

Japanese University Students' Perspectives on English Language Needs in Secondary School and University Education

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In Japan, major reform plans for English education are currently scheduled to be implemented in 2020. As part of this reform, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2014) has proposed to promote the assessment of all four skills of English (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) in university entrance examinations. In particular, the use of external tests, for example, the Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-based Test (TOEFL iBT[®]) and the Test of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP[®]), has been recommended. MEXT (2016) also proposed a reform plan for enhancing the articulation between upper-secondary education, university entrance examination, and university education. Toward this end, MEXT has plans to introduce the assessment of all four skills as a replacement for the existing National Center Test (NCT) administered by the National Center for University Entrance Examination (NCUEE), which assesses listening and reading only and is commonly used as part of university entrance examinations in Japan.

Although concerns regarding the practicality of introducing external four-skills tests as new entrance examinations have already been raised (e.g., Haebara, 2017), there has been little discussion regarding how language ability should be assessed in entrance examinations of English in Japan (Sawaki, 2017). In particular, little attention has been paid to the target language use (TLU) domain (Bachman & Palmer, 2010), which is defined as “a specific setting outside of the test itself that requires the test taker to perform language use tasks” (Bachman & Palmer, p. 60). In the Japanese university context, the TLU domain should be defined in relation to, for instance, what kinds of English language demands there are in university courses and what students learn in high school English language courses. A careful definition of the TLU domain is crucial for making decisions as to whether a new test should be developed or an existing test should be chosen as a new admission test. In addition, because university admission tests would affect high school students' English learning experiences, it is imperative to examine the washback, or the effects of tests on teaching and learning, in the setting of university entrance examinations of English in Japan.

With the above as the background, this study aims, first, to identify English language needs in the context of Japanese universities, and second, to examine students' learning experiences before entering

universities. As a first step, this author conducted a small qualitative exploration for EFL university students in Japan to examine the English language needs from the perspective of Japanese university students. This study will explore the view of English language needs in Japanese university contexts from the perspective of students, a major stakeholder group. Such an investigation would help developers of university admission tests and decision makers in university academic programs to determine what kinds of English language tests are appropriate for university entrance examinations of English in Japan so as to enhance articulation between secondary and university education.

Literature Review

University Entrance Examinations of English in Japan

The university entrance examination system in Japan is complex. Kuramoto and Koizumi (2016) explained the complex system; the admission tests in the general examinations differ across national, public, and private universities. To enter both national and public universities, candidates have to take the NCT as the first-round test, followed by a university-developed test as the second-round test. In 2015–2017, approximately 560,000 candidates took the NCT (NCUEE, 2018). To enter private universities, students have to take one or more tests: (a) only a university-developed test, (b) only the NCT, or (c) both the NCT and a university-developed test. Whereas test takers can apply for only up to two national universities in a year, there is no limit to the number of private universities to which a candidate can apply. In summary of Kuramoto and Koizumi, high school students in Japan take the NCT and/or in-house tests developed and administered by national, public, and private universities when they take general examinations.

Regarding the content of the English tests, previous studies have shown that university entrance examinations of English in Japan mainly assess reading (Brown & Yamashita, 1995; Kikuchi, 2006). Moreover, national and public universities administer writing tasks as part of their admission tests to some extent (Watanabe, 2016). Taken together, reading and writing are the main targets to date in conventional university admission tests in Japan.

There are some important differences between conventional tests and new four-skills external tests that MEXT (2016) plans to introduce to university entrance examinations. Ozaki (2008) pointed out that, because test specifications of conventional tests for university entrance examinations of English are not released to the public, contrary to standardized tests such as the TOEFL iBT and TEAP tests, stakeholders are confused about the complexity of the purposes of the university admission tests. Although it is common that the tests are used as a selection for university admission, it is not necessarily clear whether a given test has been designed as a proficiency test or an achievement test. Because the information related to test purposes released by universities is limited, it is difficult to enhance the

articulation between upper-second and university education with the available information.

Washback

When introducing a new language test, the concept of washback should be considered. The term “washback” refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Since Alderson and Wall’s washback article, there have been a variety of washback studies in the field of language assessment (e.g., Green, 2007). At the same time, since the proposal of Messick’s (1989) widely accepted unitary concept of construct validity, which argued that the consequential aspect of using tests should be included in test validity, researchers started to examine “after-effects of test interpretation and test uses on stakeholders including value implications and social consequences” (Cheng, Sun, & Ma, 2015, p. 437), as part of construct validation of language assessments.

