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EGAP Vocabulary in Required EFL Classes: Administrators', Instructors' and Students' Perspectives and Treatment

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Different stakeholders can have varying perspectives and expectations about a common piece of educational material. Often, research points to differing expectations of the three estates in higher education – Administrators, Instructors and Students (Altbach, 1998) – and it is hoped that a closer examination of the expectations and utilization of a given educational material can help the groups better understand and engage with the subject material. This paper investigates these different perspectives and expectations with regards to an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) word-list in the required EFL classes in a Japanese university.

This investigation uses a series of small-scale studies in an attempt to shed light on the perspectives and treatment of these three groups of stakeholders: the administrators of the EGAP vocabulary list, the teachers who deploy it and a cross-section of students who study it for their required EFL class as part of the general-studies programme for newly-enrolled students at a Japanese university. Comparisons of the differences in expectations and treatment are examined, with implications for pedagogy discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Inquiries into foreign or second language (L2) learning commonly state that acquiring vocabulary is one of the main building blocks upon which L2 competence can be built. Many researchers through the years have illustrated strong links between lexical knowledge and language skills (Wilkins, 1972; Krashen, 1989; Nation, 1990, 1997; Schmitt, 2010). As learners progress into higher or tertiary education, the increasingly global nature of the knowledge sphere requires at the same time a broader and more detailed vocabulary, though there are multiple ways to achieve this. Some contemporary reports suggest that vocabulary in English for

Academic Purposes (EAP) courses can be divided into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) while other research retreats from this, and further sub-divides categories into EGAP-A (Arts) and EGAP-S (Sciences) vocabulary lists for more accessible use in university-level classes.

Universities are traditional seats of higher education, learning, knowledge and exploration. Prospective students strive to attend their chosen institution and acquire knowledge and skills to help them thrive in their future. In Japan's higher education institutions (HEIs), foreign language study is but one of the common classes intended to help in this endeavor. At the same time, however, explains that such endeavors take place against preexisting and complex environmental, social, cultural and institutional backgrounds (Barnett, 2004; Biggs, 1987; Wen & Johnson, 1997). Within a given HEI, rooted first in the cultural and social forces of society at large, there will be several notable structural and systematic factors including resources, syllabus, and assessment, which may influence the perspectives of and engagement with such vocabulary lists by different estates/actors – such as administrators, instructors and students (Altbach, 1998) – within the university.

This paper seeks to explore the interaction and engagement *in-situ* and *as is*, with EGAP vocabulary lists by different actors within a given HEI in Japan. Centered on the introduction of a new EGAP vocabulary list for first-year students at a university in Japan, this investigation will discuss a series of small-scale studies in an attempt to shed light on the perspectives of and engagement of three main stakeholder groups in a university; administrators, instructors and students. Interviews were conducted first with administrators who created the list and some of the instructors who utilize it in their classrooms to assess their respective expectations and perceptions of engagement, which were followed up by a small survey of a cross-section of students who study the vocabulary list for one of their required EFL classes as part of the general-studies programme for new students at a Japanese university. The surveys consisted of Likert-scale prompts which seek to elicit personal responses related to individual study habits and reactions to the vocabulary list.

In exploring this situation, a review will first be conducted of relevant literature regarding (i) vocabulary study (focusing on EGAP vocabulary), (ii) possible social, cultural and institutional influences operating within the target situation, and (iii) the different estates of higher education. Second, the methodology for each section of the investigation will be explained, following which the results will be presented and analyzed. Finally, these results will be discussed, with findings and implications for future studies and practice posited.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary & Vocabulary Assessment

Vocabulary is an important part of second language acquisition (SLA) in general and features heavily in syllabuses and curricula for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses of study. A wide range of inquiries have focused on vocabulary as a function of language (Wilkins, 1972; Krashen, 1982; Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997; Schmitt, 2010; Nation, 2010), vocabulary learning/acquisition (Nation, 2001; Horst, 2005), as well as the selection of vocabulary for general or specific academic purposes.

Generally speaking, vocabulary is considered a central part of language ability. As broadly stated by Wilkins (1972), while “without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p. 111). Other researchers echo this importance, with Read (2000) claiming that “words are the basic building blocks of language” (p.1). This loosely links with both Krashen’s (1982) Input Theory in that a higher degree of linguistic input correlates with a higher degree of language acquisition and ability. Furthermore, while mainly focused on L2 communicative competence and ability, much of the research admits – both directly and indirectly – that wider and deeper vocabulary knowledge has strong, positively-correlated links with higher scores on language assessment tests (Schmitt, 2010). Milton’s (2009) research also highlights this link, showing that better phonological vocabulary knowledge is a strong predictor of higher scores on listening assessments. Thus, as vocabulary is a central part of language ability it positively influences practical communicative ability and assessment scores.

