

Evaluating a university preparation course for a short-term study abroad program in terms of its ability to alleviate student anxiety prior to departure

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Abstract : Excessive anxiety can compromise a person's willingness to step outside of his or her comfort zone and interact with an unfamiliar environment. It can, therefore, militate against the objectives (i.e., enhanced linguistic and cultural competence) most commonly cited by study abroad programs. The purpose of this research was to evaluate an intensive 22.5-hour preparation course in terms of its ability to alleviate student anxiety. The preparation course was run in-house at a Japanese university as a precursor to a three-week stay in the United Kingdom. The research component—consisting of a survey in the form of a questionnaire—was conducted approximately two weeks prior to departure at the conclusion of the preparation course. The questionnaire included six Likert-style questions designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the preparation course relative to six of the most salient anxiety-inducing components of the study abroad program: taking an international flight, interacting with British people in everyday social situations, discussing social issues with British undergraduates, doing a homestay, teaching Japanese culture at a British elementary school, and personal safety. Five further questions evaluating the composition of the preparation course and allowing for more expansive answers completed the survey. The feedback from the 14 student participants confirmed that the preparation course had been generally effective in terms of counteracting anxiety. Nevertheless, the data also confirmed that certain components of the program induce more anxiety and are more resistant to the type of anxiety-alleviating technique applied by the preparation course. In conclusion, the paper contends that the research should be conducted in conjunction with every subsequent edition of the preparation course so as to facilitate a continuous process of fine-tuning towards its ideal composition.

Key words : short-term study abroad program, preparation/orientation course, student anxiety, cultural competence

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List of abbreviations

- ALT Assistant Language Teacher
 FPU Fukuoka Prefectural University
 L1 First language; one's native language
 L2 Second language; a language to some extent acquired in addition to one's native language

1. Introduction: a brief history of the UK study abroad program at Fukuoka Prefectural University

The origins of Fukuoka Prefectural University's study abroad program to the United Kingdom can be traced back to 2006 when the then sole native speaker within the Faculty of Integrated Human Studies and Social Sciences took a group of twenty students to the north of England for three weeks. That this initial trip was both unofficial and unprecedented meant that it was largely free from the regulatory control that would later exert such a profound influence on the development of the program. It also meant that the aforementioned faculty member was solely responsible for the planning, preparing and day-to-day running of the trip. The current author is not, therefore, being unduly modest when he refers to the 2006 trip as a pioneering expedition and unparalleled achievement—far more so than when he himself succeeded to the same position at FPU and applied the pre-existing

template in 2008. That year's program was, however, remarkable in two respects, marking as it did the first and, as of 2018, only instance of the program not being run under the auspices of the independent education agency founded and run by the now-former faculty member and without his direct personal involvement as principal tour coordinator and guide. It was also the third and final program to be based predominantly in the city of York in the north of England.

Though the coordinators had, up until this point, taken great pains to see as much of the UK as possible (and had, to this end, ventured as far afield from York as the Lake District in 2006 and 2008 and Stratford-upon-Avon and Nottingham in 2007), the temptation to establish a base closer to London had been assiduously resisted with the sole exceptions of overnight stays in Oxford and Windsor—locations conveniently close to London Heathrow airport—immediately prior to returning to Japan. This conscious omission of the nation's cultural center from the program's itinerary was prudent in view of the fact that it would have involved a single native-speaker leading a group of two dozen or so Japanese students into a relatively densely-populated area with correspondingly high traffic accident and crime rates. This decision was taken despite the presence of a Japanese-national FPU faculty member and, from 2009, a

handful of British undergraduates from Oxford acting as assistants and chaperones. The FPU faculty members accompanying the trip were always competent and fully functional in terms of their English-language abilities. Nevertheless, and in view of their lack of familiarity with the city's layout and public transport system, their compliance with the decision to avoid London was always forthcoming. The extent to which this arrangement was non-consensual was, however, exposed in 2008 when it was discovered that several of the participating students had been engaged in making covert arrangements to visit the capital (from York, approximately 340 kilometers away). Up until this point, it had been deemed expedient to suppress any desire on the part of the students to visit London, not only by maintaining a healthy distance but also by articulating (and perhaps even exaggerating) the risks involved. The 2008 program served to demonstrate the futility of this policy. It also marked the point at which the demand for daytrips into the capital began to outstrip the reticence of the coordinators.

Fortunately, the pressure to visit London had been mounting in tandem with the confidence acquired over the course of three successful three-week programs (2006–2008). The locus of the 2009 program was therefore shifted to the City of Bath (approximately 160 kilometers west of London but still readily accessible by train)

and the policy of running daytrips into the capital established. In retrospect, 2009 may be seen as a pivotal year in terms of aligning the program with its current form. It was the first program to feature the program's creator and the current author working alongside each other in the UK and the first to incorporate a homestay component (the students having previously been lodged in university accommodation when in York and in youth hostels or hotels when elsewhere). The rationale for switching to homestay accommodation was primarily educational—to immerse the students into a completely English-speaking environment without the safety net provided by their bilingual teachers. In order to alleviate student anxiety and reduce the magnitude of the challenge, the decision was taken to arrange the students into small groups of two to four same-gender "homestay buddies." This policy has similarly remained unchanged since 2009, though it should be pointed out that, as a consequence of the coordinators rejecting "stress-inducing" homestay families (i.e., any family whose standards of care were in any way perceived to be deficient) and retaining only the most popular and cooperative, the potential for any form of unpleasantness has been reduced to a minimum. This continual vetting of the homestay families has, quite apart from the city's convenient location and World Heritage status, been a significant factor in

keeping the program anchored in Bath.

In the event, the 2009 program attracted 41 student participants—an unprecedented number well in excess of that registered by any other program before or since. In 2010, the number fell to 22, thereby obviating the need to impose a “cap” at a similarly manageable level. A year later, and the disparity between the number of student participants in 2009 and 2010 would pay dividends during negotiations to incorporate the program into FPU’s regular curriculum as an elective subject. On the one hand, the 2009 turnout (amounting to approximately four percent of FPU’s total student body) was demonstrative of the program’s popularity and feasibility, while, on the other, the relatively modest 2010 figure had the advantage of being unintimidating by comparison. This did not, however, deter the coordinators from upping the ante (and unnecessarily overcomplicating matters) in a bid to make the program more palatable at management level. As a consequence, the first and second accredited programs run in 2011 and 2012 each featured concurrent two-week and four-week itineraries (with those students opting for the latter in effect staying on in the UK for an additional two weeks). This extended program was still of short enough duration to be conducted over the summer vacation period without infringing upon the other extracurricular training programs (in the fields of nursing,

education, and social welfare) on offer to FPU students. It was, in retrospect, an attempt to wring as much benefit as possible out of the limited time available—a policy consistent with the conventional view, as expressed by Carrillo (2014, p. 1) and substantiated by Zorn, that longer periods of immersion entail greater gains in cultural competence (1996, pp. 266–272). In mitigation, however, it should be pointed out that shorter programs akin to FPU’s have also been found to facilitate cultural and even linguistic competence (Ballestas & Roller, 2013, p.132; Kartoshkina, Chieffo & Kang, 2013, p. 33) and that they tend to be more affordable, more concentrated in terms of their itineraries, and more compatible with other extracurricular activities.