Among the major findings of washback studies during the last two decades are that washback is a highly complex phenomenon and that a change of tests does not necessarily lead to a change of education (Cheng, Watanabe, & Curtis, 2004). In Japan’s case, for example, the NCT started to administer a listening comprehension test component in 2006. Nevertheless, contrary to expectations, critical reviews on the washback of the NCT listening comprehension test such as Saida (2016) concluded that its effects on higher education in Japan were weak and limited. As seen in this example, changing university admission tests does not necessarily bring about effects on teaching and learning that stakeholders would expect.

An element that would hinder expected washback is the culture for test preparation specific to university entrance examinations in Japan. One such feature of the testing culture in Japan is the acceptance of shadow education, or private supplementary tutoring (Bray, 1999). Japanese high school students usually go to *juku* or *yobiko*, cram schools that focus on test preparation. In the field of language assessment, few studies have dealt with the washback effect of language tests on shadow education. An exception is Allen (2016), who conducted a survey on how students in one prestigious national university experienced shadow education. An analysis of 133 undergraduate students’ survey responses found that even though they all passed the same exam that assessed reading, listening, and writing, they differed in how they had utilized shadow education and in how they had prepared for listening and writing questions. Given that high school students prepared for their tests outside high school, Allen reasoned that students are more affected by *juku/yobiko* than by their high school and teachers.

Taken together, the previous research findings on washback studies in Japan suggest that changing tests does not necessarily bring about positive or negative consequences, whether intended or unintended, partly due to mediating factors such as how students learn or utilize shadow education. In addition, it can be hypothesized that how students prepare for university admission tests would affect

their English language learning after entering universities. Therefore, it is important to examine their experiences of university admission test preparation as part of an exploration of English language needs in Japanese universities.

Needs Analysis

In developing language assessments, clearly identifying the target language use (TLU) domain becomes a starting point. Bachman and Palmer (2010) stated that English language demands in the TLU domain can be explicated by conducting a needs analysis “for identifying what information about test takers is relevant to making the decision” (p. 119) based on test score interpretation. Thus, test developers have to conduct needs analyses so as to make the test content relevant to the actual language use depending on their purposes of test uses.

In the Japanese context, however, to date only a few needs analyses for language assessment have been reported. The few previous studies conducted in Japan are Oki's (2015) and Green's (2014) surveys. First, Oki examined 580 high school students' perceptions of English language needs using an open-ended questionnaire in one high school attached to a private university to compare perceived English language needs between students who took university entrance examinations and those who did not, by taking a text-mining approach. The results showed that regardless of taking university entrance examinations, both groups were eager to brush up their English conversation skills. Second, Green conducted a large-scale survey with 423 high school teachers and 3,868 high school students concerning how they perceived the current situation of English education and their attitudes toward the planned introduction of new four-skills English tests to university entrance examinations of English in Japan. Green's results showed that although both high school teachers and students perceived that reading was the priority at the time of the study, they also expressed understanding that other skills were also necessary in university education. Moreover, they also agreed that university entrance examinations of English would affect English language teaching in high school, and that using four-skills tests could be preferable in this regard. Yet the two studies focused mainly on high school teachers' or students' perceptions of English education, while only a small number of university faculty members provided information regarding actual English language needs in university.

A case of needs analysis that collected information related to actual English language needs on university admission tests is Sawaki's (2017), which was an investigation into university faculty members' perspectives on English language skills that are required in successfully performing in math and earth science courses. Conducting one-on-one interviews with six faculty members, Sawaki examined what kinds of skills were needed and how these skills were employed in their content courses. Her results showed that the math and science faculty members shared the view that reading is a critical skill for

university content courses using English.

The needs analysis studies conducted in the Japanese context reviewed above, however, did not reflect students' perspectives, especially in terms of what types of language use tasks university students in Japan would encounter in university courses. Therefore, identifying representative language use tasks that students have to perform in English in university courses would also be beneficial to understanding more about the TLU domain. Moreover, considering that test takers' experiences of test preparation are considered to affect their readiness of English use even after entering universities, it would also be beneficial to conduct an in-depth analysis in this regard. This author conducted a detailed analysis of a small data set in the current study because few researchers have adopted such a research design in order to examine both representative language use tasks in university courses and students' test preparation experiences in high school.

