

## **5. Benefits and Issues: Visitor sessions with pre-intermediate learners of Japanese**

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### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Communication with native speakers of a target language can be of benefit to language learners as a means of practising their productive and receptive skills. Such communication not only may improve learners' own language skills, but can also motivate them to pursue further language learning (see, for example, Nagai, 2013). Such communication situations can be achieved through *visitor sessions*, where native speakers of a target language ('visitors') are invited to visit a language class.

In recent years, the number of Japanese language students in tertiary institutions in New Zealand has gradually decreased (Ogino, 2015), and Japanese departments have experienced budget and staff cuts. As a consequence of these losses, tertiary educators are required to effectively and efficiently conduct the same duties (if not more), but with fewer resources. Accordingly, demand for teaching-learning strategies that require minimal preparation has increased. Visitor sessions (VS) could be a creative answer to this demand, while also having significant benefits for the language learners. This study demonstrates how VS work in our institution, and may give insightful suggestions to other language educators in New Zealand who wish to incorporate VS into their curricula.

Previous studies on VS have shown learners reporting positive experiences from their VS (see, for example, Akagi, 2011, 2013; Muraoka, 1992; Nakai, 2003; Yokosuka & Murakami, 1995). Those studies, however,

mostly collected data from questionnaire-based surveys and/or interviews, but not during actual VS themselves.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the learners in those studies were almost always intermediate or advanced learners, as conversations with native speakers can require a high level of language skill.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, for more than a decade the University of Waikato has been carrying out VS with pre-intermediate learners — second-year students who have learned Japanese with *Genki I* the previous year or studied the equivalent at high school. Needless to say, these students are not intermediate or advanced language learners. Does this mean we should expect less positive results from our VS?

The following chapter demonstrates that this is not the case. Using findings from data collected from questionnaires of participants, as well as audio-recordings of VS, a hitherto under-utilised resource, the aim of the study is to reveal the benefits of VS — even at lower levels — as well as some of the issues arising.

## 2 VISITOR SESSIONS

### 2.1 Why do we need visitor sessions?

VS are particularly important for learners of a foreign language in places where there is limited exposure to the target language and/or its culture, like Hamilton, where the University of Waikato is located. Hamilton has a few hundred Japanese residents, but our students do not necessarily have contact with them regularly. Learners in such places have very limited access to native speakers, no access or access only in their language classes (Thomson & Masumi-So, 1999). In these situations, VS provide essential contact situations in which learners can be exposed to fluent Japanese and result in learners finding themselves motivated even further in their studies (Akagi, 2011; Kamata, 2003; Yokosuka, 2003).

J. V. Neustupny is a pioneer of VS in Japanese language pedagogy; he introduced VS as a part of three important phases for implementing effective language learning. The first and second phases are called 'interpretation activities' and 'practice activities', respectively. The third

is called 'performance activities'. VS are one way to implement this third phase (Neustupny, 1991).

Learners need to experience all three phases, generally in succession. 'Interpretation activities' should focus on equipping learners with skills related mainly to grammatical and lexical knowledge. Once they have acquired such knowledge, learners need to be provided with 'practice activities' in order to put their skills to use. Both of these phases are important in developing learners' communicative competence.

However, the two phases above do not expose learners to 'authentic' communication or encourage their use of it. 'Performance activities' provide language learners with the means to practise what they have learned in the first and second phases. Neustupny (1991) stresses that learners need to get out of the traditional classroom setting and engage in specific meaningful tasks, which involve 'performance activities' that can occur in the form of VS, which can ultimately be referred to as 'authentic' communication (Yokosuka, 2003).

According to Neustupny (1991), learners initially need the first and second phases to prepare themselves for the final 'performance activities'. Therefore, many VS practitioners do VS only with learners at intermediate and advanced levels. However, for various reasons it was not easy to exercise VS with intermediate/advanced learners at our institution.<sup>3</sup> Instead, as we believe that learners at any level can benefit from VS and there was an opportunity to invite Japanese native speakers to our class, we started VS with the pre-intermediate level of learners.

## **2.2 Some issues around visitor sessions**

There are, however, some issues that come with VS. For the teacher, although VS can promise time-savings in the long term, in the early stages VS can take a lot of time and effort to plan, organise and set up (Yokosuka & Murakami, 1995); for example, liaisons with groups of students visiting from Japan; recruiting visitors regularly; and preparing and adjusting lessons prior to VS. Another issue, as observed by Thomson and Masumi-

So (1999), is that learners often have high expectations which visitors cannot necessarily meet (for example, learners tend to seek vocabulary and grammatical explanations from visitors), while visitors tend to overestimate learners' potential (for example, visitors are easily impressed by the learners' basic knowledge of Japanese). Also, although VS can encourage autonomous conversation between participants (for example, discussion on a certain topic [Akagi, 2013]; participants have to come up with what they say by themselves), grammar points or vocabulary cannot be controlled or consistently monitored (Tanaka, 2006) and mistakes/errors can often go unchecked.

Participants of VS also have a tendency to rigidly follow their roles of learner and visitor (see, for example, Seki, 2007): that is, while learners are considered to be the recipients of knowledge, the visitors are perceived as the conveyors of that knowledge due to their relatively advanced knowledge of Japanese language and culture. However, Seki (2007) has attempted to figure out how to avoid such static role-settings, and identifies three key factors that teachers need to consider when inviting visitors to VS: visitors should not patronise learners; visitors must speak about themselves; and visitors should reflect upon their own use of language. Teachers need to emphasise that it is not the visitor's responsibility to teach the learner; instead, the goal is communication.

Furthermore, VS can create a double-edged sword for teachers. While they want learners to be exposed to native Japanese speakers and to practise conversing freely, teachers are also required to follow their yearly learning plans and achieve their objectives accordingly. At times, VS can interfere with the latter. While Tanaka (2006) emphasises the importance of having freer conversations and teachers also achieving their course objectives, she suggests that providing teacher-controlled tasks during her VS can achieve this balance. We recommend that VS are included in teachers' course designs, as they can provide opportunities for learners to focus on their fluency, no matter their language level.

