



## Posthumanist Approach to the Role of Textbooks that Underpins Student Engagement in English Language Learning under Covid-19: A Case from Japanese Universities

Hiroyuki Ida

*Josai University*

Yaoko Matsuoka

*University of the People*

This study investigates how paper-based textbooks were used in online English language teaching in Japanese universities during the COVID-19 pandemic, applying a posthumanist approach. Two online surveys were conducted with 126 students to examine their perception of the role and the use of paper textbooks in online classes in 2020 and 2021. Results of the obtained data and free description showed that students effectively engaged in online learning in both home space and classroom, and paper-based textbooks assisted them in developing a sense of community by sharing the same contents remotely. These results suggest that paper-based textbooks worked effectively in the pandemic-driven online learning environment. The findings are also underpinned by Japan's education policy of providing free textbooks from elementary to secondary education. At the same time, it appeared that students gradually got accustomed to online learning and began seeking new materials that would give them more options and fit online teaching. Future research would include uncovering the relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' actual sense-making processes.

本研究では、日本の大学のオンライン英語教育において、COVID19によるパンデミック時に紙の教科書がどのように使用されていたかを、ポストヒューマニズム・アプローチを適用して調査する。2020年と2021年のオンライン授業における紙教科書の役割と使用についての学生の認識を調べるため、126人の大学生を対象に2回のオンラインで質問紙調査（選択肢、自由記述）を実施した。得られたデータと自由記述の結果、学生は、自宅空間と教室の両方でオンライン学習に積極的に取り組んでおり、紙教科書は、同じコンテンツを共有することで学生の一体感を育んだことが示された。これらの結果は、パンデミックをきっかけとするオンライン学習の環境において、紙媒体教科書が有効に機能したことを示唆する。また、初等教育から中等教育までの教科書の無償配布という日本の教育政策も、これらの結果を裏打ちしている。しかし同時に、学生は、徐々にオンライン学習に馴染むにつれて、より多くの学習の選択肢を提供し、オンライン教育にも適合するような新しい教材を求め始めたことが分かった。今後の展望として、教師の信念と生徒の実際の理解プロセスの関係を明らかにする研究が求められる。

**Keywords:** textbook use, online learning, posthumanist approach, post-pandemic English teaching



## Introduction

This paper investigates how paper-based textbooks foster student engagement in online English language learning in the Covid-19 pandemic situation. The role of textbooks is culturally sustained object (Dabbagh & Atai, 2022). In Japan, from elementary to secondary school, students use textbooks authorized by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Japan (MEXT). Students are distributed authorized textbooks free from elementary to secondary school. High school uses authorized textbooks but students pay for them. At the university, Japanese students often buy textbooks especially in English language teaching context. Even at the university level, the usage of paper-based textbooks frequently occurs in English language teaching. In such a situation, students learn all the contents from their teachers, and they seldom need to seek additional information. This issue has been criticized as “spoon-feeding” (Smith, 2008), as the efficiency of course designs results in a restriction of students’ active engagement; that is, there is a deficit of interaction in the relationship between students and the learning materials, and this is not fully addressed in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Researchers and teachers have encouraged the use of technology in the emergent educational situation under the Covid-19 pandemic (Rose et al., 2021). They have also long pointed to the benefits of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Farr & Murray, 2016). This suggests that while the discussion on pedagogical issues is active, scant attention is being paid to the role of learning materials in relation to people.

A crucial challenge of the pandemic was for students to navigate the spatial dichotomy between the classroom and online instruction with the use of paper-based textbooks as objects and make sense of this engagement, beyond what was discussed in English language learning (Williamson et al., 2020). The pandemic altered the form of student participation (Gourlay et al., 2021), and a reinvestigation of the relationship between learners and textbooks is needed to help with curriculum and pedagogical design in the post-pandemic era.