Research Questions

Following the literature review mentioned above, this study addressed the following three research questions:

- RQ1: What are the characteristics of representative English language use tasks that university students in Japan encounter in university courses?
- RQ2: What factors affected the university students' perspectives of difficulties of the representative language use tasks in university courses?
- RQ3: How did the university students prepare for university entrance examinations of English before entering universities?

Methodology

To answer these research questions, an exploratory qualitative approach was employed for an in-depth analysis of a small data set for investigating representative language use tasks in university education as well as test preparation for university entrance examinations of English in Japan.

Sample and Site

Participants were six university students who were recruited because they met two conditions. First, they were all seniors and had accomplished almost all course requirements to earn bachelor's degrees at the time of their study participation. Second, they had all taken university entrance examinations of English in Japan and previously engaged in test preparation activities. The study sample was a convenience sample due to limited accessibility to students for recruitment. The author contacted and asked participants to fill in a questionnaire on a spreadsheet and send it back to the author. Additionally,

Table 1 Participants' Information

Participant	Major	Gender	Age	Affiliation	Targeted School
A	Psychology	Female	21	National	National
B	English Education	Male	21	Private	National
C	Law	Male	21	Private	Private
D	Mass media	Male	21	Private	Private
E	Sports	Female	21	Private	Private
F	Journalism	Male	22	Private	National

appointments for interviews were made for October 2016 to June 2017.

The six participants' background information is presented in Table 1. Participants' majors differed from one another, but they all were in the humanities and social sciences. They comprised four men and two women, with their age ranging from 21 to 22. Participant A belonged to one of the most prestigious national universities in Japan, while the other five belonged to one of the most prestigious private universities in Japan; both universities are in the Tokyo metropolitan area. While A, B, and F applied for national universities, only A succeeded. On the other hand, C, D, and E applied only for private universities.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved two stages: questionnaire and follow-up interviews. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide information about all courses that they had previously taken at their universities in which they used English at least partially. They were asked to report on both English language courses and content courses. English language courses are those that aim to provide English instruction, whereas content courses are those that aim to provide instruction, in English, for various fields of study. Participants wrote down representative language use tasks in each course on the spreadsheet, and also provided information regarding each course: title, level, and type (compulsory/elective). Participants also provided additional information such as texts/materials they used in the course, and a simple explanation of the content including what they learned and how they felt about the course (see Figure 1). The participants completed the questionnaire in Japanese. Upon completion, they sent their responses to the author via e-mail.

In the follow-up interviews, each participant was interviewed by this author, in Japanese, in a small seminar room at a private university. While referring to his or her survey responses, the author asked the participant various questions, so that the participant could elaborate on the courses he or she had taken. After the discussion of the university courses, the author also asked about the participant's experience of English language learning in high school. All interviews were audio-recorded and ranged

	授業名	受講した学年	必修 / 選択	テキスト / 教材	簡潔な授業内容の説明
1	general tutorial English	1年	必修	tutorial 用の教科書	英語ネイティブとの少人数授業。会話中心
2	英文法	1年	必修	Communicative grammar	先生が英文法について英語で説明し、時々出される質問について
3	英語音声学	1年	必修	Peter Roachの教科書	articulationとかsuprasegmentalについて1年間やりました。

Figure 1 Example of completed questionnaire

from 42 to 63 minutes (median = 52).

Data Analysis

As first steps to data analysis, the author transcribed the recorded audio data, then read and re-read the spreadsheets and analyzed them for coding. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, no specific analytic framework was employed. Instead, the author generated codes by taking a bottom-up approach, then integrated the codes into broader, common categories corresponding to each research question. To address RQ1, based on questionnaire information, each course was categorized by type (e.g., compulsory vs. elective, English language courses vs. content courses), and representative language use tasks that participants had reported in questionnaires and interviews were identified. To answer RQ2, information concerning perceived difficulties of the representative tasks were also categorized into similar themes. To address RQ3, the self-reported percentage of participants' efforts in developing each of the four skills were summarized into a table form. Furthermore, the characteristics of test preparation for university admission tests of English that the participants reported in their interviews were coded and categorized into similar themes. The coding and categorization were based on the participants' original Japanese responses, and the results and interview excerpts shown in the Findings were translated into English by this author. The second coding verification was conducted by the author a week after the first one.

