Learner Profiles for EFL in Japanese Higher Education: Incoming Student Beliefs, Experiences, and Expectations

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Research in language learning suggests that learner profiles can help teachers develop more appropriate and differentiated student-centered learning environments. A mixed-methods approach was used to investigate learner beliefs, experiences, and expectations. Quantitative and qualitative instruments were developed to collect data from incoming first-year students of a compulsory English communication course at a university in Japan. Data was categorized and analyzed regarding learners' orientation to English learning, willingness to communicate, and readiness for e-learning. Results indicate that while this group of learners retain more traditional orientations towards language learning, they are generally willing to interact with others in a language class, are relatively comfortable using web technology, and have positive expectations for the course. Similarity of results across departments and gender suggests that learner profiles may be more helpful to teachers at the level of individual learners. Further research exploring teacher perceptions of the utility of this data for pedagogical agendas is recommended.

言語学習の研究者は、学習者プロファイルが、教師がより適切で差別化された生徒中心の学習環境を開発するのに役立つことを示唆している。本研究では、学習者の信念、経験、および期待を調査するために、混合手法を用いました。本研究では、学習者の信念、経験、期待を調査するために、日本の大学で必修科目である英語コミュニケーションコースの新入生からデータを収集するために、量的および質的な手段を用いました。データは、学習者の英語学習への志向、コミュニケーションへの意欲、e ラーニングへの準備について分類・分析されました。その結果、このグループの学習者は、より現代的な言語学習の方向性を持ち、言語クラスで他の人と交流することに積極的で、ウェブ技術の使用に比較的慣れており、コースに対して前向きな期待を持っていることがわかりました。学科や性別を問わず同様の結果が得られたことから、学習者プロファイルは教師にとって学習者個人のレベルでより有用であると考えられます。このデータが教育上の課題に役立つかどうかについて、教師の認識を探るためのさらなる研究が推奨される。

Introduction

Following the proliferation of constructivist and socio-cultural learning theories, higher education institutions (HEI) around the world have been striving to develop more student-centered learning (SCL) environments that place a greater emphasis on the roles that students play and the potential learning affordances that they contribute to the class. In addition to the shifting landscape of educational theory, other factors that have contributed to this trend include advances in technology (both educational and commercial), increasing digital literacy among faculty and students, and the influence of consumer-based thinking (i.e., Universal Design) in an increasingly competitive education market. Though notoriously lagging to adopt new theory in practice, there is growing evidence of student-centered practices throughout the education sector worldwide (e.g., Hoidn & Klemenčič, 2020).

In their framework for characterizing effective SCL practice, The Nellie Mae Education Foundation (2020) depict high-level personalized learning as that in which teachers "engage in efforts to recognize, respect, and integrate student strengths, interests, experiences, cultural

background, home context, and learning level as assets, and personalize student content, materials, and supports based on this information" (p. 6). This characterization assumes an availability of information about learners that can be accessed by teachers prior to the planning and implementation of instructional activities. Though systems designed to collect and manage this kind of information are common among primary and secondary education institutions in certain countries (e.g., Individualized Education Plans and 504 Plans in the United States), supports for personalized learning taper at the tertiary level. In colleges and universities worldwide, students are often expected to have developed the skills necessary to direct their own learning, and course instructors are not often expected to monitor individual students as closely (Tekkol & Demirel, 2018).

The present research project aimed to address this deficiency of information through the creation of a learner profiling system that used quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect information from incoming students regarding their past experiences, beliefs about language learning, and expectations of the upcoming course. This report presents an overview of results characterizing the first-year student population.

Learner Profiling

As a strategy for promoting SCL, *learner profiling* is broadly defined as the practice of collecting and reporting information about learners within a learning environment for a range of objectives-focused outcomes. Data can be collected though formal or informal documentation, observations, and conversations, and may include personal information (e.g., name, age, hometown), proficiencies, preferences, and past experiences. The profiles themselves can take many forms (e.g., paper-based questionnaires, statistical reports, artefact portfolios, written narratives), draw from multiple sources (e.g., learners, family members, teachers), and inform a variety of pedagogical decisions (e.g., instructional planning, design of the learning environment, scheduling) that are directly related to the learning experience (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014). Regardless of what they include and how they are realized, learner profiles are student-centered in that they are intended to help students and their teachers gain a deeper understanding of the learner.

Practices resembling learner profiling have long been used in multilingual and culturally diverse language education environments to facilitate insightful and inclusive teaching. Herrera and Murry (2011), for example, suggest using preassessment strategies to guide instructional planning, and advocate teacher exploration of learners' cultural backgrounds, prior schooling experiences, first and second language proficiencies, family dynamics, and sociocultural realities (pp. 101-102). Listing similar examples of student information, Sniad (2016) recommends conceptualizing students as resources to "enhance the relevancy" of lessons, and to build and nurture a "dynamic and respectful community" (p. 253). In these contexts, learner profiles are proposed as means to mitigate the challenges faced by linguistically diverse students who are trying to learn subject content in second language (L2) environments.

Foreign language learning environments present a different challenge, as classes are largely populated by students with similar cultural backgrounds, and it is the content (i.e., target language) and often the teachers that are in the minority (Bell, 2011). This is an especially common situation in Japan, where English is often learned for the explicit purpose of passing an examination (Yamada, 2018), and a large population of L1 (English) foreigners are employed as English language educators (MEXT, 2019). In these environments, SCL practices are closely related to active learning, which has been promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Defined by the Central Council for Education (CCE), an advisory body to MEXT, active learning is a methodology that departs from "one-way lecture-style instruction" and encourages active participation in classroom-based instructional activities (CCE 2012, p. 37).