This research therefore examines the role of paper-based textbooks in student engagement in English language learning under COVID-19 and conceptualizes the relationship between learners and textbooks by introducing and applying a posthumanist approach to the context of English language learning. The concept of “student engagement” is widely accepted in higher education. Using this concept will help illustrate the way student participate in knowledge practice and embody the students’ participation in English language teaching as well. Thus, this research uses “student engagement” as a way to grasp students’ participation in learning. The study focuses on students’ perceptions of textbook use in online classes and any changes in their perceptions. Similar terms such as “posthumanism” and “posthuman” appear in the literature, but this research uses “posthumanist approach,” as the term “posthumanism” is said “to have worked its way into contemporary critical discourse in the humanities and social sciences during the mid-1990s” (Wolfe, 2010, p. xii) and tends to refer to the context of humanism. Introducing posthumanist approach helps discuss the relationship between learners and textbooks in pandemic situation under our experience of quarantine. Its approach regards humans as “seen as constituted—both from within and without—through perpetually unfolding relations with multiple other agents and forces which transgress and confound the imagined boundaries of the human individual, the human self, and the human social domain” (Nimmo, 2019, p.2). As this definition suggests, our research using this approach fosters our understanding of instable relationship between learners and textbooks, which will be conceptualized and applicable to English language teaching context. This research does not step into such disciplinary nature but focuses on the relationship between humans and artifacts in this changing era. The posthumanist approach is “in particular concerned with the revitalization of the long history of human-and-animal/animal-and-human relationships” (Chan, 2018). As a conceptual framework, it can foster the relationship between students (humans) and learning materials (artifacts) in TESOL.

## Literature Review

### The Role of Textbooks in English Language Teaching

Developers of English language learning materials have employed a wide range of approaches (Tomlinson, 2016, 2018). Tomlinson (2012) described the role textbooks play in learning, asserting that they provide an “experience” of language learning rather than the dissemination of content knowledge. More recently, Kohnke (2019) pointed out the textbook's lack of content stimulating students' interest and cognitive development, while Khaerudin and Chik (2021) examined five selected textbooks from the viewpoint of fostering learner autonomy. However, research on teaching materials has discussed little of the actual use of textbooks in class, although Garton and Graves (2014) already suggested it. The reason is that many teachers do not prepare for complex factors that surround textbook use; for instance, socio-cultural expectations affect their decision-making about the use of learning materials (Graves & Garton, 2019).

While this issue has been noted in language learning contexts, the discussion is underpinned by several research studies from posthumanism that explored the relationship between technology and humans. For example, the posthuman view was accepted in higher education, and many authors:

take on the challenging task to engage with life's human and non-human forms and to rethink the status of human while being inspired by the complexity of human and non-human relations, creativity, and imagination. (Taylor & Bayley, 2019, p. VI)

This relationship between the humans and non-humans has long been elaborated to capture the complex sense-making process of engagement in knowledge practice, and this is significant in rethinking the nature of student participation in the academy. First, I will review the key works to contextualize the discussion on posthumanism within English language learning.

In addition, the nature of learning materials has been investigated in several research areas. One of the radical but dominant discourses is from literacy studies. Objects' instability is emphasized as follows: “people and things assemble differently in different times and places” (Burnett & Merchant, 2020, p. 24). In the field of educational technology, Oliver (2013) explored the nature of tools to augment the dynamic nature as a social attribute of technology. Oliver's study shed light on several persuasive theoretical frameworks (e.g., affordance proposed by Gibson), and people's sense-making process is rather significant in considering the relationship between technology and people. This was also underpinned by Latour (2005) from sociology, suggesting that science is made in relation to the interaction between objects and people. These previous studies demonstrate the nature of the object in the academy was acknowledged as instable and complex in relation to our sense-making process.

COVID-19 has drastically changed the normal teaching and learning relationship and affected student-staff relationships as well. This has been recognized as “pedagogies of mattering,” and it has been argued that unpredictable results were emergent on marginalization and privilege (Gravett et al., 2021). Gravett et al. (2021) summarized the changing pedagogies under Covid-19 as follows:

bodily privilege and erasure have been very apparent where access to digital and face-to-face learning opportunities have produced a number of outcomes. It has enabled an increase in participation for those staff and students who are shielding and physically unable to attend lectures. (p. 10)

Pedagogically, the relationship between humans and objects has blurred the boundaries between home spaces and classrooms, resulting in teaching and learning in these spaces. Under this situation, pedagogies “offer some ways to facilitate more productive teaching and learning relationships for both parties by encouraging us to consider the impact material spaces have on teaching and learning” (Gravett et al., 2021, p. 10). This suggests that boundaries between the classroom and daily life are disseminating, and the

relationships among teachers, students, and objects are also changing, resulting in the traditional dual categorization of teaching and learning (Macfarlane, 2015); rather, newer meanings will be added to pedagogy, and English language learning can be positioned within this framework.

