JOURNAL OF THE
RESEARCH CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

www.rcetj.org

ISSN 1948-075X

Volume 5, Number 3
Fall 2009

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Research Center for Educational Technology

JOURNAL OF THE
RESEARCH CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

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Volume 5, Number 3
Fall 2009

RCETJ, 5 (3), 29-44

Social Presence, Self-Presentation, and Privacy in Tele-Collaboration: What Information Are Students Willing to Share?

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The primary purpose of this study is to present the survey results from 255 Japanese university students to examine the attitudes of Japanese students toward sharing personal information during the process of establishing an online social presence in an academic setting. These findings university are presented to illustrate difficulties teachers can have in predicting what students will view as intrusions of their privacy. A shorter version of the survey was also administered to 160 Chinese university students. The secondary purpose of this study is to compare results from Japan and China to determine if the attitudes held by Japanese university students are held by their Chinese peers, and to illustrate that students may differ in attitudes towards the sharing of personal information for reasons based on cultural and conditional perceptions of privacy.

Conducting Telecollaboration Projects

Advances in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) have increased options for teachers to have their learners undertake telecollaboration projects. Belz (2003, p. 2) defines telecollaboration as "internationally-dispersed learners in parallel language classes using Internet communication tools such as e-mail, synchronous chat, and threaded discussion (as well as other forms of electronically mediated communication), in order to support social interaction, dialogue, debate, and intercultural exchange."

The appeal of telecollaboration, specifically for language teachers, is that it can be used to put students in a situation where dialogue with their telecollaborators will need to be conducted in the target language, either with native speakers of the target language, or with non-native speakers using the target language as a lingua franca. Telecollaboration can also be used for the purpose of intercultural exchange. Therefore, telecollaboration is of interest to not only language teachers, but potentially also to teachers of other subjects such as, but not limited to, history, geography, political science, or social studies.

Developing Inter-Cultural and Inter-Linguistic Competencies

Previous literature on telecollaboration projects indicates that such projects are effective in improving inter-cultural and inter-linguistic skills. A number of reports on telecollaboration projects specifically involving Japanese students tend to support this contention (e.g. Azuma, 2003; Chu, 2005; Fedderholt, 2001; Gray & Stockwell, 1998; Itakura, 2004; Okubo & Kumahata, 2001; Stockwell & Stockwell, 2003; Torii-Williams 2005). For example, Fedderholdt (2001), reporting about a Japanese-Danish telecollaboration project, showed that students in both countries had only superficial knowledge about each other before the project, but that after the project students had made various discoveries. Torii-Williams (2004) found that students in an U.S. - Japan project enjoyed the telecollaboration and "the project helped the students improve their mastery of language and increased their cultural knowledge" (p. 121). In contrast, it is worth noting that Itakura (2004) found that telecollaboration between students from Japan and Hong Kong sometimes led to a reinforcement of previously-held stereotypes about other cultures; and that Okubo and Kumahata (2000) found that their U.S. - Japan project produced "no

statistically significant change of attitudes" (p. 21) among Japanese university participants with regards to their interest in learning about foreign culture.

Practical Issues

Previous literature has also identified a number of practical problems teachers have encountered when implementing telecollaboration projects with Japanese students. Different time zones for normal classes at the institutions involved are often cited in the literature as placing constraints on the implementation of telecollaboration projects. Okubo and Kumahata (2000), writing about a U.S. – Japanese partnership, reported that "the problem, which we cannot resolve, is the time difference during iVisit sessions; 14 or 15 hours in time difference, depending on the Daylight Savings Time, becomes a menace" (p. 22). Differences in semester schedules can also be problematic. As Azuma (2003) pointed out, "It is often the case that the academic calendar between two countries is quite different" (p. 117). In Japan, university semesters run from April until late July, and then from September until March (with some vacation in January). Azuma (2003) also identified the potential difficulty of finding dedicated partner teachers at foreign institutions with whom to build telecollaborative projects; "without a dependable foreign colleague, it is impossible to carry out the videoconference project" (p. 116).

