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Separating Grades from Assessment: Labor-Based Grading for Better Learning in EFL Classrooms*

Kyle Hoover, Asia University

Abstract

Grades often do not reflect students' academic achievement, and grading consistency can vary greatly between teachers (Jönsson et al., 2021; Nowruzi, 2021). In search of an alternative to conventional grading, this paper argues for the implementation of a labor-based grading system in which grades are separated from assessments of student performance. It argues that grades serve students' learning better if they emphasize day-to-day labor, such as low-stakes, formative assignments, activities, and assessments, rather than representing a judgement of abilities and performance. The paper first reviews the concept of labor-based grading, or grading contracts, from the field of composition studies, as well as Inoue's (2023) discussion of classroom grading economies. The paper then discusses separating grades from assessments and the learning benefits of doing so in more detail. While the paper argues that grades should reflect student labor rather than judgements of their performance, it emphasizes the importance of various forms of assessment and self-assessment for student learning. Finally, the paper considers how labor-based grading could be effectively implemented in an ELL context.

* This article was peer-reviewed by an editorial board of subject experts before being accepted for publication.

Introduction

Why do teachers grade? Aside from the act of grading obviously being an institutional requirement at most schools, most teachers would say that to grade is to convey some judgement on a student's performance in a class. Jönsson et al. (2021) define the act of grading as “making a decision about students’ overall performance according to (implicit or explicit) grading criteria,” which results in a product (i.e., a grade) that measures student proficiency “based on a more or less heterogeneous collection of data on student performance” (p. 213). However, because grades are determined through “human judgement,” grading among teachers generally lacks consistency due to the inclusion of various non-academic factors (such as effort and behavior) when determining the grade as well as varied grading processes and systems (p. 213).

It is exceedingly difficult to base grades solely on academic achievement. In fact, many teachers, whether systematically or not, incorporate non-achievement factors in their grades, such as “effort, participation, ability, improvement, behavior, personality traits, and work habits” (Nowruzi, 2021, p. 2). Nowruzi (2021) interviewed Iranian EFL teachers about their views of grading and found that most supported including non-academic factors in their grades. From one teacher’s perspective, “Learning manifests itself through effort...Where there is some effort, there should be some learning, too” (p. 14). Another stated that “[t]hose [students] who participate more and try harder also learn better and more” (p. 14). In other words, many teachers believe that non-academic factors contribute strongly to student learning and that grades should be a reflection of overall learning rather than solely students’ academic achievements in the class.

Asao Inoue (2023), a researcher in the field of composition and rhetoric studies, details his experience grading student writing and his difficulties determining a fair grade for students:

I would have to justify each grade and that meant my stance as a reader would have to be one of looking for reasons why I didn’t think the paper deserved a higher grade, or at best why I thought the paper warranted the grade I gave it—and I almost always knew the overall grade by the time I got halfway through each paper, which then turned my attention as a reader toward the markers in the paper that justified that grade, a self-fulfilling judgment practice. (p. 51)

For Inoue, the “self-fulfilling” nature of grading made him dread the act. Rather than approaching a student paper as a genuine reader and engaging with the student’s ideas, he

found that the act of grading lead him to merely search for evidence that justified a particular grade. Inoue finds that the act of grading in such a manner runs counter to student learning. He argues, “One doesn’t learn to write by turning in a finished paper. One learns in the labors of researching, drafting, and revising—in the doing—and learns best if one pays attention to how one is doing those labors” (p. 106). If many teachers agree with the sentiment that learning involves more than the results of student performance on a paper, project, or test, then perhaps the “non-academic” aspects of learning (i.e., those aspects of learning which do not involve judgements of student performance) should have more weight in our grading processes.

This paper proposes a grading system in which student grades are based on their labor rather than judgements of quality from the teacher—in effect, separating grades from assessments. The first section provides an overview of labor-based grading, otherwise known as contract grading, as well as Inoue’s (2023) explication of the circulation of value and student labor in classroom grading economies. The following section discusses what it means to separate grades from assessment and why doing so is beneficial to student learning. The final section suggests several methods of implementing labor-based grading in an EFL context and addresses some possible difficulties regarding and questions about labor-based grading.

What is Labor-Based Grading?

Labor-based grading, or contract grading, was born out of universities in the United States, primarily from teachers and researchers in the field of composition studies. Therefore, most of the work on labor-based grading is in the context of teaching academic writing, specifically first-year writing. Using the term “grading contract,” Danielewicz and Elbow (2009) explain that students in a class with labor-based grading are expected to perform all the work of the class, ranging from low-stakes writing and in-class participation to larger writing projects. In exchange, they are guaranteed to receive at least a B grade, the second-highest grade in American universities (pp. 245-246). They emphasize that the B grade is not dependent on any judgement about the *quality* of student work, merely its completion. In order to receive an A, the highest possible grade, students must demonstrate work of a higher quality (p. 253). They argue that conventional grading falsely claims to promote “common standards for grading,” and they dispute the idea that the “‘quality’ of a multidimensional product can be fairly or accurately represented with a one-dimensional grade” (p. 249). This

parallels other researchers' findings that grades are "inaccurate indicators of students' academic performance" (Nowruzi, 2021, p. 20) and that teachers tend to include non-achievement factors in their grades to encourage students who put in great effort but were unable to show academic quality (Jönsson et al., 2021, p. 213).

Inoue (2023) refers to grading contracts such as Danielewicz and Elbow's as "hybrid contracts," since they ultimately use two bases for grading: student labor (for grades up to a B) and the teacher's judgements of quality (for grades higher than a B). He instead argues for a completely labor-based grading contract that allows students to attain a higher grade not by judgements of quality, but by performing additional labor. Inoue's book, *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*, offers an analysis of student labor, which he situates in the "assessment economy" of the classroom. According to Inoue, grading systems involve the exchange of grades for student labor in the form of assignments; however, because the labor itself that goes into producing those assignments is not exchanged directly for grades, the labor tends to be devalued by both students and teachers. He argues that in a labor-based grading system, "labor is an explicit commodity that is exchanged, making it more valuable and present (not ignored) in the system" (p. 78). In other words, in a conventional grading system, the learning, growth, and skills with which teachers hope students will leave the class are divorced from students' desire for good grades, which will determine whether or not they pass a class and can directly affect their material futures.

Alternatively, Inoue distinguishes three forms of value present in a labor-based grading economy: *exchange-value*, *use-value*, and *worth*. He defines *exchange-value* as student labor, which is measured "uniformly by a single, agreed-upon, standard" and "accumulated in a document or activity" (p. 94). Rather than the quality of the assignment or activity itself, *exchange-value* represents the work that students put into their production or performance. Students complete assignments, and their completion, representing student labor, is exchanged for grades. While *exchange-value* focuses on past labor, *use-value* focuses on present labor, which "can be reflected upon either as one does it or immediately afterwards" (p. 95). In other words, *use-value* emphasizes the actual learning being done by students in the present moment, which can be made clear through short reflection activities. Finally, *worth* represents "metacognitive labor...that reflect[s] on exchange- and use-value of labor done" and is "future-oriented" (p. 94). For Inoue, students obtain *worth* from reflecting

on their labor as a whole and solidifying what they have learned from the class to carry on that learning into the future beyond the grade for the current class.