The precise 2011 itinerary, as shown in Appendix A, was also the first to substitute Oxford Brookes University accommodation for the Oxford youth hostel—an association that has undoubtedly added some luster to the program and bolstered its credentials in the corridors of power at FPU. Furthermore, and while indisputably innovative, the 2011 itinerary also served to formalize many of the longstanding features of the program, not least the policy of running a series of discussion-based lessons exploring a variety of cultural themes. These lessons typically divide the FPU students into small groups of four or five, each under the nominal tutelage of a British undergraduate

acting as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), and span or exceed the 22.5 study hours comprising a regular university course. This set-up has been a constant feature of the program since its inception in 2006 and is consistent with research suggesting that peer interaction is a significant factor in the development of linguistic competence (Shaheen, 2004). A similarly omnipresent feature formalized in 2011 was the visit to an elementary school to observe the British education system in action and teach aspects of Japanese culture (such as basic language, origami, and calligraphy) to British schoolchildren. By contrast, the one-night stopover at a youth hostel in Liverpool at the beginning of the fourth week proved to be a one-off. It was also the last program to visit the Lake District. In retrospect, and as has already been conceded, the 2011 and, in particular, the 2012 programs were overloaded with components which, despite being practically feasible and, in the event, successfully executed, proved overly taxing upon the stamina of some of the students and at least one of the attendant staff members. The three-day trip to Paris in the fourth week of the 2012 program was a case point in this regard and, for all its cultural value, has not been repeated since. It should also be noted that it was difficult to reconcile going to Paris with the education agency's consistently selfless policy of minimizing the cost of

the program while not actually running at a loss (a concern that prompted the streamlining of the 2017 and 2018 programs to twenty days so as to mitigate the effects of inflation). Furthermore, and though it was also the last program to feature a trip to the Jurassic Coast in the southwest of England, it was also the first to stop over in Canterbury in the southeast (an indication of the disproportionate distances covered by the 2011 and 2012 editions). This is not to deride or diminish the extraordinary achievements of those years—the FPU UK Summer Program has always had a strong claim to offering more educational and cultural experience for less financial outlay than any other study abroad program of comparable length operating out of any other university in Japan. The trips undertaken in 2011 and 2012 were merely the most exceptional in this regard, and were highly instructive in terms of determining those components to be retained and those to be discarded in subsequent years.

This spirit of experimentation in pursuit of excellence induced the coordinators to substitute the City of Canterbury (with which they had been impressed over the course of a three-night stay as a component of the 2012 program) for Oxford as the initial (pre-Bath) base in 2013. That this particular experiment again proved to be a one-off (the program having since returned to Oxford) is more attributable to Oxford's

closer proximity to London than to its greater renown as a center of learning (which, admittedly, resonates in a very positive way with students and faculty members alike). The coordinators also decided to reduce the 2013 program to a uniform three weeks—a logical compromise between the two-week and four-week options hitherto available. A further integral and latterly omnipresent feature of the program established in 2013 was the visit to an elementary school in Bath. This particular visit and the quality of the interaction between the FPU students and the British schoolchildren actually induced the head teacher to add Japanese to the school's curriculum—a testament to the program's ability to establish and strengthen meaningful cultural ties between Japan and the UK.

Since 2013, the program has continued to evolve via a policy of refinement rather than reinvention. The year-on-year adjustments made subsequent to the program's formative years (2006–2013) have been subtle by comparison, culminating in a 2018 schedule not markedly different from the 2013 equivalent (Appendices C and B, respectively). It would be wrong to assume, however, that the FPU UK Summer Program has only ever been subjected to a spirit of benign experimentation or that this might solely account for its evolution. Since its inception, the program has also had to contend with the media-induced panic du

jour—an annual summer ritual that has so far encompassed such disparate threats as SARS, swine flu, bird flu, Ebola, and Islamic fundamentalism. These threats—incontestably real but invariably miniscule even by comparison with the possibility of one of the participants becoming involved in a traffic accident on the way to Fukuoka Airport—have nevertheless deterred some students from signing up to the program and induced others to drop out. They have also, on occasion, raised questions as to the advisability of running a UK-based study abroad program at all. The paradox, of course, is that the Japanese archipelago is not only prone to all manner of natural disaster but also adjacent to the world's last Cold War standoff. This unfortunate convergence might lead some commentators to suggest (or even statistically prove) that the Japanese students participating in the UK program are actually *safer* over the course of those three weeks than their counterparts remaining in Japan. This, however, would be to ignore the distinction between what might be perceived, albeit subjectively, as “avoidable versus unavoidable risk,” with any excursion off of one's home turf and into a foreign “danger scenario” falling very much into the former category.

As its most current edition attests (Appendix C), the FPU UK Summer Program has consistently made itself relevant to every student's major subject,

irrespective of faculty or department, through visits to social welfare, healthcare, and education institutions. This commitment is further apparent in the extraordinary lengths the principal coordinator will go to in order to recruit British professionals from all of the aforementioned fields and have them act as research-project interviewees (each student having drawn up, during the preparation course, a personalized questionnaire allowing him or her to elicit data relative to a particular issue affecting both the UK and Japan). This comparative research component constitutes a student-led communicative experience and is indicative of authentic task-based learning. It complements the aforementioned small-group lessons built around a native-speaker of comparable age and provides a similarly conducive and motivating environment in which to discuss real-world sociological issues and cultural differences. It is also the unconventional component that most demonstrably gives the FPU UK Summer Program its edge over other the vast majority of study abroad programs operating out of other universities.

2. The preparation course

The FPU UK Summer Program's commitment to maximizing the potential offered by its assiduously planned schedule is further apparent in its application of

the type of complementary preparation course widely cited as facilitative to the success of the study abroad component (Johnston, 1993; Goldoni, 2013; Barber, 2014; Hockersmith & Newfields, 2016). Indeed, some commentators have gone so far as to expose the rather glib assumption that studying abroad will, *ipso facto*, benefit the student linguistically and interculturally (Pederson, 2010; Salisbury, An & Pascarella, 2013). The pre-departure course at FPU has been a constant feature of the program since 2008 and gained official recognition as an accredited course in its own right in 2013. It is compulsory for all students participating in the program and comprises 15 hours of classroom-based tuition plus an additional 7.5 hours of directed self-study (the sum 22.5 hours being equivalent to the duration of a regular accredited course). The classroom-based component has traditionally been run intensively over two days approximately two weeks prior to departure (its close proximity being conducive to the focusing of young minds). The precise nature of the course may most clearly be demonstrated via an examination of its most recent incarnation and some of the PowerPoint slides comprising its ten 90-minute lessons (Appendices D and E).

