of the city, vomiting on a fluffy sofa, and tripping on a stone on a road, I didn't care. He is sharp, not blunt.

But the edge is so hard to penetrate into.

He put something into me. I have thrown everything to him. Every day of almost reaching. Tiptoeing on the ground while walking. That would not be only my sensation. I walk fast to his place. It is barely reaching, but I sometimes feel I get farther. Maybe one thing I wish for is separation. Probably. But I don't mind. I walk and pass the forest in complete darkness. Sound

of bugs. My brain is like a jam of bee infants. I walk and the roads behind me fade out. Packed mind is bothered by the buzz surrounding me. My body almost fell apart. My heart is already barely seen by anybody. If I was found.

I connect, maybe bent, but somewhere of me cannot be reached.

Everything is ripped off. Everything inside my body is naked. I'll take you, he said. There is only piercing silence except for us. I'll take you where nobody thought before, wished before. The night sky is like a panorama view of the Earth from a satellite. My body is flying in the sky. I stared at the night view of the world. His hand is left from mine. My hand and his become further. He was perhaps too soft. Or me. My body is flown and flies sky high. I wonder, scatteredly.

Kaya Kobata

Kaya is a shy soul, she often keeps to herself and never really expresses herself in front of others. She's like a shadow, always there but as Leo Tolstoy said, "All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life is made up of light and shadow."

See more of Kaya's creative writing at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/kaya>

Abilify

I was made,
Secluded in my house of plastic

With me
You remain
Without me,
You cease

Hard to swallow
Reality, too bitter

Solutions I carry,
with patients
I deliver

Are the Side effects too much?
Shall I go up in milligrams?

Sane?
I exist because of You?!
Preposterous!
You Exist because of ME!
what are you without me?

patient,

Insanity will creep back in
Then you'll admit it.

Sincerely,
Your lifeline

Locked Away

12 pm is when the performance starts.

The screams and cries for help roar throughout the neighborhood. Nobody at home but my curious eyes which dart between the slit of my curtains. The slit just big enough to see the nightmare that has become a part of my life. Sometimes the show takes a hiatus, but today the curtain so to speak is rising. Eager to get a better look but without revealing my identity, I run to my light switch, turning off anything that might give away my cover. Across the road a lady in her late 40s pounds on the door. "LET ME IN! LET ME IN!" she screams. Her fist meets the door every second like a heartbeat. I have become invested in the lives of the family living in the house under siege. My commitment to investigate has permanently rearranged my room. A small space between my desk and bookshelf has been made to spy on my neighbors. The woman frantically runs around the house banging on every window, every door. "LET ME IN, YOU FUCKING PIECE OF SHIT!" she yells. My body tenses, waiting to see what the secluded soul in the house does. Right then the door cracks open, not enough to reveal the young boy who was once carried in the arms of the woman, who now uses the same arms to inflict pain on the son she refuses to protect. The woman leaps to the door and opens it. The door is flung open and shut almost immediately drawing the curtains down on the repeated horror I have become a witness to. Show over.

5 hours later the front door opens and footsteps near my room. "How was your day?" I hear my mother ask from the other side of the door. "Did you leave your room today?" She continues, "I'm making your favorite tonight, shougayaki!" I don't respond. I've noticed the delay in her arrival to my room, I can feel her hesitation growing each day while the number of questions declines each day. I can feel the day coming when she will no longer try. "Did anything happen today?" she says. If only I had the courage to speak.

Confession

8:58

Pouring rain, shattered glass.
Gray stretched across the land.
Is it 9 am or 9 pm?

9:30

Consumed in my world, consciousness slips through the gaps, reality
far from real.
Turn the page, the journey awaits.
A glance at the clock, regret lies ahead.

10:26

Tired
I can breathe but can't,
I want to scream...
but my neighbors will complain.

11:00

Waiting in silence, no noise from the living, scared to seem lonely,
A new shade of color paints over me.

11:54

I wait, empty of life, the clock strikes, 11:55

12:00

What's the difference between a suicide note and a will?

17:00

I'm scared
Sink myself in ignorance
euphoria.
there is no such thing as utopia
as long as I'm myopia.

22:44

Standing entangled in thoughts. Sudden barks, and
growls thunder across,
do I run?
do I walk?
False alarm?
Or is fleeing a must?

22:45

Cold. scatter their ashes; Run for the hills.

22:50

Descending is easy, climbing is demanding. Gasping
for air, my goal lies ahead.

22:55

Hunger, not my friend, rumbles heard in silence,
stop it! Don't blow my cover.

23:00

Head tilted down, no meaning in sight,
Kill the dead.
Can't breathe properly.
Lungs deflate
Sharpe truth leaves no marks

Kill me....

Pain seeps out
unwoven wounds

Kill her.

Drain her of red
Plaster it around the world.
Kill them all.

All of them.

23: 58

Time is not fair,

I'm a prisoner for hours
yet,
I'm desperate
till the Last 11:59 00:00.....

01:00
Scream
shatter the glass
break the drum.
Metal tastes better

Burn the flesh stick to my words
Spikes of truth graze the walls
Dig deep
hide the fear

Shade away humanity
Leave no trace

Yell, scream, shout,
hit, punch, spat,
bang, stomp, crack
Let it fall, All to burn

3:00 AM
|

Jessie Momoe Yokohama

Jessie took the 2022 FA creative writing course taught by professor Joel Friedrich.

Jessie loves both watching any kind of sport and playing sports. She played lacrosse in high school and was inspired by the excitement of the sport.

She loves listening to British English accents although she was born and raised in Australia, and plans to study abroad in the UK for a year.

See more of Jessie's creative writing at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/jessie>

An Image that Haunts

Bubbles come and go.
From my lungs to the surface of the ocean.

Wonders come and go.
Is my life going to end here, in the seas of Okinawa

Salty water stings my eyes as I float up to the surface where the palm
trees await.

The pain of the water entering each of my nostrils
Senses come back to me every now and then
Bringing me fear of death

Desperate to leave this memory along with the goggles that still sleep
beside the corals of Okinawa

The closest moment I was near death

A Small Twist

Inspired by the legendary story of the "Tatsuko Statue" which stands in Lake Tazawa, this piece is a fictional story based on the tale of Tatsuko.

There was a saying, "one's hope will come true if they drink water from the northern fountain".

Tatsuko stared at her reflection against the northern fountain mentioned in the legend. She realized how long she had been doing so when the full moon above her had almost faded into twilight.

She finally reached into the fountain and brought the water to her mouth. She took a huge gulp and felt her organs tensing as the cold liquid filled her stomach.