Overall, Inoue argues that a labor-based grading system encourages students to value and reflect on their own labor and learning rather than what kind of judgement they will receive from their teacher in the form of a grade. If students are assured that they can pass the class by performing the labor of the class, that labor will be what is valued. As Inoue puts it, “If we accept that labor is the act of learning to write, that in order to learn to write one must write, and the more one writes the better one can get at it, then a final course grade based on labor is a more accurate reflection of learning to write” (p. 151). The same certainly applies to EFL or ESL classes. If we want our students to learn certain English language skills, and we acknowledge that practicing and “laboring” with English leads to better learning, then a labor-based grading system would be a better measurement of our students’ learning.

Why and How Should We Separate Grades and Assessments?

It might be fruitful at this point to make a distinction between two components of any class that are often conflated: grades and assessments. As discussed previously, grades are nominally a judgement on student proficiency, although in practice they tend to include various factors not related to academic achievement. Inoue (2023) describes grades as hierarchical “partitions” around groups of students or types of performances (A-students, B-students, A-papers, B-papers, etc.) (p. 36). He argues that grades do more harm than good to students and their learning because of the fact that grades are determined by individuals with their own language practices and biases about what standards grades should represent. In his view, the purpose of a conventional grade is to categorize students as well as to reward or punish students for following or not following the teacher’s directions. Assessments, on the other hand, are distinct from grades. Although assessments involve some judgement from the teacher, the purpose of an assessment is to support learning by providing the student with detailed information about their performance. Good assessments give “clear information about the expectations of assessment, the *success criteria*, so learners can use that information to prepare for the assessment” (Vercellotti, 2021, p. 2) as well as to unpack and reflect upon their performance and make adjustments for the future.

In a labor-based grading system, the course grade should be based on the work students have done regardless of our assessment of their performance. Labor-based grades are the result of student effort in any form. In an EFL class there are numerous ways in which

students labor: homework assignments, studying for tests, in-class activities, listening to lectures, reading assigned texts, projects, presentations, exams, among many others. Teachers and students instinctively divide these up into low- and high-stakes assignments. Certainly, a final exam that is worth 20% of the course grade is much more important to students (i.e., has a much higher *exchange-value*) than a group activity that affects the grade very little, if at all. However, in terms of the actual progress towards learning, it could be argued that participating in the group activity in fact has more of an impact, or more *use-value*, for student learning than sitting for an exam. As Potts (2010) puts it, “Instead of using grading as a motivation for learning, and hoping that students will engage in learning activities in order to receive a grade,” teachers should make the learning activities a key component of the course grade (p. 31). To follow Inoue’s sentiment, if we believe that a grade should be a reflection of student learning, and that in order to learn a student must go through the motions of learning, then it is reasonable to implement a grading system in which the teacher’s assessment of student performance does not directly affect their grade, which is instead dependent on the work they put into the class.

It should be noted that, although they are separate from the final grade, assessments of student performance are still vitally important for student learning. Research has shown the benefit of providing various forms of assessment for students from the teacher, from peers, and from students themselves (Elturki, 2020; Fukuda, 2018; Gupta and Dzabelova, 2022; Vercellotti, 2021). A labor-based grading system makes no attempt to ignore or place less significance on such a valuable source of learning. In fact, those who have written about their experiences using labor-based grading express a greater efficacy in making assessments. For example, Danielewicz and Elbow (2009), after implementing their hybrid grading contract – in which all students are guaranteed at least a B if they complete all required work but may earn an A for higher quality work – “give just as much evaluation as ever, and in fact ... find [themselves] freer to give negative feedback or criticism because it doesn’t betoken a low grade” (p. 254). When assessment does not impact grades, teachers feel they can give more accurate feedback because students know that their grade will not be negatively affected. In turn, students are better able to use feedback to improve their performance. Because they do not need to worry about the outcome of their performance negatively affecting their grade, they can focus on the learning their teacher is asking them to do.

There are a variety of assessments that can contribute to student learning. Elturki (2020) describes two kinds of assessments common in the classroom: formative assessment

and summative assessment. Formative assessments are smaller activities or assignments that work to give a more localized understanding of a student's performance, such as quizzes, homework, in-class activities, conferences, and others. This type of assessment is generally "low stakes" in that it does not have a large impact on grades. Summative assessments may be higher-stakes tests, presentations, projects, and so on that affect student grades more directly and strongly (p. 13). In Elturki's words, a formative assessment "aims to evaluate students *in the process of learning* [emphasis added] and forming their skills," and a summative assessment "sums up what students *have learned* [emphasis added], determines whether students reached benchmarks, and measures how well students *have met* [emphasis added] the learning outcomes of a course" (p. 13). The distinction between assessing students during the learning process and at the end point of the course is vital here. When it comes to its effect on student learning, teachers are sure to value the *process* of learning (such as in-class practice, at-home studying, homework assignments, and the building of language skills) more than the final *products* of a course (the final test, presentation, or paper), which take place after the learning is supposed to have happened.

This learning process is the kind of student labor discussed earlier that leads to real improvement in the course, whether that be English language skills or another subject. As Inoue (2023) puts it, "we all take for granted that our students must labor in order to learn... All pedagogies ask students to labor, to do something in order to gain something else" (p. 125). It follows that if formative assessments are vital to student learning, they should be reflected in the final grade, perhaps even more than students' performance in summative assessments. This communicates to students that we value the in-class practice and homework we ask them to do just as much as the midterm or final tests. In addition, it tells students that, by valuing the smaller "low-stakes" work, their performance on final tests and presentations will improve.

Another important source of assessment is self-assessment or self-reflection. Self-assessment, also a kind of formative assessment, has been shown to improve student performance due to the fact that students take ownership over their own learning by setting their own objectives, making plans to achieve objectives, considering their progress, and making adjustments or revising based on their self-assessments (Gupta & Dzabelova, 2022, p. 64). This final step, revision, has students "adjust and self-correct their performance," which helps to internalize learning (Gupta & Dzabelova, 2022, p. 65). Ishikawa (2023) similarly describes the process of student self-regulated learning: the *forethought phase*, in

which students analyze tasks, set goals, and make plans; the *performance phase*, in which students practice “self-instruction, attention focusing, and self-monitoring”; and, finally, the *self-reflection phase*, in which students assess their own performance (p. 62). Self-assessment and revision after a performance (such as a test, presentation, paper, etc.), along with assessment from the teacher and possibly peers, allows for greater learning than the typical process in which students receive a grade and subsequently do not have the opportunity to do any further thinking about it. If a process of self-assessment and revision is built into our classes, both teachers and students can more clearly understand what was learned or not learned. In order to carry out self-assessment, teachers can use methods along the lines of those suggested by Vercellotti (2021), such as providing assessment checklists, discussing exemplars, and giving effective feedback. These methods could be easily adapted into self- or peer-reflection activities.

