

# English-Speaking Returnees in Japan: An Exploratory Study at One University<sup>1</sup>

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While the problems experienced by returnees in readjusting to life in Japan have been the focus of considerable research, the returnee issue has yet to receive much attention in the language teaching literature. This paper reports the results of a small-scale questionnaire and interview study which mainly addressed the issue of providing separate English classes for returnees in a new Intensive English Program for highly proficient university students. Impetus for the study was the concern of some Japanese faculty members that separate classes may result in social and psychological damage to returnees. Results of the study indicated that views of both returnees and non-returnees were mixed on the issue of separate classes, with a larger percentage opposed to separate classes for returnees. This underscores the importance of issues other than language proficiency in curriculum development.

## 日本の大学における帰国生の教育に関する一考察

帰国生が日本の生活に戻る際に経験する諸問題に関しては、相当数の研究や調査で取り上げられている。それにもかかわらず、言語教育の分野では、未だにあまり注目されていないのが現状である。この論文は、「習熟度の高い学生のための新しい『集中英語講座』に帰国生のための特別クラスを設けるべきか」という問題に関して行ったアンケートと面接形式の調査の報告である。「特別クラスを設けた場合、帰国生たちに生活面や精神面でダメージを及ぼす恐れがあるかもしれない」という一部の日本人教授の懸念が、この問題を研究しはじめるきっかけとなった。研究の結果、「帰国生の特別クラス案」に対しては全体的に反対意見のほうが多かったが、その中でも帰国生とそうでない学生との間で、微妙な意見の食い違いが見られた。このことはカリキュラム開発において、言語の習熟度以外にも考慮されるべき重要な問題があることを示していると考えられる。

This study is exploratory in nature, and our primary aim is to raise an issue which we feel merits attention: the role and status of English-speaking returnees at Japanese universities. While the *kikokushijo mondai*, or 'returnee problem', has been discussed extensively in Japanese, and several excellent studies have been carried out in English, there has as yet been little attention paid to the issues involving English language teaching (ELT) and English-speaking returnees. From among the issues of relevance to returnees and ELT, this paper reports the results of a small-scale study intended to assess returnee and non-returnee attitudes towards the establishment of separate English classes for returnees in a new Intensive English Program (IEP) at Kwansei Gakuin University (KGU). We first discuss the IEP and how our interest in returnees developed, followed by a brief account of the research in English on returnees. Following this, we discuss our study, which included a short questionnaire and interview. Although the results of this study are no doubt tentative, we hope to succeed in bringing this important issue to the forefront.

#### The Intensive English Program at Kwansei Gakuin

Our interest in returnees developed in the course of designing and implementing the curriculum for a new IEP at KGU. The IEP was intended to provide triple the usual number of contact hours in English per week (i.e., six 45-minute periods instead of two) for no more than the top thirty students from each of the seven departments at KGU (Business Administration, Economics, Humanities, Law, Science, Sociology, and Theology). Each year a new intake of first-year students would begin the program in their second semester. The first three semesters of the IEP would adopt an integrated skills approach (primarily emphasizing listening and speaking), after which advanced electives (in specific skill or content areas) would be offered. Prospective candidates were required to take both a TOEFL and an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI).

One aspect of the IEP which we were unable to change was that each department was to have its own section. We considered this a disadvantage due to the resulting situation of having a wide range of proficiencies in each section, in one case 210 points on the TOEFL. We would have preferred dividing sections by proficiency level and not department, which would have produced a narrower proficiency range within each class. This problem was exacerbated by the presence of English-speaking returnees (i.e., students who had lived and studied in English-speaking environments for a year or more), whose proficiency

in English was generally significantly higher than that of non-returnees.