Fortunately, I was able to find a dedicated colleague working at a university in China willing to participate in an asynchronous email telecollaboration project. However, previous reports of telecollaboration projects in Japan give forewarning of additional practical considerations that need to be addressed. A number of studies have revealed late or non-responses to emails as a common source of student dissatisfaction with telecollaboration projects (e.g. Bourques, 2006; Harrison, 2006; Harrison & Kitao, 2005; Rookes, 2008). Therefore, teachers not only have stipulate how many emails their students send (e.g. two a week), but perhaps also when students respond to the emails they receive. The minimal time zone distance between Japan and China would make it possible to mandate that students respond to emails the same day they are received.

Japanese students may prefer to send and receive emails using their mobile phones. If recent trends have continued, Internet access through cell phones still outshines the use of personal computers for access in Japan, at least for the younger generation (Clark, 2003). Doing so would allow students to read and respond to emails anytime, wherever they are. However, in Japan, mobile phones are viewed as very personal belongings (Igarashi, Motoyoshi, Takai, & Yoshida, 2008) and Japanese students may wish to restrict email contact by mobile phone to friends and family.

Using telecollaboration as an integral part of students' final grade assessment would necessitate teachers monitoring their students' online interaction to make sure students fulfill course requirements, perhaps by asking students to forward their teacher their email exchanges. However, Harrison (2006) found that some students objected to emails intended for their telecollaboration partner being read by their instructor.

Social Presence

This study also considers another factor in the design of telecollaboration projects that has been virtually ignored in the telecollaboration literature: how to have learners quickly establish an online "social presence" via personal profiles without inadvertently intruding on a learner's right to privacy.

Social presence is "the ability of participants in a community to project themselves, socially and emotionally, as real people through a medium of communication" (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 49). Previous literature has noted that the degree of a learner's online social presence affects the amount and quality of interaction that takes place. Gunawardena (1995) found that when the level of online social presence is low, the amount of online interaction is also low. Tu (2002) found that in an extremely private online learning environment, there may be little interaction between learners or between teachers and students.

Previous telecollaboration projects involving Japanese students have shown that establishing a social presence can increase student enjoyment of telecollaboration projects and increase learner opportunities for developing target language skills. Harrison (2006) reported that, her Japanese students were hesitant to participate in a telecollaboration project, and "Wondering how they were perceived by their [telecollaboration partners] was by far the greatest cause of anxiety for students" (p.145). While Harrison's students' initial incentive for participating in the telecollaboration project was to raise their class grade, by the end of the project students cited the connection with their foreign partner as ultimately the greater reward. Harrison and Kitao (2005) found a strong correlation between Japanese students' positive evaluation of their telecollaboration project and their perception of having developed a "friendship" with their telecollaboration partners. They also found that Japanese students' emails were generally lengthier and more frequent as their telecollaboration relationships progressed. Their students reported that they had become more interested in understanding subtle meanings conveyed in their American partners' emails as their rapport grew stronger. Harrison and Kitao concluded that it is likely that as Japanese students build rapport with their telecollaboration partner, they are more willing to spend time exploring possibilities for self-expression which lead to language learning opportunities.

Personal Information and Privacy

A primary component of social presence is self-presentation (East Carolina University, 2008a). To initially establish learner social presence, Tu and McIsaac (2002) recommend that course time be dedicated to self-introductions. East Carolina University (2008b), for example, recommends having students post a profile that could include a picture of the student, instant messenger ID, current position, prior experience, interests associated with the field of study, and other personal information. While an important first step in a telecollaboration project is dedicating the first week(s) of the course to students establishing their social presence, ultimately, teachers cannot pressure students into providing personal information to others. This is an issue of a student's right to privacy. Learners are always in a position to control their online communication by choosing when and what they would like to communicate (Tu, 2002).