### 2.3 Visitor sessions at our university

In recent years, we have regularly invited Japanese visitors to our second-year Japanese classes, generally once a week. Due to the time and effort required to organise VS, it was essential for us to use materials that allowed minimal time for preparation. Thus, in our VS we normally use sentence structure-oriented tasks extracted from the *Genki II* textbook and workbook. This type of task is suitable for our learners, because these books include clear descriptions of grammar points and appropriate vocabulary for their language level. It is relevant to note that Akagi (2013), who held VS with various levels (i.e. beginner to advanced), reported that the Japanese programme in his institution also often assigned sentence structure-oriented types of exercises, such as model dialogue practice, to lower-level learners, while advanced learners were assigned more autonomous interactions such as discussions.

One of the main purposes of VS is to create an opportunity for learners to use and be exposed to more natural Japanese, as opposed to formulaic, stilted language. Admittedly, the tasks from *Genki II* are often set in ‘mock’ situations (for example, whether or not they would cook meals for their potential partner in a ‘mock’ *omiai* or matchmaking situation), and guided conversations — like those likely to occur in our VS — might not be as natural as those in real-life situations. However, regardless of the materials that are used, some other advantages of VS are that: they can lead to more extended conversations than traditional classes without visitors; the presence of native speakers might motivate learners to speak in Japanese when they would not normally do so otherwise; and learners might be motivated to maintain communication in Japanese from a possible need to create a rapport with their partner. In addition, VS provide learners with the opportunity to hear natural Japanese from native speakers in terms of pronunciation, speech rhythm, intonation and so on.

Our visitors are mostly university students from Japan who come to our university to learn English for a short term, and we regularly recruit new Japanese visitors for our VS throughout the semester. Those students

attend English classes at the university almost all day and every day, but do not have many opportunities to meet native English speakers except their English teachers and homestay family members. Although they are asked to use Japanese during our VS, most visitors seem to appreciate VS as a chance to meet English-speaking university students.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

We have always had a strong impression that VS were well-received by learners as well as by the visitors. However, we had not systematically investigated whether learners did the tasks given and nothing else. Nor did we know whether the learners managed to say something in Japanese unrelated to the given tasks, and, if they did, what sort of things they said. To find out what our learners do in our VS, this study examined two VS using two types of data; namely, audio-recordings of VS and questionnaire-based data. We collected these data in Semester A of 2015, following the ethics regulations at our university.

The details of our data are as follows.

#### 3.1 Participants

We had two types of participants. *Learners*: second-year students at the University of Waikato, who had learned Japanese with *Genki I* in the previous year or studied the equivalent at high school. *Visitors*: Japanese native speakers who were attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at the University of Waikato.

#### 3.2 Data

We employed the following two ways to collect data: recorded conversation and a questionnaire-based survey.

##### 3.2.1 Recorded conversation

We asked the participants to audio-record their conversations during two VS (Session A and Session B), and collected 18 recordings in total. Each

session took approximately 50 minutes.

The recorded data enabled us to investigate what had actually happened in the conversations, as opposed to the questionnaires, which showed participants' perceptions of what had happened. The content of the sessions is as follows.

### **3.2.1.1 Session A: Job interview situation**

Learners were given two tasks in this session: (1) to create a list of questions; and (2) to ask those questions of a couple of people. Learners first made a list of job interview questions with assistance from the visitors. For this process, the learners consulted with the visitors and wrote down the questions. After preparing the list of questions, the learners interviewed different visitors who played the part of job applicants, and wrote down their responses. (This task was from Lesson 13 of *Genki II*.)

Prior to this class, the learners had learned the relevant grammar points and practised them. (For example, they learned how to say 'must' in Japanese — *nakuha ikemasen* — and practised making 'must' sentences with a variety of verbs.) In the VS, they were then asked to use the grammar points they had learned in the given context, which was the job interview situation.

### **3.2.1.2 Session B: Omiai (matchmaking) situation**

The given task in this session was to ask various questions to potential partners by using giving and receiving verbs. Participants were to ask a set of given questions and one or two of their own questions. Both learners and visitors asked and answered the questions and wrote down the responses they received. After meeting two or three potential partners, they chose those with whom they would like to go on a date, and wrote the reason for their choice. (This task was from Lesson 16 of *Genki II*.)

Prior to this class, the learners had learned the *-te* form and its use with giving and receiving verbs, and had practised how to conjugate the verbs.

### **3.2.2 Questionnaire-based survey**

We collected data from 17 learners and 12 visitors. They were given a question sheet asking about their language backgrounds, their opinions about the tasks given, and their experience of the sessions (see the Appendices).

### **3.2.3 Data limitation**

One limitation of the research lies in the small sample size. At the time, the total number of enrolled students in the second-year class at our university was 24, and some of the students chose not to participate in the study. However, we are confident that the findings in this chapter provide an indication of the benefits that can be achieved in VS with learners of lower levels.

## **4 FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION**

### **4.1 Audio-recorded conversations from VS**

We examined the recorded conversations, focusing on how learners used Japanese. We also investigated in which situations learners chose to use English.

#### **4.1.1 Use of Japanese**

The following three situations were identified regarding the use of Japanese: (1) the task itself (Example 1); (2) using Japanese to ask for assistance (Examples 2–6); (3) using Japanese to ask a question/make a comment on what a Japanese visitor had said (Examples 7–12).