When we suggested the possibility of separate classes for returnees, two objections were raised by the Japanese faculty members overseeing the development of the IEP. The first was of a practical nature, that is, it would be virtually impossible to coordinate the schedules of all the returnees because of departmental conflicts. While unfortunate, this constraint was nonetheless not difficult to understand. The second objection, though, struck us as rather odd: We were told that by instituting separate classes for returnees we would likely further the social and psychological damage experienced by returnees upon their return to Japan. This was something we had not taken into consideration as part of curriculum development, but it seemed that the Japanese faculty took this matter quite seriously, thus provoking our interest. That is, it was quite clear that in this context there were issues more important than language proficiency which were to inform curriculum development.

#### The *Kikokushijō Mondai* ('Returnee Problem')

While the issue of returnees has received virtually no attention in the language teaching literature, the *kikokushijō mondai* ('returnee problem') has been the subject of considerable debate in other circles. According to Goodman,

... the word [kikokushijō] seems to have been invented by the Japanese Ministry of Education in the late 1960s when the government began to consider policy for returnee children. It is formed from the combination of four Chinese characters which, individually, mean 'return' (ki), 'country' (koku), 'child' or 'boy' (shi), and 'girl' (jo), but Monbushō [the Ministry of Education] appears never to have defined the term accurately. (1993, p. 10)

White (1992, p. 26) notes that the "number of school-age children (6-15 years) returning to Japan each year has risen from 2,000 in the late 1960s to over 10,000 in 1985" and is likely to continue rising. Why should this be a problem? Kidder (1992) maintains that returnees are marked physically, behaviorally, and interpersonally: they wear different clothes, have different hairstyles, have more animated gestures and facial expressions, don't use proper *keigo* ('polite speech'), and are too direct. In short, they are different, and it seems that being different in Japan is not a good thing. Kidder (1992, p. 384) also notes that "Japan is a relatively homogeneous and tight society, marked by beliefs about

Japanese uniqueness that place people from other cultures on the outside." Along these lines, Goodman (1993, p. 60) makes reference to *Nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese uniqueness) as a genre which maintains that "Japan, and the Japanese society are unique in the world—topographically, linguistically, culturally, even anatomically." (For more on *Nihonjinron*, see Dale, 1986; Miller, 1982.)

Attitudes towards nonconformity are reflected in the well-known Japanese proverbs 'The nail that sticks up gets hammered down' and 'Tall trees catch more wind.' For returnees, this can result in being subjected to *ijime* ('bullying') at the hands of their classmates, and even being referred to as *gaijin* ('foreigner') by other Japanese. Kobayashi (1991) reports the case of a boy who, upon returning from the United States, was bullied by his classmates and told that "Americans belong in America" (p. 206). The boy eventually developed an ulcer, and his mother wrote a best-selling book describing her son's experience. In addition, since returnees often have attained higher levels of proficiency than their Japanese English teachers, they can represent a threat to them and thus are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment from teachers as well. To avoid such treatment, returnees often learn to hide their English proficiency by speaking 'Japlish' or *katakana* English. Kidder (1992, pp. 389-390) quotes one returnee as saying that

in first grade of junior high I spoke English naturally ... but as time went on [other students] got aggressive about my English ... so I tried to master the Japlish and learned to speak in those tones ... and after that my classmates were not so aggressive anymore.

The treatment returnees are subjected to has led White (1992, p. 2) to assert that returnees may "find themselves with permanently flawed identities or isolated within the group as functional but problematic or marginal members." This is a rather bleak portrayal of the plight of returnees, but is it really that bad?

Goodman (1993) notes that extreme views of returnee problems have spread as a result of media attention in cases of both homicide and suicide involving what is perceived as the inability of returnees to adapt to Japanese culture and language upon returning to Japan, but he argues that much of the bad press may be unwarranted. He conducted a questionnaire survey of 105 teachers at a private school in which about 25% of the students were returnees and found surprising results. While it was clear that returnees had problems, the teachers were divided as to what caused them and whether they were any worse than the problems

of non-returnee students. Responses fell into two categories, "those who stress the need for *kikokushijo* to adapt back to Japanese culture and those who believe that *kikokushijo* should be seen, and treated, as valuable national resources" (1993, p. 139). In addition to the teacher questionnaire, a questionnaire administered to 72 students, both returnees and non-returnees, found that some returnees did have problems readjusting, but, again, it was not clear whether these problems resulted from their overseas experience, or were any more severe than the problems of non-returnees. In sum, Goodman's findings were quite different than the bleak media portrayal of the plight of returnees. He points out that other research conducted by Japanese scholars has also found the assumption of returnees having greater problems to be unjustified, even concerning Japanese-language skills.

