A Study of College Freshman Students in Upper Level Japanese Courses:
Their Challenges and Adjustments
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Abstract

The vulnerability in adjusting from high school to college has been evident for some time. However, the transition for freshman students placed into second or third year level courses has not been a focal point for researchers especially with regard to foreign language acquisition and/or college adjustment. If general freshman students have difficulties due to college transition, they likely experience more stressful challenges in upper level placements because the course requirements and professor expectations are generally designed for upper-class students.

This qualitative study analyzed these students’ narratives about their transition experiences in aim to clarify their academic and social challenges and discover the influence of experience upon their college adjustments. Results of questionnaires and interviews revealed:

Academically, the new curriculum and teaching styles in college often confused these students; Socially, these freshman students felt isolated in the class community. Class activities such as oral practices with peers whom they did not know well increased their anxieties. Social challenge was more difficult than academic challenge. However, in general, the transition experiences had a positive effect on their college adjustment academically and socially. In particular, cooperative learning activities resulted in the facilitator more easily developing friendships as well as improving students’ language skills. Thus, this study proved that the Japanese language course/program design and delivery can have a marked impact on college adjustment. Findings implied the need to improve a Japanese language education system from the perspective of continuous language learning and to provide pedagogical assistances for these freshman students’ adjustments. Finally, this study proposed the importance for college language professors to be considerate and supportive of their students’ needs as they transition into upper level Japanese language courses upon entering higher education settings.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Do college language professors know how much freshman students who were placed into second or third year level language courses have challenges in order to adjust to their new learning styles and environments? These students seem to adapt smoothly to their new learning settings and to their professors’ expectations since their test scores and grades are generally high. Professors recognize that freshman students need careful support in acclimating to college learning styles. Nevertheless, in upper level courses, they tend to lose such premise and to expect the same performance to every students including freshman students. This study aimed to reveal these freshman students’ transition challenges in their new college language courses academically and socially, and to explore how the experiences influenced their college adjustments. The college language courses focused on for this study were Japanese.

This chapter will explain rational foundations of this study. First, the background how some students need to be placed into upper level Japanese courses and what kind of difficulties these students could face will be described. Next, college freshman students’ issues during their transition periods from high schools to college will be illustrated. Then, these two points will be integrated from the view of foreign language courses in college and the problem will be clarified. Subsequently, the purpose of this study and concrete research questions based on that will be presented.

Background
Expansion of foreign language education. The importance of foreign language learning has been emphasized in the education of the United States for decades. Today, numerous colleges require more-than-one-year of foreign language course credits for graduation. Furthermore, according to the survey by American Council on Education, Art & Science Group LLC., and the College Board (2008), 95 percent of college-bound high school students have studied a foreign language in high school. This statistics indicates that the length of learning the target language has been gradually increasing. As a result, high school graduates who enter colleges with Advance Placement (AP)\(^1\) credits of World Languages and Cultures have lost their superiority, compared with the situation decades ago.

Japanese language education had expanded the most in the 1980’s and 1990’s because of Japan’s economical presence in the world. Although the influence is decreasing due to the sluggish economics, Japanese language still attracts a constant number of learners. Japan Foundation, the official organization that is promoting Japanese language education overseas, reported that the United States has approximately 156,000 learners. The breakdown is as follows: elementary education 8.1 percent, secondary education 43.7 percent, higher education 40.4 percent, other 7.8 percent (Japan Foundation [JF], 2014). At the time of commencement of the AP Japanese Language and Culture courses in 2006, the standard of Japanese language education in secondary education was modified according to the proficiency standards of four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) presented by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language [ACTFL]. This reform was expected as a contribution to the development

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\(^1\) Advanced Placement program is offering college-level courses in high schools. Students who finished the course can take the AP Exam, which is the national standardized exam that evaluates them with the score scale (from one being the lowest, to five being the highest). According to the score, colleges approve some AP credits as college credits. The standard to determine the correlation between the score of AP Exam and how many credits students would earn depends upon each college. This nation-wide program is under the control of the College Board.
of Japanese language education in secondary education and to the improvement of the smoother curricular articulation between high schools and colleges (JF, 2014).

As a result of this expansion, high school graduates who already have enough language ability to communicate using basic vocabulary and grammar began entering college. In accordance with the common practice for effective learning, the appropriate course placements are determined by their scores from placement tests that each college creates and tends to be writing skill-oriented. Successful test takers then can continue to learn Japanese in second or third year level courses at their colleges. This placement process ought to help learners remain on track for their accomplishments. However, even if they skipped elementary level courses, all learners would not necessarily receive the benefit from or might not be satisfied with their language learning environment. Institutions are forced to reduce their Japanese program due to budget cuts; thereupon, possible courses where learners can be placed are limited. This could impact the extent to which students continue studying Japanese language.

In response to this concern, the Japanese Language Education Global Network launched J-GAP, the Global Articulation Project of Japanese Language Education, in 2011. This is the international project to promote the concept of curricular articulation and teachers’ professional development towards the accomplishment in each country. In the United States, New England Regional Association of Teachers of Japanese plays a central role to advocate to teachers the importance of curriculum articulation between high school and college. They coordinate workshops to activate the communication and pedagogical information exchange among local teachers because they found that it is essential to know each other’s educational practices before making an ambitious solution. Though the action is expanding nation-wide, clear results of curricular articulation have not been presented yet.
Challenging period: Transition from high school to college. The college transition period is very stressful for new students, yet it is critical for their academic and social successes (Clark, 2005; Conley, 2008). Conley (2008) stated that the transition from high school to college is the hardest time in people’s lives. Teachers, instead of students, are generally expected to motivate and engage students in their subjects in the United States. In high school, teachers nurture students by their flexible expectations and close relationships. However, college students are required to have autonomy with regard to their learning. College professors who work with freshman students are frequently shocked by students’ insufficient study habits and academic skills (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). Although high school graduates believe that they need to work very hard to be successful in higher education institutions, students often face difficulty in managing their time, following the instructions, and completing their assignments (Erickson & Strommer, 2005).

In addition to academic difficulties, college freshman students have to handle their new social life style choices. Most high school students are under their parents’ protection and they have shared responsibilities for their children’s daily lives. In most cases, parents bare most of the burden of their family’s decisions and duties. This secured environment suddenly changes when students attend college. Many students move to student dormitory on campus apart from their parents and high school friends. While they have freedom, students are also required to manage their lives independently. It is not easy for students who have never needed to motivate themselves in order to lead their scheduled lives. Moreover, building new friendships is also critical for college freshman students who spend most of their time on campus. Otherwise, they often cannot find places to “fit in”. As a result, some students may leave college. Numerous researchers on college students’ retention have presented the necessity of social interaction (e.g.
Freshmen in foreign language courses. The expansion of foreign language education and college transition issues can be integrated in foreign language courses at colleges. As foreign language learning increases as a requirement for college degrees, college students normally enroll in foreign language courses during their first year so that students finish the requirement as soon as possible. The majority of freshman students take elementary courses; therefore, course instructors of first year level design their classes mostly targeting freshman students. Instructors expect that some students may miss classes because they oversleep or that students may not complete assignments due to insufficient study habits. Hence, students in first year level courses would often be nurtured more than students in second or third year level courses. Instructors normally give extra explanation of how the tasks should be done and check the process frequently before the due date. Even if students could not complete those tasks as the instructor expected or submit on the due date, instructors often give them due date extensions.

Furthermore, there are a certain number of freshman students placed in second or third year level courses. For example, at the college where this study was conducted, a small liberal arts college in Wisconsin has a Japanese department that welcomes almost five freshman students in second or third year level courses every year. Although the course placement ought to promote the students’ language skill developments, their success might have depended on the
students’ abilities or efforts. Other classmates already understand what they should do for their course work. Consequently, many upper level course instructors may be less involved in students’ learning habits. In addition to these academic challenges, these “newcomers” need to jump into the formed group in order to be a part of this classroom community. In particular, this must be a stressful time for these students as they acclimate to an unfamiliar classroom dynamic.

**Problem**

Foreign language courses in college should include students’ college transition issues because many freshman students take foreign language courses in their first semester at college. As such, foreign language instructors need to pay attention to students’ college adjustment processes in order to understand and engage their students. In case freshman students being a minority in second or third year level courses, these particular students may face other challenges such as joining an existing community and acclimating to teaching expectations normally not addressed until their second or third year of study.

Nevertheless, to date, freshman students who were placed into second or third year level college foreign language courses have not been fully studied in previous research. The related literature on freshman students in language courses was primarily conducted with quantitative methods that measured foreign language learning anxiety or the class dynamics (e.g., Frantzen & Mognan, 2005, Kuriyama, 2010, 2014). Japanese language teachers recently began dealing with this concern. Koshiyama & Shibata (2005) and Takahashi & Hattori (2009) described college freshman students who are struggling with their Japanese language learning curricular articulation. However, these few studies still did not thoroughly address students’ social adjustments to their classrooms. It has been supported that language teachers must consider a student’s emotional status in order to support their academic and social development throughout
the second language acquisition process (e.g. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Krashen, 1982). A wide body of these studies indicates that it is crucial both academic and social adjustment issues that freshman students face in upper level courses.

**Purposes of This Study**

This study aimed to clarify the challenges that freshman students who were placed into second or third year level college Japanese language courses generally face during their college transition periods. Findings should be helpful for Japanese language teachers to understand their students better and encourage students effectively. Moreover, this study examined how these students’ transition experiences in their placed courses affected their college adjustment. Because freshman students have to adjust not only to the new leaning style but also to their new environment, both academic and social influences regarding Japanese courses should be investigated. Data was collected with qualitative methods since the participants’ insights in their narratives can provide authentic and honest views that will shed light on this matter.

**Research Questions**

1. What kind of challenges do college freshman students who were placed into second or third year level Japanese courses face during the transition period from high school to college?
2. How do these freshman students’ experiences in second or third year level Japanese courses influence their academic adjustments to college?
3. How do these freshman students’ experiences in second or third year level Japanese courses influence their social adjustments to college?

**Definition of Terms in This Study**

**Academic adjustment.** Many freshman students are shocked by their first semester grades. The learning styles that students used in high school and the one expected at college are
different. College students are required to have responsibilities for their learning and to manage it by spontaneously thinking, judging, and acting. This study investigated the participants’ impressions on the differences between Japanese language courses in high school and it at college. Then, if they feel they could adjust to their new leaning styles of Japanese was examined. Thus, this research did not refer to their grades or test scores to judge their adjustments. Instead, their reflections were major criteria to assess how well or how challenging the transition to college has been for them.