The 2018 preparation course applied four principal anxiety-alleviating techniques via PowerPoint and oral explication in English. The four techniques were as follows: *advice* relevant to a specific

scenario, *image training* (i.e., directing a student to mentally conceptualize a specific scenario and its possible permutations in terms of what might transpire and the language that might be used), *role-play* and the elucidation of scenario-specific lexical sets and stock phrases, and *fact-checking* through the elicitation or straight dissemination of scenario-specific facts. How these respective techniques might be presented relative to the potentially anxiety-inducing experience of interacting with one's homestay family is illustrated in Appendix D. It should be acknowledged, however, that the four techniques are not entirely distinct from each other (there being considerable overlap between, for example, *advice* and *fact-checking*). Nor is the sequential order of *advice* followed by *image training* followed by *role-play* followed by *fact-checking* strictly binding or even necessarily appropriate. That Appendix E (detailing the order applied to the experience of interacting with the British undergraduates acting as ALTs) is entirely devoid of a *fact-checking* component is furthermore illustrative of the extent to which a particular technique may be deemed superfluous to requirements and, as a consequence, elided or its respective PowerPoint slide(s) replaced by other media or further oral explication in English.

The course therefore applied a carefully considered if somewhat arbitrary

combination of anxiety-alleviating techniques to each of the following six themes: taking an international flight, performing successful speech acts in shops and restaurants, discussing social issues with the UK undergraduates acting as ALTs, interacting with one's homestay family, teaching Japanese culture to British schoolchildren, and taking precautions to ensure one's personal safety. The course was also transparently and, according to Hockersmith and Newfields, appropriately interactive and student-centered in terms of its application of role-plays and simulations (2016, p. 5). Less obvious was the way in which the preparation course also served to disseminate a wealth of important practical information relating to the logistics of the trip and facilitate team bonding. This latter aspect is particularly important in recognition of the participating students being, in effect, a group of virtual strangers drawn from disparate departments and year groups coming together for the first time. The preparation course therefore allows the students to negotiate and hopefully overcome inhibitions that would otherwise threaten to stymie interaction.

The fostering of student confidence (or, to put it another way, the alleviation of student anxiety) may be identified as the preparation course's overarching *raison d'être*. As a consequence (and certainly in relation to this single criteria), the effectiveness of the preparation course

may be evaluated even before departure and the commencement of the UK-based component. After all, and as Thompson and Lee (2014) have noted, a short-stay program precludes waiting for a student to acclimatize and overcome his or her anxiety by osmosis. The remainder of this paper will therefore address the following question: Was the preparation course to the 2018 FPU UK Summer Program effective in terms of fostering student confidence/alleviating student anxiety prior to departure?

3. Materials and methods

In order to adequately survey all 14 of the student participants in the 2018 edition of the program in relation to the above question, a single questionnaire was drawn up comprising six Likert-style questions (Figure 1a) and five further questions each requiring a more expansive, written response in the event of an affirmative answer (Figure 1b). The questionnaire was rendered entirely in English using grammatical forms and vocabulary readily comprehensible to all of the student participants. Access to bilingual dictionaries was provided and select questions paraphrased in parentheses in order to further allay any intelligibility issues.

Questions 1–6 applied a singular format based on a Likert-type scale and designed

to elicit the effect of the preparation course upon each student's confidence relative to six potentially anxiety-inducing scenarios. Questions 7–10, on the other hand, called upon each student to critique the course in terms of its composition. Question 11 was optional and non-specific, inviting the student to comment on any aspect(s) of the course at his or her own discretion.

The questionnaire was distributed to (and completed individually and anonymously by) all of the participating students at the conclusion of the course. No time limit for its completion was imposed, the only requirement being that all of the students respond to all of the questions (if only in the abrupt negative for questions 7–11) and in English (the course having gone to great lengths to shift the students into their L2 and encourage the airing of opinions [Hockersmith & Newfields, 2016, p.6]). In the event, 14 questionnaires were returned, constituting one hundred percent of the students participating in the preparation course for the 2018 FPU UK Summer Program.

4. Results and analysis

How the responses to each of the six Likert-style questions were distributed across the five possible responses (A–E) is represented graphically in Figures 2–7. Figure 8, on the other hand, is of a more composite nature, showing the average

<i>Give your opinion by checking (✓) one of the five boxes next to each question.</i>	A) Yes! I now feel completely confident! I'm not nervous at all!	B) Yes. But I still feel a little nervous.	C) No. Before this course I felt confident and I'm still confident now (no change!).	D) No. Before this course I felt nervous and I'm still nervous now (no change!).	E) No! I now feel less confident and more nervous than I did before taking this course!
Did the course make you feel more confident about ...					
1) taking an international flight?					
2) using English in places like shops and restaurants?					
3) using English in a small-group conversation class with a British university student?					
4) doing a homestay with a British family?					
5) teaching Japanese culture (for example, origami) at a British elementary school?					
6) your personal safety (against things like accidents and crime)?					

Figure 1a. Questionnaire on the effect of the course on anxiety levels relative to six potentially anxiety-inducing scenarios

7) Was anything missing from the course? (= Was there anything that you wish had been included in the course but wasn't?) Yes / No (if "Yes" please explain below)
8) Was anything spoken about or practiced too briefly? (= Was there anything you wanted to hear more about or practice more?) Yes / No (if "Yes" please explain below)
9) Was there anything that was spoken about or practiced too much? (= Was there any part of the course that was too long and should be reduced?) Yes / No (if "Yes" please explain below)
10) Was there anything that should have been deleted from the course? (= Was there any part of the course that you felt was unnecessary and should be "cut out"?) Yes / No (if "Yes" please explain below)
11) Is there anything else you would like to say about the course? If so, write your comments below.

Figure 1b. Questionnaire on the composition of the course

score achieved by each of the six Likert-style questions on the basis of each of the possible responses being awarded a commensurate number of points (an “A” response scoring five points; a “B” response scoring four points; a “C” response scoring three points, etc.). A higher average score over and above the one-point minimum and towards the five-point maximum would suggest a more successful outcome in terms of the preparation course fostering student confidence in relation to a particular scenario. The one-point discrepancy between the “C” and “D” responses was adhered to despite both denoting no change in the student’s anxiety level—a fact that might imply equivalency were it not for the “D” response being solely indicative of failure as opposed to mere redundancy.

Key to Figures 2–8 : Student responses

- A : Yes! I now feel completely confident!
I’m not nervous at all!
- B : Yes. But I still feel a little nervous.
- C : No. Before this course I felt confident and I’m still confident now (no change!).
- D : No. Before this course I felt nervous and I’m still nervous now (no change!).
- E : No! I now feel less confident and more nervous than I did before taking this course!