Learner profiles are particularly suited to address a growing issue faced by many Japanese universities. Due in part to the shrinking population of high school graduates, many universities have lowered their standards for admission, and in some cases universities have adopted open admission without screening by academic ability (Sasaki, 2017). As Sugino

(2020) points out, there is a growing number of students enrolled in Japanese universities who are seeking education for "immediate 'usefulness' in society rather than academic life," and describes a trend in passiveness, contradicting more traditional self-directed roles of university students (p. 308). This trend may create mismatching beliefs about language education between new university students and their language instructors (Ellis, 2008), and researchers have already begun to employ learning profiles to investigate this area.

Shaules, Fritz, and Miyafusa (2020) provide several examples of practical applications of learner profiling in a Japanese university language course. In their efforts to investigate motivational engagement and resistance in L2 learners, they designed a psychometric instrument (the *Linguaculture Motivation Profiler*) of thirty items that could "provide a snapshot of motivational dynamics for individual learners at a particular point of time" (p. 95). Though developed as a research instrument, they suggest four ways in which the tool could be used in teaching contexts: (a) as a diagnostic assessment that can "identify learner needs, inform curricula and help with syllabi design or lesson planning," (b) as routine formative assessment data included in a learner profile, (c) as a support for reflective thinking assignments, and (d) as a data collection tool for research projects (pp. 95-96).

In another context, Lintunen, Mutta, and Pelttari (2017) created a 36-question survey probing language learners at a university in Finland on demographic information, extramural language learning and use of technologies, and attitude-focused questions. They identified three digital learner profiles (i.e. types of learners) by which individual learners could be identified as they displayed certain categorical tendencies. They asserted that "the understanding of learners' digital profiles enables educators to recognize learners' personal needs and learning styles to promote the creation of personalized digital learning environments" (p. 64). They concluded that "Learners' profiles could help teachers create suitable exercises or suggest new ideas to facilitate extramural and/or hybrid learning and assist learners in understanding their own learning styles and how to develop them in traditional and digital ways" (p. 72).

The studies cited here show instances of teacher-researchers who have devised instruments for collecting information about their students with the aim of using that information to design more suitable learning environments. The learner profiling instrument of the current research project was designed in like fashion, with particular focus on its utility as a diagnostic tool, support for reflective thinking, and a data collection tool for research projects. In the following section, the authors explore empirical studies dealing with the type of data collected in the present study: learner beliefs.

Beliefs, Experiences and Expectations

Gaining an understanding of what learners believe about learning can have a significant impact on teaching and learning in the language classroom (Bollen & Faherty, 2016), and this is particularly true in an SCL context, where students are expected to take a greater role in their own learning. As Ellis (2008) points out, beliefs underlie the actions that students take in the classroom, in turn influencing both the learning process and student outcomes. Without knowledge of students' beliefs, teachers may make unwarranted assumptions regarding student beliefs and experiences, which can then impede instruction (Harper & de Jong, 2004).

Japanese students often hold mixed or even contradictory views of language learning, with examples found in Hayashi and Cherry's (2004) study on learners' instructional preferences. In their study, students expressed support for a communicative learning style emphasizing the social use of language (e.g., speaking in class, watching native speakers in films or TV) despite simultaneously indicating a preference for an authority-oriented style, where the teacher is fully in charge of the class and directs student learning. In addition, even though students expressed a strong preference for learning English through speaking, they expressed much less support for learning by talking with their friends or talking in pairs. If left unaware of complex learner beliefs such as these, teachers may develop a mismatch of beliefs which can hinder learning (Ellis, 2008).

It is also important to note that learner beliefs do not remain static but develop and change over time (Ellis, 2008; Yonesaka & Tanaka, 2013). This is particularly true in the

case of first-year university English language learners (ELLs), such as those who are the focus of this study. For these students, language learning beliefs can be in a state of flux (Yonesaka & Tanaka, 2013) as their beliefs are swayed by new classroom experiences and encounters with other students in learning environments and under teaching methods that can differ greatly from what they have previously experienced. Developing students' awareness of their own beliefs—and the shifts that may occur as they begin their studies in university—can help them to adopt more productive learning behaviors as well as promote two important components related to SCL: self-knowledge and autonomy (Sakui & Gaies, 1999).

The learner profiling instrument in this study was designed primarily to capture learner beliefs, which would be used for both practical teaching objectives and research-oriented questions. The authors of this paper, who were employed as teacher-researchers at an HEI in Japan, undertook this project with goals relating to both agendas. Firstly, as teachers the authors wanted to obtain more information about their incoming students than what was presently available, which included name, gender, academic department, and a numerical score on an in-house placement exam. Based on the conclusions of existing research (Sakui & Gaies, 1999), it was believed that more detailed descriptions of individual learners—as well as class summaries—would be useful for instructional planning. Moreover, it was believed that this data could also be useful to students, who would be assigned reflective and goal-setting tasks during the course. Positive washback was intended as a secondary function of this instrument, and it was hoped that the items and prompts would draw student attention to the type of environment they would soon enter, and perhaps serve as a priming activity with positive influence on their experience in the early days of the course.

Secondly, as researchers the authors wanted to develop instruments that could support quantitative and qualitative analyses of learner beliefs and contribute to the growing body of literature on English language learners in Japan. This research-oriented agenda is the focus of the present study.