But Goodman also notes that returnees do indeed face some problems. Concerning attendance in regular (versus international) schools, Goodman found cases of returnees attempting to hide their experience overseas by adopting an exaggerated Japanese accent in their otherwise fluent English, and going out of their way to ask English teachers not to call on them in class or refer to their experience abroad. Goodman also found that

... teachers in international schools believe that teachers in Japanese schools punish returnees for their poor Japanese and for not using the correct terms of respect. Worst of all, they say, the children are bullied by jealous peers and even teachers, especially English-language teachers, who feel threatened by them. (1993, pp. 152-153)

And like some Japanese faculty members we encountered at KGU, Goodman reports that a number of Japanese scholars studying the returnee issue maintain that psychological damage can result when returnees are given special treatment by being separated into returnee-only classes.

### The Study

Given the conflicting accounts of the experiences of returnees cited above, we were interested in determining the views of returnees and non-returnees in our program concerning, among other things, preferences for separate classes for returnees. We think it is fair to say that had English proficiency been the only factor to consider, the choice would have been obvious. But it was clear to us that this was not the case. We decided to conduct an exploratory study involving a short

questionnaire administered to both returnees and non-returnees, and follow-up interviews with some of the returnees who completed the questionnaire.

*Subjects:* The departments of Law and Sociology were chosen for the study from among the seven departments represented because they had the highest percentage of returnees (approximately 40% in each class). Other departments had far fewer returnees, and one department (Science) had none. Questionnaires were administered to a total of 24 returnees and 32 non-returnees.

As far as English proficiency is concerned, it is instructive to consider the TOEFL and OPI scores for returnees and non-returnees. As mentioned above, all students were required to take a TOEFL and sit for an OPI. We assume most readers are familiar with the TOEFL. For the OPI, each student received two scores, one from a native-speaking English teacher (NS), the other from a Japanese English teacher (JT). A modified version of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) rating scale (scores ranging from 0-18) was employed in assessing oral proficiency in the course of approximately five-minute interviews. The same pair of raters assessed all applicants from a given department, and while there were problems with inter-rater reliability across departments, reliability was generally high for each pair of interviewers (Pearson's  $r > .85$ ).

Table 1 shows the mean TOEFL subscores and NS and JT scores for the OPI for returnees and non-returnees, and indicates that returnees scored significantly higher in all categories except reading. Differences for listening and the OPI were substantial. Since the IEP was to emphasize listening and speaking as much or more than other skills, the dif-

*Table 1*

Mean TOEFL subscores and OPI scores for returnees (n=24) and non-returnees (n=32), and ANOVA results

	Mean		F	Sig. of F
	Non-Returnee	Returnee		
TOEFL Listening	47.41	56.42	51.787	.000
TOEFL Grammar	49.46	54.21	16.126	.000
TOEFL Reading	50.24	52.29	3.819	.055
OPI 1	11.14	14.46	10.218	.002
OPI 2	10.43	14.75	27.914	.000

ferences in scores would normally be sufficient cause to establish at least two separate sections, one each for returnees and non-returnees.