In addition to student self-assessment of their own performance on a particular test, project, or other assignment, it may be valuable to have students consider their own labor in and of itself through the teaching of learning strategies. Fukuda (2018) found that EFL students benefitted significantly from the teaching of metacognitive strategies, effort regulation strategies, and problem-solving strategies. *Metacognitive strategies*, such as elaboration and critical thinking, help students internalize material more effectively; *effort regulation strategies*, such as self-monitoring, help students maintain interest and attention while learning; and *problem-solving strategies*, such as help-seeking, enable students to overcome roadblocks in their learning process. These strategies are especially helpful for lower-proficiency students (Fukuda, 2018). Ishikawa (2023) also found that teaching strategies for time management and goal-setting is beneficial to students. Inoue (2023) implements reflective metacognitive strategies in his classroom through the use of labor logs and written reflections in which students keep track of the amount of time they have spent on classwork, what that time entailed, as well as what they have learned about the way they work. Although the amount of labor students record has no bearing on their grade, he feels that it is useful to have students “measure worth of labor by articulating the significance and meaning that [they] find in [their] present and past labors of the class” (p. 104). Explicitly teaching learning strategies and having students reflect on their own learning can help students learn more effectively.

It may be most effective to teach students learning strategies and to have them do reflection in their first language. For example, in the context of EFL students in Japan,

teachers could provide a self-assessment survey in Japanese, which students would respond to in Japanese (or whatever language with which they are comfortable). It is not necessary to answer in English because the goal of the activity is to have students consider their own performances and progress and not to produce such assessment in English specifically. Of course, there could be some difficulty if the teacher cannot also read or speak Japanese, but a simple solution could be to use an automatic translator to get a sense of what the student wrote. Again, the purpose is to have the students reflect, not to produce English sentences.

What Does Labor-Based Grading Actually Look Like?

Although most of the research regarding labor-based grading and contract grading has been in the field of composition studies, such a grading system can be beneficial for students in an EFL context as well. Of course, the specifics for grades depend on each institution, but there are some general aspects that could apply across the board. When determining a student's grade, the typical method in contract grading is to do away with points altogether and require students to keep to the terms of the contract. For example, several requirements for a B grade from Danielewicz and Elbow's (2009) grading contract include: attend class regularly, meet due dates and criteria for all major assignments, participate in all in-class exercises and activities, complete all informal, low-stakes writing assignments, and submit the midterm and final portfolio. Notice that formative assessments such as in-class activities and low-stakes assignments are given just as much weight as the midterm and final writing projects for determining the grade. Simply completing an assignment, test, or project as required by the teacher would be sufficient to get full credit, regardless of students' actual performance. As argued before, the reason for separating the grade from the teacher's assessment of student performance is to promote the *use-value* of student labor, or the actual learning students get out of doing the assignments and reflecting on the teacher's assessments and their own self-assessments. In the case of an EFL class, the result of a final exam would not be used to calculate students' final grades but would instead be used as an opportunity to provide feedback and have students reflect on their performance, which strengthens their learning of the subject. In such a situation, teachers would need to give the final exam before the end of the course to allow for time to do such self-reflection and revision.

For grades above a B, several approaches have been used. Danielewicz and Elbow's hybrid contract awards an A grade (the highest possible grade) to students whose work exhibits qualities that are made explicit to students. They argue that "when students spend

fourteen weeks doing everything the contract requires (which is a great deal), the quality of their writing improves enough to *warrant* a B by the end of the semester” (p. 250). To them, in a conventional grading system, teachers often weigh grades not just with the quality of student work but also with student behavior, which might “pull grades up and down—but no farther *up* than a B” (p. 251). Therefore, they assume that in order to attain the highest possible grade of A, students need to show some degree of quality in their work. A hybrid contract could be implemented in an EFL setting. Teachers could decide the minimum requirements for a B grade and subsequently which students get an A grade based on their performance on a final exam, presentation, project, or a combination of several sources.

Alternatively, Inoue (2023) uses a completely labor-based grading contract. In a similar way to Danielewicz and Elbow, he sets a B as the baseline grade which students may earn if they complete the contract conditions, such as participating in a certain number of classes, turning in work on time, and so on. In order to get a higher grade, students can choose to complete additional assignments for which he provides several options. Importantly, A grades are not determined by the quality of student work. For Inoue, allowing all students access to the highest possible grade makes the grading system more equitable. He argues that both conventional grading and hybrid contracts “keep the most exemplary grades away from some students, regardless of their desires for those grades or the amount of work they are willing to put into their writing in order to get those grades. More often than not, these students will be students of color, working-class, and multilingual students” (p. 58). Although Inoue’s contract was made specifically with American university students in mind, this sentiment surely applies to EFL classrooms across the globe. Some students simply have had less access to English studies and may be at a disadvantage compared to their classmates. In a fully labor-based grading contract, if students are willing to put in the work, they will be able to get the grade they aim for regardless of their social, racial, or economic background.

In both hybrid and labor-based contracts, there is a distinct lack of points in the grade. Teachers tend to mark assignments as “complete” or “incomplete” rather than giving a certain number of points. For final grades, teachers forgo a final percentage in favor of just a letter grade. When calculating the final grade, teachers generally give students a certain number of permissible absences, late assignments, and missed assignments for each letter grade. For example, Inoue (2023) allows three absences, three late assignments, and one missed assignment for B and A grades. Therefore, final grades in labor-based systems are more descriptions of completed labor rather than calculations of points. Although this system

can be readily emulated in other classroom settings, in some cases, a percentage- or point-based grade may be an institutional requirement. For these grades, the teacher could assign points to each assignment but make them an “all or nothing” grade. In my own classes at Asia University, where I teach required first-year English classes, I make each assignment worth two points. If a student completes the assignment, I award two points. If the student turns in an assignment late within a week after the due date, I award one point. If the student never turns in the assignment, I award zero points. To reiterate, the grades are not reflections of the quality of the assignment, but whether or not the student completed the assignment on time. Students should be made aware and reminded of this fact. In my classes with students of a lower English proficiency, where many may feel that they are not good at English and therefore have lower motivation, this grading practice emphasizes the idea that routinely completing weekly assignments are vital to improving their language skills.

Some teachers may find difficulty in adopting a labor-based grading system, and their resistance may be understandable. Some teachers may worry that, if the results of a test do not impact their grades, students will not be motivated to study for the test. The solution to this is simple: make preparing for the test a required assignment that, if students fail to complete, will negatively affect their grade. We trust that studying will help students do better on a test; therefore, give the studying just as much weight as the test itself. Some teachers may worry that students will end up turning in sub-standard work because they know they can still get full credit for it. One response to this is that students, as humans, cannot give 100% of their effort to our classes all the time. It is understandable if some students occasionally turn in work that we know is not their best. As long as they have completed the assignment, they should receive full credit. However, the teacher can always decide whether or not an assignment should be considered complete. In my classes, I generally give students a chance to resubmit work that does not meet the requirements of the assignment. If they resubmit a complete assignment within a week, I give them full credit.

To reemphasize, teachers still give feedback to student work in a labor-based grading system. Part of students’ learning process and labor is to make changes to their performance in response to teacher feedback. Failure to do so would be reflected in the student’s grade as a failure to do the labor of the class, but the details of their performance would have no impact on the grade itself. This stance towards homework and grading may be seen as a bit too lenient or forgiving, but the goal of such a grading system is to emphasize student labor rather than the teacher’s judgement of their performance.