When learning a target L2 such as English, part of the difficulty is the sheer scale of the task. A review of research suggests that while knowledge of 6,000-7,000 word families are sufficient for daily communicative competence, native English speaker university graduates know closer to 15,000 word-families (Schmitt, 2010, p. 7). Acquiring this level of vocabulary is often noted as not entirely practical – especially in non-language centered courses of study – as it requires a heavy commitment of time and cognitive resources both inside and outside of the classroom (Milton, 2009). In addition, there is the problem of vocabulary attrition; in order to upkeep knowledge one needs to frequently and regularly revisit it with explicit intent – though also, to a point, incidental (Krashen, 1989, p. 461) – which again in itself requires further time investment. A tendency for EFL learners’ vocabulary knowledge to be mainly receptive was noted by Melka (1997) who speculated this may perhaps be due to the focus on reading and writing skills. Further research into Japanese university students’ vocabulary sizes shows them to range on average from 2,000-4,000 words (Mochizuki, Aizawa & Tono, 2003)

which only adds to the scale of the undertaking. As such, it is often the case that vocabulary for certain fields are pre-selected.

Within the realm of EFL vocabulary, there are several subdivisions of vocabulary compiled into selected lists with specific intents and functions. Common examples, often drawn from corpus studies, include West's (1953) General Service Lists (GSL) and Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL); while they have been updated recently (Browne, Culligan & Phillips, 2013). Lists such as these – and more tailored lists for specific standardized exams such as TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC – continue to feature in a wide number courses of study with the aim of improving and honing the learner's vocabulary knowledge. In review of a range of academic papers, Nation (2001) suggests that 78.2% of the words from this mini-corpus featured in the GSL, and 8.5% from the AWL. Therefore, assuming relatively sound knowledge of vocabulary in the GSL and AWL, academic EFL learners in Japanese HEIs need to be provided with resources for effective academic vocabulary training (Tajino, Dalsky & Sasao, 2009) to help increase their awareness and recognition of specialized words within their fields of study.

Academic vocabulary differs from other subsets of vocabulary, though it remains difficult to define. Previous definitions include “low frequency, context-independent words occurring across disciplines” (Martin, 1976, p. 92), with Chung and Nation (2003) terming it more field-specific and calling it “technical vocabulary” (p. 104). While there is corpus research conducted into a selection of academic articles from multiple disciplines (Tajino, Dalsky & Sasao, 2009) demonstrating that English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) can empirically be divided into subgroups, including (i) Medicine, Pharmacy and Agriculture, (ii) Economics, Law and Education, (iii) Science and Engineering, and (iv) Literature, the same research suggests that if “developed by pedagogically determining the selection criteria” (p. 17) a structure selection of ESAP words can be divided into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), EGAP-A (Arts) and EGAP-S (Science). Such sub-division word lists in word-lists is intended to increase both (i) the specificity and (ii) the efficacy of vocabulary study with these lists undertaken by EFL learners in a given context.

Situational Influences

A range of situational factors are considered to press upon and influence the actions of individuals in given contexts, and this by nature of course extends to the learning undertaken in such a context. Here, a rugged process approach, Biggs' (1987) Pressage Process Product (PPP) framework, may help us to see how factors compound and influence factors downstream. Wen and Johnson (1997), in basing their research on this framework, importantly note that upstream, situational factors influence the outcome through individual factors (p. 31). Boud, Keogh and Walker

(1998) also note these factors as being part of the situational “milieu”. Figure 1 posits a framework for this process:

FIGURE 1
Pressage, Process, Product system (based on Wen & Johnson, 1997)

<u>Situational Factors</u>		<u>Individual Factors</u>		<u>Outcomes</u>
<i>Environmental</i>	<i>Institutional</i>	<i>Unmodifiable</i>	<i>Modifiable</i>	<i>Learning</i>
cultural	resources	knowledge	purpose	
economic	teaching	aptitude	beliefs/identity	
social	assessment	age	effort/motivation	
linguistic		prior learning	management strategies	
Pressage \longrightarrow Process \longrightarrow Product				

Taking these factors in order, we can see that Environmental factors help shape Institutional factors, which affect individuals – such as administrators, instructors and students – further along the process in the given HEI context.