**Social adjustment.** As well as academics, college students who mostly live apart from their hometowns have to begin their new social lives with new people such as roommates or classmates who have diverse backgrounds. While students could gain multidimensional perspectives through these new relationships, many researchers have reported one of the top reasons that students leave colleges is because they feel isolated from their new environment (e.g., Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Tinto, 1987). One of the keys to retaining more students in college is a sense of belonging. Therefore, this study evaluated the participants’ social adjustments by whether they obtained a sense of belonging to the new community. If the participants think that others consider their existences as part of the community, which is considered as an indicator of one’s senses of belonging to the community, was also investigated.

**Second or third year level Japanese courses.** The standard of Japanese language skill level setting for each course depends upon the institution. The course levels and the main materials at the participants’ college are as follows:

- First year (JPN1010, JPN1020): Elementary, Textbook *Genki 1*, Lesson 1-10
Third year (JPN3010, JPN3020): Elementary/intermediate, Textbook *Genki 2*, Lesson 21-23, Textbook *Jókyû e no Tobira* Lesson 1-4

The participants’ institution has upper level Japanese language courses four days a week. Regarding freshman students’ course placement, a professor determines whether the student has enough skills to enroll in JPN 2010 or JPN3010 via a placement interview. The possible courses are JPN1010, JPN2010, and JPN3010 that are offered in fall semesters.
Summary of This Chapter

This chapter introduced the topic and the background related to it. Today, many colleges require foreign language course credits for their degree; therefore elementary language courses are full of freshman students. Professors of these courses tend to help their students be college students through detailed explanations and flexible expectations. On the other hand, due to the expansion of foreign language education in secondary education, freshman students who have enough ability to skip introductory courses in college increased. However, professors have not fully paid attention to these students placed into second or third year level foreign language courses. Although there is a minority of these students that more easily adapt themselves to the new learning styles, they often must make adjustments during this transition period. Thus, this study aimed to clarify the challenges and examine the effect of the experience on these students’ college adjustments, focusing on college Japanese language courses.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, previous research related to the focus of this study will be presented. Although the purpose of this study was to clarify challenges that freshman students who were placed in second or third year level Japanese language courses generally face, this literature review is aligned to this study’s theoretical framework. More specially, this chapter will investigate relevant matters to this research that have previously not been fully discussed. First, scholarly literature on freshman students’ academic and social transition from high school to college will be summarized. There are studies of college freshman worldwide; however, only studies that were conducted in the United States will be mentioned in this study since the students’ surrounding environments and the educational backgrounds are different according to the country.

Next, the review will be narrowed down to transition issues in foreign language education since this study focused on Japanese language courses at college. As described in Chapter 1, today, freshman students who have learned the target language in high school and begin college with certain abilities enough for basic communication are increasing. While AP World Languages and Cultures courses continue to be offered more throughout the United States, college foreign language professors do not seem to be familiar with their curriculum standards in high school (Crux Research, 2007 as sited in Wilbur & Monk, 2010, p. 102). Thus, students may receive disappointing college course placement scores and/or face difficulties in adapting to new learning styles in their higher education settings.
In addition, social contexts surrounding learners such as instructional styles, instructors, and peers are acknowledged as notable factors that influence learners’ affection toward the language acquisition process as noted by Williams & Burden’s internal/external factor model (1997 as cited in Honda, 2005, p.55). Their study illustrated that both learners’ needs/interest and learning environment influence their learning. Dörnyei’s works on engagement (1994, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2007 etc.) explained that language leaner’s motivation is influenced by the quality of the learning experience. Moreover, classroom social dynamics, in combination with the works on correlation between foreign language anxiety and success of language learning by Horwitz and colleagues (1986 etc.) also impact classroom performance. Because the subjects of this study involved in new communities where relationships are formed, socio-cultural factor will be also represented in order to better understand the learners’ potential psychological states during the post high school transition period.

Finally, studies on Japanese language curriculum and the global project devised to accomplish its articulation between high school and college will be introduced. Again, these previous researches did not necessarily focus on freshman students placed in second or third year level courses. However, they are referentially useful for this study since they reveal the general transitional situations in typical Japanese language programs.

**Transition from High School to College**

According to National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2014), 10.6 million students enrolled in four-year institutions in 2012. As long as the report shows, the number of enrollment keeps growing. The undergraduate enrollment of four-year institution increased 44 percent between 2000 and 2010 (NCES, 2014). Furthermore, the number of students is predicted
to further expand. Despite the fact that educational costs are increasing, the prominence of statistics connecting college degrees to better career opportunities still attracts many young people.

The shift from high school to college immensely influences a person’s life because this is the period when late adolescents are expected to become adults (Conley, 2008). In the United States, this is also the turning point from compulsory education to education based upon one’s will to learn. Therefore, contrary to high school teachers who nurture their students, college professors have higher expectations regarding student attitudes and aptitude for learning.

For many young people, college is the first time teenagers experience significant independence (Conley, 2008). Freshman students must learn how to lead their own daily lives, which includes, in part, getting up every morning, completing assignments on time, and doing laundry etc. However, college-bound high school students often have positive expectations and ideal image on their college life (Keup, 2007). What they experience in college is, in many ways, different and they realize that the expectations are myth. Stern (1970 as cited in Keup, 2007, p. 5) named this unrealistic perception “freshman myth.” The discrepancies like “freshman myth” cause students’ disengagement and/or low-level adjustment, as a result, become a reason of leaving the college (Keup, 2007). In addition, Keup (2007) found that college-bound high school students have expectation in two broad areas of about college: academic personal development and interpersonal relationship. When freshman students gained satisfaction in those areas, they normally feel they have adjusted to the college life (Keup, 2007).

Moreover, colleges welcome a variety of people today. This could be the first person in a family to attend college and/or he or she may have a developmental disorder or learning disability. Furthermore, a majority of college freshman students are millennials meaning they are
different from the traditional college students due to their interests or perceptions (Keup, 2008). These students may require more time to adjust to a new environment than traditional college freshman needed.

**College Retention**

The first year at college is the period when the largest number of college students leave college (O’Brien, 2013). According to the research by National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC] (2014), only 58.2 percent of all students who started college in 2012 returned to the same institution. Moreover, about one in nine students transferred to a different institution by the following fall every year (NSCRC, 2014). Thus, it is obvious that college freshman students need support so that they can adapt to this new stage in their lives.

Astin (1991 as cited in Crissman & Upcraft, 2005, p. 30) classified numerous factors regarding why students leave college. It often involves the students’ academic or social challenging/unsatisfying situation. On the other hand, Tinto (1987) explored the reasons for student persistence; as a result, he discovered that college students’ departures occur because of the mixture of the students’ personal and interpersonal contexts. However, these two factors should not be treated separately. Personal factors refer to, for example, one’s intention to higher education and one’s commitments to learning such as motivation or effort (Tinto, 1987). Interpersonal context means interactions between individuals, which are needed for social adjustment to the college (Tinto, 1987). “The quality and the quantity of academic and social experiences” (Crissman & Upcraft, 2005, p. 31) significantly affect whether first year students’ commitment to their goals at their institutions. Therefore, students need to gain positive and beneficial experiences in order to find the value to remain there (Tinto, 1993 as cited in Crissman & Upcraft, 2005, p. 31). Tinto described that the greater integrations that students attained by a
pile of good experiences bring higher retention rates (as cited in Crissman & Upcraft, 2005, p. 31). Then, Tinto claimed that institutions have the responsibility to help first year students adjust to the school academically and socially (as cited in Crissman & Upcraft, 2005, p. 31). O’Brien (2013) also argued that first-year students’ transitions from high school to college is a high-stakes process, for the students as well as their institutions. Thus, colleges and faculties ought to place a heavier emphasis on and work actively to support freshman student adjustment.

**College Freshman Students’ Academic Challenges**

What is challenging for freshman students when they start college? Why do freshman students need to place effort to adopt the learning style at college? O’Brien (2013) claimed that some freshman students do not realize that their academic standings are critical until they receive their final grades. They often think that they can pass college courses by using high school learning habits. In addition, some college professors do not give students frequent feedback regarding their academic progress. The study habits and academic skills that freshman students bring to college classroom often shock college faculties (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). Conley (2008) argued that there are great differences between high school and college with regard to academic requirement and expectation. Conley also stated, “college readiness is fundamentally different from high school completion” (2008, p. 5). “Students must be prepared to use an array of learning strategies and coping skills that are quite different from those they developed and honed in high school” (Conley, 2008, p. 6). Appleby (2014) listed the differences between high school and college in the academic part that were found through first-year students’ narratives as follows:

- The amount and the difficulty of the work required in college are strikingly increasing from high school.
• However, the time that one can spend for assignments is reasonably shorter than it is in high school.

• Students must have more responsibility to learn on their own in college.

• College professors expect their students to be more responsible and to influence each other intellectually.

• Therefore, students must refer to the course syllabus instead of waiting teachers’ confirming announcements that high school teachers do.

• It is also students’ responsibility to help faculties remember their names and faces by contacting them occasionally.

Although college students are assigned to work in groups such as group projects or presentations contrary to a spread image of lecture courses, college faculties still expect students to “be independent, self-reliant learners” (Conley, 2008, p. 5). College students must have the ability to assess their own learning from an objective view and to ask some help from faculties or other students when they recognize that they have a problem (Conley, 2008). In college, students are expected to think and act on their own self-development.

However, these challenges have been described much over and over; therefore, college-bound high school students do expect that they will be required to study by themselves more in college (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). Nonetheless, the expectation does not have enough power to make freshman students act like that. Kuh (2005) stated that there is a gap about expected amount of self-study between by students and by faculties and consequently students come to class unprepared. Erickson & Strommer (2005) mentioned that high school grades are escalating and it causes freshman students’ unrealistic expectation, which is that 58 percent of freshman
students believe that they can earn at least B grade without particular efforts even in college (Sax et al., 2001 as cited in Erickson & Strommer, 2005, p. 244).

College Freshman Students’ Social Challenges

Starting college means separating from family, high school friends, and their hometown for many freshman students who move to student dormitories on campus. Freshman students begin their new life with new surroundings such as roommates and college professors. Unless the college is located in a city, students usually spend their time on campus just going to classrooms and returning to their rooms. Students need to find their comfortable spots in the campus because their social lives are limited within the campus. As mentioned previously, many freshman students leave college due to feelings of isolation. In short, social adjustment for freshman students is a serious matter that directory relates to their success or failure in college.

Due to the physical separation from their hometowns, many freshman students cannot continue their high school friendships. They may miss their high school friends and gain negative emotional state. Paul & Brier (2001 as cited in Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008, p. 553) called this situation “friendsickness.” This does not necessarily influence freshman students’ college adjustments negatively, but new friendships in a new environment help freshman students reduce loneliness and isolated feelings (Swenson et al., 2008). “Having friends to spend time with is positively correlated with satisfaction with student life” (Astin, 1993 as cited in Swenson et al., 2008, p. 563). In addition, the more supportive the friendship is, the easier the freshman student adjusts to college (Swenson et al., 2008). Focusing on the period, “increased social support over the first two semesters of college predicted improved social and emotional/personal adjustment” (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007 as cited in
Swenson et al., 2008, p. 553). Thus, it is crucial for freshman students to build new friendships as soon as possible.