Conclusion

Labor-based grading creates an environment that encourages students to use language, to practice what they are learning, and to make mistakes and reflect on them without fear of a low grade. The core philosophy of labor-based grading is seen in Inoue's remarks about teaching writing: "One doesn't learn to write by turning in a finished paper. One learns in the labors of researching, drafting, and revising—in the doing" (Inoue, 2023, p. 106). In an EFL class, students do not learn English by having a perfect conversation or by getting high marks on their final exam. They learn through the "doing" of the variety of formative activities and assessments we ask them to do throughout the semester. It makes good sense, then, to give students who complete all the work a good grade, regardless of whether they show good results. We accept that not all students will be perfect speakers or writers at the end of our class and that our class is just one pit stop on each individual student's journey in learning English. Our grading system should reflect that sentiment.

Labor-based grading has been used in writing programs throughout the United States for many years and has been shown to positively impact student learning (Potts, 2010, p. 33-34). This paper asserts that it would be beneficial to implement labor-based grading in English language learning contexts in order to emphasize practices that improve language skills in our grading. However, some further research on labor-based grading in EFL contexts would be valuable. Further studies should compare classes that use labor-based grading and conventional, quality-based grading. Such studies could examine any changes in English proficiency as well as students' perceptions and reactions to labor-based grading.

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A Book Review: *Forward Mode: English for Fashion Students*
By Akie Nyui-Kozuka, Yasue Kawamorita, and Kim S. Collins
NAN'UN-DO Co., Ltd., 2022, 127 pp., ISBN: 978-4-523-17954-2*

Reviewed by Alexis Franks, Asia University

Abstract

This paper is a review of the textbook *Forward Mode: English for Fashion Students*, which was written by Akie Nyui-Kozuka, Yasue Kawamorita, and Kim S. Collins and published by NAN'UN-DO Co., Ltd. in 2022. This textbook was designed specifically for fashion students studying university-level English in Japan, although it is meant to be a useful guide for anyone studying general English. First, the paper gives an overview of the textbook, with particular attention paid to the structure and staging of the units therein. Next, it discusses the strengths, limitations, and possible classroom applications of *Forward Mode*, ultimately determining that it is, overall, an effective resource for fashion (and fashion-curious) students who wish to improve their conversational English skills.

* This article was peer-reviewed by an editorial board of subject experts before being accepted for publication.

Introduction

Forward Mode: English for Fashion Students was first published by NAN'UN-DO Co., Ltd. in October 2022. Retailing for ¥2640, this stand-alone (not part of a series) textbook is co-authored by Akie Nyui-Kozuka, Yasue Kawamorita, and Kim S. Collins, three educators with extensive experience teaching English at the university level in Japan. The authors' relevant research interests include English for Specific Purposes (ESP [fashion English in particular]), bilingualism and the use of vocabulary during English discussions, and the Learners' Lives as Curriculum (LLC) model of English-language education.

According to the textbook's Foreword, *Forward Mode* was intended for use by fashion students in particular (although the point is made that it can be used by anyone studying general English). In addition, the Foreword avows that the textbook "was created with an emphasis on eliciting personal stories that involve students' experiences and emotions [in the] hope that students will [discover] the joy of sharing their own stories while using [it]" (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 3). In the opinion of this reviewer, *Forward Mode*, despite some limitations, is a successful and personalizable resource for both fashion and non-fashion students of English.

Overview of the Textbook

The *Forward Mode* textbook is 127 pages long (including appendices). It is comprised of 18 units, with approximately six pages dedicated to each unit. Themes range from standard conversation starters such as *My Name Story* (Unit 1), *Friends and Family in My Hometown* (Unit 3), and *My Favorite Local Dish* (Unit 14) to more fashion-oriented content like *My Favorite Fashion Item* (Unit 4), *Fashion as My Identity* (Unit 7), and *The Fashion Industry* (Unit 18). Each unit is divided into the following five parts:

Part 1: Exploring the Topic

This part introduces the unit's theme. Its purpose is not only to engage students' interest in the theme, but also to activate students' prior knowledge of the theme through brainstorming. Put another way, this part enables students to make connections between what they already know about the unit's topic and new information and structures presented in the unit. Part 1 contains four sub-sections:

- 1.1 First Impression presents the unit's title, the title of an Opening Story, and a picture and short profile of the author of the Opening Story (a real person known to the authors of the textbook). Students are instructed to read the titles and the profile, study the picture, and write their own predictions about the content of the Opening Story.
- 1.2 Listening presents a list of key words from – and several questions related to – the Opening Story. Students are instructed to listen to the audio of the Opening Story (the textbook is bundled with a CD) and answer the questions.
- 1.3 Opening Story presents the written text of the Opening Story. Students are instructed to read the text in order to check their understanding of the audio to which they previously listened.
- 1.4 Grammar Tips presents information about grammatical structures (e.g. *WH-Questions*, Unit 1; *Simple Past Tense*, Unit 7; *to + Base Form Verb*, Unit 18; etc.) that can be used in Part 2 of the unit.

Part 2: Expressing Yourself

This part asks students to personalize the unit's theme. It provides the tools to do this by highlighting form and usage of vocabulary and grammar related to said theme. Part 2 is divided into two sub-sections:

- Section A presents sample expressions with words in yellow that can be substituted with students' own information. Students are instructed to write about themselves in a general way using the expressions and the examples in parentheses.
- Section B presents writing prompts based on the sample expressions provided in Section A. Students are instructed to write about themselves in a more specific way using the prompts and the previous examples.

Part 3: Communication Practice

This part gives students the opportunity to do collaborative tasks related to the unit's theme (after a run of individual tasks in Part 1 and Part 2). A secondary goal of this part of the unit – besides having students produce and navigate the target language – is to allow the instructor to check students' understanding of the unit thus far. Part 3 consists of three sub-sections:

- 3.1 Dialogue presents 1-2 short example conversations in line with the unit's theme. Students are instructed to read the example(s) and make some sort of judgment. (The two evaluative questions that alternate between units are: "Which conversation is better and why?" and "When are the underlined phrases used?")
- 3.2 Communication Tips presents information about communication strategies (e.g., *Giving Compliments*, Unit 4; *Checking Understanding*, Unit 6; *Repairing Communication*, Unit 9; etc.) that scaffold future collaborative tasks in the unit.
- 3.3 Try It Out presents expressions that can be used to employ the communication strategies mentioned previously as well as a longer example conversation related to the unit's theme and accompanied by a list of alternative topics. Students are instructed to have a conversation in pairs using the expressions / conversations / alternative topics provided.

Part 4: Outcome

This part guides students through the process of first producing something (e.g., an illustration, a collage, an imaginary dialogue, etc.) connected to the unit's theme and to their own personal experiences and then sharing it with their classmates. Its purpose is to give students freer collaborative practice utilizing all vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies that they gleaned from the previous parts of the unit. Part 4 is made up of a number of stages that vary slightly from unit to unit. Examples include *Brainstorming*, *Organizing your ideas*, and *Creating visuals*.

Part 5: Reflection

This part invites students to check the progress of their English study by giving themselves a score of one to five for how well they completed the primary tasks of Parts 1-4 of the unit. This activity encourages students to gain autonomy in and take responsibility for their own language learning.