She suddenly became so thirsty that she lay down beside the fountain on her stomach and surprisingly drank all the water in the fountain until the last drip of holy water.

Tatsuko had become a huge dragon, which is said to still live at the bottom of Lake Tazawa. Her fiance visited the lake every year after she disappeared, and tossed a bundle of ivies into the lake. Ivies are known to mean "Eternal Love" in flower language.

Even to this day, we are able to see the beautiful ivies around the lake, which her fiance sent to Tatsuko along with his passionate love for her.

Seita Kume

Seita Kume is a poet. Perhaps, anyone can be one. Poems fascinate him, because they bend and create a new way for how someone may speak. He believes words are the best things you can play with. In the bliss of everyday he does nothing but write and come up with new ideas. The best way to put it, he is a poem from the bottom of his heart.

See more of Seita's creative writing at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/seita>

River Bed

Another summer Sunday river. Don't match Blue's dizzy mood okay. Worst case scenario the brain has to say. He did not just throw up did he?

Plastics on side, waste on board, Blue instead focused on watching a small indigo beside. From his view, a good way to start the day blue.

The river from his window was where he

Stays. All day under dark at my regular venue.
He thought about something. More thinking.
Overload. Blue was addicted to feeling blue.

Tiny window, smaller room. He could gaze outside. Right beside was a reflection of him.

Stretched with thin glass, he could see park, Blue started brushing his teeth.

Sing

Above a green lasting grass underneath was a sand,
I could use the rest of my time to count them, until
I looked to my side where someone lies down, closing his eyes
I couldn't imagine today was summer, our 18th day together
Blue started to sing

Clouds were drifting to form a smiley face and the horses and babies were racing.
Obviously the babies were faster. The wind moved the leaves back and forth. Like a
falling leaf, side to side. The ocean breeze made our eyes go ah.

Charlie Mason

Charlie is a 20 year old exchange student at AIU for the Autumn semester in 2022. She was born and raised in Australia's capital amongst trees and singing birds. She wants a future where she is happy in whatever choices she makes.

See more of Charlie's creative writing at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/akitasugi2021/charlie>

Shoulder

The train is as smooth as everyone says. She hopes it's an omen for the rest of this new life she'll be leading. Outside the round-edged window the fields have begun to get their green back after an especially frosty winter. It all passes mostly in a blur, fields and small houses, rickety roofs and well-worn steps.

It wasn't much of a goodbye, their final night together. Perhaps it wasn't meant to be, but this morning she drank the complimentary tea with lukewarm tap water and stole the amenities on her way out the door. The city was wide and vast, you could reach the tallest point and the expanse of it would continue as far as the eye could see. Last night as they stood above it all she wondered if she was meant to read something into those endless lights. Eventually she decided that she didn't want to be so self-important. Those lights are the millions of souls, not some message meant for her.

In a city of crowded lights, no-one is so important.

After she left him in the hotel she had a slight moment of regret. She knew that if she let it fester she would feel some type of guilt; she'd rather remember the night than the morning. She couldn't get back up to the room regardless.

The train swayed side to side, travelling into a setting sun. She stood, collecting her bags as the train pulled into the unfamiliar station. The train was near empty, only her and a family of three on the other side of the car. They talked in hushed voices, respecting the solemn silence of the stationary train. Her bag was heavy, digging into her shoulder as she waited for the door to open. Her bags threatened to drag her down as she stepped past the threshold.

As she stepped off the train and onto the platform, she refused to look back over her shoulder.

A Stone's Throw

The cold water flows
‘Round the tree-covered hills.
Old stones overlook the show,
A ghost sits tranquil.

The rocks under the bridge stay damp,
Through the journey the seasons take;
Their faces reflect into the camp,
The light shines us awake.

We sit around a fire and warm our hands,
The first of the leaves fall gently down.
We leave the rest of the day unplanned,
And watch as the leaves become browned.

By next morning it's as though we had never been,
Though some of the dirt has been tracked away.
Other than our shoes it feels like a dream
The beauty of that night and that day.

The Streetlight

The streetlight sits still in a dim blue night

Reaching up to a midnight sky.

Does it look towards the moon

And dream of what it can do?

Does it think about the sun,

How bright its light can be,

Or does it look at the children playing beneath and think

‘This is enough for me,’?

Big Read 2022: The Ocean in the Closet by Yuko Taniguchi



Big Read lab students Terue Nagaoka, Aymi Itoi, Yuma Vlaicu, Ritaro Ikegami, Moeka Enomoto, and Sawa Sato leading a final public discussion with author Yuko Taniguchi and Lee Friederich

What is the AIU Big Read?

In Fall 2022, AIU sponsored its first Big Read, an outreach project to Akita-area high school students, community members, AIU students, and AIU faculty and staff members that “creates a community of diverse readers for conversation and discovery through the reading of a book.”

The 2022 Big Read title featured Japanese author Yuko Taniguchi’s English-language novel *The Ocean in the Closet*, a young adult novel exploring transnational adoption after World War 2 through two very different voices: 9-year-old Helen, living near San Francisco, and her Great Uncle Hideo living in Kamakura.

AIU’s 2022 Big Read offered reading programs in variety of settings, including ZOOM discussion groups for high school students, separate in-person discussion groups for EAP students and more advanced AIU students in the LDIC, a faculty and staff discussion group at Hinata, a community discussion group in a Goshono community center, and class discussions in particular courses such as Digital Story Telling, Literature in English, Creative Writing, and Japanese Literature. Students in the new Big Read Lab class led the discussions with high school and AIU students, while Lee Friederich and her husband Joel Friederich, who teaches literature and creative writing at AIU, led faculty and community discussions, together with Kazuhiko Takeuchi, head of the Faculty and Staff Support Office at AIU.

All of the discussion groups came together for a reading and final discussion with author Yuko Taniguchi at the end of the semester-long project. This final event was moderated by the Big Read Lab class, the group of 6 students who carried out the workshops with high school and AIU students as service learning for the Big Read Lab class. The Big Read was sponsored at AIU through the Active Learning Center, with support from the LDIC.

How Can Students Get Involved in the Next Big Read?

Students who would like to lead Big Read discussions with high school students in the next Big Read should sign up for the one-credit Big Read Lab class in Fall 2024 to learn about and practice leading effective discussions with high school students in English. Literature in English/ENG 110 is also strongly encouraged, where you can read Fall 2024's selected title, a manga called Banned Book Club by Eric Estrada and his wife Kim Hyun Sook, whose life experience inspired the writing of book. In addition to describing what it was like to be a college student living under repressive dictatorships in Korea in the 1980s, the manga also delves into the issue of censorship.