To design the instrument, the authors drew on shared experiences and desired knowledge, brainstorming a list of questions. These questions were used as the basis for selecting and adapting survey items from past research on attitudes towards language learning and willingness to communicate (e.g., Fushino, 2010; Hayashi & Cherry, 2004; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001; Sakui & Gaies, 1999). Items for a third category regarding learners' competencies using technology were developed in relation to the online format of many course activities. All items were then conceptually organized into three categories, each of which is described further below: Orientation to English Learning (OEL), Willingness to Communicate (WTC), and e-Readiness (e-R). The survey is reproduced in Appendix A.

Orientation to English Learning

As noted earlier, SCL/active learning strategies have been on the rise in Japan, but the fact remains that for many students entering university, their English language learning experience has been heavily skewed towards developing receptive (i.e., listening and reading) and test-taking skills in classes that favor a more traditional, teacher-centered instructional style. Over the years, many students have entered this course having had little experience in language learning environments that are as intensively focused on speaking and communicating with others in class. For this reason, one focus of this study's investigation into learner beliefs was on students' orientation towards English language learning.

Learner orientations are often described on a spectrum between traditional and contemporary (i.e., communicative) orientations. Past research in this area (e.g., Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Yonesaka & Tanaka, 2013) has shown that Japanese learners express agreement with items reflecting a more communicative orientation (e.g., *English class should be enjoyable* or *Practicing the language is important*), while expressing slight disagreement with items relating to a more traditional orientation (e.g., *Learning English is mostly a matter of learning grammatical rules*, or, *Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Japanese into English*). These findings would seem to imply that most learners in Japan hold more contemporary orientations. However, this is not the case with all learners. In research conducted at the same institution as the present study, Bollen and Faherty (2016) found that

learners indicated agreement with items reflecting a traditional orientation, while at the same time expressing a stronger agreement with items reflecting contemporary orientation. These results underline the possibility of the co-existence of mixed beliefs among Japanese language learners.

For the purposes of the learner profile used in this study, eight items were included to reveal learners' orientation to English learning (OEL). Four items were included to represent more traditional orientations such as the importance of learning grammar, the role of L2 to L1 translation, and a perception of the teacher as the primary source of knowledge in the classroom. An additional four items were included that represented a more contemporary orientation such as the importance of individual effort and the importance of speaking and interacting with other students in class (See Appendix A, Items 1-8).

Willingness to Communicate

Macintyre and Charos (1996) determined that "communicating in a second language, in a bilingual milieu, among beginning language students, appears to be related to a willingness to engage in L2 communication, motivation for language learning, the opportunities for contact, and, perhaps most important, the perception of competence" (p. 20). The term *Willingness to Communicate* (WTC) describes the predisposition of a given learner to engage in communication when free to do so, and the concept has gained traction among L2 researchers in Japanese universities, where student passivity is a recognized issue (Doe, 2014). It is of particular concern in contexts where language courses are compulsory, like the course in which participants of this study were enrolled.

Yashima (2002) identified a strong and direct influence of confidence in communication on WTC in the L2, and suggested that factors including gender, personality, and L1 communication tendencies might influence L2 communication confidence (p. 62). Thus, seven questions were listed that probed students' attitudes and perspectives regarding communication and interaction, both in their first language and in English. Topics included confidence and experience communicating with others, collaborating with new and familiar classmates, and meeting new people (see Appendix A, Items 9-15).

e-Readiness

Listing knowledge, attitudes, skills, and habits as key components of technical readiness for e-learning, Guglielmino and Guglielmino (2003) define technical knowledge as "a basic knowledge of the components and operations of the technical system being used to deliver the e-learning," and note the foundational importance of the skills required to access and use those components (p. 21). Researchers have cited gaps in Japanese students' e-readiness (Mehran, Alizadeh, Koguchi, & Takemura, 2017; Murray & Blyth, 2011), and it has been noted that the prevalence of smartphones in Japan may lead to university students' having relatively little experience using computers (Mehran et al., 2017).

The blended learning environment in which students at this university begin their English education is heavily supported with digital resources, and students are required to bring a computer to class. Based both on relevant literature and firsthand experience, the researchers acknowledged the likelihood that many students would enter the university without sufficient confidence or experience using computers to access educational content. Relying on the assumption that habits would be developed through course requirements, several questions aimed at identifying the knowledge and skill components of learner e-readiness were included on the instrument (see Appendix A, Items 16-19).

Research Questions

The present study focused on collecting and analyzing data describing the orientation to English learning, willingness to communicate, and the e-readiness of incoming university students. Three research questions delineated the scope of analysis:

RQ1: What are these students' beliefs towards language learning?
RQ2: How willing are these students to interact in a language class?

RQ3: To what degree are these students ready to use technology for language learning?

Furthermore, given the subjective nature of beliefs, qualitative data was also sought to provide deeper insight. To achieve this, the researchers adapted a needs analysis employed by Hiratsuka (2015), to answer this study's fourth research question:

RQ4: What expectations do these students have for this course?

Methods

Participants
The participants (N = 733) were first-year Japanese university students representing all ten departments of the university: Computer and Information Sciences (20.1%), Pharmaceutical Sciences (18.3%), Architecture (10.5%), Aerospace Systems Engineering (9.9%), Mechanical Engineering (9.8%), Applied Life Science (9.5%), Applied Microbial Technology (7.2%), Design (6.7%), Nanoscience (5.5%), and Fine Arts (2.5%). Four-hundred ninety-eight of them identified as male (67.9%), 232 as female (31.7%), one as other (0.1%), and two did not indicate (0.3%).