Criteria for Evaluating an ESP Textbook

As stated in the introduction of this review, *Forward Mode* is a broadly successful English study aid for both fashion and non-fashion students. Before describing the extent of its efficacy, it is necessary to address the question of what criteria determine the level of success achieved by a textbook with an ESP focus (as *Forward Mode* is).

According to a number of researchers (Dudley-Evans & Bates, 1987; Orr, 1998; Pilbeam, 1987), the usefulness of ESP materials is determined primarily by the precise learning needs of the students. Indeed, “one of the most time-consuming activities for many ESP programs is the preparation of appropriate teaching materials. Few materials sold in bookstores fit the [students’] specific needs” (Orr, 1998, ESP Curriculum Reform in Japan section). Thus, the evaluation of any ESP-focused textbook can be distilled into four major questions, which are:

1. Is the textbook specific? In other words, does it meet the typical educational objectives of people in a specific industry as determined by a thorough needs analysis of the students?
2. Is the textbook valid? In other words, does it achieve face validity in the eyes of the students by mirroring situations and experiences that are recognizable and relevant to them?
3. Is the textbook’s approach suitable? In other words, does the underlying methodology optimize the students’ learning?
4. Is the textbook of high quality? In other words, is there a great deal of variety and creativity in the activities and exercises presented to the students?

(Pilbeam, 1987)

Strengths of the Textbook

Specificity

Forward Mode meets many of the language needs of people in the fashion industry, as per the results of a needs analysis of fashion and design college students published by one of the authors of the textbook (Nyui-Kozuka) and a colleague before the textbook’s publication. This needs analysis identifies three essential elements of a functional fashion English textbook: emphasis on the four skills of reading, listening, writing, and speaking; inclusion of activities that push students to brainstorm and develop ideas collaboratively; and focus on cross-cultural awareness and understanding (Jones & Nyui, 2007).

First of all, respondents in the needs analysis stressed that any fashion English resource should encompass the four skills, as “we do not believe that fashion and design is a field that merits only a monoskill program” (Jones & Nyui, 2007, p. 79). One respondent elaborated by “emphasiz[ing] the primary importance of writing and reading but then

continued on to state that this was only achieving the ‘minimum standard’ and that to create longer lasting business relationships verbal communication was of vital importance” (Jones & Nyui, 2007, p. 76). *Forward Mode* certainly prioritizes the four skills throughout the text. Regarding receptive-skills activities in each unit, reading is emphasized in Part 1.3 and Part 3.1, while listening is emphasized in Part 1.2. As for productive-skills activities in each unit, writing is the focus of Part 1.1 and Part 2, while speaking is the focus of Part 3.3 and Part 4.

The related tasks of brainstorming and collaborating on the development of ideas are also assigned importance in the needs analysis by respondents, who stated that “to brainstorm/develop ideas further with coworkers and designers was an essential skill” (Jones & Nyui, 2007, p. 75). These tasks are the principal components of Part 4 of each unit of *Forward Mode*, which directs students to create material that allows them to interact with others to share information. To highlight one example, in Part 4 of Unit 6, students start out by brainstorming (they choose their favorite decade and create a mind map that outlines the fashion styles that define that decade) and organizing their ideas (they rank the ideas from their mind map and select the most salient points) individually, before moving toward producing a visual (a collage or illustration) based on their ideas and describing the details to their classmates.

The last feature determined by the respondents in the needs analysis to be crucial in the creation of a fashion English textbook is understanding of cross-cultural issues. In point of fact, they indicate that “even simply raising cross-cultural awareness in a classroom may help learners who may work in an international [fashion] climate to reduce their chance of miscommunication in English [, especially] in Japan, where most people are monolingual and monocultural, [and where] many Japanese learners of English are often unaware of the variety of cultural differences in other countries” (Jones & Nyui, 2007, p. 79). *Forward Mode* pays attention to cross-cultural issues in several ways. First, the majority of unit themes are related to people’s enjoyment of cultures besides their own. Unit 4, for example, describes a Japanese woman’s fascination with French fashion, while Unit 13 tells the story of an American man’s exploration and mastery of the Zen practices that he first encountered in Japan. Secondly, many of the Opening Story authors are people of different nationalities with first-hand experience of cross-culturalism: Karia, a Mexican woman who studies fashion in Japan, is profiled in Unit 3; Padi, a New Zealander woman who works as an artist in Japan, is profiled in Unit 5; and Roozbeh, an Iranian man who studies English in the United States, is profiled in Unit 10. Finally, information in the textbook’s appendices brings cultural

differences to students' attention, with Appendix 2, Appendix 3, and Appendix 5 providing supplemental details about numerous colors, fashion items, and patterns and prints, respectively. These appendices present a variety of English terms, displaying an asterisk (*) when the spelling or word is British (rather than American) in origin (e.g., *sweater*/**jumper* in Appendix 3 and *plaid*/**tartan* in Appendix 5). Similarly, Appendix 4 provides comprehensive size charts for women's and men's clothing in Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the European Union.

Validity

Forward Mode secures a great deal of face validity by presenting situations that are familiar and relevant to its target student demographic (learners of English at the university level who focus on, or have an interest in, fashion). In other words, the textbook competently “mirror[s] and reflect[s] the world of that group” (Pilbeam, 1987, p. 121). Take as a model the situation described in Unit 15. The author of this unit's Opening Story (Part 1.3) is Risa, a Japanese woman who once worked at a language school in San Francisco, California, in the United States. She recounts her friendship with an American man she met while living abroad who expressed his love for Japanese pop culture by wearing a costume of the Sanrio character Hello Kitty on public holidays. Risa ends her story by reflecting that it is often people from other countries who inspire us to more highly prize our own culture. Key words from this Opening Story (Part 1.2) include *be interested in*, *realize*, *appreciate*, and *be so proud of*.

The material presented in Parts 1.2 and 1.3 of Unit 15 may be recognizable and relatable to students in different ways. Students will identify with Risa's experience of making a friend from a different country, perhaps, or with exhibiting their fandom of a pop culture phenomenon by wearing a costume or some other clothing item or accessory. Likewise, students might understand how it feels to realize something about their own culture that they were not aware of before or how it feels to come to treasure something about their own culture that they did not appreciate before. In Part 4 of this unit, students can explore and personalize these concepts even further, as they are instructed to discuss pop culture that they are interested in and want to learn more about, and they are shown how to create a KWL (What I Know – What I Want to Know – What I Have Learned) poster that illustrates this information and provides an opportunity for even more discussion. Griffiths and Keohane elucidate the reasons why a textbook's inclusion of texts and tasks such as the ones outlined above is of vital importance: “If learners feel that what they are asked to do is relevant to their own lives, and that their

feelings, thoughts, opinions and knowledge are valued, and crucial to the success of the activities,” they write, “then they will be fully engaged in the tasks and more likely to be motivated to learn the target language” (2000, p.1).

Limitations of the Textbook

Suitability

It can be argued that the overall approach of *Forward Mode* is communicative. Indeed, the Foreword directly states that students are expected to “express [their] own experiences and feelings [as they would in real-world contexts]” (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 3). On the positive side, each unit of the textbook contains a number of tasks and activities that effectively prioritize genuine communication and collaboration. However, there are some features of the textbook that run counter to this approach and therefore do not serve to enhance students’ language learning.