Culturally, Japan has an interesting set of national characteristics. According to Hofstede’s (1996) model of cultural dimensions, Japan has a high Uncertainty Avoidance (92/100), Masculinity (95/100) and Power Distance (54/100) with low Indulgence (46/100) and Individualism (42/100) scores. Perhaps owing in part to these characteristics, the treatment of non-Japanese artefacts (such as other languages, including English) has led to ‘English in Japan’ receiving much focus from researchers and teachers working in the various sections of the education system. McVeigh comments that Japan seemingly has a “love-hate relationship with English” (2004, p. 212), and centers his reasoning around the assessment that despite the apparent recognition of the utility and need for English speakers in an increasingly globalized world there seems to be little actually being undertaken to attain English proficiency, at least in terms of government educational policy. Seargeant (2009) also examines this issue, though from a sociocultural perspective. In taking a step back to examine the indexicality of English, Seargeant (2009) suggests that the *idea* of English, and indeed other foreign languages, as an *outside, other* item, retains strong influence on all activities concerning it.

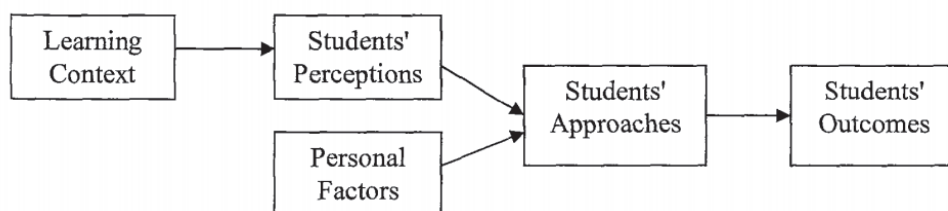
From these cultural dimensions, we can see that Japan could primarily be considered an efficient, product-focused, group-based, rule-following, risk-averse

society. In such a situation, both the active agents (i.e., instructors and students) and the passive agents (i.e., administrators) are under pressure to ‘produce’ as expected. These expectations are nominally set by departments within each HEI, though recently increasing pressure has been seen from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in the form of required plans for globalizing certain campuses and taking measures to standardize required course structure. Further, concerning the nature of the educational institutions themselves, many educators and commentators have highlighted this Japanese product-centered uniqueness, a main facet of which is the focus on examinations (Barry, 2004; Berwick & Ross, 1989; Gunning, 2009; Sato, 2009). With three examinations a semester and high-stakes tests guarding entrance to the next stage of schooling, it is perhaps not surprising that the system in its current state is frequently criticized by educators (Clark, 2009; Gunning, 2009) for its overshadowing of much of L2 language learning throughout mandatory education. The emphasis on exams supports an entire education subsector of ‘cram schools’, known in Japanese as *juku*, which an average of 60% of junior high school students attend after regular schooling hours (Mawer, 2015, p. 132). Through their own explicit focus on entrance exam tests, these cram schools have created a sort of feedback loop where some *juku*’s “feed” enrolment into certain schools. As such, this focus on exams and tests could be considered, quite understandably, to instil in students the view of looking at English – and indeed other commodified subjects – “as a test” (Barry, 2004, p. 54). This in itself might not necessarily be a bad thing, as it does seek to inspire a sense of challenge-achievement in students (Mawer, 2015, p. 139) known as “*ganbari*-ism” (Hirst, 2013), though research by Berwick and Ross (1989), and more recently by Miura (2010), suggests that while immediate pre-test motivation and effort are indeed quite high, there is a rapid post-test decline in motivation. In combination with the idea of “passing” tests or “clearing” hurdles, the mixture of test-centered education and continuous weekly testing in classrooms and *juku* could be understood to have the potential to instill a “use and forget” approach in students (who need to pass a test), teachers (who need to make their students able to pass a test) and society at large (which judges ability based on tests) to EFL specifically, but also education in general.

At both ends of this pressage, or milieu, we find individual factors creating and being created in turn by the mixture of social, cultural, personal and institutional influences in play. These are of course different for each individual (Stevenson & Clegg, 2015), though it is important to note that when considering a specific learning instance, the learner factors are only modifiable in the process-stage of the flow as depicted in Figure 1. A further simplified version of this PPP

system used by Biggs (1987) and Wen and Johnson (1997) is provided by Abraham (2001, p. 14) in Figure 2:

FIGURE 2
Simplified Model of the Learning Process (Abraham, 2001, p.14)



Here, there is a clear progression, with the *learning context* factors passing through *students' perceptions*, mixing with *personal factors* before students determine their *approach* to a learning activity. Thus, both the situational/contextual factors as discussed in this section and perspectives are important points at which to inquire when seeking to understand day-to-day realities and engagement with specific educational artefacts.