*Questionnaire:* Again, our primary aim was to assess our students' attitudes towards having separate IEP classes for returnees because this was our most immediate concern in curriculum development. While scheduling separate classes was not an option for the initial year of the program, we felt the need to explore the issue further and perhaps make a case for separate classes for future years. To this end, a short questionnaire was constructed in Japanese (see Appendix for English translation) and administered at the end of the first semester of the IEP course. The questionnaire contained two sections, one each for returnees and non-returnees, in which slightly modified versions of the same questions were asked. There were items concerning the following issues: holding separate classes for returnees, the desirability of living abroad, differences between returnees and non-returnees, hesitation to use English, and returnees as helpful for non-returnees. There was also an optional open-ended item inviting further comments on returnees and non-returnees in the IEP.

Table 2 shows the summary statistics for the questionnaire responses of both groups, and Table 3 shows the ANOVA results for the question-

*Table 2*

Means, standard deviations, and mean differences  
for questionnaire responses

	Non-Returnee		Returnee		Mean difference
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Item 1 [Separate classes]	2.5484	1.4569	2.7197	1.4136	0.1713
Item 2 [Like to live abroad]	3.4688	1.3437	4.4517	0.8836	0.9829
Item 3 [Returnees different]	3.5000	1.3189	3.1667	1.3726	0.3333
Item 4 [Hesitate to use English]	3.2500	1.2952	3.0833	1.4116	0.1667
Item 5 [Returnee helpful]	4.4375	0.8007	2.9167	1.0180	1.5208

Table 3

ANOVA results for questionnaire responses

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
Item 1 [Separate classes]	.801	1	.801	.387	.537
Item 2 [Like to live abroad]	16.073	1	16.073	11.569	.001
Item 3 [Returnees different]	1.652	1	1.652	.902	.347
Item 4 [Hesitate to use English]	.275	1	.275	.150	.700
Item 5 [Returnee helpful]	31.871	1	31.871	38.822	.000

naire responses. As Table 3 shows, there were significant differences for only two of the five items: Item 2 (living abroad) and Item 5 (returnees as helpful). We will discuss each item below. However, we will also note that since the mean and standard deviation are not always the most representative measure of central tendency and dispersion for this type of data, we have also included tables for each item to provide a more balanced representation of the data (see Tables 4-8).

Table 4

Item 1 [Separate classes]

		Disagree			Agree		
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	Row Total
Non-Returnee	Count	10	8	3	6	4	31
	Row %	32.3	25.8	9.7	19.4	12.9	56.4
	Column %	58.8	72.7	42.9	42.9	66.7	
Returnee	Count	7	3	4	8	2	24
	Row %	29.2	12.5	16.7	33.3	8.3	43.6
	Column %	41.2	27.3	57.1	57.1	33.3	
Column Total		17	11	7	14	6	55
Column Percent		30.9	20.0	12.7	25.5	10.9	100.0



Table 5

## Item 2 [Like to live abroad]

		Disagree			Agree		
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	Row Total
Non-Returnee	Count	4	4	5	11	8	32
	Row %	12.5	12.5	15.6	34.4	25.0	57.1
	Column %	80.0	100.0	100.0	61.1	33.3	
Returnee	Count	1			7	16	24
	Row %	4.2			29.2	66.7	42.9
	Column %	20.0			38.9	66.7	
Column Total		5	4	5	18	24	56
Column Percent		8.9	7.1	8.9	32.1	42.9	100.0

A cursory glance at Table 2 reveals that for all but Item 2, mean scores clustered around 3.00, which would seem to indicate a lack of commitment on any of these issues. However, the frequency tables for each item show that this is not the case. For Item 1 (separate classes, see Table 4), 41.8% of the subjects in both groups were actually on the extreme ends of the scale, with only 12.7% non-committal. No clear pattern emerges here, although more students (50.9% versus 36.4%) disagree with the idea of having separate classes for returnees. Responses to Item 3 (see Table 6) indicate that both groups feel returnees are

Table 6

## Item 3 [Returnees different]

		Disagree			Agree		
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	Row Total
Non-Returnee	Count	5	1	6	13	13	32
	Row %	15.6	3.1	18.8	40.6	40.6	57.1
	Column %	55.6	25.0	46.2	72.2	72.2	
Returnee	Count	4	3	7	5	5	24
	Row %	16.7	12.5	29.2	20.8	20.8	42.9
	Column %	44.4	75.0	53.8	27.8	27.8	
Column Total		9	4	13	18	18	56
Column Percent		16.1	7.1	23.2	32.1	32.1	100.0