While there is no universally agreed upon definition of privacy (Lanier & Saini, 2008), two well-known definitions are "the right to be left alone" (Westin, 1967) and "the right to control the collection and use of information about oneself" (Mason, 1986). Korba et al. (2004) define a learner's privacy as "the conditions under which he or she is willing to share personal and other valued information with others" (p. 69). Privacy, therefore, may be understood as the right to exercise control over disclosure of personal information.

In Japan, the legal definition of "personal information" is:

> Information about a living individual which can identify the specific individual by name, or other description contained in such information (including such information as will allow easy reference to other information and will thereby enable the identification of the specific individual) (Act on the Protection of Personal Information, 2005, Chap. 1, Article 2).

Yet, it is information "about a living individual which can identify the specific individual" that teachers would want students to disseminate to increase their online social presence. Furthermore, information students deem to be personal, and therefore private, is based on their psychological, mental, cultural, or conditional perceptions of privacy (Korba et al., 2004), making it difficult for teachers to predict in advance what personal information students would be comfortable divulging.

Research Questions

1. How do Japanese students feel toward teachers monitoring their online interaction, collecting their email addresses, and storing students' personal information?
2. How and when do (would) Japanese students prefer to be contacted by email?

3. What items of personal data are Japanese students most concerned about disclosing in an e-learning system, and what items concern them the least?
4. How do Japanese student responses to Questions 2 and 3 above compare with those from Chinese university students?

Methods

Participants

A questionnaire was distributed to 255 Japanese students in 8 classes at two universities in the western region of Japan. Participants had a mean age of 19.1 (*SD* = 2.7), and 151 were male and 104 female. The participants ranged from freshmen to first year graduate-students studying a wide range of science and arts subjects. All participants were familiar with studying in a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) environment. Among them, 102 students were taking one-year online English courses. The remaining 153 students were taking English courses that included partial use of various e-learning media.

Procedures

The initial questionnaire was piloted among 39 Japanese university students. Questions found to be inappropriately designed or confusing in the pilot questionnaire were removed as per Fukutake and Matsubara (1992). The final questionnaire (see Appendix A), was printed on an A4-sized sheet which students could complete in approximately 10 minutes. The paper format was chosen because some freshmen participants were expected to have limited computer literacy, and to allay any worries that the participants' identity might be revealed by answering questions online. Questions were written in Japanese to ensure participant comprehension. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions and an additional request to provide open-ended comments. Question 1 gathered demographic data such as the participants' gender, age, and grade level. Questions 2-8 elicited participants' perceptions of and attitudes to personal data and privacy disclosure in e-learning.

Questions 2-8 can be grouped into three categories:

(a) Questions 2, 5, and 6 investigate participant attitudes toward teachers collecting their email addresses, monitoring their online activities, and storing their personal information. These questions employ a five-point Likert Scale where the respondent is asked to evaluate a statement according to their level of agreement or disagreement, ranging from (for example) 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
(b) Questions 3 and 4 investigate how and when students would like to be contacted online.
(c) Questions 7 and 8 investigate the degree of participants' concerns over specific items of personal information that they could be asked to disclose in an e-learning program.

As a teacher in Japan, I am primarily interested in survey results from Japanese students. However, as Japanese students would be telecollaborating with Chinese university students, this study's secondary focus is to see whether Japanese and Chinese students' attitudes differ with regards to when and how they prefer to be contacted by email, and also to see if they differ with regards to sharing personal information during the process of establishing an online social presence. A shorter (4 item) version of our survey, translated into Chinese, was distributed to an additional 160 Chinese learners at five universities across southern China. The Chinese survey contained only Questions 3, 4, 7, and 8 from the survey distributed in Japan.