A Brief Introduction to *The Ocean in the Closet*

The Ocean in the Closet explores young Helen's relationship with her mother Anna. Hideo is Anna's philosophical uncle who has spent a lot of time reflecting on his experience with his family during and after World War 2. Helen and Hideo live in very different places, but surrounding the history of Anna's birth, their two worlds get connected little by little.

Anna is of mixed heritage, with a Japanese mother and an American father. She spent her first years in an orphanage in Japan and was adopted to the U.S. when she was five because her Japanese mother died shortly after she gave birth in 1945 at the end of the war. She does not know who her father is. Life in the US was very difficult for Anna because she was already fluent in her mother tongue, Japanese, belonged to her own culture, and her feisty personality was quite developed. Anna experienced a lot of racism when she moved to the U.S. because of her Japanese heritage; those tough experiences added up, causing her identity crisis as an adult. Now, as an adult, Anna is mentally sick and has trouble with relationships, especially with her children Helen and her younger brother Ken. Although Anna dearly loves her children and husband, who, as a veteran of the Vietnam War, is suffering from his own issues with post traumatic stress disorder, family relationships are strained as both parents struggle to hold their family together. To find a clue to cure Anna's mental illness, Helen starts exploring Anna's Japanese identity and ends up visiting her Uncle Hideo in Japan, who not only shares Anna's culture, but introduces Helen to Anna's mother Ume, whose greatest wish before she died shortly after giving birth to Anna, was for Anna to be able to express her sorrow.

"Creative Endings"

The ending of *The Ocean in the Closet* is quite open-ended. Students in the Literature in English class were encouraged to imagine the characters' lives years after the conclusion of the story and write an alternative ending to the book. In the creative endings below, literature students Hyuto Uno ("Black Coffee"), Meika Iso ("Red Leaves"), and Flora Alaksza ("My Family: Respecting Trauma") take up Helen's voice, imagining her in several settings: happily married to a Japanese man in Tokyo, as new college student in Tokyo who arrives in time to say good-bye to her dying uncle Hideo, and as a graduate student on her way to Japan with her young daughter Ume, named after her grandmother Anna's mother. Reiko Sato ("What we can Do") describes a reunion Hideo has with the priest who helped him finally bury his sister Ume's ashes, an encounter that helps him discover something important to share with Helen. And finally, Sayaka Eguchi ("Sunflower") ends the cycle of "creative endings" in a story written in Anna's voice contemplating her family's life as she waits for Helen to return home from Japan.

(If you wish to read *The Ocean in the Closet*, please contact Lee Friederich for a free copy.)

Hyuto Uno

Hyuto Uno is a freshman majoring in global business. His essay, "The Afterward of Helen, Who Lives in April 2022," was submitted to the English literature class under the supervision of Professor Lee Friederich. Uno plans to study abroad in Finland and find out what the Japanese government should do to improve education and the working environment by analyzing these fields in Finland. When Uno researched in high school why Finland ranked first in the world happiness report, he became interested in the differences between Japan and Finland, especially in the areas of work and education. As for his future research endeavors, he aims to improve Japan's English education system and overtime work.

Black Coffee

April 2022 < No news is good news >

Nothing strange happens. My life is much better now than in the past. Technologies have been developed, and we can communicate with others online even if we are in different countries. I talk to my children online because they are now abroad.

Sadly, our parents do not exist now. My mother died in the hospital very early when I was in university. In the end, her mental illness was completely not cured. I really regretted her death. If I had cared for her more, I might have saved her life by extending her life span or even letting her live a healthy life. At that time, I decided to live much longer than my mother and achieve many things she could not do. On the other hand, I am not sure about my father. He left our home without telling me and my brother Ken when my mother died. I heard that my father died somewhere a few years ago. Surprisingly, I did not regret his death. I assume that he had a new life in his own way.

I now live in Tokyo with my Japanese husband. I sometimes remember life with my family in the United States and compare it to my current life. I have a lot of memories and often remember these things. My husband is working today, even on a Sunday. He seems to be similar to my father on that point. So, sitting in a chair, I remember my life with a cup of black coffee alone.

April 1988 < Tomorrow is another day >

When I was 22, after I graduated from university, I started to work at a general store in Tiburon, California. Uncle Steve recommended I work there, so I decided to do it. There, I created some accessories and ornaments. In the workplace, I sometimes remembered my childhood. I could not remember clearly, but I never forgot these memories. In elementary school, I created Christmas ornaments with Ryan in December 1975. At first, I was nervous about working with Ryan because I had not talked to him since the fight in November. But he said hello and asked me to work together with him, as if he did not seem to remember that day. I was surprised, but I was also relieved.

I still had my doubts about why he seemed to forget that day. After marriage, I sometimes felt that males tend to be quick to switch off bad experiences. Even though my husband and I quarreled yesterday, he talked to me as if nothing had happened. Like most female people, I considered a lot and imagined some negative things. I admire the male point of view.

One day, I asked my husband, "Do you remember what happened yesterday?"

He said, "Of course, but today is different from yesterday, so I changed my mind. The negative mind should be quickly changed."

"I see..." I was a little confused, but I was convinced that such an attitude was essential for my life.

"So, have you never suffered from something?" I asked again.

"Of course, many times. I also suffered from thinking a lot about something. But I have tried my best since I married you because my pessimistic mind might have affected you negatively."

At that time, I understood everything. Maybe, Ryan also reflected on himself and showed an apology in his way.

August 1997 < Life is what you make it >

When I was 31, I met a Japanese man in San Francisco on a Sunday. He seemed to be lost in the street. I asked him where he wanted to go. Fortunately, he could speak English a little, and my mother sometimes taught me some Japanese when I was a child. She could speak Japanese

because she spent her first five years in Japan. So I could easily communicate with him and help him go sightseeing. He thanked me and invited me to go with him. I was surprised because I thought that Japanese people were shy. I had some free time, so I decided to go with him to see the views of San Francisco.

I asked first, "What's your name?"

"My name is Takeshi. Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you, too. I'm Helen. So why did you come here?"

"Actually, my father works in Los Angeles. So I wanted to come see him. I met him three days ago, and tomorrow I will return to Tokyo."

"I see."

We hit it off quickly and talked a lot, as if we were old friends. After one hour, we arrived at the Golden Gate Bridge. It was the first time for me, and the strong wind really surprised me.

"How nice!"

We said it at the same time and laughed in the middle of the bridge. We talked for about ten minutes there and left.