College professors are different from high school teachers. Some freshman students may have a difficulty with how they communicate with their professors. For freshman students, professors may look unfriendly or unapproachable. Yet, establishing the relationship with a caring faculty member motivates students definitely; as a result, it is significant for student achievement (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). However in reality, while “we know that interaction between students and faculty are important to many goals of higher education, it occurs all too rarely” (Erickson & Strommer, 2005, p. 245). Therefore, there is a room that professors can impact their freshman students’ college adjustments.

Saville, Lawrence, & Jakobsen (2012) proposed to make an active learning community in class through cooperative learning, which promotes beneficial peer interactions for student engagement. Vygotsky (1978) discovered the influence of interpersonal relationship on personal development in general. Each learner has Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that he/she can attain with other’s help between the zone that he/she can achieve by him/herself and the zone that he/she cannot achieve even if others assisted him/her. This theory confirmed the effectiveness of cooperative learning, which consists of peer interaction helping each other to complete the task. In a language learning setting, pair or small group work then may promote learners’ comprehension and language skill improvement. As a result, cooperative learning helps students gain a sense of learning community (Saville et al., 2012). Freeman, Anderson, & Jensen (2007) found that there is a relationship between a sense of class belonging and a sense of college-level belonging. Also, they argued that students’ sense of belonging and their academic motivation are positively related (Freeman, Anderson, & Jensen, 2007). Kuh (2007) also
demonstrated that students obtained social satisfaction by being a part of something larger than themselves, which enabled them to develop their commitment to all aspects of college life.

**Transition to a Formed Community**

This study focused on freshman students who were placed into upper level Japanese courses. In upper level Japanese courses, students often shared the learning experiences under the curriculum and the teaching style of the institution as when they were in elementary Japanese courses. These students already knew each other well and had built relationships and a sense of community on their college campus and their classrooms. Moreover, Japanese classes seem to have a strong sense of community because of students’ often shy personalities that prefer to be in a small and intimate group; whereas, freshman students have to join the formed community. This situation is similar to the one that transfer students struggle with in their new institutions. College transfer students need shorter time than freshman students in upper level Japanese courses to adjust academically since they are familiar with college learning styles to some extent (Townsend, 2008), even though they experience “transfer shock” at first by receiving lower grades than they used to earn (Hill, 1965 as cited in Laanan, 2001, p. 5). However, they “are faced with having to find and make friends in a place where most students’ friendships have already been formed, usually in the first year” (Townsend, 2008, p.74).

For newcomers, making friends is stressful, but it is critical for their social adjustments. Townley, Katz, Wandersman, Skiles, Schillaci, Timmerson, & Mousseau (2013) reported that emotional engagement like a sense of community contributes to transfer students’ both academic and social successes. As introduced above, students’ satisfaction with both academic development and social relationship links to their college adjustment (Keup, 2007); thus, whether
newcomer students can find their comfortable places in their new environments or not is a key factor for their adjustments to college.

**Transition Issues in Foreign Language Learning**

Students who have previous leaning experience of the target language usually take course placement tests in order to register for the most appropriate language course. However, some students are placed in first year level courses despite the fact that they have some basic knowledge of the language. The students who have learning experience but were placed in beginner’s level courses are called “false beginners.” Arnold (2008) conducted qualitative research that collected false beginner students’ voices. As a result, he found that false beginner students constructed their beliefs towards the language learning and/or instructors that are influenced by their learning experience in high school (Arnold, 2008). The gap between the belief and language learning style in college and the different instructional methods are clearly adjustment obstacles (Arnold, 2008).

This result implied that the transition issue between language programs does not only stem from teaching contents, but also from how to teach them. Frantzen & Magnan (2005) and Kuriyama (2010, 2014) compared true beginners and false beginners who enrolled in the same course in regards to measuring anxiety. While they found that false beginners were less anxious than true beginners, they also confirmed that the interactions between students who have different skill levels contribute to their improvement (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Kuriyama, 2010, 2014). However, the placement result of false beginner may negatively affect the students’ motivation to continue learning the language. This situation originated in a curriculum articulation problem between high school and college language programs.
Many language educators realized that there was a huge gap between high school foreign language programs and college foreign language programs in terms of the teaching contents, teaching order, and learning style at the beginning of the 1990’s (Byrnes, 1991). As the gap became more significant, the term “curriculum articulation” was frequently used. Articulation refers to “the well-motivated and well-designed sequencing and coordination of instruction toward certain goals” (Byrnes, 1990). According to Met (2007), articulation is “the work teachers do to enable students to make seamless progress through their language learning experiences” (p. 54). Lange (1982 as cited in Byrnes, 1990, p. 281) explained three types of articulations: Horizontal articulation, which is inter-courses coordination in the same language skill level; Vertical articulation, which is inter-programs coordination throughout the length of a program; and Interdisciplinary articulation, which is the coordination of a language course and other courses. Language program transition issues from high school and college are then issues of vertical articulation. Articulation is a product of collaborative effort between language educators, therefore it is crucial that language teachers cross the bridge between high school and college by communicating and by trying to have basic understanding each other’s programs (Morris, 2007).

**Transition Issues in Japanese Language Learning**

While freshman students who have studied Japanese prior to college are increasing, “a problem arises when a student has invested four or five years in studying Japanese and ends up being placed at the beginning level. This is quite discouraging for the student, and in most cases, she will quit studying the language” (Torii-Williams, 2008, p. 66). Hatasa (2008) pointed out that the disappointing results of placement test discourage high school teachers as well as the false beginner students.
Moreover, new language programs often require learners to struggle to adapt to the unfamiliar settings, materials, and teaching styles, regardless of how long they have previously learned the language or how much they are satisfied with the placement (Kojima & Matsubara, 1994). Torii-Williams (2008) analyzed that the difference of instructional focus between high school and college is that “the instructional emphasis of most college is on language learning, whereas that of most high school is on cultural exposure” (Torii-Williams, 2008, p. 66). Kinoshita, Chikamatsu, Kinoshita, & Chikamatsu (1994) also demonstrated the difference of course objectives between high school Japanese language programs and college programs. Researchers claimed that high school teachers and college professors do not share the same assessment standard to gauge their students’ language skills (Kinoshita et al., 1994; Kojima & Matsubara, 1994; Koshiyama & Shibata, 2005). Even after AP Japanese Language and Culture, which was expected to bridge the gap between high school and college programs when it was established in 2006, Graham (2009) and Takahashi & Hattori (2009) reported that students who earned high scores from their AP test experienced confusion before adjusting college Japanese language instructions. Tohsaku (2012) stated that AP only works under situations in which the curriculum articulation is smooth.

In response to this unfavorable situation, J-GAP, the Global Articulation Project of Japanese Language Education, was founded in 2010. This study focused on the transition gaps between high school and college in the United States, but this project is carried out in nine countries where the same problem occurs. The aim of this program is the improvement of curriculum articulation between high school and college Japanese language program in order to augment continuous high-level learners in each country. Although the lack of articulation is a universal issue, the backgrounds are different depending on the “local educational, political,
social, and cultural contexts and conditions” (Tohsaku, 2012, p. 11). Then, one representative local area from each country, for example the state of Virginia in the United States, organizes workshops to advocate the concept of curriculum articulation and to discuss Japanese language education standards among institutions. As Morris (2007) mentioned, it is the first step towards an accomplishment of articulation that teachers know each other’s programs well (Tohsaku, 2012, 2013). Any concrete solution has not been reported yet; however, Tohsaku (2012, 2013) also claimed that J-GAP contributed to enhancing local teachers’ awareness on this issue.

**Influence of Social Contexts in Foreign Language Classrooms**

Many researchers, such as Dörnyei (1994, 1997, 2003, 2007 etc.) and Williams & Burden (1997 as cited in Honda, 2005, p. 55), have declared that a learning environment affects individual motivations and the results of language learning. Dörnyei mentioned that language learning motivation changes according to the process of learning and accounted for how the quality of learning experience influences the learners’ motivations (as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 538). Moreover, Dörnyei (1994, 2003) presented that there are three components that affect learners’ motivations distinctively in a language learning setting: course-specific motivational components, for example interests in the course materials, appropriateness of the teaching methods; teacher-specific motivational components, for example effects of the teacher’s personality, attitudes, and teaching style, and impact of relationship with the students; and group-specific motivational components, for example influence of classmates dynamics such as goal-oriented, norms/rewards, cohesion.

Dörnyei (1997, 2007) then argued that cooperative learning, like group work, that produces active peer relationships provide excellent conditions for language learning. Williams & Burden (1997 as cited in Honda, 2005, p. 55) presented a new motivation model that has two
factors: internal factors, such as learners’ needs and/or interests; and external factors, such as teachers, classmates, tasks, and/or evaluation methods. These two factors influence each other, and consequently, the learners’ motivation gradually transform (Honda, 2005). Their work explained that learning environments, including socially related situations, fully impacts learners’ motivation.

Some studies on the relation of language learners’ anxiety and social situation clarified that learners in a foreign language classroom often experience strong anxiety when they believe they are in competition with others or are less competent than others (Bailey, 1983 as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 539; Kitano, 2001). Anxieties in foreign language classrooms are because of the distinctive instructional practice; “foreign language classroom anxiety constitutes a particular kind of situation anxiety, one that is distinct from classroom anxiety in general because being required to use an L2 [second or foreign language] when proficiency is limited constitutes a threat to learners’ ‘language-ego’” (Ellis, 2004, p. 539). Ellis (2004) pointed out that the experience of anxiety impacts learners’ continuous learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) created The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and proved that high-level anxiety causes poor language learning outcomes.

Kitano (2001) investigated learners’ anxiety in the Japanese language classroom and figured out that advanced-level students tend to experience anxiety more strongly than in introductory settings due to a fear of being negatively evaluated. Other researchers also argued that Japanese learners’ anxiety level increased as their language course levels rise (Samimy & Tabuse, 1992 as cited in Kitano, 2001, p. 551; Saito & Samimy, 1996, as cited in Kitano, 2001, p. 551).
From a comprehensive view, both positive and negative emotion has an effect on language acquisition. Krashen (1982) claimed that there is a positive relationship between learners’ emotional states, such as motivation and anxiety, and second language acquisition (Affective Filter Hypothesis). Every language learner has an affective filter, which rises or falls depending on his or her emotional states. When learners have negative emotions, their affective filters rise and their language acquisitions would be delayed.