In summary, objects themselves are instable and posited outside people, which have been overlooked in English language learning. In language learning, locating the textbook within changing pedagogies embodies its instable aspects.

## **Student Engagement as a Form of Participation**

As the relationships among space, objects, and humans are changing, the nature of student engagement in learning is as well. Based on a wide range of studies, Trowler (2010) defined student engagement as below:

Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort, and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution. (p. 3)

“Student engagement” is a broadly accepted concept in higher education, which covers entire students’ experience in the academy. While engagement is sometimes equated with participation in activities, Trowler suggests that it includes both positive and negative experiences and sets the categories of “behavioral,” “emotional,” and “cognitive” aspects. These categories can be relevant to students’ desired outcomes (Kuh, 2009a, 2009b). Kuh’s understanding of student engagement was easier to be accepted as it demonstrates the performance of students, which leads to the development of an outcome-based curriculum and is assimilated into the simplistic view of learners. Latour and Woolgar (1979) propose that in the context of science in the laboratory, science develops from the interaction between people and objects. This features the mechanism of the making of science, and the perspective can be drawn over into the nature of learning in higher education, where criticizing simplistic discourse tends to be a characteristic of learners (Macfarlane, 2015).

In the discussion on student engagement, the values of academic disciplines are often ignored (Kreber & Castleden, 2009; Löytönen, 2017). Literacy scholars, especially those who highlight a social view, warn about such superficial discourse. One of the underlying views was launched by criticizing the performance-based study skill approach and decontextualized academic writing (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2006), and this theoretical framework was taken over into the discussion on student engagement (Gourlay, 2015, 2017; Gourlay & Oliver, 2016). With the introduction of the sociomateriality of literacies, the posthumanism approach was used to investigate the relationship among learners, technology (objects), and space. Drawing on the sense-making process, student engagement in knowledge practice is highly situational and free-floating (i.e., unpredictable), and technology cannot bind student engagement in the academy. Furthermore, the current literature builds on a sociomaterial approach to literacy and technology (Burnett & Merchant, 2020), and even in the pandemic situation, students gain new knowledge and practice wherever they are (Gourlay, 2021). The term “virtual learning” fails to recognize students’ embodied practices.

As the form of student participation is flexible, this concept also applies to this research. In fact, when students face remote learning, they can positively participate in class and develop their own way of learning both inside and outside of the classroom by using textbooks. This also raises the need to shed light on the human relationship with objects in the process of engagement. Section 2.3 introduces the posthumanist approach and explores how humans relate to objects in TESOL.

## What is the Posthumanist Approach?

As we have experienced during the pandemic, educational engagement in TESOL is changing alongside the objects that are used. To link learners and objects, this paper introduces the view of posthumanism. Posthumanism is widely used and accepted, and this research reviews the discussion in applied linguistics. Fuller (2011) explains that in the posthumanist view, “humans are improving their capacity to manipulate and transform the material character of their being” (p. 109). Hasse (2020) applies the posthumanist approach to educational context, rejecting the taken-for-granted view of education.

The human is no longer to be taken-for-granted in teaching, learning, and educational matters. Posthumanism calls for a notion of diversity and a transgression of old dichotomies and a priori separations. It speaks against a neutral universal approach to education and learning. Instead, it emphasizes the entanglement of the social, the material, and the discursive. (p. 313)

Considering this definition, the relationship between learners and material is not predefined; rather, the need to explore emergent assemblages will enhance the authentic role of paper-based textbooks.