Key to Figure 8 : Potentially anxiety-

inducing scenarios

- 1 : Taking an international flight
- 2 : Using English in places like shops and restaurants
- 3 : Using English in a small-group conversation class with a British university student
- 4 : Doing a homestay with a British family
- 5 : Teaching Japanese culture (for example, origami) at a British elementary school
- 6 : Personal safety (relative to accident and crime scenarios)

Without exception, the graphs representing each of the six potentially anxiety-inducing scenarios (Figures 2–7) exhibit a bias towards responses “A” and “B.” This would suggest that the course was to some extent effective in terms of its principal objective of alleviating anxiety relative to each specific scenario. Indeed, an “A” or a “B” response was selected by at least 50 percent of the student body for all of the scenarios bar those relating to “using English in places like shops and restaurants” (Figure 3) and “using English in a small-group conversation class with a British university student” (Figure 4). Even in these instances, however, the aggregate percentages for the two responses denoting a measure of failure (i.e., “D” and “E”) were only 21.4% and 7.1%, respectively. This latter tally (representing a single student returning a “D” response) was

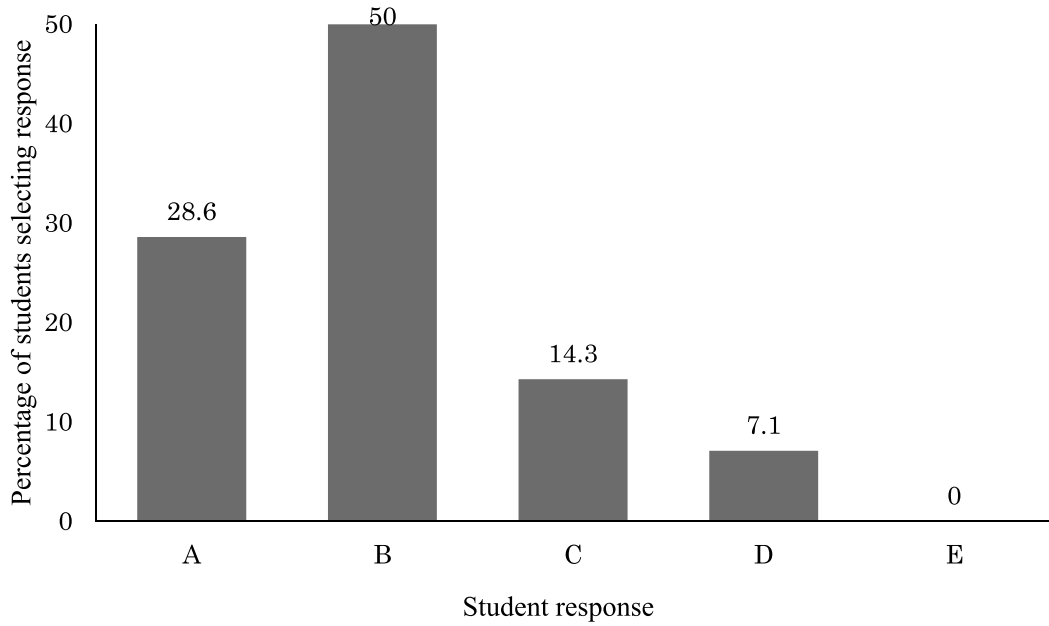


Figure 2. Did the course make you feel more confident about taking an international flight?

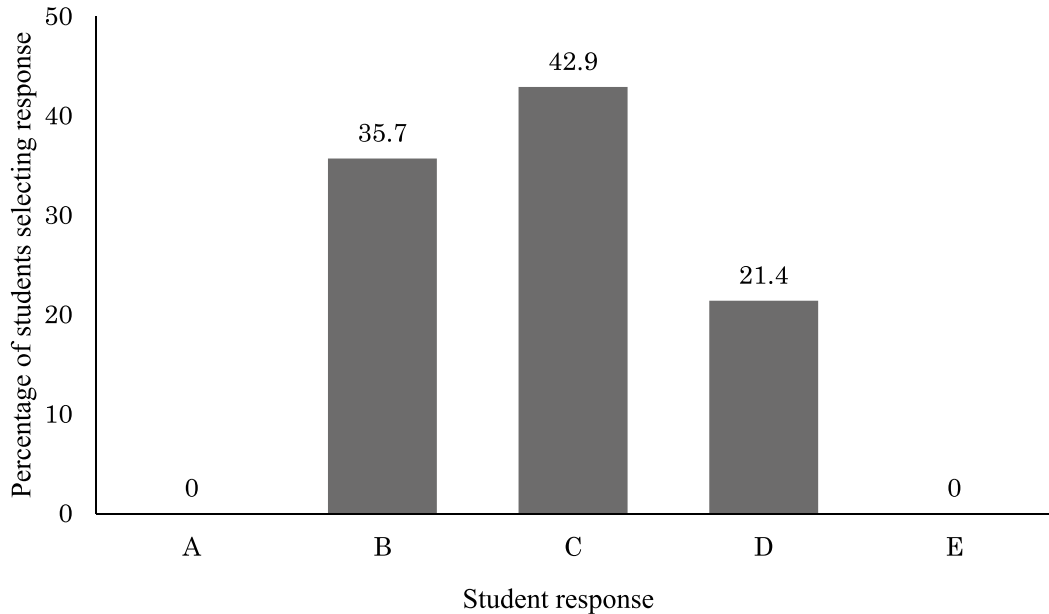


Figure 3. Did the course make you feel more confident about using English in places like shops and restaurants?

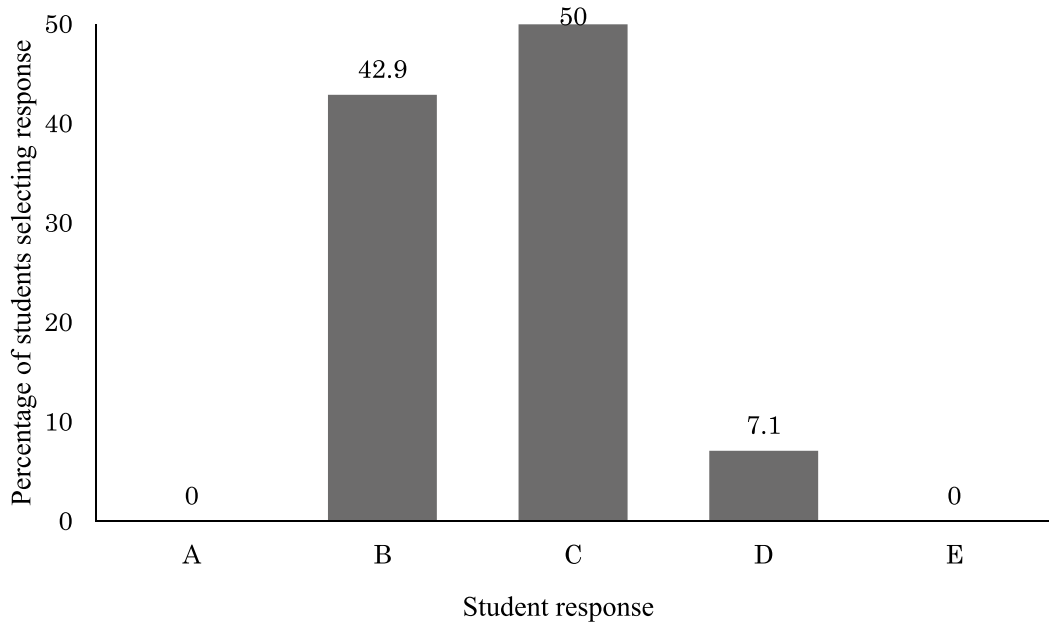


Figure 4. Did the course make you feel more confident about using English in a small-group conversation class with a British university student?