I had worked at Tiburon for nine years, but it was my first time seeing this view. It was also the first time I dated a man. At that time, I forgot the "date" with Uncle Steve. I had never been to a matchmaking party, so I was initially nervous. But Takeshi was very kind and talked to me in a friendly manner. He was one year older than me and worked at a consulting company in Tokyo. I gradually became attracted to him. The day went by quickly. We exchanged our contact information and said goodbye. After he went back to Tokyo, we often communicated by calling. Two years later, Takeshi invited me to Tokyo. I was thinking a lot and decided to go there. I quit my general store job and started living in his house. In 2000, we finally got married.

October 2001 < It is not birth but breeding that makes a man >

When I was 35, two children were born, a boy and a girl. I named my son Nao and my daughter Kalen because those names sounded natural both in Japan and the United States. The naming was essential because I thought they might be discriminated against in Japanese schools if they sounded too foreign. I cared for my children very much. My parents had not seen me and Ken due to his busy work and her mental issues. I tried not to do the same to my children, so Takeshi and I paid attention to their care.

As they grew up, I sometimes spoiled my children. For instance, I bought many cakes for them. I just wanted to make my children happy. When I bought some sweets for them, they became more joyful and thanked me a lot. So, to see their happy faces, I spoiled them. But, I did not eat many sweets myself. My mother always said that sugar was a poison, and her words were somewhere in my mind, so I refused to eat sweets even after I became an adult. On the other hand, Takeshi liked sweets so much. But, he did not recommend that his children eat sweets, caring for their health.

Usual Day < East or west, home is best >

In my daily life, I am used to speaking Japanese and can easily communicate with Japanese people. But I sometimes think Japanese people may look differently at those who look different. Many people looked at me as an outsider. I do not think it is discrimination, but I do not feel good about it. Japan is an island country, so foreigners are rare for most Japanese people. As the world has been globalized, more foreigners have come to Japan, and we can easily live in Japan. But, when I came to Japan for the first time, most Japanese people gave me a strange look, and I was disgusted. In elementary school, I was embarrassed to say that my mother was Japanese. I fought with Ryan about this issue. In Japan, I was at first embarrassed about my national-

ity. It is strange to be embarrassed about where you were born. No matter who you are, everyone has the right to live with confidence.

My two children are now 21 years old and in their third year of university. They entered Akita International University. The university requires all students to study abroad, so my children are currently studying abroad. Nao is in Vietnam. He is studying at Foreign Trade University in Hanoi. I never talked to him about my father. But I felt my son and father were somehow connected by blood. On the other hand, Kalen is in the United States. She is studying at San Francisco State University in California. I found some similarities between us. I imagine her life in thirty years and drink the rest of my coffee.

Meika Iso

Meika Iso graduated from Akita International University in 2023.

Red Leaves

Notice

As I anxiously wait for the letter, I find myself gravitating toward the closet as if to find somebody in there. After growing older and being away from Mom for a while now the closet doesn't frighten me as much as it used to. I don't even think about it most times except for when I feel anxious and scared. I think about going for a walk as it eases my mind a little. I can't even count how much time I've spent walking alone. The dorm is calmer in the early afternoon as students go about their way. As I make my way down to the lobby my friend Bella waves at me with a sort of anxious look. The mail is here. "To Helen Johnson" it says. I take a deep breath and open the envelope slowly. The paper feels cold in my hand as I read the first word "Congratulations." I don't know whether to feel excitement or fear, relieved or anxious. I feel sandwiched in the middle. Come to think of it, ever since I applied for the exchange program to a University in Japan, I have been whirled up with mixed emotions making me think that I don't know what it is I really want. The faint smell of cherry blossoms comes back as I reminisce about Japan. I can't believe it's been five years. I think of Chiyo and Hideo and Mom. "I guess I'm going" I look up at Bella. "You're not excited are you" she says. She always seems to see through me. "It's not that I'm not excited..." I don't really know what to say. I spend the remainder of the semester mentally preparing myself for Japan and planning out my stay from September. Uncle Steve and Aunt Mary are also happy for me. Ken just said to me "Nice." He's in his phase where he doesn't talk to us that much, but I know he's always thinking about things.

September

I step outside from Haneda airport and the air smells nostalgic. The humidity wraps around my body as if summer is telling me it still wants to stay. As I walk past many buses with my large suitcase, I try to read the signs to find my line. It's my first time being in Japan all alone and it feels so weird to finally be here. Ken and I visited Japan with Uncle Steve a couple times when I was in middle school, but after Mom's crisis we sort of stopped going. I get on the bus. It was crowded and I couldn't understand what the people around me were saying. I've been meaning to learn Japanese because Uncle Steve says it'll be good, but I haven't really done anything. I should've listened to Uncle Steve.

I was surprised that the dormitory was very clean and new. It's not that big but it's enough for two people to live in. When I was settling in the room, I met my roommate Tomoka. She seemed very outgoing and confident. I've always made friends here and there at school but I'm beginning to worry whether I'll be able to make friends here. I look at the silk cloth I brought with me and think of Chiyo and Hideo. I remember my second time in Japan Chiyo bought me a red silk cloth just like Mom's. I haven't talked to them in a while. I try to imagine their surprised faces as I suddenly visit their house. How would they react? Would they be happy or sorry? How often do they think about us? Once I start asking these questions I can't stop. I know that I didn't do anything wrong, but I still feel a little guilty. Mom was doing well for a while after her and Dad separated. We did our gardening every week and she seemed to enjoy it most of the time. So, it felt really sudden for Ken and I when one day she had a breakdown. I was watering the sunflowers that had grown taller than Ken when Mom started crying and broke down on her knees. Mrs. Hogan hurried toward Mom, but she started mumbling and yelling things. Once Aunt Mary realized what was happening, she rushed to Mom and called out for Uncle Steve who was working on the front yard. I can't recall the exact words Mom said that day but she said bad things about Dad and started crying about her life. She said she hated Japan and hated this house and wished that she was never born. She was upset about Hideo and Mrs. Hogan. She was

upset about everyone and everything. Ken and I just stood a few feet away from her not knowing what to do. I remember I was shaking and felt anxious. I felt sorry that I couldn't do better to help Mom.

I had breakfast at the school cafeteria and walked back to my dorm. It's been a few weeks now and I've made a few friends, mostly students that speak English. The air is getting a little cooler, but we still have lots of warm days. I've explored around Tokyo and learned how to buy tickets and go on the train. My dorm room is becoming a bit cozier, and I have a new white blanket with red flowers on them. I go to my desk and find a letter. It's from Chiyo. I look around nervously. Tomoka is out to class, so she probably won't be back for a while. I carefully open the letter and see a piece of paper folded neatly in half. It's Japanese washi paper.