Learners as well as visitors needed to use Japanese to carry out the tasks. The following example shows a conversation from Session A: a learner (L) asks a visitor (V) a series of questions as required from the matchmaking task.<sup>4</sup>



*Example 1*

L: 料理してくれますか (3) 掃除し(.) してくれますか  
 V: ええ勿論です 自分でし

L:  
 V: てください

L: Would you cook? (3) Cleaning (.) Would you do  
 V: Yes, of course. Please

L:  
 V: clean (the room) by yourself

We noticed that learners asked for help in Japanese at times. The following is a collection of such questions and comments selected from all of the interview data:

*Example 2*

日本語ではlazy何ですか  
 What is 'lazy' in Japanese?

*Example 3*

あの: teach は?  
 Well: what is 'teach'?

*Example 4*

Overtime知っていますか(.) 日本語で何?  
 Do you know 'overtime'? (.) What is it in Japanese?

*Example 5*

漢字がわかんない  
 I don't understand the *kanji*.

*Example 6*

Ah もう一度?

Ah, say it again.

When learners asked questions, as above, the exchange between a learner and a visitor was often relatively short, like Example 7:

*Example 7*

(dialogue continued from Example 2)

L: 日本語ではlazy何ですか 怠け者 怠け者 Ah え: (4)

V: 怠け者 怠け者

L: ありがとう

V:

L: What is 'lazy' in Japanese? 'namakemono'

V: 'namakemono'

L: 'namakemono' Ah well: (4) thanks

V: 'namakemono'

Although short, this is an example of a natural conversation. The learner asked a question unrelated to the given task and received an instant reply. This spontaneous interaction is just one of the positive aspects of VS that would rarely occur in traditional classroom settings with one teacher and many students in a class.

When it came to more complicated questions, their exchanges became longer:

*Example 8*

L: 残業(.)を? が? が(3)がだけ?を(.)をも[大丈夫ですかが]

V: 残業(.)が [残業を]

L: だけ?残業が]

V: 残業 残業を]することができますか(.)か(.)残業ができますか

L: [(笑) Vさん日本人]

V: [残業を(.) 残業が(笑)]日本語って難しいと思うよ

L: Overtime (.) 'o'? 'ga'? 'ga' (3) only 'ga'? 'o' (.) also [is it

V: overtime (.) 'ga' [over-

L: okay only 'ga' overtime 'ga']

V: time 'o' overtime] can you do (.) can you (.) can you do overtime

L: [(laughter) you are Japanese]

V: [overtime 'o' (.) overtime 'ga' (laughter)] I think Japanese is hard

In Example 8, the learner struggled to make a correct sentence with a potential verb, as potential verbs sometimes can take either a particle 'ga' or 'o', and she was not sure which she should use. She sought the visitor's help, but did not get an answer straight away. Native speakers are not normally aware of this type of grammatical point; therefore, it is not necessarily easy for them to answer grammar questions related to the Japanese language. Example 8 is a noteworthy example. The visitor's struggle led the learner to tease the visitor, saying 'you are Japanese'. This comment is indeed an example of a natural conversation.

Learners sometimes expanded their conversation with comments and questions, which were not necessary to complete the given task. The phrases underlined in Examples 9–12 are examples of such comments and questions:

*Example 9*

L: 夜に働きますか [[笑]]なんで?  
 V: できません[[笑]]

L: Would you work at night? [[laughter]] Why?  
 V: I cannot [[laughter]]

*Example 10*

L: 日曜日に: はたらかなくちゃいけない(.)いいですか [[笑]]  
 V: うん いいです[が]

L: お金のために[[笑]]  
 V: んばります(笑) [[笑]]どうして知っているのその言葉

L: On Sunday: you must work (.) is it okay [[laughter]]  
 V: yes it's okay [I will work

L: for money [[laughter]]  
 V: hard (laughter) [[laughter]] why do you know such an

L:  
 V: expression

In Example 9, the learner asked a further question, and Example 10 includes a further comment made by the learner. These are also good examples of natural interaction. This type of question/comment sometimes led to a longer dialogue:

*Example 11*

L: 夜に: 働け: ますか Ah [[なぜで]すか  
 V: 働け (.) 働きたくありません [[働き] え:

L: Ah (2) [[遅くまで]ではないんですけど  
 V: 私は寝たいです [[I want to] あ: わかりました

L: (笑) Okay                    Oh わかりました ありがとうございます  
 V:                    働けます

L: Can you: work: at night:                    Ah [why]  
 V:                    can (.) I do not want to    [work] well: I want

L:                    Ah (2) it's not [till late]                    (laughter) Okay  
 V: to sleep                    [I want to] Oh I see                    I can work

L: Oh, I see. Thank you very much.  
 V:

In this case, the learner received a negative answer from the visitor, and then began negotiating with the visitor to get a positive outcome. These data clearly show that natural interactions are possible even in 'mock' situations.

Another example of a natural interaction is shown below, which is slightly different from the above examples in terms of its nature.

### Example 12

L: あなたは (2) 働い (.) 働く (.) あ:で[働かない]はた (.) らか (.) なくちゃ  
 V:                    [働かなくちゃいけない]

L:                    (笑) 長すぎる:                    ない  
 V: なくちゃ    はい                    長いね狭いね

L: you (2) work (.) work (.) Ah: [not work] wo (.) rk (.) must    (laughter)  
 V:                    [must work]                    must

L: too long:                    no [space]  
 V: yes                    long short

In Example 12, the learner struggled to say 'must work', which required a relatively long phrase in Japanese. She finally managed it and tried to write it down on a task sheet. In the above exchange, 'too long' and 'long' refer

to the length of the required phrase and 'short' and 'no space' refer to the blank space given on the task sheet.

The nature of this exchange is noteworthy as neither participant made these comments from the perspective of their assigned roles (i.e. 'learner' or 'visitor'). Rather, both of them commented on a deficiency of the learning materials and commented on the target phrase (meta-language). We believe that the native speaker's presence encouraged the learner to express her own opinion.