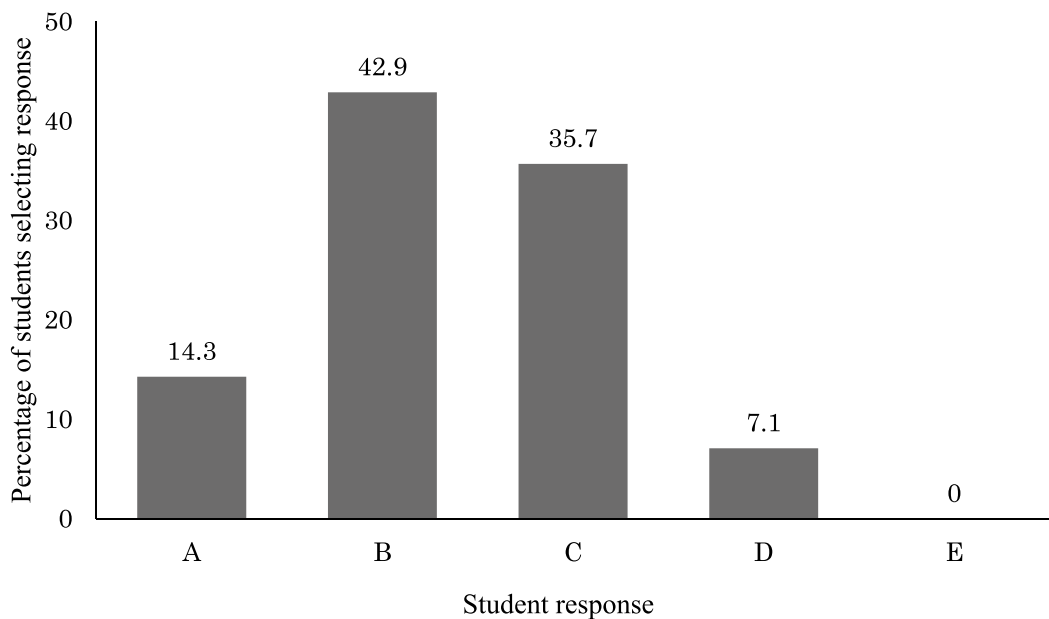


Figure 5. Did the course make you feel more confident about doing a homestay with a British family?

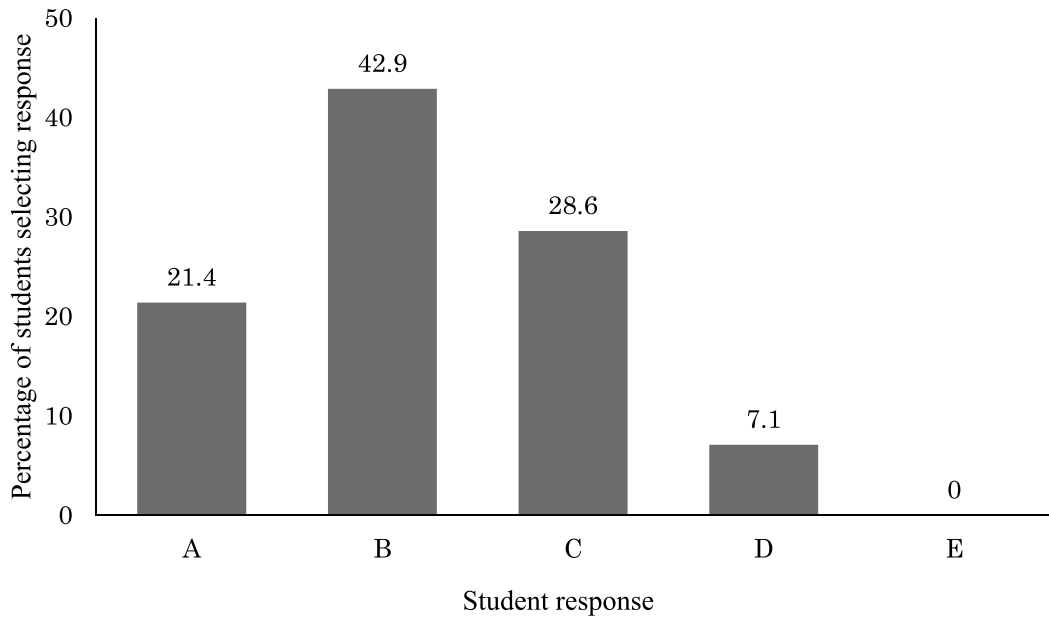


Figure 6. Did the course make you feel more confident about teaching Japanese culture (for example, origami) at a British elementary school?

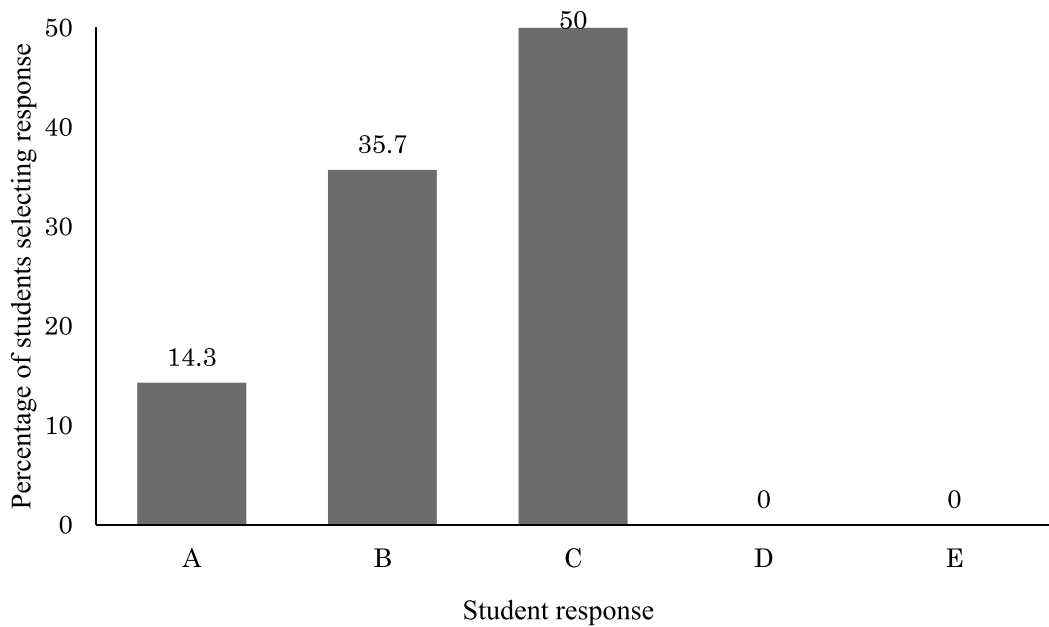


Figure 7. Did the course make you feel more confident about your personal safety (against things like accidents and crime)?