Findings

RQ1: Characteristics of Representative English Language Use Tasks in University Courses

To address RQ1, this section summarizes the types of courses that study participants had taken, then describes the representative language use tasks in those courses that participants experienced, first for English language courses and then for content courses.

Types of courses. To identify the representative tasks that participants encountered, the number of

Table 2 Number of Courses That Participants Took

Participant	Major	# of Courses	Compulsory	Elective	Language	Content
A	Psychology	9	4	5	6	3
B	English Education	19	5	14	7	12
C	Law	8	8	0	8	0
D	Mass media	4	4	0	4	0
E	Sports	10	4	6	6	4
F	Journalism	3	2	1	3	0

courses that they had taken were counted, then tallied by type, as shown in Table 2.

As depicted in the fifth column of Table 2, the number of elective courses taken varied across participants. For example, participant B reported taking 14 elective courses out of 19 courses in total — a large ratio compared to the other participants. The reason could be that B's major is English education. On the other hand, C and D took no elective courses that involved English, while F took only one such course. A and E took elective courses in various fields of their interests. F took one elective English language course because he wished to brush up on his reading comprehension skills for test preparation for a graduate school entrance examination of English.

Similarly, the number of content courses previously taken varied from participant to participant (see the right-most column of Table 2). Participant B took 12 content courses involving English out of 19 courses in total. In contrast, A and E used English for their majors rarely; A was required to use English in two psychology seminars, and E used English in a sports journalism seminar.

Another characteristic shown in Table 2 is that almost all compulsory courses involving English taken by participants C, D, and F were English language courses. This was true for all such courses taken by C and D, and for one out of three such courses for F.

Representative language use tasks in English language courses. Table 3 shows the list of representative language use tasks in English language courses that emerged through data analysis.

Among these tasks, at least two participants experienced reading textbooks written in English, having a discussion with other students, listening to lectures in English, responding to a lecturer's questions, and writing paragraphs and essays following conventions of academic English. Five out of the six participants experienced giving presentations in English. These tasks could be considered frequent in English language courses in this study context. Other tasks were experienced by only some of the participants: watching English video (A, C, F), reading textbooks aloud in class (A, C), and giving a speech (B, C). The characteristics of common representative tasks that participants experienced were those required in compulsory and English language courses that encouraged the use of the four skills.

Representative language use tasks in content courses. Tasks experienced by more than one

Table 3 List of Representative Tasks in English Language Courses in University

Representative Tasks	Participants
Reading textbooks written in English	A, B, C, D, E, F
Having a discussion	A, B, C, D, E, F
Listening to lecture in English	A, B, C, D, E, F
Responding to lecturer' s question	A, B, C, D, E, F
Writing academic English	A, B, C, D, E, F
Giving a presentation	A, B, C, E, F
Watching English video	A, C, F
Reading textbooks aloud in class	A, C
Giving a speech	B, C

Note: Participants means who experienced the representative tasks on the left side.

Table 4 Representative Tasks in Content Courses in University

Representative Tasks	Participants
Reading English papers	A, B, E
Reading textbooks	A, B, E
Summarizing English papers	A, B
Giving a presentation	A, B
Translating English papers into Japanese	A, E
Listening to English lecture	B, E

Note: Participants means who experienced the representative tasks on the left side.

participant in content courses they had previously taken are shown in Table 4. Whereas participants experienced various language use tasks such as those in Table 3 in several English language courses, only participants A, B, and E used English in content courses. The numbers of representative language use tasks in content courses were fewer than those in English language courses.

As Table 4 shows, participants A, B, and E all experienced reading English papers and reading textbooks, while only two participants experienced each of the following tasks: summarizing English papers either in Japanese or English (A, B), giving presentations (A, B), translating English papers into Japanese (A, E), and listening to lectures delivered in English (B, E).

The participants' interview responses showed that the tasks mentioned in the previous paragraph can be divided into major courses and courses of the participants' own interests. In their major courses, participants A and E were required to perform few tasks in English in their own majors, psychology and sports, respectively. For example, A needed to summarize academic papers in Japanese so that she could share them with her seminar classmates.