In applied linguistics, the posthumanist approach is discussed to conceptualize the relationships among language, humans, and objects, and agency has gradually come to be recognized as well (Pennycook, 2018). In Pennycook’s argument, these four elements are not the properties of individual humans but are “distributed across people, places and artifacts” (p. 446), meaning they can be relocated as social elements. Although Pennycook did not refer to the context of online learning as a result of the pandemic, the coupling of human-technology is often investigated and gradually accepted as “technological posthumanism” (Cecchetto, 2013), which does not regard the relationship between human and technology as fixed or concrete, enabling us to serve as a basis for further elaboration. Hayles (2012, p. 14) argued that material “is not pre-given entry but rather a dynamic focus.” To advance our discussion in TESOL, such relocation will enable us to consider students’ new way of participation, not as individual factors but as socially constructed ones, which will dominate the new form of student engagement. In this line, second language learning links to the cognitive process, but the posthumanist approach notes that “consideration of the social, spatial, and embodied dimensions of language learning opens up an understanding of second language development as a distributed process” (Pennycook, 2017, p. 9). This is related to students’ sense of their engagement in their own way underpinned by the socially motivated condition. In dissolving the boundary between classrooms and daily life in language learning, we need to understand such flexible aspects of practice and, again, the role of objects that will aid student participation in remote environments. This will be insightful in analyzing students’ flexible interaction between textbook and online teaching, and posthumanist approach is the foundations of understanding the relationship between people and material use in TESOL context.

In remote learning in the context of English language learning during the pandemic, new experiences will emerge with the use of learning materials. This paper uses the approaches of literacy scholars to English language learning to discuss the sense-making process of student engagement in language learning.

## Methodology

The same survey was conducted twice, in 2020 and 2021. This research administered the first round at University A at the end of the 2020 fall semester. After about a year, the second survey was conducted at University B in the late 2021 fall semester. Both are co-educational universities that include male and female students and are in central Tokyo. University A consists of a few humanities departments, including pedagogy and business administration, while University B is a more comprehensive organization with a more significant number of departments, ranging from economics and business administration to science and engineering. This research has chosen these universities because each of the present authors has

instructed courses at each university. This difference in instructors in the two universities has affected little of the research results because the students' age and English learning experiences, the class delivery modes, the way to use materials, and other situations had many things in common. Furthermore, the instructors (the authors) shared information regularly to maintain the consistency of the study. The study adhered to approved procedures for research ethics and informed consent, including anonymity and confidentiality.

## Participants

The participants were 123 first-year students majoring in education (University A:  $n = 94$ ) and economics (University B:  $n = 29$ ) with lower-intermediate to intermediate English proficiency and varied learning motivations. Although the number of participants differed at each university, all the participants were first-year undergraduates majoring in non-English humanities, had similar English proficiency, and were engaged in remote learning because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

University A provided the students with online materials in the spring semester and a paper-based textbook in the fall semester. The course was designed to develop four integrated English skills and included paragraph and essay writing. Classes were mostly delivered asynchronously with a few synchronous online lessons via Microsoft Teams.

At University B, the instructor chose a paper-based textbook and distributed supplementary materials to develop students' writing. Many course activities were designed to foster writing skills, and communication skills were also emphasized. Students at University B take English modules by the second year as compulsory. The course was delivered in the form of blended online classes with both synchronous and asynchronous Zoom lessons.

## Materials

The electronic questionnaire was disseminated via the online learning management system (LMS) at Universities A and B. It consisted of five multiple-choice questions on the effectiveness, benefits, drawbacks, and the easiest and most challenging aspects of using textbooks in online classes. Students who chose "Other" as their answer could add further comments after each response. There was also a sixth, open-ended question in the free description space to elicit the students' general views on online instruction. The survey questions were as follows:

1. Do you think it is good or effective to use a paper-based textbook in an online class?
2. What are the benefits for students to use a paper-based textbook in online classes? Select as many answers as you like. (+ Free comment)
3. What are the drawbacks for students to use a paper-based textbook in an online class? Select as many answers as you like. (+ Free comment)
4. Choose the first and second easiest contents to study in the online class using the textbook. Please be sure to choose two for this class only.
5. Choose the first and second most difficult contents to study in the online class using the textbook. Please be sure to choose two for this class only.
6. Free Comment: Describe your feelings about online classes, including on-demand classes using the LMS and classes using simultaneous delivery methods such as Zoom and Teams.