For instance, learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety have higher potential to facilitate their target language learning than the others, on the other hand, low motivation, low self-esteem and/or high level of anxiety decrease their language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Therefore, one of language instructors’ roles should be to create situations in which a learner’s affective filter can be kept (Krashen, 1982). To sum up, social contexts, including teacher-student relationships and peer interactions, may directly influence learners’ affective filters and language learning accomplishments.
Summary of This Chapter

This chapter summarized related literature. Studies on college freshmen have proven that the first year of college is critical for student success. The transition period between high school where students are nurtured by surrounding adults and college where students are expected to be responsible can be an ordeal. Particularly in upper level Japanese courses, which this study focused on, freshman students have another challenge to join the classes since most of students know each other and formed community. This social difficulty was explained with literature regarding transfer students.

Moreover, transition issues between language programs are presented. Some students have to repeat elementary courses even though they have years of their target language training. This is primarily due to discrepancies between high school language programs and college curriculum designs, teaching styles, and/or teaching content. Japanese language professors have begun investigating on this issue, but thus far have not proposed any viable solutions. Finally, how social contexts influence language learning was introduced and included how to apply studies on language learners’ emotions such as Dörnyei’s motivation studies (1994, 1997 etc.) and Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) to academic success.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will introduce how data collected for this study. It aimed to display how college freshmen transition into upper level Japanese language courses and how the transition experiences influence their general college adjustments. Qualitative methods were employed in order to approach the participants’ insights through concrete descriptions of their narratives. Due to a limited pool of available participants, only seven samples at a private liberal arts college in Wisconsin were gathered. Combined methods, a questionnaire and individual interviews, were conducted during fall 2014 and spring 2015. Then, how to analyze data and ensuring strategies that enhance the validity and reflexivity of this study will be explained.

Why Qualitative Study?

The participants’ honest narratives were needed to accurately describe challenges college freshman students faced in upper level Japanese courses. Their experiences and impressions regarding this transition including how they view the situation and themselves, what they were struggling with, how they find the way to get through the difficulty, and so on. Those could be key factors to understand the freshman students’ situations. Thus, this study utilized qualitative methods, which are suitable for understanding “how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). Narrative analysis was selected as a whole design of this study. The participants’ stories would be the powerful and valid key to interpret the event for them since the collected narrative data is analyzed to define the meaning
of the experience for its author (Merriam, 2009). Consequently, these methods were considered as the best means of how to pursue this study.

**Roles of the Researcher**

The researcher of this study is a graduate student who also teaches Japanese language at the college. The college has only one Japanese professor and two graduate students including the researcher who teach elementary level Japanese courses, thus all participants knew the researcher and four of them were students of the researcher when this study was directed.

For the period of this study, the researcher produced and gathered the questionnaire for written data and then interviewed the participants individually paying attention to their visual expressions. The researcher also made the prepared question guide for interview and took notes during it. All the collected data was managed under the charge of the researcher. Upon analyzing the data, the researcher summarized the findings and concluded this study with implications.

**Participants**

There are only four freshman students who were placed in second and third year Japanese courses at the researcher’s institution because the Japanese department itself is relatively small. Therefore, sophomore and junior students with such experiences were also considered as subjects of this study. Looking back upon one’s experience can offer the individuals another calm and objective insights that contribute to describe and generalize their experiences. During the informed consent, ten students were asked to participate in this study; however, seven students responded positively. Without any intention, all participants are female. Table 1 shows the detailed description of their learning backgrounds. The individual names of the participants were replaced anonymously in order to maintain their confidentiality. Kate and Rachel went to colleges to take only Japanese language courses when they were high school students.
Table 1. *Learning Backgrounds of the Participants.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>College year during this study</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Learning experience prior to the college</th>
<th>The prior institution (state)</th>
<th>Japanese course where they were placed at the college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Studio Art</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>High school (MI)</td>
<td>JPN2010 (2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Japanese/Chinese</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>High school (IL)</td>
<td>JPN3010 (3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Japanese/Business</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>High school (IL)</td>
<td>JPN2010 (2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Japanese/English Creative Writing</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Home school (IL)</td>
<td>JPN2010 (2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Japanese/International Political Economics</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>High school (IN)</td>
<td>JPN2010 (2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Japanese/Chemistry</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Home school Personal Tutoring</td>
<td>JPN2010 (2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Japanese/Asian Studies</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>College (IL)</td>
<td>JPN3010 (3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5 year</td>
<td>Study abroad in Kobe, Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection Methods**

**Document data: Questionnaire.** One of the instruments was the questionnaire, which has two parts of different foci: Part A. learning background and Part B. transition experience at the college. Part A asked the participants about their Japanese learning experience before entering the college such as course design, classmates, and teachers of the Japanese class they took previously. Those helped the researcher who is not familiar with Japanese language education in American high schools get a general picture of their past Japanese learning. At the end of Part A, the respondents evaluated their Japanese language skill level when they were high school students. In addition, Part B focuses on the participants’ impressions towards their first
courses where they were placed in, comparing with their classes in high school with regard to both academic and social aspects. Finally, the respondents evaluated their Japanese language skills again after the transition period and their learning at the college in order to assess whether their placements contributed to their improvement.

Although the questionnaire included some quantitative data such as the length of learning in high school and the class hours, mostly it consisted of open-ended questions. This is because the respondents can directly express what they would like to say without forming or categorizing their words according to the indicated answer styles. In this way, they could reveal the real situations of Japanese courses they had in high school and at college.

**Oral data: Individual interview.** Since answers to open-ended questions include diverse styles of language usage and the interpretation of data is influenced by the researcher’s subjectivity, individual interview was conducted to clarify the meaning of answers and to corroborate the researcher’s interpretation of each answer with the participants. Furthermore, additional questions regarding common topics among multiple responses from answers of the questionnaire such as their impression on pair/group work in class and comparison of difficulty between academic and social challenges were incorporated into the interviews. Though the lists of follow-up questions had been created to every participant’s responses of the questionnaire, the interview was organized under the semi-structured format, which retains the flexibility of words selection, the question order, or pursuit of unexpected topics. “This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). In order to avoid making the interviewee too nervous to speak out honestly, the interviewer began the session gradually with casual conversation and proceeded to the pre-structured format.
The interviews were operated mostly in a quiet classroom in the college. Interviewer paid attention to the participants’ visual expressions such as facial expressions, gestures, and eyes of the interviewee. All interactions during the interviews were audio-recorded with consent of the interviewees.

**Procedure**

In order to gather empirical data that explains the challenges of freshmen face in upper level Japanese language courses, an original questionnaire to investigate their learning history before college and their experience at the researcher’s college was created. Ten students who were placed into second or third year level courses based upon their results of the placement interview within the latest three years were asked for their voluntary participation via email. Seven of them showed their interests to participate in this study and answered the questionnaire.

First, the responses to questionnaires and attempted to find certain common points, patterns, or tendencies were closely examined. For open-ended questions, the responses were summarized with simple words aiming to extract common points among the participants. To keep the researcher’s unbiased view, this process was repeated over time. However, while some participants answered with detailed explanations based on their personal impressions, some participants answered with little explanations. In short, there was a discrepancy of the quality between the data. Therefore, follow-up questions were needed to clarify the respondents’ answers. Meanwhile, some plausible themes were already found. Thus, individual interviews were required in order to clarify the meaning of answers to the questionnaire and to obtain additional information regarding the themes. Then, the quantitative data was organized with a table first since it can be treated without an issue of subjectivity, and planned individual interviews for other more descriptive data.
Individual interviews were conducted during January and February 2015. Although all the participants were asked for the participation, six of them took the interview. After each individual interview session, the audio data was transcribed, reflecting the interaction from a critical view and wrote a journal. The process of rereading and rearranging the data continued for more than a month and a half. The details of data analysis will be explained in the next section. All the narratives and answers were arranged according to themes and whether each answer expressed positive reaction or negative reaction regarding academic and social transitions. As a result, unique aspects Japanese language courses/programs generally have and the influence towards freshman students’ college adjustments were revealed.

**Data Analysis**

The conceptual type of data analysis for this study was inductive analysis; that is, this study tried to discover general themes from scattered personal narratives.

**Questionnaire data analysis.** At first, the researcher focused on the backgrounds of the participants and organized the information on a table. The table manifested the variety of samples regarding college status, major, prior learning style and period, and placed courses at college. Next, the answers to open-ended questions were examined in order to understand individual experiences. Repeated keywords among plural participants’ responses were highlighted. For example, keywords used at this process were: overwhelmed/stressful, adjust, challenge, outsider, pair/group work, oral versus written language skills, close friends, serious/dedicated classmates, etc.

However, the free-style answers had ambiguities. Moreover, there may have been a confusion regarding the intention of questions and explanations of answers. Data should not have been categorized strictly at this moment to avoid a strong intervention of the researcher’s
subjectivity. This analysis was confined to making a rough list of keywords and example answers that the keywords used. In addition, many participants mentioned about activities in class such as pair work or mingle work, thus this primary data analysis implied an importance of investigation on class activities and the influence upon freshman students’ college adjustment.

**Interview data analysis.** As soon as the individual interviews finished, the audio-recorded data was transcribed with observed data, such as gestures, facial expressions, or gazes from the researcher’s notes taken during each interview. Semi-structured interview method was chosen for this study; hence, the data included varied additional questions and interactions as well as planned questions and the order. However, the purpose of individual interviews was to clarify what the participants meant by their responses to the questionnaire and to look into the participants’ deeper insights. Therefore, the transcribed data was restructured into the order of the questionnaire.

Then, repeated words among the responses were again taken notice in order to reconsider the keywords. As a result of additional questions and follow-up questions, new keywords were discovered: for instance, peers, community, interaction, help each other, characteristic of Japanese courses. Next, the researcher categorized the keywords with more general concepts such as influence of activities in class, impression towards courses and the communities, and comparison between high school Japanese language programs and the college program.

Findings were summarized with some examples of narratives. These findings had numerous aspects that freshman students broadly face in their first semester at college. Therefore, this study extracted some main points to discuss, which are more related to their college transition and Japanese language learning, because the purpose of this study was to
expose what and how the freshman students perceive from their placed environment and how the environment influenced their college adjustments.

After summarizing findings, the data was organized with tables in the chronological learning process order and they displayed notable research results in a demographic way. The freshman students’ perception change and adjustment process were clarified. Lastly, this study was concluded based upon these trends and it proposed implications for further study and improved pedagogical practice.

**Issues of Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative research could be criticized the credibility due to the ambiguity of the data and the subjective analysis compared with quantitative research, which the data clearly displays result of the experiment using numbers. In this study, the following strategies were employed to enhance the validity and reliability: multiple data collection methods and follow-up confirmation by interviewing the participants if the researcher’s interpretations were correct. Moreover, in order to reinforce the weak generalizability because of the focus on particular situations, the way to increase of the transferability was determined. Transferability means the possibility of that other researchers can apply the methodology used in this study to their studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as sited in Merriam, 2009, p. 224). In this study, detailed descriptions of the setting and the participants, and the findings with direct quotes, and a variation of the samples in terms of age, prior learning experience, courses where the participants were placed and the teachers, and major subjects other than Japanese were utilized.