#### 4.1.2 Use of English

The following two situations were identified regarding the use of English (underlined): (1) an extended question related to the given tasks (Examples 13 and 14); (2) having a chat unrelated to the given tasks (Examples 15 and 16).

##### Example 13

L: What's the difference between 働きます and 仕事します?

V: (.) Same

L: What's the difference between 'hatarakimasu' and 'shigoto shimasu'?

V: (.)

L:

V: Same

##### Example 14

V: あの: アイロンかけてくれますか かけません

L: あ: かけません How do

V: [Ah] 使い方がわかりません 使い方

L: you say 'I: don't know'[do I] つか

V: が (.) わかりません

L: 使い方 わかりません (.) 使い方がわかりません

- V: Well: would you iron? No [Ah]  
 L: Ah: no How do you say 'I: don't know' [do I]  
 V: I do not know how to use it how to use I (.) do not know  
 L: use how to use  
 V:  
 L: do not know (.) I do not know how to use it

Examples 13 and 14 were about something the learners did not know. Questions that the learners needed to ask may have been too complicated to ask in Japanese; therefore, they chose English to do so. When the participants had a chat unrelated to the given task, English was often used.

#### Example 15

- V: あとけがした ACL (2) ACLってわかる? ACL  
 L: Okay Ah broken knee? (1) oh  
 V: ACL ah ligament  
 L: Yeah  
 V: And I got injured ACL (2) Do you know 'ACL'?  
 L: Okay Ah broken knee?  
 V: ACL ACL ah ligament  
 L: (1) oh Yeah

A visitor began Example 15 saying 'I got injured' in Japanese and next revealed that this injury occurred to his ACL, the anterior cruciate ligament in the knee. The visitor may have judged that the Japanese term for ACL (*zenjūji jintai danretsu* in Japanese) was beyond the learner's comprehension, so he switched to English and offered more details about the injury. The learner's immediate response, 'Yeah', indicated that she understood the English explanation; therefore, the visitor's judgement seemed right.

The following is another example of an interaction that was unrelated to the given task; however, when the learner found something he could say in Japanese, he switched to Japanese.

*Example 16*

V: Especially it is pretty hard when I like a (.) take an English test. Hard to  
L:

V: spell. Ah: Oh true  
L: Even my spelling at English is terrible Yeah yeah (1)

V: Pretty hard. Even like Kanji, ah:  
L: yeah I struggle to spell English.

V: 難しい  
L: (laughter) yeah yeah 漢字:難しい Yeah

V: Especially it is pretty hard when I like a (.) take an English test. Hard to  
L:

V: spell. Ah: Oh true  
L: Even my spelling at English is terrible Yeah yeah (1)

V: Pretty hard. Even like Kanji, ah:  
L: yeah I struggle to spell English.

V: difficult  
L: (laughter) yeah yeah kanji:difficult Yeah

When the learner started using Japanese, the visitor also responded in Japanese. It appears that the extent of Japanese spoken in VS is influenced by the frequency in which learners use the target language (for example, the more the learner uses Japanese, the more their partner will use it). This may be because the Japanese language proficiency of our learners is (much) lower than the English language proficiency of our visitors.



#### **4.2 Findings of questionnaire-based surveys**

This section reports on the two questionnaire-based surveys administered to the learners and visitors. The questionnaires were distributed at the end of Session B and took about five minutes for the learners and visitors to complete. (See the Appendices.)

The main questions to the learners related to:

- information about themselves (age, gender, language background, how long they had learned Japanese and their purpose for learning Japanese);
- past experiences of their participation in VS, and when they asked for help from native speakers; and
- cultural exchanges with native speakers.

The main questions to the visitors related to:

- information about themselves (age, gender, English learning experiences, their length of stay in New Zealand, and how much longer they will stay in New Zealand);
- the reasons why they participated in the VS;
- the learners' use of Japanese during activities/tasks;
- their own use of English.

Spaces for general comments were given after each question.

The questionnaires were completed by 17 learners and 12 visitors. Of these participants, 15 (88.2%) of 17 learners and 10 (83.3%) of 12 visitors answered all of the questions.

##### **4.2.1 Learners' responses**

The VS were positively assessed by all learners. Most of the participants (learners and visitors) evaluated VS as fun and useful experiences. Although one learner commented that one of the VS was an anxious experience (i.e. 'it was a bit scary at the beginning'), other comments from learners focused positively on engagements with native speakers, enhancements in learning

from interactions with native speakers, and the novelty of having non-textbook conversations. Analysis of these data suggests: (1) these findings reflect those of other studies (Akagi, 2011; Kamata, 2003; Yokosuka, 2003), which conclude that their VS led to increases in learners' motivation; (2) our earlier view of VS conducted in previous years at the University of Waikato appears to have been accurate — that VS were well-received by learners as well as visitors.

Of the 17 learner questionnaire participants, 13 (76.4%) indicated that they had had opportunities to converse in Japanese with: native speakers of Japanese; exchange students; homestay students; Japanese friends; peers/friends from their previous paper; or when visiting Japan. However, the frequency and duration of Japanese discourse conducted in such situations are questionable. Therefore, it seems that VS can fill this gap in learners' communicative competence by allowing learners to have access to native speakers on a regular basis, for a set length of time, and in an authentic, yet controlled environment.

Learners were asked to evaluate the adequacy of activities in VS (Figure 4.1 below).

Most learners evaluated the activities as easy or adequate, so it seems that the activities were in accordance with the purpose of practising the items that they had previously learned. However, as was shown in some comments, it was felt that some vocabulary was difficult and that it was challenging to make suitable sentences in Japanese. Despite these comments, the activities seemed to be suitable enough to be all fully completed by the learners.

The learners were asked to indicate how they felt about doing activities with native speakers in VS in general. The responses are summarised in Figure 4.2.

VS in general were considered as good or very good experiences by learners; a comment such as '[visitors] helped to say things you don't know' indicates that VS provided good opportunities for the participants to practise the target language.