Dear Helen,

Thank you so much for your letter.

I was very surprised to hear that you are in a university in Tokyo now. I am so glad that you are doing well and enjoying your stay. You must have worked hard to get accepted for exchange here. I can't believe Ken is in high school now, he must be very grown now. I'm delighted to hear that Steve and Mary are doing well and taking care of you both.

Over here in Kamakura, things have changed a bit since you last came. Hideo's health hasn't been in the best condition the last few years. A few months ago, we went to the hospital because he was feeling unusually sick. The doctor told us he had heart cancer and it was already at stage 4. He is now hospitalized and receiving treatment, though it is likely that he will not be here for long. I was just about to write a letter to you and your family when I got yours.

I visit Hideo about 3 times a week. It would be lovely if you could visit him while he is still able to understand and talk to us. He seems to know that he doesn't have much time left and I often find him lost in his thoughts and memories. I am quite sure that you are there among his thoughts.

There is absolutely no need to worry or feel sorry for us with what has happened with Anna. We understand. Hideo wishes that he could have done things differently, but it is the unfortunate reality that we cannot change our past.

Please let me know if you will be able to visit us, you are also free to drop by any time and stay over.

Please take care and stay happy and healthy.

Love,
Chiyo

I woke up early this morning to go to Kamakura. I couldn't sleep too well last night because I kept thinking about the letter. "He seems to know that he doesn't have much time left." After Mom had her crisis, she went back to her institution. She kept saying that she didn't want to be Japanese and didn't want her kids to be associated with Japan. I think Mom knows that Japan didn't do anything wrong, but it probably hurts to acknowledge that part of her identity. One thing that is common between Mom and Dad is that they both seem distant from reality. Their head is in their own world where they always linger on the past and think about what could've been. I think they both feel that they have failed in life in one way or another. Dad doesn't stay in one place. He's always traveling here and there saying it's for work. And he drinks more. The air feels cooler this morning as I head to the station to catch my train. It takes about an hour and a half to get to Chiyo and Hideo's place in Kamakura. Once I get to Kamakura, I follow the address from the letter to get to the house I know well. This is probably my fourth or fifth time coming back here. I reach the house and ring the doorbell. It rings a nostalgic

sound as I hear slippers scurry down the hallway. The door slides open and Chiyo is there surprised. "Helen!" Her face changes to relief and steps out to hug me tightly. "Hi Chiyo" I smile. "Oh it's been so long, you've grown so much! You look beautiful Helen." Chiyo strokes my hair. "Thanks..." I feel a little shy.

In the afternoon we went to Hideo's hospital. He looked weaker and smaller and struggled to talk in long sentences. It hurt to see him struggling in pain. He had tubes stuck in him and didn't move much. When he first saw me come in, he was very surprised but then, just like Chiyo, he looked relieved. As we started talking, he started to tear up a little. He told me how glad he was to see me. Chiyo left the room to give us some alone time. "I'm sorry to hear that your mother is unwell again." Hideo spoke. "I didn't mean to abandon your mother when she was little..." Hideo coughed loudly. I know this because Hideo has told us before. "I'm sorry that I've made her life difficult... and yours as well." "It's okay, Hideo". I suddenly feel very guilty that I hadn't come to see him more often over the years. I was young and I didn't really understand when Mom had her crisis. I just felt like it was my fault, so I didn't want to go to Japan anymore. Now that I think about it, I should've thought about Hideo and Chiyo's feelings more. "I've felt lonely..." Hideo says as tears silently fall down his cheek. "My mother left this world too early, and so has Ume... I've abandoned my niece and caused her suffering...in the end...I guess I am like my mother after all...always in fear but too weak to do anything about it...and now I die alone in regret...just like my father..." Tears start forming in my eyes as I tell Hideo, "I'm very glad to have you as my family." I grab two tissues and give one to Hideo. "I don't think you are weak at all...I think you have a lot of respect and care for people." I wipe my tears and take a deep breath. "I think I was unfair...when I wrote to you that I didn't want to go to Japan anymore, I was just confused...I didn't actually dislike Japan or you or Chiyo...I just thought everything was all my fault and I didn't know what to do. But now...I know that it wasn't anyone's fault... it's just how things turn out sometimes..." It was never easy for me to speak honestly about my feelings, but for some reason the words came out easily for me. "You are a very strong woman Helen..." Hideo says, looking at my eyes. "I'm thankful that I got to know my niece..." Hideo starts to cough in pain again. I tell him that he better get some rest. As I get up and grab my bags, I tell Hideo that it's not his fault. "I'll come back later this week, okay?" I close the door and look for Chiyo so we can go home.

Hideo passed away two weeks later. His condition got progressively worse after we met the first time. I visited him three more times and spent a lot of time talking. I spoke to him a lot because he had trouble speaking. Chiyo said she could tell he was enjoying my company. I really hope so. He was in a lot of physical pain, but he seemed calm emotionally like a heavy burden on his heart was lifted.

It's autumn in Tokyo now and the leaves are turning bright red. Colorful leaves fall gracefully to the ground and surround my footsteps as I make my way to school.

Flora Alaksza

Flora is an international exchange student at AIU from the University of Exeter. Her creative ending of Yuko Taniguchi's novel "The Ocean in the Closet" was written for the English Literature course under Professor Friedrich at AIU. Flora became interested in the portrayal of topics such as mental health, mother-daughter relationships and childhood trauma in Taniguchi's novel, and focused on these in her creative ending.

My Family: Respecting Trauma

A week before my trip to Japan I drove to Steve's and Mary's house to ask them if I can leave Ume with them. I wished I could have taken her with me, but I can't really have her miss school for that long. This first year is way too important in her education, and besides she wouldn't enjoy the 16-hour long flight either. I have been putting off this visit for a while, and only as I was parking my car on their driveway did it cross my mind that I take their willingness to look after Ume for granted. On the other hand, Steve has just retired, and him and Mary adore Ume so I didn't see why they would refuse to take care of her whilst I'm away to complete some finishing touches to my PhD on Japanese folklore.

Mary opened the door, and immediately hugged me tightly. "We haven't seen you for a while! How have you been? And how is my favourite great-niece?"

Entering their house, taking in the familiar sight of the furniture, and the smell of whatever Mary is cooking or baking always fills me with nostalgia. It still amazes me how quickly those ten years I spent living here went by. It was only supposed to be for a couple of weeks, but then weeks turned into months, and months turned into years, and before any of us noticed, Steve was helping me carry cardboard boxes of all my belongings to the car as I was moving out for college. I tried to make a habit of visiting them at least once a month but recently the visits became sporadic as I was overwhelmed with finishing my PhD, my part-time job, and just being a single parent to Ume.