For one thing, some of the language models in *Forward Mode* are inauthentic. In Part 3.3 of Unit 2, for instance, students read through several prompts for *Yes/No Questions* (e.g., *Do ...?*, *Can ...?*, and *Are you ...?*) before pair-practicing them with the support of a sample conversation. The instructions for Student A read, “Choose a topic [1. friends; 2. family; 3. favorite things; 4. your personality; 5. your idea] and say to Student B, ‘Please ask me about (the topic you chose) [emphasis added]’” (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 15). Because a natural conversation does not begin this way – with one participant explicitly inviting the other to share information about a pre-selected topic – this task is not noticeably transferrable to communication in the real world.

The content of some tasks also undermines the communicative goals of the textbook. By way of illustration, only one of three listening questions in Part 1.2 of each unit is based on comprehension of the aural text of the Opening Story. The others, so states the textbook’s Foreword, “are not designed to test your comprehension, but rather to ask you what you *perceived* [emphasis added] based on the opening story” (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 3). No instruction is given for the students to check their answers through discussion; rather, they are asked to “[r]ead [the written text] and check the contents of the Opening Story [they] heard in the Listening Section” (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 12). However, if *all* the questions in this section tested comprehension, students might be able to confirm what they took away from the listening in a more interactive way – by sharing their answers in pairs, groups, or the

whole class – thus removing the necessity of including the written text of each Opening Story in the textbook and instead leaving room for additional speaking practice.

Quality

In some respects, *Forward Mode* is lacking in quality, a term which “does not refer to the standard of reproduction,” as Pilbeam (1987) argues, “but rather to the variety of material and exercise types, and their usability in the classroom” (p. 122). Most significantly, there is a lack of variation in the textbook material. As outlined in the Overview section of this review, the structure and staging of each unit of the textbook is firmly fixed (apart from a few very slight differences, such as the content of the evaluative questions in Part 3.1). This uniformity even extends to Part 4, the section that seems to call for a great deal of variety, as the aim is for students to create visuals that exemplify both the theme of the unit and their own experiences and perceptions. In fact, out of 18 units’ Part 4 sections, nine require the production of a collage or illustration, four require the preparation of photos or realia, four require the composition of a speech or story, and one requires the design of a poster. Such homogeneity makes it more likely that students using the textbook will become bored as their English course progresses, especially if they “don’t like the routine formula of [content that is] similar to other textbooks they studied before” (Hagino, 2007, p. 52). Certainly, it would be more enjoyable and more useful for students if *Forward Mode* offered a greater diversity of productive activities.

Another qualitative limitation of the *Forward Mode* textbook is what might be seen as an overreliance on “real people” (i.e., people who are known to the authors of the textbook) for authorship of the Opening Story of each unit. Surely, fashion students in particular are very interested (and, in some cases, *more* interested) in becoming acquainted with well-known personalities, events, or issues within the fashion world than they are in consuming information about “real people” (which may be significant in other ways). Incorporation of “famous people” stories might even have the added benefit of more closely connecting the units of the textbook with the appendices. As an example, Appendix 1 provides a lot of helpful information about the use of English pronouns, including the use of gender-neutral pronouns such as nonbinary third person singular (*they/them*). In fact, this appendix goes so far as to advise students about what to do if they misgender someone by using the wrong pronoun: “Everyone makes mistakes. When you make a mistake with a pronoun, don’t worry. Just apologize, repeat using the correct pronoun, and continue the conversation” (Nyui-

Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 114). Despite the existence of such valuable guidance in its accompanying appendix, no nonbinary people are represented, and no *they/them* pronouns are presented organically, in Unit 2. Instead, the Opening Story in Part 1.3 features two people who identify as female and use *she/her* pronouns, and the example conversations in Part 3.1 and Part 3.3 shy away from having students practice the form and usage of *they/them*. One way to correct these oversights might be to craft an Opening Story that recounts the experiences of a nonbinary celebrity from the world of fashion who uses *they/them* pronouns, such as Alok Vaid-Menon (author), Jonathan Van Ness (hairstylist and influencer), and Fish Fiorucci (model) (Korstanje, 2023). A simple Google search of any of these names yields numerous results that illustrate how interesting and linguistically rich such an Opening Story could be. Martin (2022) writes, “It wasn’t until *their* [emphasis added] days working in fashion when Fish [Fiorucci] would come to appreciate the beauty of *their* [emphasis added] face and hone an identity through that. ‘I’ve blossomed into the Fish people always wanted me to be,’ *they* [emphasis added] say” (para. 8).

Classroom Application of the Textbook

Given its themes, content, and structure, *Forward Mode* functions best as the primary resource for a low- to mid-level English Communication class for teenagers or adults. (Ideally, the students in this class have an interest in ESP in general and an interest in fashion English in particular.) It is possible for each unit of the textbook to be covered in a single 100-minute lesson or, if time runs out, for students to complete Parts 4 and 5 of a unit for homework. It is also possible, as the units are independent of each other, for the instructor to omit certain units (if they do not fit into the class schedule) or to teach units out of the order that they are presented in the textbook.

In this reviewer’s opinion, a good way to apply the *Forward Mode* textbook to the classroom context described above is for the instructor to modify the desired student output of certain parts of each unit taught. To incorporate more peer-to-peer communication in the target language, the instructor might adapt the tasks in Part 1.1. For example, Part 1.1 of Unit 1 introduces Saki, a Japanese woman who studies fashion business and creation at Dressmaker Gakuin in Tokyo, Japan. In the picture, she holds up an illustration that depicts her name in *kanji* script, its meaning in English, and the things that she likes about her name. The instructions for Part 1.1 are: “Look at the picture and the title [*I Love My Name*]. Write your predictions about the story” (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 5). Changing this instruction

to a question – How are the picture and the title [*I Love My Name*] related? – not only gives the students the same opportunities for brainstorming as the original directive, but it also transitions smoothly to collaborative work, as students can share their answers to the question in pairs or groups and then consolidate their findings with the whole class.

Correspondingly, to more closely link together different parts (and thus achieve a clearer progression through the stages) of a unit, the instructor could modify the tasks in Part 4. To illustrate this, Part 4 of Unit 1 requires the students to create personalized collages around their “name stories” and to present that information to their classmates. During the preparation stage of this task, students discuss the following questions: “1. Do you like your name? Why? Why not? [and] 2. What are your family’s naming traditions?” (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 10). It is advised that the instructor replace these questions with a few alternatives – 1. What’s your name?; 2. What does it mean?; and 3. Do you like your name? Why or why not? – and then have students sketch out their names in a creative way (as Saki does), thus more closely connecting Part 1.1 and Part 4 of Unit 1 together and allowing students to see more clearly how tasks earlier in a unit bolster their language production toward the unit’s end.

Conclusion

Forward Mode: English for Fashion Students does, on the whole, capably support students looking to improve their skills in either an ESP (e.g., fashion English) or a general English setting. To that end, the textbook includes a lot of material and tools that are deemed by the results of a needs analysis to be useful to those in the fashion industry. It also introduces scenarios that are relatable to students and are therefore primed for personalization. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that *Forward Mode* has some weaknesses, some of which slightly detract from the textbook’s communicative goals or result in variety and creativity of the textbook’s tasks and activities being constrained to some degree. Despite these drawbacks, however, *Forward Mode* does serve to “encourage learners to be the center of the classroom while helping to establish their self-esteem and communication skills” (Nyui-Kozuka et al., 2022, p. 4).