Estate Perspectives in an HEI

As with the examples given above regarding situational influences, the constructivist view of reality further suggests that different individuals in different positions will have different perspectives on a common artefact or action. While this infinite diversity in infinite combinations holds with all people in a given context, within educational research it is standard practice to consider there being three subsections, or estates, in a school or HEI; chiefly, these are the administrators, the instructors or teachers, and the students/learners (Altbach, 1998). While potentially differing from institution to institution, there are several noted characteristics of each of these estates. The administrators, having risen to prominence as the porous post-modern era continues (Barnett, 2004) to increase the need for oversight of not only the structure but the content of academic degrees (Altbach, 1998), commonly consider the more structural aspects of courses and curriculum. Teachers, instructors and professors, even throughout their decline from institutional prominence as higher education increased through mass-enrolment to post-mass enrolment (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008), are generally thought to focus on balancing pedagogical and student concerns with the requirements of the course (Brady, 2013) (though this does depend on the types of courses being taught). Students, the most transient of these three subdivisions, generally have become more concerned with

the usefulness of their higher education in relation to their vocational pursuits (Altbach, 1998), and in engaging with their courses of study seek to balance them with their non-academic issues and needs (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011). These three estates, though of course as diverse as the individuals that comprise them, nevertheless have several common threads tying them together.

Administrators and instructors, as the more permanent actors in a given HEI, are commonly the participants of research into pedagogical training, leadership and values alignment. Additionally, with the continued blurring of the lines between the university as an independent institution of learning and society in general (Barnett, 2004), the degree of external directives, standardization and centralization of the course structure is also considered to be gradually increasing (Capaldi-Phillips & Poliakoff, 2015). As such, while some HEIs structure their courses with small variations, in Japan in recent years there have been several points that MEXT has sought for administrators to align with; these include course-length (nominally 15-18 classes per semester), promotion of non-contact self-study time (recommended at 45minutes per class per week), a required number of English and foreign language credits per degree (usually between 12 and 16, varying between department and institution), and an increasing focus on the globalization or internationalization of both university campuses and attending students (commonly evidenced by an increase in TOEFL or IELTSs-focused academic courses) (Burgess et al, 2010; MEXT, 2012). These points, in combination with factors from the previous section concerning national socio-cultural consciousness (Hofstede, 1996) and expectations of what “university” represents (Horio, 1995; McVeigh, 2002), commonly lead to a relatively uniform university experience throughout the country with the functions of administrators and instructors notably separate.

In this context, then, the administration and the instructors would focus on technically aligned values and goals though often from different perspectives. Regarding assessment, where administrators might focus on shifts in aggregate test scores over intake years and cohorts (the “letter” of assessment) teachers might focus on making the assessment relevant in “spirit” (Reimann & Sadler, 2017, p. 725, citing Marshall & Drummond, 2006), while both remaining aware that assessment by its nature is both a test of ability and learning (Boud, 2000). Indeed, this distance between perspectives and engagement on a common item such as the assessment practices used in the classroom is a common occurrence, with many teachers perceiving their role as creating learning opportunities to gain and test newly acquired knowledge, while at the same time making assessment aimed at learning (Marshall & Drummond, 2006; Brady, 2013), transparent, and “for the students” (Reimann & Sadler, 2017, p. 731). For administrators, it might be the case that comparisons between standardized test scores and questionnaire returns are the

center of attention; for teachers creating and maintaining a balance between these expectations, though, the requirements of the syllabus and the pedagogical needs of the students remains a complicated, involved task.