"Come to the kitchen! Steve was just about to try the apple pie I made, it's a new recipe!" Mary said. I followed her to the kitchen, and greeted Steve with a hug. After answering all their questions about Ume, my studies, and listening to how Steve's first weeks of retirement went, I finally told them the reason behind my unannounced visit.

"Could you look after Ume next week? I am going to Japan to look at some original documents for my writing, and to finish up some research. I would take her with me but she can't miss school now, and I don't want to drag her out of her daily routine now that she's finally starting to get used to it."

"You know we would love to, Helen, but we're going to be away for the next month. Didn't Mary tell you on the phone?" said Steve, glancing at his wife disappointedly. "I must have forgotten to mention it! I'm sorry dear, but we're visiting my father. He hasn't been too well since my mother passed away last year, and we're helping him to move to a nursing home" said Mary apologetically. Why didn't I ask them about this earlier? I started to feel guilty for assuming they would always prioritise my needs above their own.

"What about Anna? I'm sure she would love for Ume to stay with her for a bit!" said Steve. "I have visited her last weeks, and she seems to be doing well these days. When was the last time you've seen her?" Steve's suggestion left me surprised; it hasn't even crossed my mind to leave my daughter with my mother. We have been in touch relatively regularly, and especially since I left for college, I felt like I started letting go of all the resentment that has built up during my teenage years. At sixteen it felt reasonable to give her a sort of ultimatum. I was sick of her not accepting the responsibility that comes with being a mother, and spending only the occasional weekend with her suddenly seemed like her way of saying that she didn't care enough. I told her that I'll either move back in with her, or not see her again, and when she broke down in tears, I just stormed out of the room and didn't talk to her for months. I suppose this happened around the time when I stopped seeing my mother as a weak, empty tree that needs constant support, and started to see her as a bad mother who abused me and my brother. As the years went by and I matured, this changed into a more nuanced view but even so I felt reluctant to leave my daughter with her for longer than a couple of hours.

But my father lives way too far away from us, and what with Ken living abroad she really did seem to be my best option. “I suppose I could call her, but you know what she is like! She always says she wants to look after her, but every time we’re there, she seems so agitated and nervous, it almost makes me feel guilty! I wish Mrs. Hogan was still around!”

The thing that really worried me however, wasn’t actually my mother’s nervousness around Ume. I didn’t see the point of bringing this up to Steve or Mary when it happened, assuming that I’ll never need to leave my daughter with my mother for too long anyway. But now that they were seriously suggesting I should leave Ume with her, I couldn’t keep it to myself anymore.

“You were out of town that weekend, but around six months ago my advisor rescheduled an important meeting last minute, and I needed to leave Ume with someone for the day. I called Anna, and she agreed to look after her. When I picked Ume up, and asked how their day was, she said Ume was good as gold, apart from when she refused to eat the vegetables with her lunch. She said she had a bit of a tantrum but they all resolved it, and Ume seemed fine. A couple of weeks later we were having dinner at home, and she didn’t want to finish some of her food. She asked me if she needs to go to the closet for that. I was so shocked, I didn’t even know what to say. I told her that of course she doesn’t, but it really upset me. I’ve almost forgotten that she used to do that to me and Ken...”

“Oh Helen!” Mary stood up from the dining table, and hugged me. “I’m so sorry about this! Why didn’t you tell us?”

“I just didn’t see why I should! You were so happy with how content and stable she seemed at the Christmas dinner, and I wasn’t planning to leave Ume with her again anyway.” I said.

“But this is exactly the kind of thing we have to talk about!” Steve said, sounding slightly angry and upset.

“I don’t know, Steve. It made me think. Do you remember when Ken and I moved in with you? You used to tell me that she was like a hollow tree that needed our support. That she loved us very much, but was just somehow weak to be able to take care of us. I didn’t realise it at the time, but it made me feel so guilty. That’s a lot of responsibility to put on a nine-year-old’s shoulders. And I understand that she had a difficult childhood, and a lot of trauma, but that doesn’t excuse everything. People go through awful things, and they don’t all become abusive parents.”

It was raining heavily as I was driving to pick up Ume from school. I got there early, so I just sat in my car parked in front of the school, deep in thought, waiting for her to run out to the car in her red raincoat. I was thinking about my mother, and all the things that she had gone through in her younger years. All the things that formed her into the person I knew as a child, and now as an adult as well, growing up mixed-race in the fifties and sixties, moving to America, and then changing host families.

I still remember what Uncle Steve told me about how hostile everyone was to her when she got married to my father. She was always the outsider, and after my father left for Vietnam, even more so. Of course I understand why she had nervous breakdowns! And it’s not surprising that she thought she was an inadequate mother if it felt like the whole world was against her. But then I remembered the darkness of the closet, and not knowing whether it was going to be ten minutes, an hour, or until dinner and my father’s arrival that I had to stay in there. The worst was when Ken was in there with me. I learned how to kill time, just retreat to my imagination, but Ken was always restless, crying or constantly moving around and talking.

Thinking about Ken’s behaviour in the closet jolted another memory, a much more

recent one, one from about two years ago. One of my old friends from college was in town for a few days, and she came up to our flat for dinner that night. Ume was excited, but as soon as my friend and I tried to have a conversation, she kept interrupting, and demanded our attention. I don't know what got into her that night, but she just wouldn't sit still, she was uncontrollable. I could feel the anger slowly growing inside me, and finally I snapped at her. Of course she started crying, and although I immediately regretted my reaction, I had to be consistent, so I grabbed her arm and led her to her room. I shut her door, and told her she couldn't come out until she calms down.

It was only now, that I've been thinking more about my childhood again that I realised whose behaviour I was mirroring that night. Of course I didn't lock her in a closet, but I certainly overreacted. In a way, I could empathise with my mother, and understood how helpless she felt. But then I also remembered the darkness of the closet. And the ghost.

"Mum, look! Look what I made in art class today!" Ume waved a colourful drawing at me as she was getting in the car, soaking wet from the rain, her dark hair sticking to her forehead. She handed me the drawing from the backseat. It had "my family" written on it by the teacher, and a group of people standing next to a house surrounded by flowers and trees.

"Tell me who is who!" I said, and I felt my throat tighten, as I recognised the figure with long black hair with a bit of red in it. Ume pointed at each figure one by one, and said "Grandma" when she got to the woman with the long hair.

This made me realise. I could finally put into words the thoughts that have been racing through my mind. I can't exclude Anna entirely from my daughter's life. Somehow I need to find a way to respect her trauma, and understand the reasons behind the ways she treated me, but also to protect my daughter, which always has to be my first priority.