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A Book Review: *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills*
By Garry Pearson, Graham Skerritt, Adrian Francis, and Hiroshi Yoshizuka
Seibido Publishing Co. Ltd., 2021, 91 pp., ISBN: 9784791972258*

Reviewed by Michael Watts, Asia University

Abstract

Garry Pearson, Graham Skerritt, Adrian Francis, and Hiroshi Yoshizuka's *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* (2021) is a communicative English-language skills textbook designed for beginner to intermediate level EFL/ESL students. The book is organized into 15 units, with each unit focusing on a specific discussion skill and a current, global issue. Each unit begins with three simple discussion questions aimed at warming up students for the lesson and introducing the global issue topic. Then, the bulk of each unit provides students with six relevant vocabulary terms and their definitions; listening practice exercises with listening tips; a sample report on a global issue; a model discussion focused on said issue; and an explanation of a discussion skill or strategy with an accompanying discussion activity. *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* is an essential book that incorporates globally minded topics for the 21st century and helps build the necessary discussion skills students need in academia and in their future careers. This paper provides a brief explanation on the importance of building adequate discussion skills among Japanese English learners as well as the internationalization of curriculum and integrating global learning and awareness into communicative language classes. This is followed by a more thorough description of the textbook. Finally, this paper concludes with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of this textbook as a resource in the communicative English language classroom.

* This article was peer-reviewed by an editorial board of subject experts before being accepted for publication.

Background

Over the last four decades, multiple English education policy initiatives have been implemented in Japan with the aim of improving students' English communicative abilities. For example, the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) established the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme in 1987 to increase students' exposure to native English speakers and foreign cultures (Glasgow & Paller, 2016; Matsuura, Chiba, & Hilderbrandt, 2001). MEXT then created "The Action Plan" in 2003 to create smaller class sizes, encourage teaching English in English, promote overseas in-service teacher training, and push for high schools and universities to use speaking assessments like the TOEFL, TOEIC, EIKEN, etc. in their entrance examinations (Glasgow & Paller, 2016). Finally, the 2009 "Global 30 Project" aimed to internationalize participating universities by encouraging foreign students in Japan to complete degree programs through content courses with English as the medium of instruction (Glasgow & Paller, 2016). These varying language education programs and policy initiatives make clear that Japan continues to prioritize improving students' communicative English language ability and internationalizing their higher-education institutions. Yet, there is still more work to be done toward achieving these endeavors.

One common issue routinely heard about Japanese students of English is that although they have been formally studying English for 10 years – since junior high school – they cannot answer simple "How are you?" questions. Researchers and educators have discussed the unique challenges Japanese students face regarding their oral and communicative abilities in English (Matsuura, Chiba, & Hilderbrandt, 2001; Yamaoka, 2010; Yanagi & Baker, 2016). Some critics may blame policies, ineffective pedagogical practices, unique cultural influences, and/or myriad other reasons. Of course, all these factors are responsible to varying degrees. However, teachers, researchers, policy experts, and business leaders with experience in Japan can all agree: before entering university, Japanese students are taught to read English, not speak it (Matsuura, Chiba, & Hilderbrandt, 2001; Yamaoka, 2010; Yanagi & Baker, 2016). In fact, due to students' limited opportunities for English speaking practice prior to university entrance, Yamaoka (2010) encourages junior high and high school teachers to emphasize a four-skills approach in their teaching and to incorporate more communication tasks (e.g., debates, discussions, and presentations) in their lessons. Once in university, students are then asked to practice expressing themselves and their ideas on a wide range of important and timely topics in their English courses. University teachers are thus placed in a strategic and leading role of improving their students' communicative

English ability and internationalization efforts by incorporating global learning and awareness into the curriculum.

A study done by Matsuura et al. (2001) found that although the majority of students and teachers agree that lesson topics related to daily life are the most appropriate for learning English, more than 66% of students from the study felt that learning about social issues is also an important and appropriate way to study language. Cates (1990) also explains how the responsibility of a language teacher is to teach more than just grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills. Rather, language teaching should integrate “the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to help language students become socially responsible world citizens” (Cates, 1990, p. 46). Finally, universities themselves have a special role in societies around the world (Reimers, 2009). Higher education institutions have a responsibility to develop global values, global citizenship, and foreign language skills in their students (Cates, 1990; Leask, 2015; Reimers, 2009).

Higher education and affiliated language classes hold special responsibility for preparing students for an ever-changing and globalizing world. It may be said then, that integrating global topics into the curriculum can be used as an important tool for language learning. This move also contributes to larger internationalization efforts and provides effective opportunities for Japanese students of English to improve their communicative English ability. *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* is a textbook that adequately assists teachers in creating an engaging communicative English classroom in tandem with cultivating among students a deeper understanding of global issues, awareness, and citizenship.

Description of *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills*

Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills (Pearson et al., 2021) is a textbook designed to teach the strategies, skills, and phrases that students need to effectively participate in English discussions. Simply speaking, the textbook provides a range of global issues for students to discuss and illustrates how different countries are working to solve each issue. The textbook package comes with a student book, a teacher’s manual (with two review tests), and an audio CD for the listening exercises.

Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills is divided into 15 units. The topics include: **The Cashless Society, Fast Fashion, Plastic Packaging, Cell Phone Etiquette, Vegetarianism, Social Media, The Soda Tax, Over Tourism, Improving**

Education, Voting Age, Rethinking Zoos, Alternative Energy, Equal Pay in Sports, Gaming Addiction, and Britain’s Royal Family. Additionally, each unit focuses on learning a useful discussion skill or strategy. These skills include: *how to discuss opinions, how to ask questions if you didn’t hear or understand, how to agree and disagree, how to give yourself time to think, how to support reasons with examples, how to continue a discussion, how to expand your answer, how to ask for, make, and respond to suggestions, how to support your opinion with multiple reasons, how to check understanding, how to lead a discussion, how to discuss the pros and cons, how to discuss both sides of an argument, how to interrupt politely and deal with interruptions,* and, finally, *how to summarize a discussion.*

Each unit begins with the unit topic and the discussion skill goal. This is followed by the “Get Ready” section, which provides a set of three simple discussion questions (generally, *yes* or *no* questions or *wh-* questions) that are used for warming up the students and introducing the global issues topic. For example, on the topic of social media, the questions include: “How often do you use social media?,” “Do you ever post comments to famous people’s social media accounts?,” and “Do you use your real name when you post on social media? Why? / Why not?” (Pearson et al., 2021, p. 32). The next section is “Vocabulary,” which provides a set of six relevant vocabulary terms for the global issues topic. The students are asked to match the six vocabulary words with their correct definitions.

Following the vocabulary section is the “Listening” section. This section is broken down into five exercises. The first exercise asks students to read a listening/pronunciation tip and then listen and repeat the example sentences. The next exercise asks students to listen and complete a gap fill. Following this exercise is an example report that explains the global issue topic and examines how a specific country is working toward solving the issue; this report is accompanied by one exercise that asks students to listen for main ideas and answer some questions (true/false, multiple choice, etc.) and another exercise that has the students listen for details and answer questions (gap fills, multiple choice, true/false, etc.). The final exercise in the “Listening” section asks students to read along with the report and fill in the missing words.