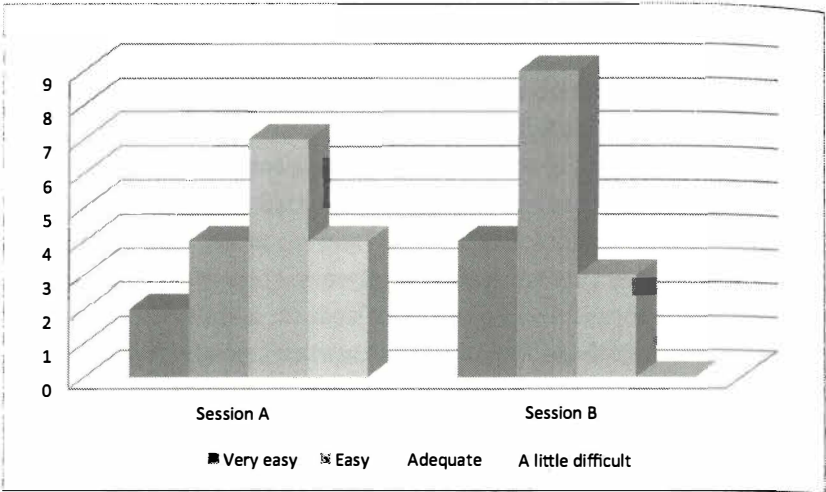


Figure 4.1: Ease/difficulty of the activities that the learners did with Japanese native speakers in VS

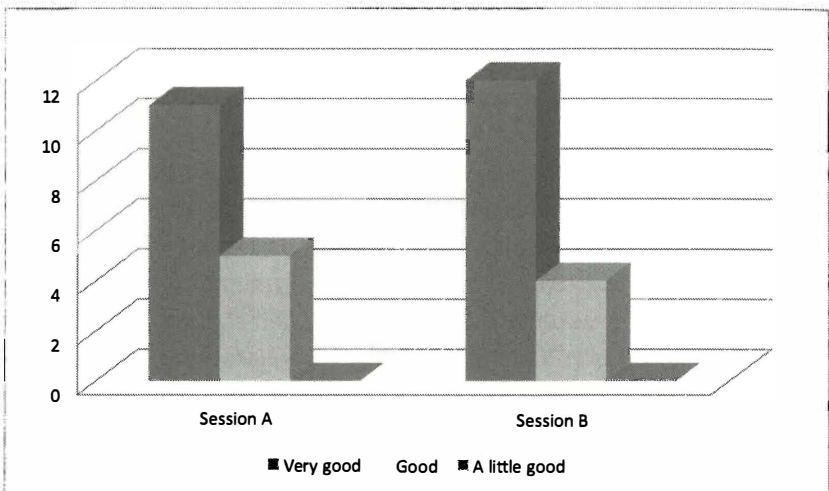


Figure 4.2: Doing activities with native speakers in general

Most learners asked the visitors for help when they had problems during VS. How often they asked for help is indicated in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: How often the participants asked the Japanese partner for help**

Frequency	Number of responses
Very often/quite often	6
Occasionally	10
Very seldom/never	2

Of the 17 respondents, 15 (88.2%) indicated that they had asked for help during the VS (one participant ticked both categories 'Very often/quite often' and 'Occasionally'). As indicated from their comments, they had asked for help when they encountered vocabulary they did not know or understand, and/or when they had difficulty in structuring sentences.

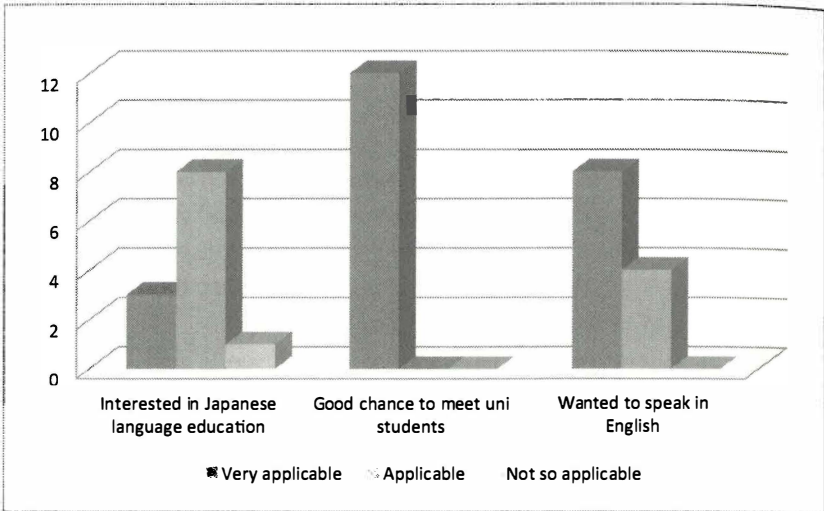
Of the 11 (64.7%) respondents who indicated that it was not easy for them to write/speak sentences in Japanese during the activities in VS, they were asked what they did in such situations. They could select one or more options from four categories. There were 27 responses (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2: What the participants did when it was difficult to write/speak in sentences in Japanese during VS**

Action	Number of responses
Asked the Japanese partner	10
Checked the textbook/dictionary	8
Checked with classmates	8
Have a cheat sheet I can read	1

#### 4.2.2 Visitors' responses

As for the Japanese native speakers, 10 (83.3%) of the 12 visitors (no responses from two participants) also positively assessed the VS. The reasons they had participated in the VS are summarised in Figure 4.3.



*Figure 4.3: The reasons why the visitors participated in VS*

Of the 12 respondents who answered this question, all indicated that they had participated in the VS because they wanted to meet university students and speak in English, and most of them (91.6%) were also interested in Japanese language education. For the visitors, it appears that VS can provide great opportunities to meet students of a similar age.