Table 7

## Item 4 [Hesitate to use English]

		Disagree			Agree		
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	Row Total
Non-Returnee	Count	5	3	8	8	5	32
	Row %	15.6	9.4	25.0	25.0	15.6	57.1
	Column %	50.0	42.9	80.0	80.0	62.5	
Returnee	Count	5	4	2	2	3	24
	Row %	20.8	16.7	8.3	8.3	12.5	42.9
	Column %	50.0	57.1	20.0	20.0	37.5	
Column Total		10	7	10	10	8	56
Column Percent		17.9	12.5	17.9	17.9	14.3	100.0

different than non-returnees, with this sentiment being slightly stronger among non-returnees (62.5 versus 41.6%), but the difference was not statistically significant. Results for Item 4 (see Table 7) should come as no surprise to anyone who has spent time teaching in Japan: a majority of returnees (54.2%) and half of the non-returnees (50%) agreed that they were hesitant to speak English in front of their classmates. However, it is a bit surprising that 25% of the non-returnees and 37.5% of the returnees indicated that they were not hesitant to do so.

As noted above, there were significant differences for two of the five

Table 8

## Item 5 [Returnees helpful]

		Disagree			Agree		
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	Row Total
Non-Returnee	Count		1	3	9	19	32
	Row %		3.1	9.4	28.1	59.4	57.1
	Column %		16.7	20.0	75.0	90.5	
Returnee	Count	2	5	12	3	2	24
	Row %	8.3	20.8	50.0	12.5	8.3	42.9
	Column %	100.0	83.3	80.0	25.0	9.5	
Column Total		2	6	15	12	21	56
Column Percent		3.6	10.7	26.8	21.4	37.5	100.0

items on the questionnaire. For Item 2, a majority of both groups expressed a desire to either live abroad again or live abroad for the first time (see Table 5). The difference is that while returnees were almost unanimous in their agreement (95.9%), not as many non-returnees were so sure (59.4%). This may indicate that whatever the difficulties of readjustment may be, living abroad is an experience the returnees would not want to give up. It may also indicate, as Goodman maintains, that returnees' problems have been exaggerated, and that the stigma of being a returnee is not such a bad prospect to the non-returnees. The other item which produced significant differences was Item 5 (see Table 8). While only 20.8% of returnees perceived themselves as helpful for non-returnees, 87.5% of non-returnees felt that this was the case. Whether this is an instance of humility (real or feigned) on the part of returnees is not clear, but such a strong sentiment among non-returnees could be one argument for not splitting the two groups.

On the open-ended question, few returnees commented, but a number of non-returnees took the time to write additional comments. Several non-returnees noted that the level difference made the class difficult for them, less challenging for returnees, and difficult for the teachers as well. Several non-returnees also commented that they felt stimulated by the presence of returnees, but the experience wasn't always easy. As one non-returnee put it, "Sometimes I get culture shock from them. It's a good stimulus." There were no negative comments concerning the presence of returnees in the class. On the contrary, non-returnees pointed out that having a mixed class made things more interesting, and a few noted making some good friends, despite differences.

*Interviews.* The main purpose of the interviews was to allow the returnees the opportunity to talk at length about their views on separate classes. In addition, we were also interested in hearing about their experiences in readjusting to Japanese life and culture upon their return. To this end, we solicited volunteers from among the returnees, which produced approximately fifteen interviews. Interviews were conducted individually in English.

The interviews did not yield results significantly different than the questionnaire on the issue of separate classes. As on the questionnaire, there was a wide range of views expressed in the interviews. However, one option not mentioned on the questionnaire was brought up by several returnees—the possibility of having both types of classes, that is, of keeping the current arrangement of combining returnees and non-returnees and also offering a few additional sections for returnees only.