"Do you want to visit Grandma this afternoon, Ume? We haven't seen her in a while. And then we go home, and start packing, because it's time that you visit the country some of your family is from. You'll come to Japan with me!"

I know Ume is too young to understand trauma, and mental illness. But I want her to grow up in an environment that doesn't treat these things like taboos, and doesn't brush over major issues only to preserve the image of a functioning family to the outside world. I can start telling her the stories of her family, including myself, now and I'll keep telling them until she fully understands everything. I don't think I'm a perfect mother, but the best I can do is understand the mistakes of the generations before me, and not repeat them.

Reika Sato

Reika Sato is a Sophomore student majoring in Global Connectivity. Her creative essay "What We Can Do" was submitted in English Literature under the supervision of Professor Lee Friederich. Her story is aimed to show the after-story of "The Ocean in the Closet" and to illustrate people with diverse backgrounds who interact and support each other mutually. Sato takes the Teacher's License Program and has been interested in promoting inclusive education in Japan. She plans to conduct further research on this topic by studying abroad in Sweden.

What We Can Do

Planning

After Helen's going back to the U.S, for a while, nothing apparently changed in our daily lives. Chiyo plays her double bass energetically, and I sometimes go to her concert to see her. I thought adults could not grow up and change, but as Chiyo got better and better at playing the instrument, I found it was wonderful to be a human being. In contrast, I still cannot overcome the past, and I am a little afraid of losing this happiness. Every time I experience a blessing, I foresee the pain when it is lost. However, it got a little better after Helen and Steeve. They reminded me of the joyful memories in the past, and also they motivated me to live. Our current goal is to go see Helen's family in the U.S. It was a Sunday after we came back home from walking to the Hachiman shrine, when Chiyo said, "Helen will be a great woman, don't you think?"

"Yes, she must be. Her strength and kindness will help more people around her," I answered.

"Let's go see her in a few years when she's older!" Chiyo asked me cheerfully, and her eyes shined.

It prevents me from denying her. However, the past is sometimes good to be left. My junior high school teacher told me at our graduation ceremony, "Forget about the teacher as soon as possible. There must be someone closer to you who you can ask for help, rather than depending on someone from the past. If you want help, don't come to me." I felt the situation was similar to Helen and us. I would rather want her to keep walking forward than want her to remember us. But I have had many experiences of being helped by past relationships. Now I thought I would let it be good for her smile's sake.

"I'll practice the double bass more to show Helen how wonderfully I can play!" Chiyo said.

"I look forward to it."

"Hideo, what will you show Helen? There are many interesting things for her to see in Japan, but what can you show her yourself?" It was a difficult question. Should I show something to her? Thinking about it made me even more reluctant to go see her. I just laughed it off at that time, but I was thinking about what I can do. I decided to take my time and think about it because it would not be too late to go see her once I determined what to do.

Reunion

I often take walks to the shrine these days. Reading a book in the shrine areas makes me relax, maybe because I can be released from my past for a while. One day I went for a walk as usual and was sitting on the temple grounds when the priest approached me. I thought I had done something offending to God and was about to walk away. But he said, "Wait, Mr. Takagawa." It was someone I had seen before. He was the one who had mourned for Ume at that time. It had been a long time, so I did not recognize him. But I was surprised that he was still working here.

"It's been a long time. Thank you for that time."

"Don't mention it. I am glad to see you are well."

"Thanks to you."

"Isn't this place beautiful? Especially this tree. We have been protecting it for hundreds of years. It is also a resting place for the dead."

It was a strange thing to say, but I understood what he meant.

"I understand. I have always felt the warmth of this tree." The conversation quietly continued.

"Why do you think I approached you at that time?" I had no idea. Wasn't it because he

could not bear to see me wandering around with Ume's bones in my hands? Was there a reason for his words and actions?

"I must have saved you," he said. "If I hadn't spoken to you, the deceased would have taken you with her." With a serious face, the priest said. There was a short silence. My feelings at that time were so vivid that I can still remember that deep and staggering sadness as if it just occurred in my mind. At that moment, everything in the world seemed to be shrouded in darkness.

"What can I do now?" I could not determine whether the priest had heard or not such an internal monologue.

"To live, you need the power of others."

"What do you mean?" He said nothing more about it.

"Please come back here again." He smiled at me and walked away. After I arrived home, I kept thinking about it. After a while, one day when I had almost forgotten about it already, I received a phone call from a professor, my boss at the university I was working at. It was an invitation to participate in a new educational program. While high school and university cooperative programs were becoming increasingly popular, the faculty decided on a policy of visiting elementary and junior high schools to teach classes. However, the professors were busy with research and did not have time, so they had to ask retired teachers and part-time teachers to take their places. She said, "I heard that you had some experience in reading to children. I thought you must be the right person for the job."

"Yes, I used to read to children in an orphanage."

"Would you mind doing it then?" I remembered the priest's words about the need for human power at this point.

"Yes, I will try." Normally, I would not want to take on something troublesome. But now, I was not only looking for a turning point, but I thought that God might be pushing me to do it, so I undertook it. The content of the class was usually about books of English literature. We read together, discussed our opinions and asked the students to think about the main character's thoughts. With the help of Chiyo, I chose simple materials for children. The children at the school I taught were interested in a unique lesson. In one class, there was a child in a wheelchair. His arms and legs were thin and looked as if they would break at any moment. His facial expressions were poor, and he seemed to have no muscle strength. After class, I asked the homeroom teacher, "What happened to the child in the wheelchair?" She told me that he had a disease that caused his muscles to deteriorate gradually.

The teacher said sadly, "As the disease progresses and he loses the ability to move his internal organs and heart, death awaits him." How painful it must be to realize that life is surely fading away? I could not even imagine. The next time I went to that classroom, I decided to say a few words to him. It wasn't much of a conversation, but I would ask him if he enjoyed the story that day and what he thought, and he typed the words with the fingertips he could move. The words the child gave me were as innocent as those of children his age, but thoughtful, the words of a human being living in a world inside his head. It became a trivial pleasure, and I continued talking to him. One day after class, I received a letter from the child.

Until now, I disliked school. Even though I went to school, I couldn't play with others because of my body, and even studying was difficult. But after learning how to read many books in your class, I started to enjoy studying. I want to read more books and express myself. I want to be a writer when I grow up. Thank you.