All participants were enrolled in a compulsory English Communication course, which focused on developing conversational skills. The course was scheduled in accordance with new university health and safety protocols aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19, which meant that half of the lessons were conducted in-person (i.e., face-to-face), and half of the lessons were individually accessible online for a window of time between in-person sessions (i.e., on-demand). Prior to beginning the course, all students took an in-house placement test, with results indicating that the participants varied in ability from pre-A1 to B1 according to the CEFR-based framework for ELT in Japan (i.e., CEFR-J).

Procedures
This study adopted a convergent parallel design (Creswell, 2012), where quantitative and qualitative data were gathered concurrently but analyzed separately, and the results were merged in order to provide a more complete answer to the research questions. For this purpose, two survey instruments were employed. The first of these, a questionnaire featuring nineteen Likert-scale items, was used to gather quantitative data concerning participants' perspectives on language learning, their willingness to communicate or interact in the classroom, and their e-readiness. Data from this instrument were used to answer RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3. The second instrument was a follow-up survey which gathered qualitative data using narrative frames (Hiratsuka, 2015) to elicit responses to open-ended statements in order to answer RQ4.

Both surveys were administered in students' L1 (Japanese) using Microsoft Forms. Participants accessed the initial questionnaire during their first face-to-face class, immediately after finishing a placement test. The follow-up qualitative survey was accessed as part of their on-demand coursework and completed within two weeks of the administration of the first questionnaire. All participants were informed of the nature of the study and were given the option to opt-out by means of a question requesting permission to include their responses in the study.

Instruments
The two instruments used to gather data on learner beliefs were developed for this study.

Likert-scale questionnaire
Questionnaire items that queried learners' orientations towards language learning and willingness to communicate were drawn from past research (e.g., Fushino, 2010; Hayashi & Cherry, 2004; MacIntyre et al., 2001; Sakui & Gaies, 1999), while items concerned with learners' e-readiness were developed based on the demands of the course and the researchers' firsthand experiences teaching the course in previous years. The content validity of the items

on the questionnaire was determined by agreement among five educators familiar with the course. A total of nineteen items were included on the questionnaire, with eight relating to orientation towards language learning, seven to willingness to communicate, and four to learners' e-readiness (see Appendix A). All items were rated on a six-point Likert-scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*). Participants who submitted more than one set of survey responses were omitted from the analysis. In addition, data collected from respondents of the Architecture and Nanoscience departments (*n* = 117) were removed from analysis due to technical issues with the online form, leaving a total of 616 valid responses.

Narrative frames survey
To provide more in-depth information on incoming students expectations for the course, the researchers adapted Hiratsuka's (2015) needs analysis approach, which employed narrative frames (see Appendix B). Narrative frames elicit qualitative data by prompting participants with an incomplete sentence that they then complete. In the case of narrative frames used for needs analysis, completing the open-ended sentences provides students with the opportunity to make their "needs and wants regarding the course" (p. 61), which in turn can give teachers a clearer understanding of their students' aspirations as language learners. These insights can then be used to create content and activities that are more closely aligned with student interests and beliefs. Furthermore, the repeated use of narrative frames can allow students to notice and reflect on their development as language learners.

Analysis
Data analysis proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was undertaken to determine if the items on the Likert-scale questionnaire formed factors that were similar to its supposed/conceptualized categories. This EFA used responses from a pilot administration of the questionnaire (n = 125; M = 67; F = 58). In the second stage, quantitative data was analyzed using: (1) descriptive statistics, to determine the overall shape of the data; (2) correlational analysis, to determine the relationships between the categories on the survey, students' placement test scores, and their previous opportunities to use English; (3) t-tests, to determine differences based on gender; and (4) ANOVA to determine differences between departments for each of the categories. In the third stage, the qualitative data from the follow-up narrative frames survey was analyzed and coded taking a data-driven coding approach (Gibbs, 2007). The data was coded independently by both authors, and to maximize intra-coder reliability, multiple rounds of coding were undertaken (Revesz, 2012).

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis
The data from the pilot group was first screened for outliers, with none exceeding the recommended values (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). Both Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2 = 1028.98, *d.f.* = 171; *p* = .000) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (0.777) indicated that the use of factor analysis was appropriate. The initial solution suggested five factors, however the fourth and fifth factors each had high loadings from only two items and cross-loadings with other factors which usually indicates over-factoring. As a result, a three-factor solution was attempted. One item (Item 8) which failed to load sufficiently on any factor (>.40), and one item (Item 4) which cross-loaded on factors one and two were removed, resulting in sixteen items grouped in three factors, accounting for 58.8% of the variance (see Table 1). Item 4, *I have had many chances to speak English in my education*, was retained in the analysis, as the researchers felt this would allow them to examine the possible influence on speaking opportunities on the other variables of interest.

As a result of the factor analysis, the researchers adopted the phrase "Willingness to Interact" in place of "Willingness to Communicate" because the correlated items extend beyond communication, and the researchers reasoned that "interacting with other students" and "working collaboratively" may constitute engagement that does not necessarily involve spoken communication. The three resulting factors resembled the proposed structure of item

categorization, with the first factor indicating learners' orientation towards English language learning (OEL), the second their willingness to interact in classroom (WTI), and the third their e-readiness (e-R). The reliability of each factor was determined using Cronbach's alpha and found to be acceptable (Kline, 2000; Table 1).