The visitors were asked to report if they had used only Japanese during the VS. Four (33.3%) indicated they had. Of the other respondents, the reasons they used English are summarised in Table 4.3. They could select one or more options from four categories. Ten responses were given.

**Table 4.3: The reasons why the Japanese native speakers used English during VS**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
The student did not know the meanings of Japanese vocabulary.	5
The student could not make a sentence in Japanese.	2
The student did not know how to pronounce <i>kanji</i> .	1
Visitor wanted to speak in English.	2

Of the 17 learners and 12 visitors, all learners and eight (66.6%) of the visitors indicated they used English during their VS. Some of the reasons provided by the visitors for using English during their VS were in reaction to the learners' responses; i.e. because of the learners' vocabulary difficulties (Examples 2–4 in Section 4.1.1, and Example 13 in Section 4.1.2) and difficulty in making sentences in Japanese (Example 14 in Section 4.1.2). However, two of the visitors (16.6%) indicated that their reason for using English was because they had wanted to speak English.

The visitors were asked to what extent they understood the English spoken by the learners during the VS. Of the 12 respondents, eight (66.6%) indicated they understood most of the conversation, while four (33.3%) indicated they could understand only half of the conversation. These four participants nevertheless managed such situations by using dictionaries and asking other visitors for assistance.

The questionnaire-based data show that the learners evaluated the benefits of VS as a good opportunity to have vocabulary and grammar checked, and as a good way to encourage their use of the target language. From the data, while it seems that the learners benefited more (i.e. practised their Japanese) from interactions with their Japanese partners, the visitors also seemed to benefit when they used English. This indicates that both parties recognise that even though they are learning different languages, they are learning from each other. Tanaka (2006) emphasises the importance of learners and visitors coming together as equals, and it is our belief that we managed to keep this equal balance during the VS at

our university. An unintended effect, other than language learning, was also found from the questionnaire-based data: learners and visitors had exchanged social contact details with the intention of meeting each other, exchanging opinions about Japanese food and discussing their hobbies together.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The results of our questionnaire-based survey confirm our earlier impression that both learners and visitors enjoyed their VS. Learners showed appreciation for the opportunity to be able to ask native speakers questions when they needed help. These findings are in line with those reports from other studies (for example, Akagi, 2011, 2013; Muraoka, 1992).

One of the main purposes of VS was for learners to have 'authentic' conversations with native speakers, by doing tasks together which require a high level of language, social and cultural skills, such as organising an occasion like a job interview. Although the learners in our VS were pre-intermediate and their vocabulary and grammar knowledge were limited, the audio-recorded data of this study showed that the learners used Japanese not only for doing textbook-based tasks, but also for occasionally asking extended questions and making comments spontaneously.

However, VS may present unexpected issues to the participants; for example, learners might suddenly forget what to say, get confused with certain grammar points or not comprehend the message the visitors are trying to convey. Incidentally, these 'accidents' (Yokosuka, 2003, p. 349) encouraged learners to use Japanese to spontaneously solve the issues, which, as noted by Yokosuka, would rarely occur in traditional class settings.

Akagi (2011, 2013) also referred to such unexpected issues in VS, and observed the effort of learners to solve them. Akagi argued that extra activities like that were indeed somehow equivalent to the 'performance activities' which Neustupny (1991) highly valued. Moreover, Akagi positively valued VS, even with learners of lower levels, as he found that the VS were

used as an opportunity for learners to recognise their own language ability; the learners also acknowledged all sorts of aspects of native speakers' Japanese, such as variations of expressions, speech intonation and the ways of expressing their own opinions in Japanese. The instructors in Akagi's study also reported that their students were strongly motivated to talk in Japanese, and some students became more talkative than usual.

We can see similar findings in the Nakai (2003) study as well. Nakai reported that one of her students commented that a VS gave them far better interactions than just practising with fellow learners in a normal class setting. We cannot know exactly what was meant by 'better interactions', as no further information was provided about the comment. We can only guess that the student might have had natural and spontaneous interactions, which the participants in our VS as well as Akagi's and Yokosuka's experienced.

Based on the findings from our study as well as the reports from the previous studies, unexpectedness seems to be an inevitable but positive aspect of VS, as it can work as a trigger for natural interactions. If this indeed is an inherent component of VS, VS should be carried out with learners at all language levels; therefore, as was found in our VS, natural interactions are possible even with learners at lower levels.

A few other issues were observed. Firstly, learners at lower levels rarely, if at all, had extended conversations; instead, they tended to have conversations based only on the given tasks (see Example 1 in Section 4.1.1). Secondly, no matter the language level, the learners' extended use of Japanese cannot be guaranteed all of the time; it may be dependent on the personality of learners. Thirdly, we noticed that learners sometimes said something in English which, considering their Japanese language skills, they could have said in Japanese; it is possible that the learners chose English because their visitors wanted to use English.



## 5.1 Learners

Almost all of the learners said that the given tasks were easy or adequate. This suggests that we could have provided additional tasks to promote more authentic interaction opportunities; for example, suggestions for learners to ask questions or make requests in Japanese. For instance, to say ‘What is *x* in Japanese?’ or ‘Excuse me, please write *kanji*’ and so on in Japanese. As seen in Section 4.1.1, some learners actually delivered this type of exchange voluntarily, but pre-intermediate learners may need extra encouragement to say something like this, as they tended to stick to the given tasks.

Nakai (2003) gave an ‘asking questions’ task in her VS (for example, questions about vocabulary) to improve students’ conversational competence. Her students commented that such tasks provided good opportunities for natural interactions. Although Nakai’s students were intermediate learners, this type of task should also work with learners at lower levels, as long as the instructors carefully prepare the level of questions for them.