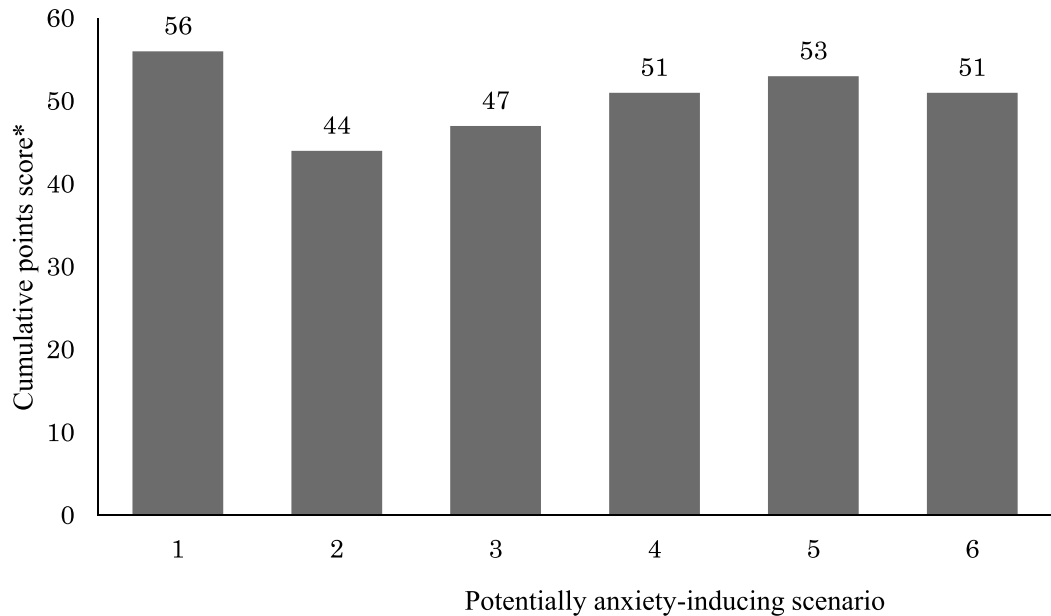


Figure 8. The effectiveness of the course relative to each potentially anxiety-inducing scenario (*a score of 5 points having been awarded for each A response; 4 points for each B response; 3 points for each C response; 2 points for each D response, and 1 point for each E response)

common to all of the scenarios with the exception of “personal safety” (Figure 7). No “E” responses were returned, suggesting that the course itself had not provoked anxiety (a distinct possibility, given its preoccupation with anxiety-inducing scenarios).

In terms of its effect upon each specific scenario, the data suggests that the course was most effective relative to “taking an international flight,” with 78.6% of the student body returning either an “A” or “B” response (Figure 2). This interpretation is borne out by the same scenario registering the highest

proportion of “A” responses (28.6%) and highest cumulative score (Figure 8). It may not be entirely coincidental that this was the only component of the course where explication in English was complemented by explication in Japanese (courtesy of the travel agent who “dropped by” for approximately twenty minutes to distribute documents and advise the students on matters pertaining to the flight and UK customs and immigration). Conversely, the relatively low number of points garnered by the only scenarios specifically highlighting (in the wording of the questionnaire) the necessity of

“using English” (i.e., the aforementioned “shops and restaurants” scenario and the “small-group conversation class” scenario) would seem to be indicative of a deeply entrenched lack of linguistic confidence. That the course singularly failed to provoke a single “A” response in relation to either of these scenarios (Figures 3 and 4) would seem to lend weight to this interpretation. Even here, however, a relatively low cumulative score belies the fact that each of the “English-stipulating” scenarios registered a disproportionately high number of “C” responses denoting a pre-existing lack of anxiety—a distinction shared only by the “personal safety (against things like accidents and crime)” scenario (Figure 7). By contrast, and with the exception of the “taking an international flight scenario,” the “doing a homestay with a British family” and “teaching Japanese culture” scenarios (Figures 5 and 6, respectively) comfortably registered the highest cumulative percentages of “A” and “B” responses. Perhaps the most surprising data was, however, returned in relation to the course’s effect upon the aforementioned final scenario concerning personal safety, the distribution of responses indicating that the students are relatively anxiety-free from the outset and amenable to having any residual misgivings allayed by the course (Figure 7). Other, more circumstantial evidence suggests that the same cannot be said of their parents or teachers.

The data collected by questions 7–11 was less quantifiable and more interpretive. Nevertheless, certain salient trends were discernible. Chief among these was an almost-uniform reluctance on the part of the students to assist in the fine-tuning of the course by writing anything negative about it. This could, of course, be interpreted as proof of the course’s abiding excellence. Such an interpretation would, however, fail to account for precisely 50 percent of the responses to questions 1–6 implying a modicum of lingering post-course anxiety (the responses being something other than either “A” or “C”). In fact, and leaving aside the approbatory comments (e.g. “The course was very good! It was very helpful for me. Thank you!”) and those relating to matters beyond the remit of the course (e.g. “If you have decided who will stay at which host family’s house, please tell us.”), the only comments of any practical use were those bare few written in response to questions 8 and 11. These comments have been reproduced verbatim and, for ease of reference, numbered below:

Comments in response to question 8 (“Was anything spoken about or practiced too briefly?”):

- 1) “I want few Japanese meeting.”
- 2) “I wanted to practice using English in places like restaurant and shop, and in small-group conversation class with a British university student.”

3) “Practice (for example: pronounce many words; differences between British and American English).”

The first comment, which might have been more appropriately made in response to question 9 (“Was there anything that was spoken about or practiced too much?”), has been interpreted as referring to that component of the course that had been intended to give the students practical experience of teaching Japanese culture (specifically origami and calligraphy) to schoolchildren. To this end, an arrangement had been made for six or seven (albeit Japanese-speaking) schoolchildren from the university’s *hikikomori* center to be “taught” origami and calligraphy in English by the course students for one hour. In the event, however, only a single schoolchild accompanied by two staff members visited the class, thereby rendering the exercise largely redundant from a teaching practice perspective. All of the (diminished) benefits that accrued in terms of the course students being able to practice the relevant task-specific English phrases could have and should have been procured far more efficiently—a point succinctly made by comment #1. In mitigation, however, it is quite conceivable that, with a higher quota of schoolchildren, this component of the course might have proved an enjoyable and thoroughly worthwhile diversion, as in previous years.