RQ2: Factors Affecting University Students' Perception of Difficulties of the Representative Tasks

Coding and categorizing of the interview data resulted in the identification of four categories and subcategories, explained below, for which students perceived difficulties in representative language usage tasks: spontaneous speech, knowledge of academic skills, past experiences, and lecturers' feedback. Table 5 shows these categories and subcategories, identified by participants.

The column labeled as "Positive/negative" shows whether a given (sub-)category affected their perception of the tasks above positively or negatively. N/A means that it was difficult to determine positive or negative.

Spontaneous speech. Participants commented on four subcategories of spontaneous speech.

Difficulties in speaking. Four participants (A, B, C, F) reported having difficulties in speaking during discussions and responding to lecturers' questions. Participant A faced this difficulty in an English language course: "all students except for returnees coming from English-speaking countries were worried about speaking. We could say only ordinary things." Expressing what they wanted to say effectively was the most frequently reported difficulty.

Difficulties in listening. Two participants (C, E) reported difficulties in understanding what their course instructors intended to express in English in their English language courses. This appears to have been caused by a lack of listening comprehension ability.

Ease of giving a presentation. In contrast, two participants (A, B) mentioned that they did not mind planned speech: "Presentation is not difficult because I could prepare for it" (participant B). Although giving a presentation involves extended oral production, advance planning reduced the perceived difficulties for these participants.

Table 5 Categories and Subcategories of Participants' Perceived Difficulties of English Language Tasks in University

Categories	Subcategories	Participants	Positive/negative
Spontaneous speech	Difficulties in speaking	A, B, C, F	Negative
	Difficulties in listening	C, E	Negative
	Ease of giving a presentation	A, B	Positive
	Qualities of discussions	E, F	N/A
Knowledge of academic skills	Lack of general academic literacy	A, C, F	Negative
	Lack of academic writing skill	C, D	Negative
	Lack of vocabulary	C, D	Negative
Past experiences	Studying outside universities	B, E	Positive
	Background knowledge	B, C	Positive
Course instructor's response		B, C, D, E	Positive

Note: Participants means who told the felt difficulties on the left side.

Qualities of discussions. Whereas participants referred to the difficulties of spontaneous speech, two participants (E, F) pointed out that discussions were not always difficult unless quality expectations were high. Participant F reflected on discussions he experienced in English language courses:

During discussions, the conversation did not continue. Someone told his or her opinion, after that the other told his or her opinion, and the discussion ended. There is little to do left, although discussions in the class is regarded as OK (...) Communication is interaction, so the discussion is not an interaction.

Participant F said that even if students in his class seemed to have accomplished the discussion tasks, it did not follow that they could communicate with each other. Therefore, the perceived difficulty of spontaneous speech could be affected by factors other than participants' language ability.

Academic skills. Three subcategories were identified in regard to deficient academic skills.

Lack of general academic literacy. The lack of general academic literacy, distinct from English language learning, was mentioned by three participants (A, C, F). For instance, C had to give a presentation during an English language course: "I spent a lot of time searching for references and reading them."

Lack of academic writing skills. Two participants (C and D) had not written any academic essays in English before taking university courses requiring this skill, so they reported difficulties. D was not sure how to write essays that follow the conventional structure, i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion, which made this task difficult for him.

Lack of vocabulary. Two participants (C, D) had difficulties with unknown words and phrases upon entering universities. They discovered that the vocabulary level in university education in English could be much higher than that at the high school level.

Past experiences. Participants' past experiences also affected their perceived difficulties of academic language use tasks at the university. There were two subcategories of these experiences.

Studying outside schools. Experiences of studying English outside campus made two participants (B, E) speak with confidence: "At the end of my second year, I attended a short-term study-abroad program in Britain. I did not improve my speaking ability much, but I became confident" (participant B).

Background knowledge. The knowledge participants had gained previously reduced the burden to read English because "It was easy to read English books on phonology with my background knowledge" (he learned in the previous semester) (participant B).

Course instructors' responses. Participants reported that instructors who taught their courses provided feedback in various ways, facilitating students' speaking. Participants C and E experienced

that, although the courses were conducted in English, the teacher provided Japanese support when necessary.

RQ3: University Students' Preparation for University Entrance Examinations of English Before Entering Universities

This section first describes the ratio of practicing the four skills in their test preparation, based on the participants' interview responses. This will be followed by a discussion of the characteristics of participants' test preparation for university entrance examination of English through coding and categorizing interview data related to this area.