Table 1 Results of a Factor Analysis of the Learner Profile Survey

Learner Profile Questionnaire Items	Factor Loading		
	1	2	3
Orientation towards English Learning (OEL; α = .743)			
2. Learning English is mostly a matter of translation.	-.116	**.868**	.102
1. Learning English is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules.	-.007	**.752**	-.035
5. I learn well in a teacher-led class that has no group work.	.223	**.696**	-.041
6. My learning depends mostly on the teacher.	-.032	**.643**	-.079
Willingness to Interact (WTI; α = .865)			
7. It is important for my learning to interact with other students during class.	**.866**	.007	-.126
10. I enjoy working collaboratively with classmates during class time.	**.806**	.090	.038
15. I am willing to express my opinions and ideas with other students in English.	**.750**	.106	.057
9. I find it easy to talk with people I've never met.	**.736**	-.055	-.075
11. I can do group work in English if the task is simple.	**.696**	-.116	-.050
3. I can improve my English by speaking with my classmates.	**.664**	.138	.025
12. If I need help or have a question, I am comfortable asking another student using Japanese.	**.594**	-.189	.194
14. I am willing to express my opinions and ideas with other students in Japanese.	**.474**	.055	.310
e-Readiness (e-R; α = .838)			
17. I can find information on new websites relatively easily.	-.002	-.022	**.889**
18. I can find information that I'm looking for on the internet easily.	.079	-.008	**.832**
19. I know what an internet browser is.	.038	-.094	**.789**
16. I'm comfortable using a computer.	-.077	.033	**.706**

Note: N = 125. The extraction method was principal component analysis with direct oblimin rotation. Factor loadings above . 40 are in bold.

Descriptive Statistics
Average scores for each of the three dimensions as well as opportunities to speak English (hereafter abbreviated OSE) were calculated. Agreement with the items representing OEL indicated a more traditional orientation, and for this reason the raw data on these four items were reversed in order to bring them into line with trends on the other factors (on which higher numerical responses indicated more favorable orientations (e.g., a greater willingness to interact and greater familiarity with technology). The means and standard deviations for each of the three factors, the additional OSE item, and scores on the placement test (PT Score) are shown in Table 2.

On the basis of these results, it can be said that the participants are generally willing to interact and are mostly ready to meet the technological demands of the course. They do, however, retain a somewhat traditional orientation towards language learning, a notion that is reinforced when responses to Items 1 and 2 from the questionnaire (which most clearly reflect traditional attitudes) are examined, with 86% of respondents expressing at least some agreement with Item 1 and 80% with Item 2. Finally, a slight majority of the participants have experienced OSE in their language learning history, with 55.2% agreeing with this item.

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations and Pearson Correlations between WTI, OEL, e-R, Placement Test scores, and OSE

	M	SD	OEL	WTI	e-R	PT Score	OSE
OEL	2.94	.612	-				
WTI	4.40	.681	.090	-			
e-R	4.24	.920	-.090	.316**	-		
PT Score	5.69	1.775	.203**	.060	-.103	-	
OSE	3.58	1.157	-.068	.277**	.108**	.202**	-

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed); $n = 616$

Correlational Analysis
The relationships between the three factors, OEL, WTI, and e-R, placement test scores, and OSE were examined using Pearson correlation, with the results presented in Table 2.

In general, the relationships between the three factors – OEL, WTI, and e-R – are not very strong, with very little shared variance between them. Even the strongest relationship among them, that between WTI and e-R, can only be considered as small (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014), and these two share only 9.9% of variance. The relationships between the factors and participants' PT scores are also rather small, with OEL helping to explain only 4.1% of the variance in PT score, e-R about 1.1%, and WTI a marginal 0.36%. Finally, the strength of the relationships between OSE and the three factors follow this trend of weak relationships. Having more opportunities to speak English explains less than .05% of the variance in OEL score, and only 4.1% of the variance in PT score. As might be expected, however, it does explain a greater percentage of the variance in WTI score, 7.7%.

Table 3 Results of independent t-tests for gender differences in OEL, WTI, e-R, and OSE

	Males		Female		t (612)	p	Cohen's d
	M_m	SD	M_f	SD			
WTI	4.43	.696	4.35	.651	1.28	.366	0.11
OEL	2.92	.619	2.97	.599	-.910	.232	0.08
e-R	4.36	.909	4.02	.906	4.39	.000**	0.38
OSE	3.53	1.16	3.69	1.15	-1.66	.097	0.14

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed);

Impact of Gender
Independent t-tests were used to examine differences between male and female participants ($n = 614$; M = 409; F = 205) in OEL, WTI, e-R and OSE. As shown in Table 3, no significant differences between males and females were observed for OEL, WTI, or OSE. There was a difference between scores of male and female participants in regards to e-R, with male participants having higher scores in this area. The size of this difference is quite small however, with the value for Cohen's *d*, .038, falling below the value for a small effect (0.40%; Plonsky & Oswald, 2014)

Differences between Departments
A series of One-way ANOVAs with post-hoc comparisons using Hochberg's GT2 test (due to the differences in group sizes) were carried out to determine if there were significant

differences between departments in regards to OEL, WTI, e-R and OSE. Because of the very small size of the Fine Arts and Design departments, these two departments were combined. The means for each department are listed in Table 4. The results for each ANOVA are summarized below.