Students, as the intended receivers of higher education, are routinely the subjects of research on a wide-ranging series of topics, including their concerns, requirements, attainment and engagement with the learning opportunities provided to them. Here, however, as with any undertaking, there are two important, if somewhat blunt, prerequisites to attend to; intent and ability. Marton and Pang (2006), in critically examining educational research, remind us not to simply “presuppose” that “students are paying attention, that they are trying to learn” in any given educational context (p. 217). Stevenson and Clegg (2015) note, despite being the continued focus of such investigations many reports merely assume that students are “funded, full-time... and with leisure time outside their studies” (p. 233); that is to say, that they are not only willing, but able to bring their cognitive capabilities fully to bear on a learning opportunity. Indeed, as Warrington (2006) points out, Japanese universities are busy places both for study and socialising, with customary non-curricular club activities and part-time jobs requiring a large dedication of time and energy. Previous research and reports support this splitting of time and commitment; a report by Benesse (2016) showed that when asked in a survey what they devoted energy to, responses were 66.8% lessons, 64.0% part-time jobs, and 49.3% club activities, and previous research (Lees, 2014) suggested that students spend roughly 13 hours/week commuting, 12 hours/week at part-time jobs, and between 5-6hours/week in club activities (admittedly varying both individually and by university). MEXT’s (2012) report also notes student study time as a point for improvement. In such conditions, it is not unreasonable to question whether students are accessing their deep learning potential for more surface or strategic learning strategies (Entwistle, 1981; Ramsden & Entwistle, 1981) or “satisficing” (Prabha et al, 2007), where information in the classroom may be more viewed as an external demand rather than internal opportunity. Thus, it is potentially the case the students may view the same artefact – such as a skill (structured academic writing) taught through weekly scaffolded progression or knowledge (academic vocabulary) tested from a word-list – quite differently to both instructors and administrators.

RESEARCH SITUATION AND QUESTIONS

The areas of interest discussed in the literature review comprise the most salient issues thought to influence the current study: vocabulary (chiefly, its nature, acquisition, and categorization for study), environmental and institutional factors present in typical Japanese HEI learning contexts, and general perspectives held by the three main actors, or estates, present in higher learning institutions such as

universities. These issues coalesce in the research context in the following ways, and in doing so lead us to the research questions stated at the end of this section.

Research Situation: Vocabulary

Based on corpus research conducted into EGAP vocabulary, a Japanese university created a list of academic English words. These words were divided into three sections, with each section containing words progressing according to decreasing frequency; (i) EGAP vocabulary (lower-frequency words found in both the Sciences and Arts), (ii) EGAP-A (higher-frequency words found more commonly in the Arts), and (iii) EGAP-S (higher-frequency words found more commonly in the Sciences). This list – in the form of a *tango chou* (vocabulary book) – is provided to students upon entering the university and contains comprehensive definitions, example chunks, collocations and sentences for each of the targeted English lexical items.

Research Situation: Curriculum

Newly enrolled students are required to undertake a series of common classes before focusing more on their chosen major from their second year. Though the exact number of classes per week varies depending on the department in which they are enrolled, each first-year student is scheduled to attend between 15 and 18 classes, each 90 minutes in length, per week on average, in addition to completing roughly 45 minutes of homework per 1-credit class as recommended in MEXT's guidelines (MEXT, 2012). Foreign language classes make up three of these weekly classes, with two of these being English classes focused primarily on reading, and the other on academic writing and listening.

Due to their focus on academic listening – chiefly centered on TOEFL-style activities and tests – the academic word-list is most saliently utilized in the academic writing and listening classes. A series of 9 vocabulary tests, conducted throughout the semester on weeks without aural tests, were created from the first section of the provided academic word-list; each test features 10 lexical items drawn from ascending 50-word groups, and consists of 5 multiple-choice questions followed by 5 fill-in-the-blank questions (first-letter provided), with prompts and answers both written exclusively in English. On weeks with vocabulary tests, test-papers are distributed to the students who are then given 6 minutes to complete them. Following each test, papers are commonly exchanged and checked by classmates before being returned to the teacher. These vocabulary tests are then checked and graded, and make up roughly 1% per test of the students' grades for the course. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, these descriptions of the vocabulary and the curriculum in which it is featured summarizes the situation in which this short study will be conducted.

Research Questions

When linked with issues discussed in the literature review, the research situation prompts us to ask the following exploratory questions:

1. *How do the three main estates/actors view the use of the vocabulary list in situ?*
2. *How is the vocabulary list deployed and engaged with by the teachers and students respectively?*
3. *What alignments or conflicts between the groups' perspectives can be witnessed?*

It is hoped that investigation of these questions will help further understanding of the day-to-day operational realities occurring in the research situation so as to better craft and tailor pedagogical approaches to dealing with EGAP vocabulary study.

METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to answer the research questions and expand understanding on the complex nature of any educational context, a multiple-inquiry study was undertaken combining three different source materials and observational approaches: the administrators (N=2) undertook a casual, semi-structured interview; the teachers' perspectives were assessed through volunteered responses in course-feedback meetings; and the students' opinions and engagement were measured through a quantitative survey (N=121). The perspectives of the administrators and the instructors were loosely used to create the students' survey, which can be found in the Appendix. The survey was administered on-line, and was administered to newly enrolled first-year students within the first half of the spring semester, so as to balance familiarity with the target vocabulary study and test-method with potential survey fatigue.

RESULTS

Administrators

Salient common perspectives from the interviews with the administrators (Admin) revealed the following main points, which will be collected here and supported with excerpts from each administrator's interview.

Intended to improve their academic vocabulary knowledge

Both Admin-A and Admin-B stated, in response to the initial rationale for the creation of the word-list and the inclusion of it in the syllabus, that the academic word list was intended to improve the academic knowledge of the students who enter the university. As the administrative members are both focused vocabulary-

research (diagnostic vocabulary and corpus linguistics), they both mentioned the need for university students in Japan to expand their vocabulary:

Admin-B: Research shows that in general, we need to have knowledge of 8000 words, word families, and according to my research into vocabulary, Japanese university students have only knowledge of about 4800 words. They fall short on vocabulary knowledge, so, enhancing, increasing the students' vocabulary knowledge is kind of like, um, an urgent goal, objective.

Admin-A also points out that while there is a lot of support for Japanese students who are studying to get into university, there is much less focus on field-specific academic vocabulary:

Admin-A: For entrance exams... ni ha touji takusan ga atte, sou... daga, daigakusei ni naru to, mattaku sou iu no ga nakatta desu ne... [For entrance exams... at the moment there are lots (of vocabulary materials), but when they become university students, there really weren't any...]

Here, then, at least on the surface, it would appear that the main reason for the introduction of the academic EGAP vocabulary word-list is to help improve the first-year students' academic vocabulary.

Intended more as an introduction to academic vocabulary rather than a destination

Despite the vocabulary-improving rationale, both Admin-A and B recognize that this is being more an introductory measure, not the be-all-end-all of vocabulary study:

Admin-B: I thought that this could serve as an initial step for... making vocabulary knowledge...

Although the Administrators do not actually teach classes themselves, they have colleagues who do. They commented on some ways that they thought instructors would be helping students to engage deeper with the academic vocabulary on the word-lists:

Admin-A: Sensei-tachi ga kono book de, tatoeba, sorezore no tango no word origin wo oshiemasu, koko kara kite, academic words ni natta n desu yo, to oshieru no desu. [Teachers would, for

example, use the book to teach the word origins, and show where the words came from.]

This leads on to the next common point, regarding the need for instructors to support their students' academic study with extra materials and in-class activities. *Intended that instructors will support these academic vocabulary with extra materials/activities*

The Administrators highlighted two ways that they heard from their colleagues who teach the classes featuring the word-list:

Admin-B: We expect teachers to encourage students to... for example, read a lot of texts, a lot of academic texts... to see, to come across these words... to learn these words more deeply...

Adding on this, both suggested that instructors probably should be showing students academic articles including words on the list:

Admin-A: Tatoeba, class de, journal paper toka wo yonde moratte, to iu koto de, de soko kara detekuru kotoba wo miru... [For example, in class, having the students read through academic papers to show that the words actually exist there].

Despite these observations, however, there was little focus on prescriptive methods by which this support should be undertaken.

Instructors

While not as focused as the administrators' interviews, the comments volunteered by instructors on their employment and perceptions of the academic word-list in the syllabus also highlighted several common trends.

Post-test feedback

The majority of the instructors provided feedback for the vocabulary tests. While this focused mainly on the correct answers for the test, some instructors volunteered that they did a short five-minute focus on one or two words which were considered difficult, showing examples of the word in use and eliciting example sentences from the class. Though post-test feedback was a common feature of instructors treatment of the academic vocabulary, when considered within the total number of comments and points raised about the academic writing classes under discussion it was not a major part of the feedback session; instructors instead focused more on the selection and use of textbooks in the course, as well as the balancing required between writing the other requirements of the course of study.

Highlighting of specific academic vocabulary in textbooks and articles when they naturally arise

Akin to the above post-test feedback, when asked what other supporting measures they take concerning the academic vocabulary instructors generally volunteered that they focused on academic vocabulary when it naturally arose, from textbooks, aural passages or academic articles. While a few instructors stated that they sometimes did short activities on certain words from the week's test – such as etymologies or famous uses in the past – this was not a particularly common approach. Counterbalanced against the point raised that the syllabus has a lot of separate, time-consuming aspects – the academic vocabulary, essay writing (including outlining, structure, researching, citing and checking), and listening-assessment requirements – many instructors pointed out that they were rather rushed in their classes; as the vocabulary makes up only 10% of the course grade and is effectively dealt with by the 9 short tests, there is scope to suggest that it is not as frequently focused on by instructors as academic writing components.