The second and third comments made in response to question 8 were, however, more consequential in terms of informing the composition of the course. Despite the misleading implication that role-play was neglected (when, in fact, it was extensively applied to a variety of potentially anxiety-inducing scenarios, including those explicitly mentioned by the student), the former comment has been interpreted as a request for a greater emphasis on simulated practice. Likewise the potentially speech-act stymieing disparities between British English and American English which were only dealt with incidentally by the course (comment #3), the teacher having glibly assumed that exposure to his own vernacular would sufficiently attune the students to British English and allay the possibility of interference. Future research will determine the veracity of the teacher’s assumption that instances of speech-act failure in the UK due to Japanese students being more familiar with American English are few and far between. Nevertheless, and at the very least, the course should explicitly address the issue, identify the lexical disparities between British English and American English most likely to cause interference, and provide reassurance that such disparities are highly unlikely to cause offence or misunderstanding.

Comments in response to question 11 (“Is there anything else you would like to say about the course?”):

- 1) “Explain of money in England was very easy to understand, but I want it directly.”
- 2) “I want you to explain in Japanese when I have what I don’t know. For example, (name withheld) sensei explain to me in Japanese.”
- 3) “Thank you for the simple explanation! Your explanation really helped!”

The first comment has been interpreted, possibly erroneously, as a request for a more “hands-on” demonstration vis-à-vis the handling of British currency through the introduction of realia (i.e., actual notes and coins). This is a reasonable request and one that will be acted upon in subsequent years, the teacher having hitherto relied upon screen-based images. The latter comments, meanwhile, arguably reveal more about the learning proclivities of their authors than they do the efficacy of the course. On the one hand, comment #2 refers to a Japanese-national teacher and her technique of providing explication to her students in their mutual first language (L1). This mode of instruction, evidently analogous to “better teaching” in the opinion of at least one student, allows for the confirmation of meaning and, to that extent, might even be contributive to the alleviation of anxiety. It is, however,

wholly inconsistent with the arguably superseding objective of developing coping strategies as a precursor to the student becoming immersed in an English-speaking environment. And while some concession to the L1 was made by the course (viz. the flight-related advice administered by the visiting travel agent), comment #3 suggests that the predominant use of the target language did not preclude comprehension and that it was an effective medium for the conveyance of important information.

Before proceeding to its conclusion, this paper must briefly acknowledge and account for certain inconsistencies, not least those pertaining to the idiosyncratic nature of the course itself. It must be conceded that, of the six potentially anxiety-inducing scenarios, some were afforded more emphasis than others (the “shops and restaurants” scenario, for example, having been subjected to a more extensive role-play component than the “personal safety” scenario). These discrepancies were attributable to nothing more than teacher intuition in pursuit of the optimum blend (the primary objective of this research being to replace that intuitive aspect with something more empirical). It is worth noting, however, that as in every real-world teaching scenario involving finite resources and an ever-changing mess of personalities, abilities, and learning preferences, this pursuit can only ever be maintained by an ongoing process of

negotiation with, as far as possible, each course adapting itself to the specificities of the greater program, learning context, and participants.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In conclusion, the data suggests that the 2018 incarnation of the preparation course was generally effective in terms of its principal objective, i.e., the alleviation, prior to departure, of student anxiety relative to six specific study abroad scenarios. That the scenarios were arbitrarily imposed by the course teacher would be of greater concern were it not for the students' apparent inability to identify alternative sources of anxiety when prompted to do so. It must, however, be conceded that, relative to any given scenario, up to half of the participating students were left unmoved by the anxiety-alleviating efforts of the course for the simple reason that they were (by their own accounts) not harboring any anxiety to begin with. This is evocative of redundancy or, at the very least, of overkill in terms of the course misdirecting its efforts towards the slaying of non-existent monsters. Nevertheless, and with at least as many students admitting to a modicum of pre-existing anxiety relative to any given scenario, such an interpretation would be unduly dismissive. It would fail to acknowledge the possibility of anxiety festering within the minds of

"carrier" students and infecting others. Furthermore, and for a host of other reasons only obliquely relevant to the alleviation of anxiety (the fostering of interpersonal relationships within the group and the dissemination of important advice and information, for example), the status of the course as a worthwhile endeavor should not be questioned.

Having thrown the disparate levels of lingering anxiety into starker contrast, this research will facilitate the pursuit of a more appropriate balance in terms of the emphasis afforded each potentially anxiety-inducing scenario (the data having demonstrated the need for more practice relative to the "shops and restaurants" scenario, for example). The research should be repeated and conducted in conjunction with every subsequent incarnation of the course so as to be in a continuous state of negotiation with the elusive ideal balance. The data accrued should also be applied to the explanatory presentations that are the basis for recruitment onto the FPU UK Summer Program, it being readily conceivable that the same anxieties felt by students who have nevertheless committed to studying abroad will, if not addressed from the outset, dissuade other less daring types from doing so.

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Appendix A

Itinerary for the concurrent 2-week and 4-week FPU UK Summer Programs run in 2011

Month/Day	Morning	Afternoon	Accommodation
8/16		Depart Fukuoka Airport	(In-flight)
8/17	London Heathrow to Oxford	Oxford tour	Oxford Brookes University dormitory x 5 nights
8/18	Lesson 1 (09:00–11:30)	Coach trip to Blenheim Palace	
8/19	London (09:00–20:00) Coach trip (with Oxford Brookes students): Westminster (Big Ben), National Gallery, Downing Street, etc.		
8/20	London (09:00–20:00) Coach trip (with Oxford Brookes students): British Museum, St. Paul's, Tower Bridge, Greenwich, etc.		
8/21	Lesson 2 (09:00–11:30)	Lesson 3 (13:30–16:00)	
8/22	Oxford to Cotswolds	Arrive Bath	Homestay in Bath x 7 nights (for 2-week students) x 15 nights (for 4-week students)
8/23	Lesson 4 (09:30–12:00)	Lesson 5 (13:30–16:00)	
8/24	Lesson 6 (09:30–12:00)	Lesson 7 (13:30–16:00)	
8/25	Coach trip to Stonehenge and Lacock (10:00–18:00)		
8/26	Lesson 8 (09:30–12:00)	Lesson 9 (13:30–16:00)	
8/27	Coach trip to Cardiff and Blaenavon (09:00–18:00)		
8/28	Coach trip to Glastonbury and Wells (09:00–18:00)		
8/29	Research interviews to 2-week students depart		
8/30	Lesson 10 (09:30–12:00)	Bath University campus tour	
8/31	Coach trip to Stratford-upon-Avon (09:00–19:00)		
9/1	Lesson 11 (09:30–12:00)	Free time in Bath	
9/2	Lesson 12 (09:30–12:00)	Lesson 13 (13:30–16:00)	
9/3	Coach trip to Jurassic Coast (10:00–19:00)		
9/4	Free time in Bath		
9/5	Lesson 14 (09:30–12:00)	Lesson 15 (13:30–16:00)	
9/6	Coach trip to Ironbridge	Chester (tour) to Liverpool	Youth hostel
9/7	Liverpool tour	Lake District	Youth hostel x 4 nights
9/8	Visit to Dowdales School (observing/teaching Japanese language)		
9/9	Visit to Dowdales School (observing/teaching origami)		
9/10	Lake District walking tour		Youth hostel
9/11	Free time in Lake District	Oxford	
9/12	Oxford to Windsor (tour)	London Heathrow Airport	(In-flight)
9/13	(In-flight)	Arrive Fukuoka Airport	