Table 4 Departmental Means for OEL, WTI, e-R, and OSE

Department	OEL	WTI	e-R	OSE
Fine Arts and Design	2.71	4.31	4.18	3.18
Applied Microbial Technology	2.85	4.32	4.08	3.53
Aerospace Systems Engineering	3.15	4.75	4.43	3.81
Applied Life Science	2.99	4.26	4.08	3.47
Mechanical Engineering	2.92	4.39	4.25	3.64
Computer and Information Sciences	2.85	4.39	4.65	3.51
Pharmaceutical Sciences	3.07	4.38	3.88	3.80

OEL Aerospace Systems Engineering had the highest mean score (3.15) while Fine Arts and Design had the lowest mean score (2.71). ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference between departments, $F(6,609) = 5.17$, $p = .000$. Post-hoc test comparisons indicated significant differences between Aerospace Systems Engineering, Fine Arts and Design, and Computer Information Sciences. The differences between other departments were not significant. This suggests that participants from Fine Arts and Design, and Computer Information Sciences may benefit from extra support when adapting to the communicative teaching style they will encounter in the course.

WTI Aerospace Systems Engineering had the highest mean score (4.75) while the lowest mean score was registered by Applied Life Science (4.26). Again, ANOVA indicated significant differences between the departments, $F(6,609) = 4.27$, $p = .000$. For this factor, Aerospace Systems Engineering was significantly different from all other departments, and clearly the most open to interaction in the classroom. Even so, the mean scores of all departments were above 4.25, so it can be argued that most participants were relatively positive about interacting with other students in class.

e-R As might be expected, Computer Information Sciences had the highest score (4.65), with Pharmaceutical Sciences registering the lowest (3.88). There was a significant difference between departments, $F(6,609) = 10.41$, $p = .000$, with post-hoc tests showing that Computer Information Sciences was significantly higher than all other departments, except for Aerospace Systems Engineering. These results suggest the participants from the Pharmacy department may need a little more help with the online aspects of the course. All other departments' mean scores were 4.0 or above, which suggests that most participants are relatively comfortable using the kinds of technology needed to succeed in the course.

OSE Once again, Aerospace Systems Engineering had the highest mean score (3.81), with Fine Art and Design the lowest (3.18). While the differences were statistically significant, $F(6,609) = 2.88$, $p = .000$, post-hoc tests showed that only the differences between Aerospace Systems Engineering and Fine Arts and Design were significantly different. There were no significant differences between the other departments. This suggests the participants from Fine Arts and Design may find it more challenging to become used to speaking in class, whereas participants from the Aerospace Systems Engineering might be more used to the kinds of activities planned throughout the course.

In summary, while there are differences in mean scores between some departments, they are mostly not large and indicate that participants, irrespective of department, are more like each other than they are different.

Qualitative Analysis
Qualitative data gathered through the second survey was analyzed by both authors and coded into categories for each item following data-driven coding procedures detailed by Gibbs (2007). A total of 682 valid responses were collected. Table 5 presents these categories for

items that the authors reasoned were most informative for revealing participants' past learning experiences, their overall expectations for the course, and the role they see English playing in their future.

Table 5 Prompts and Responses from Narrative Frames Survey (*n* = 682)

Item and English Translation	Response Categories (number of instances)
In my high school my English class we mostly learned…	grammar (397); multiple skills (205); reading (72); test-taking (41); writing (40); other (139); irrelevant/no response (31)
I hope my English class in university will…	communicate (393); improve (64); use English (53); enjoy (46); speak (44); other (172); irrelevant/no response (22)
What I am most excited about is…	communicating (291); speak with foreigners (105); make friends (63); work with others (52); improve (47); speaking (30); other (117); irrelevant/no response (108)
What I am most worried about is…	communicating (240); lack of skill (177); keeping up (77); understanding (41); improving (19); other (139); irrelevant/no response (94)
I'm taking this class because…	to communicate / speak (182); it's required (172); to improve (126); I want to learn (43); English is important (38); other (122); irrelevant/no response (20)
And I want to learn…	to communicate (470); to use English (47); vocabulary (46); about foreigners (31); other (150); irrelevant/no response (25)
In this class I want my teacher to…	make class enjoyable (122); help me improve (103); teach me to communicate (92); support me (82); be kind / fair / gentle (66); be easy (55); other (105); irrelevant/no response (91)
I want my classmates to…	communicate (208); get along / be kind (154); enjoy / have fun (86): work together (74); be active (53); improve together (51); other (80); irrelevant/no response (82)
Compared to other courses, I think this course will be…	fun / positive (193); involve communication (123); difficult (75); active (42); social (42); useful (28); interesting (27); other (122); irrelevant/no response (66)
In the future I think I will use English…	in my work (269); when travelling (191); speaking with foreigners (111); for communication (76); in my daily life (49); I don't know (37); other (55); irrelevant/no response (46)

Participants' prior learning experiences were encapsulated by the content of their high school English courses. Activities indicating a more traditional orientation towards learning and instruction such as grammar study, reading, and test preparation dominated, making up over 85% of participant responses. The number of participants who mainly practiced speaking skills comprised slightly over 10% of responses. These results suggest that the transition from secondary to this university-level English course represents a significant change for a large number of the participants. This shift, however, is not unwelcome for most participants, as is shown by their expectations for the course.

A single category overwhelmingly dominated responses to those items aimed at revealing participants' expectations for the course—*communication*. This concept was the most mentioned in items directly relating to course content, including what they expected the course to contain, what they were hopeful of, what they wanted to learn, and even why they were taking the course. It was also prominent in their expectations for their teacher and their classmates. While communication is on the whole a positive aspect of student expectations, it is also the most prominent object of student anxiety as well.

Finally, while not directly related to the other aspects of learner beliefs examined in this paper, student expectations concerning the ways they will use in English in their future can provide teachers with valuable information when considering course content and tailoring it meet the needs of their students. In the case of these students, almost 40% see English playing a role in their future career.