A desire for more coordinated materials

Linked with this was a strong desire for more coordinated materials. Given that there was a notable concern with the time pressures that both teachers and students were under due to the demands of the course, it was suggested at several feedback meetings that more coordinated materials – i.e., materials that actually use a selection of words from test-range – be communally available. This would help teachers to better provide support for students, and would link well with the concerns of the administrators in the previous section, specifically about the exposure to these words from source materials other than the vocabulary tests and the list themselves.

An admission that passionate, individual engagement on behalf of the students varied

Though as anecdotal as the previous points raised, several instructors admitted that individual engagement with the academic word-list – as evidenced through the tests – varied widely amongst each class. Some students would practice by repeatedly writing words in their notebooks, as they probably have done through their junior- and senior-high school careers, some would be seen testing each other a few minutes before class started, and others would come into the class without their vocabulary list and be surprised that there was a test scheduled that week. While these engagement differences most likely translate over to the writing and other course activities, instructors allude to the point that there is a wide spectrum of engagement on behalf of the students with regards to the academic vocabulary.

Students

Of the respondents, all were of the science track, with 65 from Engineering, 30 from the Sciences, and Medicine had 26 answers registered. As a quantitative questionnaire with only a few open-ended and voluntary questions, the results from the students cannot neatly be explained. Instead, as behavioural data, the findings from the survey show the following (Table 1 and Table 2).

TABLE 1
Results for Pre-Test Engagement Questions

Questions	Response Choices	Number of Responses (%) (n=121)
When do you usually start studying for the test?	At the start of class	13 (10%)
	Break time before the test	54 (45%)
	Morning of the test	24 (20%)
	Day before the test	19 (16%)
	Two+ days before the test	11 (9%)
How many minutes do you think you study for each test?	5 minutes	21 (17%)
	10 minutes	24 (20%)
	15 minutes	23 (19%)
	20 minutes	22 (18%)
	30 minutes	20 (17%)
	45+ minutes	11 (9%)

Pre-test engagement

Of the 121 students answering the questionnaire, when asked about when they *first* started studying for the vocabulary tests, 91 stated that they started studying the day of the test, with 62 of the 91 responding that they started studying either during the break time between classes before the test or at the start of the

class. As the majority of the students started their studying in the break time before or during the beginning of the class before the test, this was mirrored when the students were asked how many minutes they studied for the test. Twenty-one responded that they studied five minutes and 24 said that they studied about ten minutes for the vocabulary tests. Twenty-three said that they spent about 15 minutes and 22 answered using 20 minutes for studying, resulting in the overwhelming majority studying for 20 minutes or less.

TABLE 2
Results for Post-Test Engagement Questions

Questions	Response Choices	Number of Responses (%) (n=121)
To what extent do you think you remember the words you study a week after the test?	I can remember the words with confidence	0 (0%)
	I can remember the words quite well	17 (14%)
	I can't remember the words with confidence	32 (26%)
	I can't remember the words at all	72 (60%)
To what extent do you review the words after the test?	Usually, as part of my routine studies	4 (3%)
	Usually, to see if I answered correctly	6 (5%)
	Sometimes, at random after the test	42 (35%)
	I don't usually review the words after the test	69 (57%)

Post-test engagement

As Table 2 shows, there are also clear trends revealed in the students' responses. First, 86% of the students replied in the negative to the question regarding recollection post-test, suggesting that they believed that they would not be able to remember the words that they had studied a week after the test. A small number, roughly 14% of the cohort, reported that they would normally be able to remember the words that they studied quite well. The second question, asking about the extent to which students reviewed the words after the test, also revealed a generally low degree of engagement; while 35% answered that they sometimes reviewed the words immediately after the test, 57% stated that they did not usually review the words after the test. Again, a low number of students reviewed the words either as part of the regular studies or to see if they got the test answers correct. These answers, though admittedly small-scale, clearly show an operationalized low level of engagement with the learning opportunity beyond it as a test or assessment.