**Issues of Subjectivity**

As mentioned above on the validity and reliability, qualitative research has a possibility to be lack of objective stance because of the dependence on the researcher’s perspective. Two
strategies, field notes and reflex journal, were selected in order to self-reflect the process and to keep an adequate distance from the data and the participants. These reflective tools were valid enough for designing the reliable study since Cresswell (2008) stated that the researcher’s awareness of his/her bias in the study leads candid and genuine descriptions that are worth trusting.
Summary of This Chapter

This chapter illustrated the data collection methods of this study. Qualitative research methods were conducted taking advantage of the descriptive data. This study’s first purpose was to clarify challenges that freshman students generally face in their placed upper level Japanese courses; hence, their direct and uncategorized data was considered significant. Participants consisted of seven students of Japanese at a liberal arts college in Wisconsin. Data was obtained by the questionnaire, which has principally open-ended questions, and the following individual interview, which attempted to confirm the intention of answers to questionnaire and to explore additional key points of their experience. Keywords were discovered from collected data and they were organized with more general idea. Although the researcher played many roles in this study ranging from the designing to analyzing, strategies such as multiple data sources and reflex journal are applied to reinforce the validity. The results of data analysis will be presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will present the findings derived from gathered data through the questionnaire and the interview. The purpose of this study was to clarify the challenges that college freshman students who were placed into second or third year Japanese courses generally face during their transition periods from high school to college. Furthermore, it also tried to discover the influence of the transition experience upon their college adjustments. Participants’ narratives will be provided as qualitative results of the investigation because narratives can directly offer the participants’ insights and honest impressions without the researcher’s intentional categorizing process. Data will be demonstrated in following three sections: 4-1. The participants’ previous Japanese language learning experience before college, 4-2. The participants’ academic and social challenges in upper level Japanese courses, 4-3. Benefits for college adjustment that the participants gained from the transition experience. Finally, the results will be organized on tables regarding some main findings.

4-1. Japanese Language Learning Experiences before College

The first half of the questionnaire asked the participants about their learning experience of Japanese language learning before they began college. Additional details such as class hours and textbooks that were used in prior institutions were also collected thorough individual interviews in order to comprehend Japanese language programs in high school. However, Wendy’s case was peculiar to her since she did not have any learning experience at an official institute, instead, she had private tutoring sessions. Kate was a home school student, but she
attended introductory Japanese courses at a college before she began college. Rachael was a public high school student who took Japanese courses at another college because the high school did not offer Japanese program. All data was organized on Table 2 because the researcher valued their experiences as comparable data as the participants’ preparation of Japanese language skills. This research found the following six features of Japanese language programs where the participants had learned Japanese before entering college.

Table 2. Japanese Language Programs before College.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Native Japanese instructor</th>
<th>Conducting language</th>
<th>Emphasized skills</th>
<th>AP course availability</th>
<th>Class hours per week</th>
<th>Number of students in class</th>
<th>Textbook</th>
<th>Teaching speed compared with college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Japanese &amp; English</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Adventures in Japanese</td>
<td>Slower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle &amp; Christina</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mostly Japanese</td>
<td>Reading Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>Genki</td>
<td>Almost same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mostly English</td>
<td>Speaking Reading</td>
<td>N/A (College)</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Genki</td>
<td>Faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mostly English</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>N/A (College)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20 in 1st year 7 in 2nd year</td>
<td>Genki</td>
<td>A little slower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 in 3rd year 2 in 4th year</td>
<td>Yokoso</td>
<td>Almost same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>N/A (Private tutoring)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Genki</td>
<td>Much slower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4-1-1. Some students had learned Japanese through English instruction before college.

Although many language teachers acknowledge the effectiveness of teaching in the target language in terms of second language acquisition, there were Japanese language courses that are
taught in English. The participants recognized that English instruction is occasionally needed because novice Japanese students may not understand the teacher’s directions in Japanese.

“We just started beginner level, so didn’t have enough vocabulary or grammar [in Japanese]” (Kate).

“It was kind of beginner level, you know...” (Rachael).

“She [the high school instructor] was trying to give us basic instructions in Japanese a lot, but... Even when she [the instructor] had given the instructions in Japanese, students won’t know what’s going on, so she would switch back to English” (Diana).

4-1-2. Japanese language programs in high school place more emphasis upon written language skills.

According to the participants’ impressions of the lessons they attended in high school, Japanese language courses accentuated writing and reading skills. The participants illustrated that they had vocabulary and/or Kanji quizzes or tasks every day.

“We had a kanji test in class every day... I think there were ten Kanjis on the quizzes” (Diana).

“It was very Kanji intensive that year and just reading stories... The teacher wanted us to take a kanji and new vocabs, and create sentences using them” (Taylor).

4-1-3. The use of the same textbook helped students maintain their consistent learning methods.

Although the teaching speed and the approaches depend on the institute, textbook *Genki* is broadly used in elementary Japanese courses. *Genki* is a textbook series that are made for American college students. It has explanations of Japanese grammars in English and plenty practice pages. The also series has workbooks that teachers can assign after every lesson.
Taylor’s high school used *Yokoso*, but the covered contents are mostly the same as *Genki*. Therefore, almost all participants did not see the gap of grammatical knowledge between high school and college.

“We used *Genki* in the college actually, so that worked out very well” (Kate).

“A little [different]; instead of saying 学校に行く, we used the particle へ rather than に.

Other than that things are very familiar” (Taylor).

**4-1-4. The atmosphere of Japanese language class was relaxed.**

Students answered that there is a difference between classmates in high school Japanese courses and ones in college regarding their motivations. Christina recognized the difference is not significant, however, like Rachael, she discussed college students’ focus on the language.

“I think the interests are a bit different, because in high school, a lot of people took Japanese because it was fun or just because they liked anime and manga, but in college, people are taking it for a lot of different reasons, and they’re more serious about it” (Christina).

“My classmates at [the college] were more dedicated to the language than my previous classmates” (Rachael).

“At college, everyone is focused, for the most part, what we’re learning” (Taylor).

Diana introduced the characteristics of her high school Japanese classes with an example as follows:

“The *Otaku* subculture was more prominent in high school, though it definitely still existed in my Japanese class in college... In high school, because Japanese culture was so popular at the certain people, there were a lot of people who spent like their whole lives looking at Japanese culture. Whether, even just go with the narrow focus... My high
school class also had a more relaxed atmosphere and a slower pace to my college course.”

This relax atmosphere welcoming students’ particular interests could prompt students to participate in the class actively. Gabrielle commented, “My high school classmates were twice as vocal as my college classmates... The college class is... not many people participate in class.”

4-1-5. Students rated their Japanese language proficiency before college as low.

On average, freshman students who have learned Japanese before they began college rated their high school language skill level as 2.14 out of a five-point scale (n=7). In that scale, one was the lowest skill level and five was the highest skill level. Although students completed novice period, they recognized that they were still at elementary level proficiency. Furthermore, the participants also noticed that they could not improve their oral communication skills while they have confidence in their writing and reading abilities.

“I couldn’t really communicate... at that time... Reading would be a little bit higher” (Kate).

“Yes, [I had confidence]. I think speaking was kind of heavy, but I’m pretty good at writing... It’s tough to think up the right words [during the conversations]. Like I tried just to say what comes out, but speak slowly, I think” (Christina).

“Speaking, I keep more in 3 or below” (Taylor).

“Having very limited interaction with others who spoke Japanese during high school, I was good at reading and writing Japanese, but not listening or speaking” (Wendy).

4-2. The Transition Challenge: the First Japanese Language Classroom in College

The goal of this study was to understand freshman students’ challenges in upper level college Japanese language courses. As literature on freshman adjustment in college
demonstrated, freshman students realized that there are academic and social differences between high school and college in their first year at college. This study found that freshman students who were placed into second or third year Japanese courses experience these challenges in class as well. Academic challenges as well as challenges in social context were revealed. First, the following four academic challenges were discovered through analysis of questionnaire and interview data.

Academic Challenge 1: The instructing language is in Japanese.

The usage of English is minimized in foreign language classrooms since the college where this study was operated applies communicative approach and direct method. The instructors use English only when they need to explain complicated grammar rules or to introduce the target language’s concept/culture. Students who were taught Japanese through English instruction in high school are overwhelmed and stressed by the teaching style. Because of the uneasy feelings, the students felt that they were behind in their classes.

“I felt like I was way behind and overwhelmed... And I felt like I was not at their [the other students’] level” (Diana).

“[It] was very stressful at first... For the first week, I had no idea what the TLE [Target Language Expert: elementary Japanese instructor] was saying... For about a month, I wondered if I should’ve been placed a level lower.” (Wendy).

Academic Challenge 2: Students have to speak Japanese in class.

Students ought to use Japanese during class in order to improve their listening skills and to practice the use of the target language in authentic situations. However, students who did not have enough oral exercises in previous institutions realized their weaknesses in speaking Japanese. They were under pressure to keep up with dialogues.
“Possibly just because I was moving from more introductory courses to more advanced, I found there was a lot more emphasis placed on speaking in college... I felt I couldn’t speak at near the level I was supposed to...” (Diana).

“One large pressure was having to talk for the sake of language practice” (Wendy).

**Academic Challenge 3: The instruction speed is faster than in high school.**

Although students did not find that the learning contents became more difficult in college, they needed to adapt to the faster teaching pace. The researcher’s college does not offer drill sections that aim students’ stable understandings as some institutions integrate lecture classes and subordinate oral practice classes. The instructors use one class hour (sixty-five minutes) to introduce new grammar construction and the way used in a context, to conduct some pattern practices, and to present a few Kanji. Kate mentioned that there was no time to review each grammar that students have learned and to maintain the knowledge in class as follows:

“Japanese in college has been much more rapid-paced than during high school. I learned a lot... because we went through new material faster [than we did in the prior institute]. [However,] I didn’t like that older material wasn’t reviewed much as the semester progressed...the teacher did not help us retain older materials” (Kate).

“My high school class also had a more relaxed atmosphere and a slower pace to my college courses... There was also the difference in the use of Japanese in college, which was almost total immersion, versus high school, which was usually conducted in English. As a result I felt I was learning at a much faster pace” (Diana).

**Academic Challenge 4: The amount/difficulty of assignments increased remarkably.**

The assignments from upper level language courses are decided according to the professor’s expectations of second or third year students who are supposed to acquire a college
learning strategy. Freshman students who were placed in upper level courses need to follow their classes without assistance that bridge the gap of learning styles between high school and college. Rachael attended Japanese courses at another college before she started college, but she found the difficulty of assignment: “It was very different from my previous college. The homework amount was more difficult.” Kate, the other student who had attended Japanese course in college when she was a high school student, reported the instructor’s expectation level. “The tests and final projects were a lot more rigorous that what I’d experienced in the past” (Kate).