Discussion

Interpretation of the results are addressed as responses to each of the research questions.

RQ1: What are these students' beliefs towards language learning?

Similar to the findings in previous studies at this institution (e.g., Bollen & Faherty, 2016), the incoming students who participated in this study hold complex and even contradictory views towards language learning. Many of them retain traditional beliefs regarding language learning. By quantitative measures, respondents were more likely to agree with statements that defined language learning as grammar study and translation. Conversely, students' understanding of the value of classroom communication, and their eagerness to engage in such activities, was clearly reflected in qualitative data. These types of responses were both unsurprising, given historical criticisms of the mismatch between stated policy and achievable outcomes (Tahira, 2012), and reassuring, given recent policies advocating for more active learning environments (McMurray, 2018).

Results relating to this research question are useful to the teachers of this course because they constitute an empirical overview of their incoming students' backgrounds and needs. As routinely pointed out by researchers and educators (e.g. Herrera & Murry, 2011; Shaules et al., 2020; Sniad, 2016), this type of information can help teachers better understand where their students are coming from and thus direct the adoption of appropriate strategies and techniques. Most of the teachers of this course have had little to no experience of modern high school English education in Japan, and stereotypical generalizations portray passive learning environments with few opportunities for students to engage in meaningful English communication. As an example, teachers of these students may need to direct some effort towards coaxing students out of grammar-translation mindsets despite the communicative nature of course activities.

Importantly, this type of information is perhaps more useful at the individual level than as a class or department summary. Reported as individual scores within a class context, teachers can identify students who self-report as having outlier beliefs of language learning (on both ends of the spectrum), which the authors suggest may present an opportunity for teachers to differentiate instruction for the benefit of individuals and by extension the function of the classroom as an inclusive learning environment.

RQ2: How willing are these students to interact in a language class?

Quantitative data shows that this group of students are relatively willing to interact with other students and the teacher in a language class. This is unsurprising, as the transition to university often marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter in students' lives. Many students come to their first classes eager to meet and make new friends, and in no small part due to the use of this department as a PR asset for the university, it is likely that many students expect this English course to serve as a venue for socialization.

Qualitative data provide more specific features: students were looking forward to communicating, making friends, and working with others. Interestingly, a similar number of students cited communication as something they are worried about. As noted earlier, faced with a classroom full of relatively timid first-year students, this information should serve to alleviate the fears of teachers that students are apprehensive of interacting with each other.

Teachers may find information on individual students more useful than class summaries. Students who indicate a strong aversion to interpersonal interaction can be accommodated for in planning, such as the assignment of partners or groups, the selection of certain task sequences, or the use of individual interventions.

RQ3: To what degree are these students ready to use technology for language learning?
The four technology-related items in this instrument represented only a small facet of students' e-readiness: students' technological knowledge and skills. Despite the limited scope, one result was particularly illuminating: the relatively low mean response to "I know what an internet browser is." It is certainly unlikely that these students have never used an internet browser, and the authors posit that in an age where smartphone apps reign, the term *internet browser* may be unknown to many young Japanese, as it translates (インタネットブラウザー).

This is not to say that the item response result is inaccurate or flawed. In fact, the authors and their colleagues acknowledge common scenarios: students are asked to access the university's Learning Management System (LMS) using a short and easy-to-type URL, which they mistakenly type into their internet browser's search bar rather than the more appropriate address bar. Other standard features of the user interface that are commonly needed in class, such as the refresh button, have also required explicit instruction. These scenarios were common even as the university implemented a bring-your-own-device policy. Quantitative data gathered in this study serve to corroborate teachers' first-hand experiences. In the immediate future, this information can be used to validate the development and provision of extra technology-related supports for incoming students, not only for language learning.

Again, teachers may find this information useful on an individual level. This is especially true when institutions implement fully online instructional policies. Without being able to monitor and aid students in a physical classroom, this data can be useful for flagging potential students who need extra support at the beginning of the academic year.

RQ4: What expectations do these students have for this course?
As evidenced through themes extracted from the narrative frames survey, these students clearly possessed accurate impressions of the course. Hopes, anticipations, and worries were most associated with communication, speaking, general improvement of skills, and enjoyment. Having no firsthand experience of the course, their expectations may have been influenced by open campus tours and publicity, course syllabus information, or accounts related by other students who had previously experienced the course. The existence of these expectations can serve as positive feedback for university administration: publicity for the institution's English program has been effective at portraying an active learning environment grounded in a communicative language teaching approach. These results also lead the authors to suggest that teachers of this course do not need to spend much time and effort on explicitly describing the merits of communicative language learning approaches, despite students' traditional orientations to English language learning.

It is interesting to note that many students expect their teacher and classmates to contribute to an enjoyable experience. Unfortunately, none of the survey prompts asked students to elaborate on the roles and responsibilities they expect for themselves.

Conclusion

This research project aimed at developing a learner profiling system that could be used to investigate newly enrolled learner beliefs as they related to orientation to English language learning, willingness to interact, and readiness for e-learning. The results were reported to teachers as individual responses collated in class groupings and presented alongside department-wide results, with the intention of providing teachers with information that could be used to design more student-centered learning environments. Data indicated that the incoming student population retained traditional beliefs regarding language learning, that they were relatively willing to interact in a language class, and that they are generally capable of utilizing computers to access information online.