The rationale expressed for this was that mixed classes allowed returnees to develop friendships with non-returnees, something a number of them mentioned as a valued result of mixed classes. At the same time, though, virtually all of the returnees were well aware that their English skills would be better served by separate classes, so when pressed as to which they would choose if there were an option, a number of returnees admitted that they would choose separate classes. But it should be kept in mind that this was not seen as ideal by any of the returnees we interviewed. That is, in the interviews none of the returnees attempted to make a strong case for separate classes.

As far as readjustment to Japan was concerned, again we found a wide range of experiences. Some reported few or no problems adjusting, others maintained that it took only a few months to fit right back in, while a few spoke of difficulties which continued to the present, up to several years after returning. As reported in the various returnee studies, some of our returnees had been subject to bullying, being called *gaijin* ('foreigner'), and even being harassed by Japanese English teachers. One returnee who spent four years in the United States was referred to in English class by her teacher as a walking English dictionary, and she was regularly picked on for answers. After being unable to produce accurate information on several lexical items peculiar to British English, her title was revised to a walking American English dictionary. She did not enjoy such treatment (to put it mildly) and often found ways of avoiding English class. Some returnees also reported adopting exaggerated Japanese accents in their English to avoid distinguishing themselves. In fact, this was observed in IEP classes. When we asked one particular returnee who often made a practice of speaking *katakana* English in small group work despite her ability to speak in a nearly flawless Australian accent, she replied that she did this because others expected her to speak English well and she felt that she did not. She wanted to hide what proficiency she had acquired during her time abroad. Another returnee we interviewed reported a similar experience. After approaching his English teacher about a 'B' grade he had received, the teacher (who he said couldn't speak English well) told him that he had become too proud of his English. After that, he decided not to speak in English class, and when asked to read aloud, would intentionally alter his pronunciation (e.g., *I wentu to a zoo*).

#### Discussion

The questionnaire and interview study we conducted is no doubt limited in both the issues and population it addresses, so any substan-

tive conclusions based on it must be seen as preliminary. There is clearly a need for further research in a variety of contexts which addresses more issues and draws on larger samples. Having said that, though, there are several comments which can be made based on our findings.

We set out primarily to address the issue of separate English classes for returnees based solely on the fact that their proficiency in English warranted their being placed into such classes. As noted above, we were rather surprised to learn of the possible problems associated with implementing such an approach in a Japanese context. In our experience, placing students into respective levels based on their proficiency was appropriate simply because it facilitated language learning and teaching. We had never considered the issue of social and psychological damage due to separation into proficiency levels as central to the development of an English language program, so we were reluctant to do so in developing the IEP. Results of the questionnaire showed that students had a wide range of views on the issue of separate classes for returnees, with more opposed to them than in favor. A number of students (mostly non-returnees) indicated on the open-ended questionnaire item that they were well aware of the problems caused as a result of the proficiency gap, yet many were still opposed to separate classes. And in the interviews, not a single returnee made a case for separate classes. Rather, most expressed a preference for mixed classes or special classes for returnees in addition to mixed classes. In fact, one returnee made a point of noting that she benefited just as much (if not more) from helping non-returnees as they did from receiving her help. So the views of students in our program did not support establishing separate classes for returnees. Given that a number of Japanese faculty members also expressed reservations about separate classes, it seems then that potential social and psychological damage to returnees is indeed a central issue for curriculum development.

A second issue we were interested in was the readjustment experience of our returnees. As noted above, there are conflicting accounts of the problems caused by the experience abroad, but it is perhaps fair to say that the prevalent picture is rather bleak: stories of bullying by students and teachers, and difficulties with both spoken and written Japanese are common. There are even cases of suicide and homicide which have been linked to this issue. However, results of our interviews suggest that while returnees do experience problems, these problems may not be as serious as believed, and they are certainly not common to all returnees. In fact, several of the returnees we interviewed indicated that they experienced few or no problems in readjusting. It should come as

no surprise that individual experiences will vary—despite common perceptions of homogeneity among the Japanese (which do have some factual basis), there are indeed substantial individual differences on a number of variables. It would be reasonable, then, to expect variation in returnee experiences based on things such as age of experience abroad, gender, personality, and any other of a number of variables. How these individual differences affect readjustment is a question for further research, which raises one final area we would like to address.