Next, the participants expressed the following three major social challenges in their placed Japanese courses in college.

**Social Challenge 1: “Outsider/newcomer” experiences in class.**

There is only one Japanese language course for each level besides introductory courses at the college where this study was conducted since the Japanese language program is too small to have several sections. Most students take introductory courses because they can finish their two-semester foreign language requirements for graduation by taking first year level Japanese courses. On the other hand, students in second or third year level courses made a decision to continue learning Japanese for their major or for fun. They will study with the same classmates semester by semester. As a result, the classes form strong communities. Freshman students placed in second or third year level courses felt that there is a barrier between the other classmates and them. The term “outsider” or “newcomer” was often used to express their isolated feelings in their classes.

“I did [feel uncomfortable] at first. I was entering a class where most people had studied together” (Diana).
“I felt a little uncomfortable around the other students, knowing a lot of them knew each other very well and that I was a newcomer... As far as forming a community went, community already existed there because the [college] spirit is a strong one, but only one or two students actively worked to help involve me in the pre-existing Japanese class community. Most of the students stuck to themselves and the people they already knew... They were like already partners learning Japanese” (Kate).

“Everyone else had been in the same class for the past two years and had grown together. I was outsider” (Rachael).

“There seemed to be some sort of barrier between me and the other students, because most of them were sophomores who had taken classes with each other [like Japanese 1010 and 1020] during their freshman year. They had already formed close relationships, and would always partner up with each other, so I felt a little like an outsider” (Wendy).

“The real adjustment was being with the new classmates” (Gabrielle).

Social Challenges 2: Students needed time for social adjustment.

In order to be a part of the new community, students tried to make friendship with their classmates throughout the semester. The length required until they could build relationships with new people in the placed courses depended on the individuals because it might be influenced by each personality in a social setting. However, this study found that there was a gap of the length between students who could build friendships quickly and those who needed a semester or more. Table 3 displays the period that freshman students needed to be comfortable with their classmates in second or third year courses. The question was open-ended, but responses were either two weeks or less, or a semester or more. The participants who answered it was two weeks
or less studied Japanese for four years in high school and did not respectively have academic challenges.

Table 3. The Period until Freshman Students Who Were Placed in Upper Level Japanese Courses Felt Comfortable with Their Classmates. (n=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of answers</th>
<th>Two weeks or less.</th>
<th>A semester or more.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Challenge 3: Working with peers increased new students’ stress.

Pair work and group work are often incorporated in foreign language lessons for cooperative learning that requires students to communicate in the target language. It also enables to augment the individual’s opportunities to use the target language. At the college where this study was held, pair work is utilized for pattern practice and small dialogue practices. In addition, students in second or third year level Japanese courses are assigned a group project work as a final oral exam. Students usually decide to form their own groups, however, freshman students who are “newcomers” feel uneasy about the process. Rachael, whose placed course had odd number of students, expressed her complaint and described the unfair situations she had as follows:

“I was still the last one picked to partner with and I always did group work alone or with the teacher instead of with a partner [even in the second semester]... I did all my group project work by myself. I had other people outside who helped me shoot the film. It was hard” (Rachael).

Wendy stated her isolated feeling too: “They [the other students] had already formed close friendships, and would always partner up with each other, so I felt a little like an outsider.”
Furthermore, the topics that students are supposed to talk with new classmates are related to their histories and/or families, therefore Wendy seemed to be hesitant at first.

“You have to talk to everybody so much... You learn a lot of things about them that you wouldn’t do in other classes, even like Western Heritage [courses related to western philosophy that were requirement for graduation as foreign language] that we are supposed to talk a lot, you don’t really learn about people’s childhood” (Wendy).

Moreover, some students disclosed that speaking out in class could be a stress for freshman students, in particular those who realized that their speaking skills compared poorly with their classmates’.

“Because I thought I was so behind in speaking, I’d never wanted to speak. Even though my partner was freshman. I don’t know. It kind of was stressful. That’s a part of reason [why I didn’t want to speak]. Only in Japanese [class], honestly. It ’s not necessarily a universal habit of mine [to compare my skill level with others]. I think that, just, the fact that a language [class] is more, like involves working with others is easier to compare myself, than sitting in the classroom, like a lecture type class. It’s harder to compare yourself” (Diana).

Diana felt that the other students judged her Japanese skills, therefore she stressed out during these cooperative activities. Besides, five participants answered that pair work, group work, and answering the instructor’s questions apparently show the individual’s language skill level. While Diana and Wendy were anxious about speaking practices with peers due to the fact, the other students tried not to mind it in order to save themselves from uneasy feelings that would be caused by comparing their skills with others.
“I don’t necessarily like having compared myself to my classmates. It happens but... it kind of like makes me anxious. I don’t like worrying. What if I’m not as good as the other person you are talking to. So, I try not to think about it, but it still happens” (Kate).

Although these social aspects could make freshman students uncomfortable, the notable fact is that freshman students also recognized the easiness to talk about themselves without hesitation. Taylor explained the common atmosphere that students in Japanese language courses often make.

“It’s something about Japanese class, even in high school, everyone is just comfortable with each other and then you don’t have to be so guarded. We are all different, but I think we all have something in common. I just talk easier.” (Taylor).

**Social challenges were more difficult to adjust to than academic challenges.**

Freshman students who were placed into second or third year level Japanese language courses in college face both academic and social challenges that stem from the differences of learning styles, professors’ expectations, and surrounding people as well as general freshman students. However, freshman students in upper level Japanese language courses seem to think that social challenges were more stressful and time-consuming compared with their courses’ academic challenges that they could overcome relatively soon.

“Japanese was pretty hard, socially... I mean it was kind of difficult to get to know people, but I don’t think that did anything my academic learning at all” (Wendy).

“I think social issues [are more challenging than academic challenge in the first semester] because you’re like an outsider and no one really knows you and everyone knows each other, so you have to find a little place to be okay with friends” (Taylor).
“That [academic transition] was pretty easy... It [social transition] was not a problem, but definitely more a challenging part of the experience” (Kate).

On the other hand, Diana who took more time to adapt to the new learning style in college pointed out that academic and social adjustments were influenced by each other effectively: “I think that [social adjustment] helped me overcome the academic challenge.”

4-3. Contribution of Transition Experience in Upper Level Japanese Language Courses

Freshman students who were placed into second or third year level Japanese language courses faced various challenge both academically and socially in their first semester. However, this study discovered that these students’ transition experiences might contribute to their college transitions in general. The participants’ narratives proved that their success and/or achievement in both academic and social areas in their placed Japanese courses could connect to their universal experiences in the college.

**Academic Benefit 1: Students discovered their college learning strategies.**

Freshman students who experienced the differences and the need to adapt their high school learning styles to those expected in college Japanese language courses established individual ways that were beneficial for college academics after the first semester. Gabrielle and Rachael adopted methods that were college students often utilize such as group study session or tutoring session with senior students so that they could ask questions and deepen their understandings out of class as well. Some students put more effort on daily individual study habits at home in order to maintain vocabularies and grammars from previous lessons because college professors usually do not take very much time to review items that were already learned. Kate “started relaying on flash cards so that [she] could review and remember older material on
my own.” Diana “practiced Kanji, vocabulary, and my homework every night. [She] would also write in Japanese probably once or twice a week.”

Diana and Wendy stated that they utilized opportunities to speak in Japanese with others so that they could reinforce their speaking skills. This active attitude towards opportunities offered outside of class is also one of abilities expected to college students for their successes.

“I did do my best to speak Japanese when given the opportunity, especially at Japanese Lunch Table” (Diana).

“I have accesses to so many Japanese language students and native Japanese speakers at [the college] that have helped me improve my listening skills, speaking skills, and accent” (Wendy).

**Academic Benefit 2: Students gained confidence in their progresses in college.**

Participants looked back on their experiences in their placed courses as the required period for their personal development as college students although they had been stressed in order to adapt to the new learning styles in college.

“It [the academic transition from high school to college] was difficult. During the time, I was like ‘Oh my gosh! The hardest thing ever.’ But looking back now, it’s not that bad. They were just things you had to get through” (Rachael).

“It was a challenge, but not hard. It was just an interesting new learning experience that I had to get used to” (Kate).

All participants answered that their course placements were effective in improving their Japanese language skills.

“I might be bored with the academics in 200 level even though I could enjoy the class. That’s not fair. [So, I was happy to be placed in 300 level]” (Rachael).
“I’m pretty happy with 200 level ’cause [the class is] a little challenging, not overwhelming” (Taylor).

“[The placed course (third year level) was] still easy, but still [there were] things I don’t know” (Christina).

After freshman students survived their first year in second or third year level Japanese courses, they rated their Japanese language skill level as progressing. The experience might lead their certain confidence in learning Japanese language in college.

“I have definitely come a long way from where I started freshman year... I also have noticed my reading comprehension has increased dramatically [during sophomore year]” (Diana).

“I do think my comprehension has gotten better” (Christina).

“I am probably at a 3 now where after high school I was 2 out of 5” (Gabrielle).

“I think I’ve improved a ton since coming to [college]. In my current Japanese class [400 level], we’re writing large essays in Japanese, and carrying on lengthy conversation about deep topics. [The professor] talks at a native pace, and I can understand her just fine... I’m very proud of how far I’ve come” (Wendy).

“I have a more advanced knowledge of grammar now, and I am able to express myself in a lot more ways and with much greater ease than before my studies at [the college]” (Kate).

**Social Benefit:** Students acquired a sense of belonging in their placed Japanese courses, and subsequently to the college.

It was the primary social issue for freshman students in upper level Japanese language courses to join the already formed community and to build friendships with their classmates.
Freshman students who were “newcomers” felt uneasy to find partners and to talk in Japanese since activities in Japanese language classrooms at the college where this study was operated often force students to work in groups. Yet, at the same time, students felt it easy to speak out in Japanese thanks to the fact that Japanese language courses are different from other courses in terms of classmates’ personalities such as tolerance to individual differences (e.g. interests, opinions, behaviors). When students became used to the activities, it helped them get to know new peers.

“In fact, the conversation practice in class served as a way to help me make friends a little faster... Other classes didn’t really have room for social [activities]... I think Japanese class is unique... In fact, pair-working trying get to know other people, probably help [make friends] even though [it’s] stressful” (Wendy).

“Working with others on projects was a new experience for me... These [classmates] are people who you gonna working with. That was really nice being able to actually engage with them and get to know them, even while we were working on Japanese together” (Kate).

Moreover, working with peers decreased freshman students’ anxieties to speak in Japanese as well as building personal relationships with new people by helping each other.

“I think it [working with peers] ’s really good for both students because they’re like helping another person” (Taylor).