When I saw the words "when I grow up," tears welled up in my eyes. I thought it was wonderful to have hope, even though there was no guarantee that he would live through tomorrow. I wanted to share this experience with Helen. I wanted her to have the ability to think positively

about the future, even though, like Chiyo, I did not have anything that I could do or show her. I am sure that I will have many more experiences as I interact with children. I will share my experiences with Helen when she grows up. I think it can expand her horizon. She must have found it surprising that I was so energetic in going to the school to teach. "I'm sure Helen would be interested to see you like that," Chiyo said.

Sayaka Eguchi

Sayaka is a senior student in the Global Studies program. Her essay “Sunflower” was written for English Literature under Professor Friedrich at AIU. Sayaka wrote this piece as an epilogue of “The Ocean in the Closet,” based on her interpretation of the book. The original story illustrated hardships and struggles of Anna, a Japanese-American, and her husband James, who served as a Vietnam War fighting soldier. While the story is told from a view of their daughter Helen, Sayaka attempted to bring out the hidden voice of Anna to give readers a hint of what was in her mind behind Helen’s narration.

Sunflower

In 30 minutes or so, Helen's plane will be arriving at San Francisco International Airport. I checked the clock again to see it was almost time I should leave the house to pick her up.

"Ken, I'm leaving! Would you like to come?"

"No, I'm ok. I'll see her soon anyway, right?"

So I got into my car, headed down the driveway from our pretty house filled with flowers. It was July- sunflowers and roses shone with the gleam of the setting sun. It reminded me of the days we first worked on our garden, and the long struggle our family had overcome together. James did return to us in November, 1976. Until then, Helen, Ken and I continued to meet on weekends to check the garden. My children were always sweet and loving, and the fear and anxiety of motherhood began to melt away little by little.

For me, raising Helen and Ken was the process of retracing my own childhood. I stood out in my neighborhood, for my black and sleek hair, a typical Asian appearance. As a child, I could not understand why I was brought to such an alien place. It felt like everyone was watching me with curiosity and sometimes, hostility. The first of two American couples who adopted me tried to be nice to me, but I was too desperate to go home in Japan. I could not stop crying from not being able to understand anything. I sometimes screamed to forget the fear that haunted me. When I was adopted by a new couple, and I was starting to get used to the English and American way of life. My primary school, middle school, and high school days passed away, and finally I met James. A few years later, Helen, and then Ken joined our family. I wished that the joy of this moment would last forever.

But life was not a fairytale. Cruelly enough, James was conscripted to the Vietnam war. That meant I had to take care of our children all alone. There was no doubt how important they are. Yet, I started to get seriously frustrated at them. Why could they act so freely, even though they are partly Japanese as well? Why are they getting me into trouble, where I get an especially stern look because I am Asian? And ultimately, how should I love them, even though I do not know my true mother's love? The concerns and anxiety were swirling inside me, though I could hold on because of the hope that when James returned, everything would be all right again. Such an expectation turned out to be too optimistic.

James returned home with a tired look. His passion for movies, music, and dance was gone. What worried me the most was that he might also have lost a tolerance for me. As if my guess was true, he did not stay home for a long time. Anxiety inside me grew day by day, and my mental state was very unstable. Sometimes I thought there were two me; the adult, responsible me, insisted that I have to be a nice mother and supportive wife for my troubled husband. On the other hand, the child in me took over my body and acted based on her inner desire. I felt bad locking Helen and Ken in the closet, as a responsible mother. Later on, I lost such feeling since the other me was dominant and the adult me was also locked in my closet. I managed to have a feeling that I need to change before the worst thing happens. I talked with James and we decided to take a distance from the children while we fix our own problems.

In the hospital, I enjoyed a life without children's concern for the first few weeks. Surprisingly though, I found myself longing to see Helen and Ken after that. I was relieved, but did not rush to go and meet them. I was still unsure of my condition. As much as I thought about children, I thought about James. At this point, I came to imagine James' mental condition throughout and after the war. I noticed that I was too dependent on him although he had his own problems. I regretted that I did not care about it when I was back home. One day when James came to visit me, I talked about my findings and apologized to him. He seemed a little surprised and became silent. After a while, he started talking about his plan to go to Vermont. There is a friend

who is trying to establish a counseling organization for veterans. He wanted to be involved in the activity because he might also find a solution to get out of a restless mentality. It was hard to think of a life without him again, but I said okay to his decision. I trusted his words that he will return by autumn.

After James returned from his project in Vermont, I also returned home. We were about to start a whole new chapter of our family story with this house. James was not fully recovered yet; but he learned how to deal with the flashbacks and depression that was prolonging after the war. He revealed his experience little by little to me and also Steve. He also told me that he could not come home early because time with family felt unreal and therefore uncomfortable to him. I accepted his apology that he was too occupied with his issues. After all, we are both wounded in some ways and we had to support each other to continue on. He started to sing and dance again with Steve's suggestion. Helen and Ken seemed shocked for the first time, but they soon got used to it. They joined Dad and cheered our house up.

I have not fully recovered yet either. When I got stressed, I wanted to lock away my children in the closet and be alone. But the difference from the past is that I have realized there are so many supportive people for my instability, including my children. In that case, I would call Mrs. Hogan and have my thoughts straightened by talking to her. When James had the capacity to help me, I talked to him as well. He would just listen and hold me tightly. I liked the way he does that; it magically calmed me down. I explained about my condition a bit to my children too. Ken seemed puzzled; no wonder since he is still very young, sometimes he is still like a baby boy. But Helen, although struggling to comprehend all, seemed to have some understanding of me. She has grown mature, especially after her visit to Japan. I was honestly astonished at her courage to do so.

Now it is almost twenty years since then. A lot has changed. James looks much younger compared to the past, being a cheerful man as he was in college. He often takes me out on a date to watch Japanese movies or to dance. He also established a veteran counseling organization in San Francisco by himself. He is admired by many participants there. My mentality became stable, thanks to all the people who supported me. I can feel myself laughing more and being optimistic than the past. I cannot thank my family enough. Oh, and about the children. Ken is now a high school student. He still does some stupid things, but is loved by his friends. They often come over to our house and play basketball. I feel happy at the sight. Helen is now a university student. Since she visited Japan for the first time, her interests for Japan grew more and more. When it was time to decide which university to go to, she told us that she wants to study abroad in Japan. After confirming that her mind is determined, James and I let Helen choose the university. She is studying Japanese literature in Tokyo. She sometimes sends us pictures of scenery, selfies with her friends, or delicious food she encountered.

Now, she is coming back to San Francisco for the first time in her university years. The sign on the road said there is only five miles left to the airport. She must have gotten off the plane by now. James will be home by dinner, he said. He was also excited to hear Helen's story about Japan. I am also very eager to hear her experience, and very, very proud of her. Tonight is going to be the time of our life.