The results of this study confirm similar findings from other research (e.g., Bollen & Faherty, 2016; Hayashi & Cherry, 2004) regarding the complexities of learner beliefs, and

while these results and the above discussion points are necessarily focused on the authors' teaching context, the findings of this study may also be of particular relevance to teachers and administrators elsewhere as an example of using learner profiles to achieve similar pedagogic and organizational aims.

One particular shortcoming that will need to be addressed in future iterations of this project is the attention to technical vocabulary in some of the items. Murray and Blyth (2011) noted that self-rated competencies may be lower than actual ability due to a lack of vocabulary. For example, a student may be a capable user of Safari, Edge, or Chrome, without knowing that all three are classified as *internet browsers*, and results can be further complicated by the existence of other terms such as *web browsers* or simply *browsers*.

Policy issues regarding the attributes of learner profiles and the ownership of digital information should also be considered if this system is further pursued (Sgouropoulou, Ehlers, & Pawlowski, 2006). Furthermore, the need to analyze and report gender distinctions may be questionable. No differences were found in this study, and unless gender impact is a focal point of the research, it is recommended that subsequent studies using these instruments refrain from collecting such data.

As a final note, a related study is currently underway that investigates the extent to which teachers of this course perceived the learner profiles and were able to make use of them. It is also recommended that further research should be done to investigate student perceptions and use of these instruments as benchmarks for course-final reflective tasks.

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Appendix A: Learner Profile Questionnaire and Results

Item (English translation)	M	SD
1. 英語を学ぶということは、ほとんどが文法のルールを覚えることです。 (Learning English is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules.) *(r)*	4.37	.949
2. 英語を学ぶことは、ほとんどが翻訳することです。(Learning English is mostly a matter of translation.) *(r)*	4.22	.953
3. クラスメイトと話すことで英語力が向上します。(I can improve my English by speaking with my classmates.)	4.80	.902
4. 私は今までの英語教育の中で英語を話す機会が多くありました。(I have had many chances to speak English in my education.)	3.58	1.157
5. 私はグループワークのない先生主導のクラスで勉強がはかどります。(I learn well in a teacher-led class that has no group work.) *(r)*	3.59	1.029
6. 私の学習はほとんど先生に依存しています。(My learning depends mostly on the teacher.) *(r)*	4.05	1.008
7. 授業中に他の学生と交流することは、私の学習にとって重要です。(It is important for my learning to interact with other students during class.)	4.67	.914
8. 私の学習は、ほとんどが私自身の努力によるものです。(My learning depends mostly on my effort.)	3.68	1.130
9. 初対面の人とも話しやすいです。(I find it easy to talk with people I've never met.)	3.71	1.266
10. 授業中にクラスメイトと協力して仕事をするのが楽しいです。(I enjoy working collaboratively with classmates during class time.)	4.57	.962
11. グループワークは簡単なものであれば英語でできます。(I can do group work in English if the task is simple.)	3.83	1.124
12. ヘルプが必要な場合や質問がある場合は、日本語を使って他の学生に質問できます。(If I need help or have a question, I am comfortable asking another student using Japanese.)	4.91	.844
13. 助けが必要な場合や質問がある場合は、日本語を使って先生に聞くのが安心です。(If I need help or have a question, I am comfortable asking the teacher using Japanese.)	4.96	.805
14. 自分の意見や考えを日本語で他の学生に伝えることに抵抗はありません。(I am willing to express my opinions and ideas with other students in Japanese.)	4.57	1.024
15. 自分の意見や考えを英語で他の学生と表現したいと思っています。(I am willing to express my opinions and ideas with other students in English.)	4.16	1.064
16. パソコンを使うのは快適です。(I'm comfortable using a computer.)	4.43	1.069
17. 初めて使うウェブサイトで情報を比較的簡単に見つけることができる。(I can find information on new websites relatively easily.)	4.22	1.069
18. インターネットで探している情報を簡単に見つけることができる。(I can find information that I'm looking for on the internet easily.)	4.47	1.002
19. インタネットブラウザが何か知っている。(I know what an internet browser is.)	3.87	1.145

Response values

[1] 強く反対する (Strongly disagree); [2] 反対する (Disagree); [3] やや反対する (Somewhat disagree)

[4] まあまあ同意する (Somewhat agree); [5] 同意する強く(Agree); [6] 同意する (Strongly agree)

Appendix B: Narrative Frames Survey

このアンケートでは、あなたの高校時代の英語のクラスついて、また崇城大学での英語の授業に対する期待に関して、最後にあなたの将来において英語を使うことをどのように考えているかを語ってもらうため、質問しています。

1. 私の高校の英語クラスは…
   In high school my English class was…

2. 私たちが高校の授業で主に学んでいたのは...
   And we mostly learned…

3. 私が大学で英語の授業に望むのは…
   I hope my English class in university will…

4. 私が最もワクワクしているのは…
   What I am most excited about is…

5. 私が最も心配しているのは…
   What I am most worried about is…

6. 私がこの授業を履修している理由は…
   I'm taking this class because…

7. この授業で私が学びたいのは…（例をあげるか、詳細をあげて下さい）
   And I want to learn… (please give some examples or details)

8. さらに私が英語担当教員に期待するのは…（例をあげるか、詳細をあげて下さい）
   In this class I want my teacher to… (please give some examples or details)

9. 私がクラスメートに期待するのは…（例をあげるか、詳細をあげて下さい）
   I want my classmates to… (please give some examples or details)

10. 他の授業と比較して、私はこの授業は ….. と思う。
    Compared to other courses, I think this course will be…

11. 将来、私は　…で英語を使う。
    In the future I think I will use English…

12. 最後に、言いたいことは…
    Finally, I would like to say that…