DISCUSSION

1. How do the three main estates/actors view the use of the vocabulary list in situ?

Based on the analysis of the three main estates, we can see different perspectives on the use of the academic vocabulary list in situ in the targeted course of study. Administrators generally tend to see it is a method by which to introduce students to higher-level, field-specific vocabulary for university-level academics, with expectations that instructors would help support students by giving them more authentic exposure to this kind of vocabulary and that students would seek to expand their knowledge through frequent individual study of the list across their first-year general-studies classes. Instructors, while varying widely with how they deal with it as a syllabus requirement, generally support it with short, in-class activities based around potentially problematic words from the tests or on words that arise naturally in lesson-materials such as textbooks. As shown by the data from the survey, the majority of students tend to engage with the vocabulary list primarily as a test, rather than a learning opportunity. While the possible analyses based on the data from this investigation are admittedly surface level at best, they do tend to match relatively well with the environmental and institutional influences discussed in the literature review.

2. How is the vocabulary list deployed and engaged with by the teachers and students respectively?

Both instructors and students could be categorized as engaging with the academic vocabulary list more as a course requirement than as an important learning opportunity, as initially hoped by the administrators, though as with all

endeavors there are individual differences in both groups. Almost all instructors gave feedback post-test, though some instructors chose to focus on problematic words from the test, and others instead focused on words that arose naturally from the lesson materials and textbooks. When balanced against other issues discussed in end-of-semester feedback sessions vocabulary does not appear to be focused on much beyond the test, the short activities attached to it, and naturally arising incidents of the target vocabulary. This level of engagement can also be evidenced in the students, as operationalized by (i) when they start studying, (ii) the length of study, (iii) the method of study and (iv) the post-test review of the vocabulary. In both cases, this could potentially be explained by the situation of the list within the syllabus; as a short test, worth at most 10% of the course, featuring in only one class out of their 15-18 classes a week, and being similar in scope to the tests that they have done throughout their scholastic career. It would thus be understandable that situational factors could push students (and potentially instructors) towards a strategic, cost-benefit analysis regarding academic vocabulary list deployment and engagement, though as noted by the investigation the majority of instructors did make some efforts to support the vocabulary outside of the tests.

3. What alignments or conflicts between the groups' perspectives can be witnessed?

While each group can be said to engage with the academic vocabulary list with different expectations and approaches, there does not appear to be any direct, system-breaking conflicts between these perspectives. The administrators intended it to help; the teachers focus on problematic and naturally occurring authentic examples; and the students learn from it, to varying degrees, and complete the tests as part of the course requirements. In this way, each group could be said to be responding to the artefact in ways according to the pressures and influences of their situation. One thing that could certainly be said for the situation is that material coordination, inter-group communication across all levels and specific consciousness-raising for the students should be more strongly emphasized. As is often the case with large organizations, unvoiced intentions and lack of communication can lead to 'situational-normal' behaviors, where each actor will engage with an artefact according to the letter of the thing (perhaps understandably) as opposed to the spirit of the thing. Thus, while an objective viewing of the situation has shown that different groups each hold different perspectives on a common artefact, this does not necessarily mean that these perspectives are inevitably in a system-destroying degree of conflict. A degree of operationally viable conflict is a potentially acceptable starting point, though as stated there is certainly scope for improvement in a situation such as the one under study.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, as both a small-scale investigation and an exploratory study into a learning context this paper has shown that different perspectives and levels of engagement are shown by different groups of actors with regards to a common education artefact. Both administrators and instructors, in general, appear to engage with the academic vocabulary list on a syllabus-item level, and the majority of students could be said to engage with it mainly as a test as opposed to a learning opportunity. Given the small scale and the ontological focus on behavioral observation instead of constructivist explanation, however, there of course remain several issues with the study and questions which will require further inquiry.

Regarding issues with the study, its scale, scope and degree of linkage between cohorts certainly limit its generalizability. Constraints on the length of the study also limited the inclusion of supporting details for the administrator interviews and the instructors' feedback, though it is hoped to be possible to expand and better link these approaches together in future research on such matters.

In terms of implications, these findings suggest a few potential courses of future action. Administrators, detached as they often are from the classrooms and syllabuses that they oversee, could stand to better inquire into the day-to-day operational realities of the courses. Instructors, though of course capable to independently create such materials for individual activities, could be better able to support students with vocabulary-focused coordinated materials such as articles, essays and other activities, which should hopefully help students to better engage with the target vocabulary. Additionally, expansions to the study should seek to include interviews with students to better determine their individual opinions in relation to their study approaches to the academic word list.

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