After the “Listening” section is “Conversation”. It is in the “Conversation” section that the book moves from focusing on the global issues topic to emphasizing the specific discussion skill or strategy of the unit. The first exercise has students answer questions related to an example conversation provided in the textbook. Just like the earlier listening practice, the students are asked to answer questions before the listening (a.k.a. the example

conversation). Once this exercise is finished, the students listen to the example conversation and answer questions about the main ideas and details. On the back side of the “Conversation” exercises page is the model conversation, which includes two, three, or sometimes four speakers. The speakers have both Japanese and non-Japanese names. The model conversation provides an example of how the specific discussion skill, strategy, or phrase is used in context as it relates to the global issues report.

The final section after “Conversation” is “Discussion”. This section provides numerous items: an explanation of the discussion skill for the unit, its relevant and useful phrases, a flowchart describing how the discussion skill or strategy is used in discussion, and an accompanying discussion activity. For instance, the unit covering the discussion skill *how to lead a discussion* includes a flow chart that shows how a discussion leader introduces, manages, and concludes a discussion. The accompanying discussion activity asks students to lead their group in discussion using the following questions: “Should zoos be banned?,” “Are pet cafes good for animals?,” “Is it okay to keep pets in small apartments?,” and “Which are better as pets: cats, or dogs?” (Pearson et al., 2021, p. 67). The flow chart clearly shows the student leader introducing the topic and the first question, involving group members, discussing the question, checking if anyone has more to add, moving to a new question, and then finally ending the discussion. For each step of the flowchart, there are useful phrases the students can reference and use during the discussion. Some of these phrases include: “Today’s topic is...,” “Let’s start with the first question.,” “Do you agree with...?,” “Does everyone agree?,” “Does anyone have anything to add?,” “Let’s move on to the next question.,” and “Thanks everyone. That was a good discussion.” (Pearson et al., 2021, p. 67).

Strengths of *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills*

The textbook *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* has multiple strengths. These strengths include organized and consistent units, suitable global issues topics, well selected discussion skills and strategies, and adaptable units. First, because all the units of *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* have the same structure (“Get Ready” → “Vocabulary” → “Listening” → “Conversation” → “Discussion”), both teacher and students can develop a comfortable daily or weekly routine (depending on how often the class meets). Additionally, the tasks and exercises within each unit are straightforward and simple, allowing the teacher to effectively plan and time the lesson and its activities.

Second, the global issue topics selected for this textbook are suitable for beginner to intermediate language learners. The global issues themselves are important and timely, yet not overly complicated for a typical university-aged student. Additionally, the language used to discuss the global issue topics is appropriate for beginner to intermediate student levels. The language is neither too difficult that it demotivates student learning nor too easy that it bores students.

The next, and perhaps biggest, strength of this textbook is that the discussion skills and strategies covered are thorough and well-selected. As mentioned, Japanese students of English need to not only develop their oral communication skills, but also to learn, understand, and ultimately practice how discussions are conducted in English. The discussion skills and strategies selected for this textbook provide students with useful phrases, strategies, flow, and organization for effective English discussions. This textbook breaks down the components of a natural discussion and provides example discussions that the students can reference. Using these skills, students gain the ability to successfully participate in English discussions, which is important in academic settings and careers with an international, English-language component.

Lastly, *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* has adaptable units which the teacher can tailor to their class and scheduling needs. The textbook has a total of 15 units that fit perfectly for a class that meets once a week during a 15-week academic semester. The teacher could also expand the use of the textbook and cover half of the textbook in one semester and the other half in the second semester, thus creating a yearlong course. However, for course expansion, the teacher would need to create appropriate supplemental materials and activities depending on the length of each class and the needs of the students. For example, the teacher could spend more time having students work on the discussion skill *supporting their opinions with reasons* in preparation for an upcoming class debate.

Weaknesses of *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills*

Despite the numerous strengths of *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills*, the textbook is not without its weaknesses. These limitations include minimal unit vocabulary, redundant exercises, and lack of creativity in book discussion activities.

Each unit of the 15-unit book includes six new vocabulary words, and the vocabulary exercises include a definition-matching activity. The words are then used in context in the global issues report. The book does an adequate job of showing how the words are used but is

lacking in the number of vocabulary words and the presentation of said words. The book could be improved if the authors increased the number of vocabulary words per unit (12-15 words) in future editions. This would allow the teacher to create engaging vocabulary exercises and activities for students to do. Unfortunately, six words is just not enough to make fun vocabulary activities. Additionally, the book could be improved if the presentation of the vocabulary words went beyond just matching the definitions. The book could include other vocabulary activities and perhaps eye-catching illustrations that showcase the meaning.

Another weakness of this textbook is the redundancy of activities. Yes, one strength of this textbook is that repetition of the structure and activities allow students and teachers to develop a comfortable routine. However, constantly presenting the same listening and conversation activities can easily become dull. One remedy might be for the teacher to incorporate other activities (dictations, role plays, pair/group work, etc.) into each exercise.

The final drawback of this textbook is the overall lack of creativity in discussion activities throughout. Each unit utilizes similar types of activities and does not venture beyond “safe” exercises such as simply asking students to discuss a question with their partner. The teacher will need to supplement these activities to make them more engaging for students. Thus, the teacher is advised to use the textbook merely as a template and guide for a course on global issues and discussion skills, rather than to follow the book class by class or week by week. From this starting point, the teacher can be creative in designing their course. The course design can include activities and assessments such as term papers, presentations, class debates, posters, discussions, and other student-centered activities. One major class project I incorporate into my own course (English communication for pre-intermediate to intermediate university students) is an activity called “Firestarter.” In this activity, students are divided into groups of three to four for the semester. Each student then signs up for a class day/week of their choosing and, on that day, the student is required to bring a real English news article they found to class. The student leads their group in discussion on that news topic. In preparation for this activity, the student reads the news article, writes a summary, and creates discussion questions for their group. On the day of the discussion, the student presents a summary of the news article along with five discussion questions. The groups are then expected to have an English-only discussion for about 20 minutes using the discussion skills and strategies practiced in class and from the textbook. After the discussion activity, the students are asked to do a short reflective assignment about what they learned and how well they think the discussion(s) went.

Conclusion

Overall, *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* is an adequate and unique textbook to help improve students' English discussion skills as well as their knowledge of global issues. The textbook provides an organized and consistent structure that allows for creative course-building and imaginative supplementation from the instructor. The book itself also provides example reports of global issues, overviews of how different countries are tackling said issues, ample listening practice, and useful skills and strategies for conducting effective English discussions. I recommend this textbook for intermediate- to advanced-level English communication classes. I also advise that more experienced teachers and instructors use this textbook as a successful course will require a lot of preparation, planning, and course-building. Beginning teachers may find this amount of necessary course planning overwhelming. Nevertheless, if an English department or instructor is looking to add a global element to their curriculum, or if there is a need to improve students' communicative discussion abilities, *Global Issues: An Introduction to Discussion Skills* is a textbook worth considering.

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