Self-reported Ratio of Skills for University Admission Test Preparation. During the interviews, this author asked participants to assign percentages of time spent on test preparation for the four skills. Table 6 presents their self-report ratios for the practicing of reading, listening, writing, and speaking for university admission tests. The type of university to which they applied is noted because the emphasis on the study of listening seems to depend on whether they took the NCT, including its listening comprehension test.

As shown in Table 6, participants mainly studied reading (50%–80% of effort), followed by writing (10%–30%). In addition, the extent of preparing for listening varied among participants. Participants A, B, and F practiced listening because they targeted national universities. Thus, they had to take the listening test of the NCT. The reason why E practiced listening while she neither targeted a national university nor had to take the listening test for the NCT is that one of the private universities she applied for assessed listening comprehension. Furthermore, and not surprisingly, participants did not practice speaking because there was no speaking test in their entrance examinations.

Characteristics of Test Preparation for University Entrance Examination of English. The main categories and subcategories are shown in Table 7.

Factors affecting test preparation. The factors included shadow education, high school, and past university admission tests, among other factors.

Table 6 Participant's Self-Report Percentages of Effort on Each Skill

Participant	Targeted School	Reading	Listening	Writing	Speaking
A	National	80	10	10	0
B	National	60	10	30	0
C	Private	60	0	30	0
D	Private	70	0	30	0
E	Private	50	30	20	0
F	National	50	30	20	0

Table 7 *Categories and Subcategories of Participants' Test Preparation for University Admission Tests*

Categories	Subcategories	Participants
Factors affecting test preparation strategies	Shadow education	A, C, D, E, F
	High school	A, B, C
	Past university admission tests	A, D, E
Common specific test preparation practices	Word books	A, B, C, D, E
	Supplementary textbook	B, C, D, E, F
	Past tests	A, B, C, D, E, F

Note: Participants means who reported the test preparation for university admissions on the left side.

Shadow education. Five participants (A, C, D, E, F) went to *juku/yobiko* not only to take supplementary English language courses but also to learn how to prepare for tests from lecturers or advisors in *juku/yobiko*. Participant D turned to *juku/yobiko* partly because teachers in his high school focused on test preparation for national universities only, while D wished to go to private universities. In sum, shadow education affected students' test preparation in important ways.

High school. Even though participants were likely to turn to *yobiko/juku* for test preparation, three participants (A, B, C) also asked their teachers for help. Considering that they were also engaged in shadow education, however, it appears that high school education had less impact on their test preparation than did shadow education.

Past university admission tests. Three participants (A, D, E) changed their test preparation strategies on their own through studying past university admission test questions: "At first, I thought it is enough to prepare only for reading, but I found English composition questions in the past exam. So, I came to think this (word book) was useful for writing." (participant D)

Common materials for entrance examination preparation. As shown in Table 7, the common types of materials that the participants reported utilizing for test preparations were word books, supplementary textbooks, and past tests.

Word books. All participants used word books that contained lists of vocabulary that were likely to appear in university entrance examinations of English: "I started reading a word book for 20 minutes a day while going to school by train" (participant B).

Supplementary textbooks. Participants used several textbooks that were appropriate for the type of test tasks they would encounter in actual examinations: "In *juku*, I did not take a course of grammar, so I bought a textbook for grammar recommended by my *juku* teacher" (participant C).

Past tests. All participants answered the questions in past tests that are commercially available. Even participants A and D took courses of *yobiko* in which the textbooks adopted questions from tests of famous universities.

Discussion

The purposes of the study were first to identify the English language needs in the context of Japanese universities, and second to examine students' learning experiences before entering universities. To do this, the study addressed three research questions in order to identify representative language use tasks that study participants experienced in university courses as well as their perceived difficulties of the tasks (RQ 1 and 2) and to explore their experiences of university admissions test preparation in high school (RQ 3).

Representative Language Use Tasks and Perceived Difficulties in Universities

The major finding is that participants experienced language use tasks that require four skills in English language courses, but three of the six participants used the four skills in compulsory courses for the most part and never used English for their majors. The characteristics of common tasks that participants experienced (Table 3) were those required in compulsory as well as English language courses. This shows that university students experienced the use of the four skills in the first or second year, but they would not continue to use the four skills after they completed the courses. Contrary to studies by Oki (2015) and Green (2014), this suggests that university students' actual needs of English language use are limited for getting university credits.