These questions were designed to examine the roles of textbooks (objects) that might support student engagement in English language learning in remote situations. For this sake, the analysis focused on multiple-choice questions 1, 2, and 3. It also focused on question 6, the free comment that elicited information on students' learning experiences and contextualized how they used textbooks in remote learning. The final analysis, however, excluded the results of questions 4 and 5 that focused on specific English skills because they appeared to have no direct relationship with this study's purposes. All the

questions and answers obtained were in Japanese, and the authors translated them into English, taking care to maintain the meaning of the original sentences.

## Results and Analysis

For the questionnaire results, the quantitative data are tabulated in simple numerical forms, and the qualitative data comprise the students' comments. The results include the participants' overall perceptions of textbook use, including its positive and negative aspects, followed by individual students' opinions and comments about the use of paper textbooks in online classes. As students' time and space of learning differ in online learning, the relationship between learners and textbooks cannot be fixed; rather situated experience will be featured not to eliminate their sense-making process. This is the perspective drawn from the posthumanist approach, challenging the view of instable combination of the human and object.

### Students' Overall Perception of Using Paper Textbooks in Online Classes

Question 1 asked "Do you think it is good or effective to use a paper-based textbook in an online class?" Table 1 shows the results of the students' answers at University A ( $n = 94$ ) in 2020 and University B ( $n = 29$ ) in 2021 in number and percentage.

TABLE 1

*Results of Q. 1: Effectiveness of Using Paper-Based Textbooks in Online Classes in Numbers and Percentage*

Choices	AY 2020, University A ( $n = 94$ )		AY 2021, University B ( $n = 29$ )	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1. I think so	52	(55%)	12	(41%)
2. I think so to some extent	19	(20%)	9	(31%)
3. Not so much	5	(5%)	7	(24%)
4. I don't think so	1	(1%)	1	(3%)
5. No answer	17	(18%)	0	(0%)

The students were asked to select one of five answer choices. In University A in 2020, 52 students (55%) answered "I think so" and 19 students (20%) answered "I think so to some extent," which means that, in total, about 75% of the participants admitted the effectiveness of paper-based textbooks. In University B in 2021, 72 % of students answered "I think so" (41%) and "I think so to some extent" (31%). Only 1% in 2020 and 3% in 2021 answered "I don't think so." Thus, overall, more than 70% of the participants believed that using a paper textbook in online classes was effective.

### Benefits Of Using Paper-Based Textbooks In Online Classes

Question 2 asked "What are the benefits for students to use a paper-based textbook in online classes?" Participants were allowed to select more than one answer from the five choices and were encouraged to fill in the free comment section if they had additional answers. Table 2 summarizes the results.

TABLE 2

Results of Question 2: Benefits of Using Paper-Based Textbooks in Online Classes in Percentage (Multiple Choice)

	University A (n = 94)	University B (n = 29)
	AY 2020	AY 2021
1. It is easy to share information since both teachers and students have the same textbook.	46%	31%
2. I can get detailed explanations and information that are difficult to be conveyed online.	36%	24%
3. With the paper textbook at hand, I can have peace of mind.	44%	28%
4. It is easy to learn even when I am absent from the online class.	22%	17%
5. It is easy to check contents that are completed / to be studied.	45%	0%

In each year, most participants selected choice 1, “It is easy to share information since both teachers and students have the same textbook,” (46% in 2020 and 31% in 2021). Similarly, choice 2, “I can get detailed explanations and information that are difficult to be conveyed online,” and choice 3, “With the paper textbook at hand, I can have peace of mind,” were selected by a considerable percentage of students in both years: 36% and 44% in 2020 and 24% and 28% in 2021, respectively. Moreover, in 2020, the fourth percentage of 22% of students selected choice 4, “Easy to learn even when absent from the online class.” At the same time, 17% selected the same choice in 2021. However, 45% of students chose choice 5, “Easy to check contents that are completed / to be studied,” in 2020, while no one selected that choice in 2021. Despite the slight change in the social and educational conditions from 2020 to 2021, the results for the two academic years showed similar trends. The students admitted the practical usefulness of the paper textbooks and perceived a sense of togetherness in the remote study environment in both years. Despite the similar trend, there was a 12- to 16-point decrease in the percentages of students selecting these choices in 2021 over 2020. This may indicate that more students were able to learn online without relying so much on paper textbooks. Also, the big difference between 2020 and 2021 regarding the ease of checking contents suggests that students might have got used to digital materials and become more comfortable reading online. In other words, the affinity for online classes increased in 2021.