To create more authentic interaction opportunities, it might also be useful to introduce icebreaker questions at the beginning of VS — to ask their names, ages, hobbies, etc. — as it could help learners prepare themselves for the main task. We noticed that learners in our VS were so excited about being with Japanese visitors that many of them did not properly pay attention to the instructions of the given task. An ‘icebreaker question’ task could work as a warming-up (and calming-down) exercise.

Another thing we could do as instructors is to frequently and actively encourage the use of Japanese during VS. The recorded VS revealed that there were some learners who at times said things in English that they could have easily said in Japanese, but if we encourage their use of Japanese, perhaps even less-confident learners will try to say something in Japanese, if it is simple enough (see Example 16 in Section 4.1.2).

## 5.2 Visitors

Responses for the questionnaire-based survey revealed that many visitors indicated that they had participated in the VS because they wanted to use English. Two of them stated their reason for using English during the VS was because they wanted to speak in English. We verbally asked the visitors to use Japanese prior to VS. Perhaps we should have given them an instruction sheet emphasising the importance of the use of Japanese. We have to note that the Japanese visitors participated in our VS free of charge because our university does not have funding to pay for their participation. Therefore, it is difficult for us to completely forbid the use of English in our VS. To be fair to the visitors, we should consider setting aside a short time — for example, five minutes every session — for their English conversation, and this should be mentioned beforehand. This type of arrangement would shorten Japanese practice time, but it would be the most realistic solution to cater to both groups of students in our VS.

## 6 CONCLUSION

We have been holding VS for over a decade, but have never previously methodologically examined their benefits in detail. In this study, we collected two types of data, audio-recorded VS conversations and questionnaire responses, for the purpose of investigating our VS. Those data showed that both learners and visitors enjoyed our VS, and that most of them practised their target language with its native speakers. This would probably not have happened unless the VS had occurred. Therefore, we could say that this study highlights the benefits of our VS, and supports its continued provision to pre-intermediate learners with non-teacher-trained native-speaking visitors.

We used tasks provided by a textbook which were practised under 'fictional' situations. Although we admit that less-confident learners tended to do only the given tasks, our data showed that learners fully completed the tasks and also experienced authentic interactions in Japanese from time to time.

**NOTES**

1. Muraoka (1992) collected conversational data from his VS, and showed the problem-solution strategies that learners used.
2. A few studies have dealt with learners of lower levels. Honda and Ishimura (2003) carried out a questionnaire-based survey and interview, and reported the opinions of Japanese language teachers on VS with beginners. Seki (2007) tried out VS with beginners, focusing on the process of building relations between learners and the community, and described her experiences.
3. We normally do not do VS in either first- or third-year classes. The reasons are that it is too challenging for first-year learners to communicate with native speakers, and there is a timetable clash with third-year learners.
4. The symbols used for transcription are as follows:  
 (n) length of pause; for example (3) means three-second pause  
 (.) very short pause  
 : long vowel  
 ? rising intonation  
 [ ] overlap

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**APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNERS**

Thank you very much for your participation. This questionnaire is to ask your opinions about our tutorials where the native speakers of Japanese were invited to participate. The questionnaire will take about 5–10 minutes to complete.

**Part 1: Tell me about yourself**

Please tick appropriate boxes  or write comments in spaces provided.

1.1 You are ...

Female

Male

1.2 Your age ...

17–20

21–25

26–30

30+

1.3 Your first language ...

English

Māori

Other (Please specify below)

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1.4 How many years have you learned Japanese?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

or \_\_\_\_\_ semesters

1.5 What is your main purpose for learning Japanese?

Towards a degree with Japanese as my major


General interest

Other (Please specify below)

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 Please add a comment if you like

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## Part 2: Aspects of your Japanese learning

Please tick appropriate boxes  or write comments in spaces provided.

2.1 Have you ever had opportunities to talk with Japanese native speakers in Japanese in the past (excluding this paper)?

Yes  No

 Please add a comment if you like

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2.2 Do you think inviting Japanese native speakers to your class was a good experience for you?

Yes  No

 Please add a comment if you like

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2.3 Were the activities that you did (last week and this week) with the native Japanese speakers easy for you to carry out?

2.3.1 Last week ('Let's employ a good Japanese teacher! [「～たことがありますか」 etc.]')

very easy	easy	adequate	a little difficult	not at all easy
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

 Please add a comment if you like

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2.3.2 This week ('Partner-searching game [「～てくれますか」]')

very easy	easy	adequate	a little difficult	not at all easy
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

 Please add a comment if you like

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2.4 Doing tasks/activities in pairs with the native speakers of Japanese in general was ...

2.4.1 Last week ('Let's employ a good Japanese teacher! [「～たことがありますか」 etc.]')

very good	good	a little good	not at all good
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## 2.4.2 This week ('Partner-searching game [「～てくれますか」])

very good	good	a little good	not at all good
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 2.5 Please provide reason/s for your response to Question 2.4.

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## 2.6 During the activities, did you ask your Japanese partner for help when you had problems?

Yes  (→Please go to Question 2.7)No  (→Please go to Question 2.8)

## 2.7 How often did you ask your Japanese partner for help?

very often/quite often	occasionally	very seldom/never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

 Please add a comment if you like

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## 2.8 Please provide your reason/s for not asking your Japanese partner for help? Please write below.

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2.9 During the activities, was it easy for you to write/speak in sentences in Japanese?

Yes  No


If, 'NO' to Question 2.9, what did you do then?

Checked your textbook/dictionary

Checked with your classmate

Asked your Japanese partner

Other (Please specify below)

 Please add a comment if you like

### Part 3: Cultural exchanges

Please tick  one or more boxes.

3.1 You had a chat about which of the following topics with your Japanese partner ...

Japanese *anime*

Japanese *manga*

Japanese pop stars

Hobbies

Japanese cities


Japanese food

Meeting again next time

Other (please specify below)

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 Please add a comment if you like

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3.2 Which of the following contact information did you exchange with your Japanese partner?