As to content courses, three of the six participants used the four skills in content courses, yet the tasks were mainly experienced by B, whose major was English. In the cases of A and E (psychology and sports majors), the skills used in their majors were mainly reading and writing. This is partly consistent with Sawaki (2017), showing that five out of six faculty members of science reported that textbooks and handouts were the main types of reading materials, and that one faculty member in her study said that they used English a little in writing theses. The difference between findings of this study and those of Sawaki is that participants in this study reported using not only reading but also additional tasks: summarizing and translating English into Japanese or English. This indicates that in terms of students' perspective, the main skills needed in major courses (except for English majors) are reading skills and only more rarely writing skills, although the findings come from only two participants.

Factors Affecting University Students' Perception of Difficulties of the Representative Tasks

Participants referred to perceived difficulties of the representative tasks they experienced. Lack of skills related to spontaneous speech and lack of knowledge of academic skills affected students' difficulties negatively. On the other hand, participants' knowledge of past experiences and course instructors' help affected them positively.

In terms of the articulation of education between academic years in university, it is difficult to judge whether participants' perceived difficulties came from deficits in the four skills or the lack of a bridge course in the first year of university to support the use of English after the second year. What makes interpretation difficult is that as shown above, the use of the four skills could be limited only to compulsory and English language courses. As stressed by the excerpt from participant F, although discussions are introduced in English language courses in Japanese university, it is doubtful whether the activities worked well in the classroom. Considering that they all completed the courses successfully, what should be examined first is what university students obtain in their compulsory courses in the first year.

Experiences of Test Preparation for University Admission

Findings show that five out of the six participants went to *juku/yobiko* and tended to turn to *juku/yobiko* rather than teachers in high schools. In addition, they utilized information regarding word books, supplementary textbooks, and past tests to succeed in passing entrance examinations, showing that test preparation outside high school had a more important role for students' test preparation than did high schools. Another notable finding concerning participants' test preparation activities is that participants used past exams and that their test preparation strategies depended on their content.

This suggests that if MEXT tried to improve the articulation between upper-secondary education and university education by way of changing university admission tests, it would not function well because students turn not to high school but to shadow education and online information. The findings are consistent with Allen's (2016) in that university students in prestigious national universities varied in how they prepared for listening and writing tests, although the entrance examination for the national university consists of reading, writing, and listening questions. This point is worth noting in considering how to facilitate positive washback by introducing new tests. Moreover, as noted above, participants used the contents of past tests and materials (word books, supplementary textbooks). These findings supported previous studies (Ozaki, 2008), showing that Japanese universities release not the specifications for their tests but the past tests themselves, resulting in students who might not know about the purpose of the tests. Therefore, introducing the four-skills tests requires investigation of how stakeholders perceive the new tests with new test cultures.

Overall Discussion

In summary, the study identified English language needs from students' perspectives. In terms of articulation between upper-secondary and university education, it requires further investigation into which affect governs the perceived difficulties of English language uses in university: students' preparation for university admission tests, in particular, through shadow education, or compulsory

English language courses that most students would have to complete for their graduation. Moreover, the problems of articulation would pose a broader question about the purpose of compulsory and English language courses in the first year of university.

Conclusions

The study identified representative language use tasks that a small group of Japanese university students encountered in university English language and content courses as well as how they prepared for university entrance examinations of English as high school students. This study could contribute to the development and selection of university admission tests in providing a description of how university students felt about difficulties of English language needs as well as how they prepared for the admission tests. Although this is an exploratory study and data were gained from only six participants in a small number of departments in two universities, it will serve as a first step to identifying the TLU domain for better English tests for university admission as well as for a smooth articulation between upper-secondary and university education in Japan.

In conceptualizing further studies, some of the findings of the in-depth interviews conducted in this study could provide hypotheses to be tested in the future: 1) most university students in Japan use English only for compulsory English language courses; and 2) shadow education for university admission test preparation plays a crucial role in affecting high school students' English language learning. To test these hypotheses, further studies could include larger quantitative surveys on English language needs in Japanese contexts, or more detailed examinations regarding how high school students as university candidates perceived English language needs. The findings of representative tasks and perceived difficulties in the study will enable them to be implemented.

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