“Just you and the teacher is, like, a little bit intimidating because you know, like, if there’s just me and [a professor] trying practice Japanese, that’s really scary. What if, like, you and your friends, like, practicing Japanese together, then [you can] help each other” (Wendy).
“I think it makes language learning a lot easier when you are comfortable with the people in your class because it makes speaking easier... if you interact with them outside the class, you can practice outside the class, which is nice to have” (Diana).

“In terms of transition, it was probably a little more comfortable talking just with peers. I do appreciate that aspect for sure” (Kate).

The accumulation of such personal relationships through pair/group works in class brought the students a sense of belonging in their placed courses. In addition, as Kate indicated below, the fact that classmates in the Japanese language course would continue to be their classmates over semesters reinforces their senses of community. Students believed that Japanese language courses formed closer communities than other courses did.

“There is a difference [between Japanese language courses and other college courses] and the fact that my Japanese peers are people who would probably continue to take [Japanese courses] for the rest of my college life. Because we’re taking the same course, like, year after year and year, I definitely feel close to Japanese peers. It’s more like a tight-net exclusive group of people” (Kate).

“Like I said, [Japanese language class is] a really close community, so once I thought I was a part of community, that helped me a lot. ...I think even the whole program has a sense of community” (Diana).

After finishing their transition periods, six participants expressed that they considered themselves as a part of their classes’ communities and expected the other students to recognize as they were the community members. Furthermore, this study found that the strong involvements in Japanese language courses might be related to a sense of belonging to the college as well.
“If you know people in class, you know people elsewhere and see [and recognize] them, [and say] ‘Hi!’ And then you feel like you fit in” (Christina).

Taylor mentioned that freshman students in second or third year classrooms could take advantage of the environment that the other students were upper-class students who have rich experiences at the college. “I ask those freshman questions to the other students and they helped me [solve the problems]. It’s really helpful for college adjustment” (Taylor).

Some previous studies claimed that the quality of professor-student relationships affect freshman student’s sense of belonging, academic success, college adjustment and the retention rate. However, this study showed that peer relationships are more influential than professor-student relationships in terms of freshman student’s college adjustment.

“You have more years to get to know the faculty and teachers and everything, but in order to feel like you fit in and bring your stress down, I think it’s important to get to know some friends first so they can help you” (Wendy).

“I think that peers [are more important]... You don’t usually see teachers outside of class as much” (Christina).

“I learned a lot from my classmates through the years, especially, freshman year.” (Diana).

**Demographic Tables of Results**

To sum up these findings above, the participants’ narratives were arranged into three categories: Positive, Challenging/Negative, and Both/I don’t know; these were directed at the following four sequential events in order to display how the transition process influenced freshman students’ adjustments to their placed courses and the college in a demographic way. Table 4 shows the freshman students’ first impressions on their placed courses academically and
socially. Although there are not significant gaps between numbers of participants who had positive impressions and those who had negative impressions, it is notable that only two had positive impressions on being in their class communities.

Table 4. *Impression on the First Japanese Language Course in College* (n=7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic (Instruction, course level etc.)</th>
<th>Social (Classmates, atmosphere etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging/Negative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both./I don’t know.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of questionnaire and interview, cooperative learning activities such as group and pair work strongly impact freshman students’ adjustment to their courses not only academically, but also significantly socially. Table 5-1 clearly illustrates that working with peers had negative effects due to social difficulties for newcomer freshman students in second or third year level Japanese language courses. Nevertheless, as time passed, the activities contributed to their adjustments academically and socially because Table 5-2 displays that negative impression on social aspects of collaborative activities drastically decreased and the majority realized the benefits from those activities for their language skill improvements.

Table 5-1. *Influence of Working with Peers at First* (n=7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging/Negative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both./I don’t know.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5-2. Influence of Working with Peers Later (n=7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging/Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both./I don’t know.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that the language courses examined were Japanese. As many participants mentioned, Japanese courses’ personalities are different from other college courses. Generally speaking, students are shy and clam, and acknowledge each other’s individualities and accept the differences. As a result, they seem to create unique, helpful atmosphere. As Table 6 shows, all participants answered that the atmosphere facilitated their learning. Also, many students began to feel being in the Japanese language community was comfortable and conceived that the relationships helped their improvements even though they had difficulty to jump into the formed groups at first.

Table 6. Influence of Japanese Language Class/Program Community’s Atmosphere (n=7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic (Easiness/helpfulness to learn)</th>
<th>Social (Peer relationship)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging/Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both./I don’t know.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the transition period to college, freshman students generally experienced challenges in their placed courses. However, these experiences brought positive outcomes both academically and socially, as indicated by Table 7. Freshman students acquire a sense of
belonging in their classroom and felt their Japanese language skills improved through cooperative learning with their peers.

Table 7. *Outcomes of Experience in Upper Level Japanese Language Courses* (n=7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic (Language skill improvement)</th>
<th>Social (Obtaining a sense of belonging)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging/Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both./I don’t know.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, this study discovered that freshman students gained academic confidence and found their comfortable spots through successful adjustments to the Japanese language courses where they were placed in. As a result, they eventually adjusted to the college academically and socially too.
Summary of This chapter

This chapter presented the findings from the questionnaire and the interview in detail with rich direct quotes. First, how the participants had learned Japanese in their previous institutes and the differences from college Japanese programs were summarized. This study discovered that there were many gaps such as the teaching emphasis, teaching style, and the classroom atmosphere.

Second, the academic challenges that freshman students needed to overcome in upper level Japanese courses were revealed. The college program where oral practices were emphasized placed pressure on the freshman students and the course expectation made for upper class students required them prompt adjustments.

Third, the social challenges, which are unique to freshman students in their first upper level Japanese courses, were presented. Due to the cohesion of class community that other upper class students already formed, freshman students felt isolated and had difficulty to make friends. Thus, freshman students had additional stress by working with peers whom they do not know well for oral practices.

However, this study also discovered that these painful experiences contributed to their college adjustments. Students discover their own learning strategies that lead to their academic successes and acquired a sense of belonging to the college through building the close and helpful relationship with their peers in the courses they placed. Based on these results and analysis, this study will be concluded in the following chapter.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter will deliberate the significance of this study by summarizing the research results. This study aimed to elucidate what kind of challenges college freshman students who were placed into second or third year level Japanese courses in college generally deal with during their transition periods from high school to college. As a result of the questionnaire and individual interviews, these students experienced both academic and social challenges in order to acclimate themselves to the new learning environments. Moreover, this study also tried to examine the influence of the freshman students’ transitions to upper level Japanese language courses on their college adjustments. Results discovered a positive correlation between these students’ experiences in upper level Japanese courses and their college adjustments. Recommendations for the further study will be discussed based on limitations of this study. Furthermore, pedagogical implications will be offered at the end of this chapter.

Conclusion

From the results of the questionnaire and individual interviews, it was found that freshman students who were placed into second or third year level Japanese language courses in college all experienced transition issues. Although the participants academically succeeded in their placed courses from the first semester, they faced challenges that required them to adjust to new learning styles and environment. The participants felt uncomfortable at first during this experience; however, when reflecting on the experience, they stated that it helped their personal
development as college students. Research results will be organized below according to the research questions introduced in Chapter 1.

Research Question 1. What kind of challenges do college freshman students who were placed into second or third year level Japanese courses face during the transition period from high school to college?

**Instructional differences between Japanese language programs.** The comparison of Japanese language programs in the participants’ institutions prior to college and the college program where they study now showed the following instructional differences.

- The college program is conducted in Japanese while some high schools teach Japanese in English. Students in college courses have more time to speak Japanese in class.
- The college program used a communicative approach and placed teaching emphasis on speaking skill in class; however, high school programs tended to focus on reading and writing skills. Thus, freshman students who did not have many oral exercises in high school rated their verbal language skills as low.
- The college program was more rapidly paced than in high school.
- Students in college have a variety of motivations to learn Japanese, but their attitude towards learning the language is consistently more serious than those in high school.

In this study, confusions or complaints about the gap of teaching contents were not reported since almost all participants learned Japanese using the same textbook. Instead, the differences of
teaching styles, such as the use of the language and the pace, influenced the participants’ language learning transitions.

In addition to transition challenges between different Japanese language programs, the participants also experienced general college transition challenges, such as class difficulty, multiple assignments, and lack of understanding college professors’ expectations etc. Just as other general college freshman students face transition issues, these students had to deal with additional college course requirements in upper level Japanese courses. Moreover, freshman students in upper level Japanese courses needed to adjust these changes promptly so that they can be successful in their courses.

**From an “outsider” to a part of the class community.** Social challenges, such as building friendship and a sense of community in the placed courses, were the most distinctive challenges of freshman students in upper level Japanese courses. This study demonstrated that most freshman students felt alienated from their classmates and felt uncomfortable with their upper level Japanese courses during their first semester, because the upper-class students had shared learning experiences for a year or more, and consequently formed close classroom communities. However, some class activities forced students to work with classmates contrary to freshman students’ awkward uneasy feelings. However, freshman students also quickly realized that students in Japanese language courses generally accept others. They found it easier to talk with their classmates than they expected. The participants stated that working in-group helped freshman students to make friends since it encouraged students to help each other and learn from partners even before friendships were established. The collection of small peer relationships through these class activities produced freshman students’ sense of community in their placed courses. Their classrooms then became safe places where they could be who they are.
Furthermore, most of participants indicated their sense of belonging in their class communities and expected the other students were happy to have them around.

**Correlation between academic and social challenges.** The study clarified that there was a correlation between freshman students’ academic and social challenges in upper level Japanese language courses. Compared with participants who did not have many academic transition problems, participants who evaluate themselves as being inferior to the other students on their Japanese language skill level needed longer time to socially adjust to the class environment. Freshman students’ academic confidence in college Japanese language courses might make them easier to join in the formed community. On the other hand, good peer relationships and/or sense of community through participating group study/practice session or Japanese Lunch Table and so on increased the opportunity to use Japanese and helped students improve their language skills.

**Research Question 2. How do these freshman students’ experiences in second or third year level Japanese courses influence their academic adjustments to college?**

**Acquisition of general college learning style.** As a result of strenuous efforts to obtain successful learning strategies in upper level Japanese language courses, freshman students found their study methods, which include universal college learning styles. Students realized the advantages of not only individual study such as writing Kanji, writing journals, and making flashcards, but also study in groups for their improvement. Through pair/group work activities in class, freshman students could become accustomed studying with peers. They recognized the benefits of making up for each other’s weaknesses and expanding their comprehension towards class subjects. These stimulating interactions are meaningful for college level academics. As mentioned above, freshman students in second or third year level Japanese courses need to adjust
quickly to the course works in order to attain successful outcomes; therefore, in the end, they
gain their college learning habits faster than other general freshman students. After the transition
period, the participants had confidence in their learning abilities in college and realized how they
improved in Japanese language skills. Freshman students who were placed in upper level
Japanese courses have more challenges until they obtain the expected leaning habits than general
college freshman students do in introductory courses; however, the course placement can
contribute to their quick college academic adjustments as well as their language skill progress.