In the free descriptions, the participants generally agreed that they could write down important points and underline sentences directly, and it was easy to review and preview contents in the textbook. Furthermore, students at University B underpinned that they could compensate for what they did not understand from what the teacher said. Interestingly, whereas students were asked to purchase paper-based textbooks in class, they found their own way of using them to fit their learning. The following are excerpts from the students’ free comments.

- It makes me aware of what I am learning. It was good I could write down what I didn’t understand and see the progress of the questions. (University A, 2020)
- Even if I don’t understand the content, having the textbook, I can take my time and don’t have to rush. (University B, 2021)

### Drawbacks of Using Paper-Based Textbooks

Question 3 asked, “What are the drawbacks, for students, of using textbooks in online classes? Select as many answers as you like.” If the students chose “Other,” they were encouraged to specify their answer further. The results are summarized in Table 3.



TABLE 3

*Results of Question 3: Drawbacks of Using Textbooks in Online Classes in Percentage (Multiple Choice)*

	University A (n = 94)	University B (n = 29)
	AY 2020	AY 2021
1. It's unreasonable to pay for textbooks for an online class	28%	62%
2. I want all the materials to be given online if it is an online class.	17%	41%
3. Online classes cannot do the entire content of the textbook, which results in wasted parts.	34%	10%
4. It contains content that can only be done well in paper form.	11%	10%
5. I am more familiar with digital materials than paper materials.	2%	3%

Interestingly, the percentage of students who selected choice 1, “It’s unreasonable to pay for textbooks for an online class,” increased significantly from 28% in University A in 2020 to 62% in University B in 2021. The ratio for choice 2, “I want all the materials to be given online if it is an online class,” also increased from 17% to 41% in these two years. In contrast, the proportion of those who selected choice 3, “Online classes cannot do the entire content of the textbook, which results in wasted parts,” decreased considerably from 34% in 2020 to 10% in 2021. In both years, about 10% of students selected choice 4, “It contains content that can only be done well in paper form,” and only a few percent of students selected 5, “I am more familiar with digital materials than paper materials.”

Over the two years, students became somewhat familiar with the digital learning environment, even if they did not gain advanced computer skills. As they became more comfortable with online classes and could afford them, they may have become more willing to accept online materials and started to consider the cost of paper-based textbooks.

The students’ comments in the free description space backed up these results and provided additional information based on their thoughts. For example, some students commented as follows:

- In online learning, there may be a difference between those who use textbooks and those who do not. (University A, 2020)
- I want teachers to seek a unique way [of instruction] to fit online teaching. (University B, 2021)

These comments suggest that having textbooks raised the sense of belonging in the class and assisted their self-paced learning. Based on these comments, it seems the students perceived some contradiction in the teacher’s instructional methods. Furthermore, the students at University B critically answered as follows:

- The quality and level of a textbook may decide the quality of the lesson.
- When I am outside, if I don’t have a textbook, I cannot take the lesson.
- It is inevitable that our understanding in an online class will be different from in a face-to-face class. I think teachers should limit online teaching to conversation for effective instruction.

While this research takes posthumanist approach, where students’ engagement is highly flexible, the roles of textbooks played a crucial role in framing the boundary between lesson and daily lives outside the classroom. Textbooks were the prerequisite object that constitute the lesson itself. They found that the online classes differed from conventional face-to-face classes in terms of course materials and teaching methods, and accordingly, they wanted different instructional approaches.

## Discussion

Three points emerged for discussion. Firstly, as research studies from literacy studies and relevant areas suggested, students' engagement itself is situated and free-floating. This research underlines the role of paper-based textbooks, underpinned by student engagement. While research studies on student engagement suggested (i.e., Trowler, 2010; Kuh, 2009), actual student's participation is situated and embodied through the use of textbooks, which goes beyond the superficial definition. Students worked on tasks on the textbooks outside the classroom and ask questions based on the lectures. These are specific to English language teaching, and added the way the notion of student engagement was enacted. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Japanese students are familiar with paper-based textbooks from secondary education, and expanding educational practices need to take into account the influence of the educational system. In this sense, the data are culturally bounded and not generalizable.