Email addresses

Other Social Networking Service (SNS) ID accounts

Phone numbers

Other (please specify below)

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 Please add a comment if you like

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3.3 Would you like Japanese native speakers to come to your classes again?

Yes  No

Please provide reason/s for your response




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Thank you very much for your participation.

## APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR VISITORS

アンケート

日本人学生のみなさまへ

先週と今週は日本語の授業に参加していただきありがとうございました。授業後の感想などのご意見を伺いたく、以下のアンケートにお答えいただけますよう、お願いいたします。アンケートの所要時間は約十分程度です。あてはまる箇所にチェック☑やあてはまる番号に○をし、\_\_\_\_や空欄に回答をご記入ください。

**Part 1:** 今回の授業に参加したきっかけは...(あてはまる番号に○をしてください。)

1.1 もともと日本語教育に興味があったから

とても当てはまる	当てはまる	あまり当てはまらない	当てはまらない
4	3	2	1

1.2 同年代のワイカト大学生と交流が持てる良い機会だから

とても当てはまる	当てはまる	あまり当てはまらない	当てはまらない
4	3	2	1

## 1.3 英語を話したかったから

とても当てはまる	当てはまる	あまり当てはまらない	当てはまらない
4	3	2	1

✍ 日本語の授業に参加したきっかけについてご意見があれば、どうぞご記入ください。

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**Part 2: 日本語の授業で与えられた課題をしている時、ペアになった学生と...**

2.1 日本語だけで会話をした。

はい  いいえ

2.2 2.1の質問で「はい」と答えた方はPart 3の質問にお進みください。

2.1の質問で「いいえ」と答えた方は以下の質問にお答えください。

日本語だけで会話をしなかった理由にあてはまるものを選んでください

(複数回答可)

ペアを組んだ学生が...

日本語の単語の意味がわからなかったから

漢字の発音の仕方がわからなかったから

日本語で文を作れなかったから

その他(以下に詳細をお書きください)

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✍ ペアになった学生についてご意見があれば、どうぞご記入ください。

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**Part 3:** 今回、日本語を学ぶ大学生と英語で会話した方は以下の質問にお答えください。

3.1 今回、日本語を学ぶ大学生と英語で話してみて、会話の内容をどのくらい理解しましたか。

全部理解した ほぼ理解した	半分くらい理解した	あまり理解しなかった 全く理解しなかった
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.2 今回、日本語を学ぶ大学生と英語で話した時、自分が言いたいことをきちんと伝えられましたか。

はい                       いいえ   
(→Part 4にお進みください。)

3.3 質問3.2で「いいえ」と答えた方にお聞きます。それはどうしてだと思いますか。

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3.4 質問3.2で「いいえ」と答えた方にお聞きします。その状況のとき、あなたはどのようにしましたか。

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**Part 4: 日本語の授業に参加してみても...**

4.1 日本語の授業に参加してよかった。

はい  いいえ

4.2 こういう機会があったら、また参加したい。

はい  いいえ

それはどうしてですか。


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 日本語の授業に参加してみてものご意見があれば、どうぞご記入ください。

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**Part 5: あなたのことについて教えてください。**

## 5.1 性別

女性  男性 

## 5.2 年齢

18-20 21-25 26+ 

## 5.3 どのくらい英語を勉強していますか。

\_\_\_\_\_年間

## 5.4 ニュージーランドに来てどのくらいですか。

\_\_\_\_\_週・ \_\_\_\_\_月・ \_\_\_\_\_年

## 5.5 今回のニュージーランドの滞在予定期間はどのくらいですか。

\_\_\_\_\_週・ \_\_\_\_\_月・ \_\_\_\_\_年

ご協力ありがとうございました。

**APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR VISITORS  
(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

Dear Japanese students,

Thank you very much for participating in our Japanese classes at the University of Waikato. The questionnaire is to ask your opinions about our classes where you participated. The questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to complete. Please tick appropriate box(es) or write comments in spaces provided.



**Part 1: You participated in the Japanese classes, because ...**

1.1 you were interested in teaching and learning of Japanese as a second/additional language.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

1.2 it is a great opportunity for me to have contact with Waikato Uni students.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

1.3 I just wanted to speak English.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

 Please add a comment if you like

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**Part 2: During the task in Japanese classes...**

2.1 You and your partner talked only in Japanese.

Yes  No

(If you answered 'YES' please go to Part 3)

2.2 If you answered 'NO' to Question 2.1, please choose your reason(s) below.

Because your partner . . .

didn't know Japanese vocabulary

didn't know how to read *kanji*


couldn't compose sentences in Japanese

Other (Please specify below)

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 Please add a comment about your partner if you like

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**Part 3: If you talked to students in English, please answer the questions below.**

3.1 How much did you understand the conversations you had?

all or most of the conversation	half of the conversation	a little or very little of the conversation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.2 Did you manage to convey what you really wanted to say in English?

Yes  No

(If you answered 'YES' please go to Part 4.)

**3.3** If you answered 'NO' to Question 3.2, why? Please write your reasons below.

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**3.4** If you answered 'NO' to Question 3.2, what did you do? Please write your reasons below.

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**Part 4: After participation . . .**

**4.1** I am glad that I participated in the Japanese classes.

Yes       No

**4.2** I wish to participate again.

Yes       No

Why do you think so?


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 Please add any comments about your participation in Japanese classes if you like.

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### Part 5: Let us know about yourself.

#### 5.1 Sex

Female  Male

#### 5.2 Age

18–20

21–25

26+

#### 5.3 How long have you been learning English?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

#### 5.4 How long have you been in New Zealand?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks • \_\_\_\_\_ months • \_\_\_\_\_ years

#### 5.5 How long are you going to stay in New Zealand in total?

\_\_\_\_\_ weeks • \_\_\_\_\_ months • \_\_\_\_\_ years

Thank you very much for your time.