Research Question 3. How do these freshman students’ experiences in second or third year level
Japanese courses influence their social adjustments to college?

Acquiring a sense of belonging within the college. This study discovered that freshman
students have people who they can be with, can study with, and can ask for help with even when
they are outside the classrooms, due to the close peer relationships gained through pair/group
work in class. In addition, this study confirmed that general Japanese language students’ calm
personalities could ease freshman students’ tension that stem from “newcomer” situations and/or
unfamiliar learning styles. Freshman students who found their niches in Japanese language
classrooms turned to feel the sense of belonging within college as well.

Improvement of college life. The course placement, in which the other students were
upper-class students, benefited freshman students’ college adjustments although they felt isolated
at first. When freshman students have personal questions, such as where to go when they are not
feeling good, the upper-class students can recommend a place to go and what to do. Upper-class
students can help freshman students to adjust to college life by giving useful advise of how they
can make their lives better or easier since they already overcome similar freshman challenges.
Limitations of This Study

Small samples. First, the number of samples in this study was just seven (six for the interview). This is not enough to generalize other Japanese language programs. The college where this study was performed at was a small liberal arts college. The college offers Japanese language as a major and a minor; however, the program size is small and has a section with about ten students in upper level courses. As a result, suitable students for this study were limited. Although the samples had a variety in regards to their learning backgrounds, ages, majors, and the placed courses, all participants are female who academically succeeded since their first Japanese courses in college. If the participants had experienced more diverse outcomes of their course placements, their reflections might have displayed problematic issues that demanded to take appropriate measures promptly.

The participants were outstanding students. Secondly, the participants in this study were so-called ideal students whose academic grades are excellent. Their grades from Japanese courses were As and placed daily effort on their class responsibilities. Therefore, the participants did not have many difficulties in overcoming their academic adjustments in college. The participants looked back at their academic transitions and said that they were not problems or burdens. As soon as the first semester in college started, they recognized that there were differences between high school classrooms and college classrooms in both academic and social aspects, and they tired to be successful in accordance with professors’ expectations.

Students who scored out first year level Japanese language courses at the college were generally good at studying by themselves. The students had already had the meta-cognitive ability to assess their leaning by comparing themselves with their peers or by referring to the professor’s expectation seen through how students complete instructions and tests. As a result of
the self-assessment, the students realized what their strength and weakness were in learning Japanese; therefore, they developed their learning styles so that they could succeed in their placed Japanese courses.

However, all students who were placed in upper level language courses do not necessarily have these abilities and study habits. Thus, the participants’ relatively smooth academic transitions presented in this study might be due to their individual learning ability or effort, but this study could not prove the general situation of curricular articulation problems from high school to college.

**The researcher’s many roles.** Thirdly, the researcher was the instruments producer, the data collector, the data analyzer, the discussion presenter as well as the Japanese language instructor for some of the participants during this study. As a consequence, this study might be inadequate in terms of credibility although some methods that enhance the objectivity were applied. The questions in the questionnaire and the interview could be affected by the researcher’s expectations. If the participants were not the students of the researcher, more critiques towards the curriculum or the program might be raised. The most controversial point of this study would be that there was no observation nor reviews by a third person who revised the direction of study.

**The influence of Japanese language courses on college adjustment.** Although the field of this study was college Japanese language courses, the participants took other courses as well as Japanese. Some participants were double majoring in Japanese and in another areas. Thus, it could not be determined that more significant factors in their college adjustment were derived from Japanese language courses, compared with other college courses. In addition, the participants also had social connections with people outside their Japanese courses; again,
Japanese language courses were not the only one that had affected their college adjustments. This study could not indicate the absolute prominence of Japanese language courses in regards to freshman students’ college adjustment both academically and socially.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

In consideration of limitations above, first of all, the further study should have more varied participants and have a third member to confirm the credibility so that the validity will be enhanced. In that case, results can be generalized for other situations. In particular, inclusion of participants who were struggling with new learning styles and/or experienced negative outcomes through the transition from high school and college will expand the understanding of students’ transitions and reveal issues that educators have to address for improvement of Japanese language education.

Moreover, how Japanese language courses influence freshman students’ college adjustments should be examined more closely. Although this study partly demonstrated the characteristics of Japanese language classrooms such as the atmosphere. Researchers can collect similar data about freshman students’ experiences in other college courses they took during the transition period. They can then compare the effects of Japanese language courses and that of other courses upon college adjustment. The study may display the prominent influence of Japanese language courses.

Furthermore, as a study of a learning community, the other students’ impressions of both freshman students’ adaption and how the classroom’s atmosphere changes through the transition period should be investigated because their views can be helpful to comprehensively understand the interactive influences in second or third year level Japanese courses. It is important to
investigate upper-class members’ views of how the freshman students are accepted and/or considered as members of the class communities.

**Pedagogical Implications**

Many freshman students may receive professors’ easy-going attitude and concrete instructions in introductory college courses so that they can understand how they are supposed to perform for success and acclimate to college learning styles. On the other hand, in general, students in upper level courses may be expected to perform as college students. Therefore, freshman students who were placed in second or third year courses need to adapt to the new learning environment and requirements as quickly as possible in order to follow the other students in class. College professors should consider that freshman students are on the transition process from high school to college, once they realized the presence of freshman students in their courses. Although professor-student relationships were not indicated as significant as peer relationships on freshman students’ college adjustment in this study, still the result did not indicate that the professor-student relationships had no effect. Professors should observe their individuals well and if needed, scaffolding supports such as individual tutoring, counseling, or vocabulary practices can be arranged.

This study revealed that working in groups in language courses contributed to freshman student college adjustment. Professors can utilize class activities that require students to make their own groups for their academic and social success. Yet, some freshman students have hesitation and/or anxiety to speak out in front of peers due to their developing language abilities or shy personalities. Therefore, how their partners work with the freshman students is a key factor to determine whether the newcomers can feel comfortable to practice verbally. Professors may decide group members for freshman students at the beginning of the semester since
professors should be able to judge which upper-class students can help reduce the freshman students’ worries and promote their language learning. In order to organize this social support, professors are encouraged to make daily efforts to understand and engage each student.

In addition, even though this study could not discover serious problems regarding curriculum articulation from high school Japanese programs to college programs, Japanese language instructors should at least acknowledge the gaps between programs that can cause learners’ depression and/or decisions to quit learning Japanese. Today, Japanese is not a strongly attractive foreign language to learn in the world. The number of learners is not expected a huge growth in the future, and hence, it is also a critical role of Japanese language teachers to maintain the number of learners because maintaining current learners is a more realistic choice than producing something to gather new learners from now.

A smooth curriculum transition from an institution to another institution is a way that promotes learners to continue to learn Japanese. In fact, the participants in this study who did not find many discrepancies between their high school Japanese program and the college program quickly adjusted to their new learning styles. As stated in Chapter 4, the favorable academic transitions could expedite the freshman students’ social adjustment in college as well. Japanese language instructors in college should access information regarding Japanese language curriculum in high schools so that students who have experiences of learning Japanese before college can continue learning Japanese smoothly.

As J-GAP is conducting, active communication between high school Japanese teachers and college professors is crucial so that educators can deepen their understandings towards the practices of each other’s programs. They will be able to share a certain common ideal image or standard of Japanese language curriculum. Those common recognitions will be helpful for both
high school students and college instructors to prepare for the course placement tests; students may express their language skills with confidence because they can expect what will be assessed, and college instructors may decrease time and effort needed to create placement tests since they can follow the standards.

Moreover, though this study focused on freshman students’ transition from high school and college in Japanese language courses, in the context of continuous learning, supports to students who finished the program before their graduation should be discussed too. Students who were placed into upper level Japanese courses will complete the program before they graduate from the college. The students loose the opportunity to officially learn and use Japanese, and that may result in decrease of their language skills that they have built in college. Rachael who completed her learning when she was sophomore showed her disappointing feeling because of the fact and proposed that the Japanese program should have more options to continue learning even after fourth year level courses. Realistically speaking, it would be difficult to establish new courses or individual instructions due to time and cost. However, utilization of technology should have a possibility to make the accommodation happen. Thus, today’s Japanese language teachers may be expected to be familiar with technology-assisted instruction.

This study elucidated how college freshman students generally transition into second or third year level Japanese language courses both academically and socially. However, it is important to note that social adjustment to the class communities was more challenging for them. In the Japanese language program, the majority of students begin to learn it when they are college freshmen. Consequently, students in upper level Japanese courses often form their communities before freshman students are placed in the courses. Freshman students thus felt isolated at first; however, they obtained a sense of belonging in the class communities through
effective peer interactions such as pair/group work activities. Furthermore, this study discovered that freshman students’ challenging experiences in their placed courses contributed to their college adjustments. It focused on Japanese language courses, but these results may be found in other foreign language courses where pair/group work often conducted too. Still, the characteristics that Japanese language students generally have could make a difference. Their calm personalities had an impact on freshman students’ sense of being accepted.

Finally, this study hopefully will help college language professors pay attention to freshman students’ transition challenges in upper level courses and offered scholars a new study perspective. College language professors should not forget that they play an influential role on freshman student academic and social adjustment. Professors should make a continual effort to understand and engage each individual student through careful observations and utilization of meaningful peer interactions.
References


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Japanese Language Textbooks that Were Introduced in This Study


Appendix

Questionnaire
Part A. Background (Before College)

1. How long had you studied Japanese before you started college?

2. Where have you previously studied Japanese?

3. How many students were in your Japanese class?

4. Did you have good relationship with other students in your Japanese class?

5. Did your classmates and you have anything in common? What was it?

6. How many hours a week did you have Japanese class there?

7. Which of four skills below do you think your institution put most emphasis on? (Choose one.)

   - Reading
   - Writing
   - Listening
   - Speaking

8. From 1 being the lowest to 5 being the highest, how would you evaluate your Japanese language skill level when you were a high school student?

   - Low
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - High

Why?
Part B. At College

1. What did you think of your Japanese class, at first?

2. Did you feel uncomfortable in the class you were placed in?

3. Was it easy for you to be a part of your new community (class)?
   If not, what do you think your problem was?

4. How long did you need to make friends in your first Japanese class?

5. Is there any difference in terms of members of class between your Japanese class in high school and the Japanese class you were placed in, such as the atmosphere, classmates’ interests, or their attitudes?

6. What kind of pressures both on your learning and on your social change did you have from taking your first Japanese class at your college?
7. Was there anyone you could go to when you needed support for your social issue such as friends or counselor?

8. Compared with your learning experience in high school, did you find any differences in learning Japanese?

9. Did you have any difficulties/problems in your first Japanese class at your college?

10. How did you overcome your difficulties/problems?

11. Would you evaluate your Japanese language skill level differently now?