Appendix B

Itinerary for the 3-week FPU UK Summer Program run in 2013

Month/Day	Morning	Afternoon	Accommodation	
9/5	Depart Fukuoka Airport	London Heathrow to Canterbury	Canterbury Christ Church University dormitory x 7 nights	
9/6	Canterbury orientation	Canterbury tour		
9/7	Lesson 1 (09:30–12:30)	Coach trip to Leeds Castle		
9/8	London (09:00–20:00) Coach trip (with Oxford Brookes students): Westminster (Big Ben), National Gallery, Downing Street, etc.			
9/9	Lesson 2 (09:30–12:30)	Coach trip to Dover Castle		
9/10	Coach trip to Cambridge (09:00–20:00)			
9/11	Canterbury high school tour	Free time in Canterbury		
9/12	Canterbury to Kew Gardens	Arrive Bath		Homestay in Bath x 13 nights
9/13	Lesson 3 (09:30–12:30)	Bath tour		
9/14	Lesson 4 (09:30–12:30)	Free time in Bath		
9/15	Coach trip to Cardiff (09:00–18:00)			
9/16	Coach trip to Oxford (09:00–19:00)			
9/17	Lesson 5 (09:30–12:30)	Visit to Roman Baths		
9/18	Coach trip to Cotswolds and Stratford-upon-Avon (09:00–19:00)			
9/19	Lesson 6 (09:30–12:30)	Elementary school visit 1		
9/20	Lesson 7 (09:30–12:30)	Elementary school visit 2		
9/21	London (09:00–20:00) Coach trip (with Oxford Brookes students): British Museum, St. Paul's, Tower Bridge, Greenwich, etc.			
9/22	Coach trip to Stonehenge and Lacock (09:00–19:00)			
9/23	Lesson 8 (09:30–12:30)	Research interviews		
9/24	Lesson 9 (09:30–12:30)	Free time in Bath		
9/25	Bath to Windsor (tour)	London Heathrow Airport	(In-flight)	
9/26	(In-flight)	Arrive Fukuoka Airport		

Appendix C

Itinerary for the 20-day FPU UK Summer Program run in 2018

Month/Day	Morning	Afternoon	Accommodation
9/2	Depart Fukuoka Airport	London Heathrow to Oxford	Oxford Brookes University dormitory x 7 nights
9/3	Lesson 1 (09:30–12:30)	Oxford tour	
9/4	Lesson 2 (09:30–12:30)	Free time in Oxford	
9/5	Lesson 3 (09:30–12:30)	Christchurch and Bodleian tour	
9/6	London (09:00–20:00) Coach trip (with Oxford Brookes students): Westminster (Big Ben), National Gallery, Downing Street, etc.		
9/7	London (09:00–20:00) Coach trip (with Oxford Brookes students): British Museum, St. Paul's Cathedral, Greenwich, etc.		
9/8	Coach trip to Blenheim Palace	Free time in Oxford	
9/9	Oxford to Cotswolds	Arrive Bath	
9/10	Lesson 4 (09:30–12:30)	Bath tour	
9/11	Lesson 5 (09:30–12:30)	Visit to Roman Baths	
9/12	Lesson 6 (09:30–12:30)	Visit to elderly care facility	
9/13	Lesson 7 (09:30–12:30)	Elementary school visit	
9/14	Lesson 8 (09:30–12:30)	Free time in Bath	
9/15	Coach trip to Cardiff (09:00–19:00)		
9/16	Coach trip to Bristol (09:00–19:00)		
9/17	Lesson 9 (09:30–12:30)	Research interviews	
9/18	Lesson 10 (09:30–12:30)	Coach trip to Lacock	
9/19	Free time in Bath		
9/20	Bath to Windsor (tour)	London Heathrow Airport	(In-flight)
9/21	(In-flight)	Arrive Fukuoka Airport	

Appendix D

PowerPoint slides demonstrating the four techniques (*advice*, *image training*, *role-play*, and *fact-checking*) applied by the 2018 preparation course relative to interacting with one's homestay family

<p style="text-align: center;">Advice on <u>Doing a HOMESTAY</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be confident• Be interactive• Be helpful• Be yourself <p style="text-align: center;">Our homestay families are recommended professionals and very nice people. Try to get to know them!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>BRAINSTORMING!</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Imagine you're meeting your homestay mother for the first time ...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What will you say to each other? Your homestay mother will probably be very talkative! She will also ask you <u>many</u> questions.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">With a friend, imagine what you'll say to each other. As always, make notes in a PORTFOLIO (and don't forget to take it to the UK!)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>MEETING YOUR HOMESTAY FAMILY</u></p> <p>Hello. <u>It's nice to meet you. My name's Tomomi Yamamoto. Please call me Tomomi.</u></p> <p>Hello, Tomomi! I'm Sally. Welcome to our home. <u>Did you have a nice flight?</u></p> <p>Yes, thank you. But it was very long! <u>Thank you for allowing me to stay in your home.</u></p> <p>It's my pleasure. I hope you'll enjoy your stay with us. <u>How's the weather in Japan right now?</u></p> <p>Much hotter and more humid than it is in Bath! (British people also love talking about the weather!)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TRUE or FALSE?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. When you meet your host family for the first time, you should kiss them. False. Just shaking hands is okay!2. When you say goodbye to your host family for the last time, you should hug them. Maybe! And they may kiss you!3. You should take a business card to the UK. False. You'll never need it!4. You should take off your shoes when entering your homestay parents' house. Please ask! ("<u>Should I take off my shoes?</u>")

Appendix E

PowerPoint slides demonstrating the three techniques (*advice*, *image training*, and *role-play* [the latter represented by two slides, *fact-checking* having been elided]) applied by the 2018 preparation course relative to interacting with British undergraduates acting as ALTs

When you are with the UK ALTs ...

- **RELAX!** They're the same age as you, and what they want most is to be your friends.
- **DON'T BE SILENT!** The UK ALTs will feel very uncomfortable if you are silent or only saying "Yes." and "No."
- **EXPRESS YOUR OPINION!** The UK ALTs will tell you what they think about all kinds of things ...

In the UK, you are going to meet many British university undergraduates.

What are you going to ask them?!!
You should have already made lists of questions in your PORTFOLIO (if you haven't, start now!). Spend a few minutes showing, sharing and adding to those lists of questions with your teammates ...

Now let's practice asking and answering some of those questions. **No writing!**

Keep the conversation going ("How about you?" and follow-up questions) and don't SCARE your UK ALT with ...

Ice-breakers and small talk

What are your hobbies? Where are you from? Do you like your university? What do you study? Do you like sports? What kind of music do you like? What's your favourite (movie)? Have you ever met a famous person? What's your impression of Japan and Japanese people? Who is your hero? What do you do in the evenings? Do you work part-time? What's your dream? What shops/restaurants/café's do you recommend in this city? What do you think about (Japanese pop groups like AKB48)!!?