There are a number of issues concerning returnees and ELT that merit further study. We will mention only a few. One major issue which we have not addressed is the tendency to place all returnees into the same category. Throughout this paper, we have been referring to English-speaking returnees, but the general practice is not to differentiate among returnees from various countries. That is, Japanese children returning from, say, the United States, Colombia, Hong Kong, Germany, Indonesia, or Switzerland would all be given the same label (i.e., *kikokushijo*) and most likely the same (or similar) treatment. There are likely some important differences obscured by this practice. Another key area involving returnees is that of language attrition. It would be of interest to see what impact the constraints on utilizing language proficiency gained abroad have on language attrition. It would probably be fair to say that the great pressure returnees feel to hide their foreign language proficiency does not do much to aid language maintenance. More central to ELT issues, it would be of interest to carry out classroom ethnographies to investigate the nature of classroom interaction involving returnees and the impact of their presence on non-returnees. While the perception is that returnees are generally reluctant to demonstrate language proficiency in the presence of fellow Japanese and non-returnees are intimidated by the superior skills of returnees, classroom ethnographies would provide data to support or refute such perceptions. Also, we should expect to find variation according to, for example, age of students or percentage of returnees in a given class. These are only a few of the many possible research questions involving returnees. There are no doubt additional issues which merit attention.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have primarily addressed one issue involved in developing English language programs which contain a significant proportion of English-speaking returnees, that is, whether returnees should be placed into separate classes based on higher English proficiency. In

efforts to design and implement a curriculum which included placement by proficiency, we encountered the issue of social and psychological damage to returnees which could result from separation. To assess student preferences for separate classes, we conducted a small-scale questionnaire study with follow-up interviews of some returnees. Results indicated that setting up separate classes was not preferred by either returnees or non-returnees. So perhaps the most central finding of this study is that questions of a social and psychological nature may be of more importance in curriculum development than language proficiency. However, any conclusions based on this study must be viewed as preliminary, and it is our hope that future returnee research will shed further light on this hitherto neglected area.

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#### Note

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 19th International JALT Conference, Omiya, October 1993, and the 28th Annual TESOL Convention, Baltimore, March 1994. We would like to thank the students (returnees and non-returnees) who took part in this study, and the audience members at both conferences for helpful comments.

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### Appendix: English translation of questionnaire

1. Are you a returnee? a. Yes b. No  
If you answered 'yes', please complete questions 2-10.  
If you answered 'no', please complete questions 11-16.
2. In what country did you live (outside of Japan)?
3. How long did you live there?
4. How old were you when you went there?

Please circle the number that most closely represents your degree of agreement.

- 1 = Disagree strongly
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Agree strongly

5. The IEP should have a separate class for returnees. 1 2 3 4 5
6. If I could, I would live abroad again. 1 2 3 4 5
7. At times I feel I am different from other Japanese. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I hesitate to speak English in front of other Japanese. 1 2 3 4 5
9. In the IEP, I can help other students with their English and also make use of my English skills. 1 2 3 4 5
10. If you have any comments about returnees and non-returnees in the IEP, please write them below.
  
11. The IEP should have a separate class for returnees. 1 2 3 4 5
12. If I could have, I would like to have lived abroad. 1 2 3 4 5
13. At times I feel that returnees are different from non-returnees. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I am hesitant to speak English in front of returnees. 1 2 3 4 5
15. Having returnees in the class is a good stimulus for my English. 1 2 3 4 5
16. If you have any comments about returnees and non-returnees in the IEP, please write them below.