Secondly, the introduction of the posthumanist approach to textbook use in TESOL was efficient in conceptualizing the relationship among people (bodies), objects (textbooks), and spaces (classroom/online). Especially, as such boundaries are shifting, textbooks underpin students' sense-making, and this was made visible during the Covid-19 pandemic. To conceptualize the relationship between learners and textbooks, posthumanist approach was an effective framework in that materials helped eliminate the boundary between classrooms and students' daily lives. However, it might have existed before the pandemic, as the posthumanist approach often emphasizes the nature of textbooks. Again, a textbook is not a taken-for-granted tool, as it assists students' sense of belonging in the lesson. As this research focuses on emergent phenomena, we could not clearly compare the differences in how student experiences really changed in relation to their textbook use. More specifically, the notification of interpretation of data is that to what extent the data really support the uniqueness of pandemic-specific phenomena. This is what we need to note in addressing emergent phenomena, but focusing on the role of objects enabled us to reconsider the role of the relationships among bodies, objects, and spaces, locating them in a comprehensive way, as in Pennycook (2017, 2018). This research adds to and embodies Pennycook's framework in the TESOL context.

Lastly, regarding the free descriptions, students at University A had begun online learning at the start of the pandemic, and they were not well prepared to reflect on the experience. On the other hand, those at University B had engaged in online learning for at least two years, and they explicitly understood the uniqueness and ubiquitous aspect of it. This was reflected in their free description responses, and students were anticipating a different way of participating in the lesson. As time went by, their experience was changing. Although this research could not trace their educational background, the students at University B might have taken online lessons at the stage of secondary education, which might have affected their expectations at the university. As a clear comparison was not possible in capturing emergent practices, the challenge we faced was to limit the scope and unit of analysis, which alternatively might overlook the element that would be relevant to student engagement. In Japan, the discussion on material has focused on content analysis, where the use of textbooks has little been discussed. In this sense, this research has achieved the actual use of textbooks in the pandemic era, but would contribute to foster situated practice of textbook use applicable to broader English language teaching context. However, methodological challenge remains. In eliciting experience of textbook use, students can appropriately express their experience as reflection. This is methodological issue in respect to methodology, and self-reporting (reflection) was investigated previously (Macfarlane & Gourlay, 2009).

Further methodological limitations exist. To effectively draw much more authentic data, a different approach to students' experience should have been employed as well (i.e., interview; visual method) (Rose, 2016) to augment and include student experiences as authentic evidence.

## Conclusion

This research concludes that paper-based textbooks helped students learn during the Covid-19 pandemic and materialize the concept of "student engagement" in the TESOL context. In other words, paper-based textbooks fostered student engagement as a situated practice. The combination of material and people is dynamic and cannot be fixed, as structuralists suggest. In this sense, the posthumanist approach conceptualizes such flexible nature of engagement. The posthumanist approach can explain such social aspects of learning from the in-person and online environment. While much material research focuses more on its content development, our study using critical theories of "student engagement" and "posthumanist approach" made it possible to grasp the invisible but dynamic aspects of the learners' use of textbooks.

Future research should be directed toward teachers' views on the use of learning materials. As the need for online materials is gradually recognized, the next challenge is to explore teachers' viewpoints after the pandemic. This research focuses on the experiences of students, and teacher's decision-making process on material use is not covered. For further theorization, connecting the experiences of students to that of teachers will lead to offer a holistic view of the posthumanist approach in TESOL.

## The Authors

*Hiroyuki Ida* is assistant professor in Teacher-Training Course Center of Josai University in Japan.

Teacher-Training Course Center  
Josai University  
1-1 Keyakidai, Sakado, Saitama, 350-0295, Japan  
Tel: +81-49-271-8045  
Email: hiro-ida@josai.ac.jp

*Yaoko Matsuoka* is currently an online faculty at the Department of General Education and English at University of the People in California, USA.

Department of General Education and English,  
University of the People  
225 S. Lake Ave, Ste 300 Pasadena CA 92101, USA  
Email: yaoko.matsuoka@uopeople.edu

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