Results from Japanese Students

Japanese Students' Perceptions of Collection of Email Addresses

Question 2 asked whether Japanese students support their teachers' collecting their mobile or computer e-mail addresses and used a five-point Likert Scale from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 5 (*strongly support*). Japanese students were generally supportive of their teachers collecting their e-mail addresses. Eighty-four (33%) students responded with 4 (*support*) and 38 (15%) with 5 (*strongly support*), totaling 48% of all students. One hundred and seven (42%) students responded with 3 (*neutral*), while only 18 (7%) and 8 (3%) students responding with 2 (*oppose*) or 1 (*strongly oppose*) respectively. Though just fewer than half the students were supportive; the largest single group of students (42%) was neutral with regards to collection of their email addresses (Figure1).

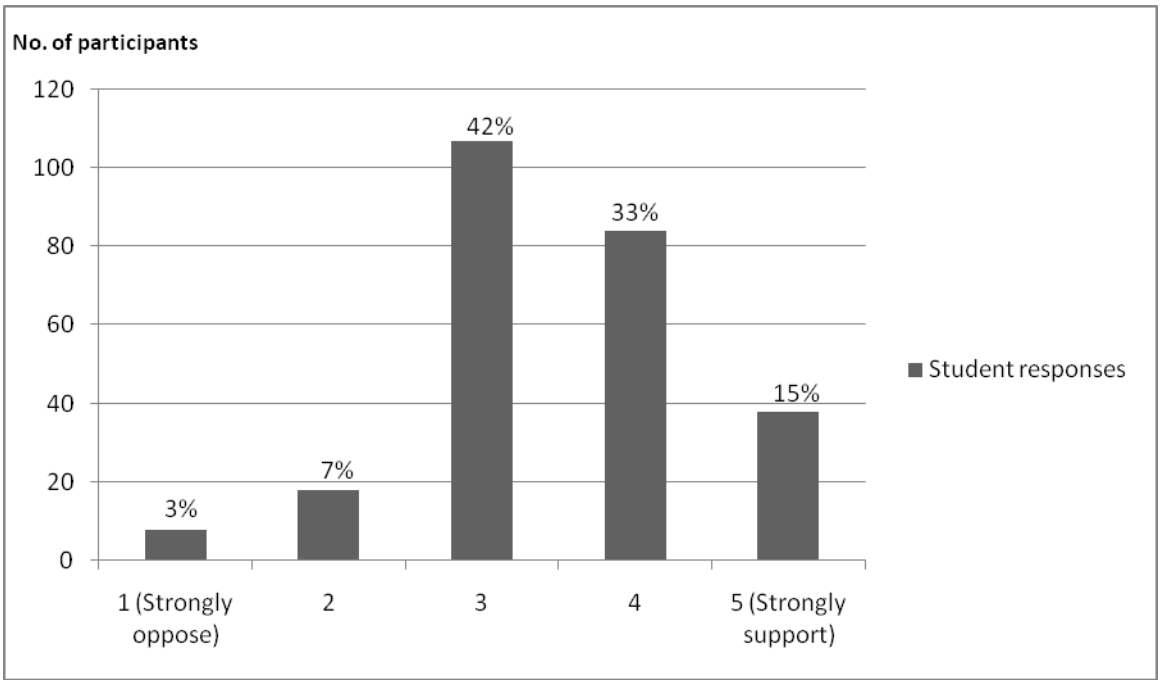

Figure 1: Japanese Students' Attitudes towards E-mail Address Collection

Question 2 also requested participants to write reasons for their ratings. Seventy-nine (79) participants commented on teachers' collection of their e-mail addresses. Of these responses, 52 (66%) were positive, 11 (14%) neutral, and 16 (20%) were negative. Out of 52 positive responses, 31 (69%) pointed out the convenient features of e-mail, such as its function to allow bidirectional communication. For example:

> It is easier for me to communicate with my teacher through emails.
>
> It is convenient when I want to ask questions to teachers.
>
> I can get information fast, and mobile phone e-mails are especially easy to check.
>
> Assignments or notices given by e-mail are easier to remember than a teacher's verbal instructions.

Collection of our e-mail addresses is convenient for course administration.

I support it (collection of e-mail addresses) because I believe e-mail is the quickest way and cheapest way to contact teachers.

The 11 participants' who were neutral towards the collection of student e-mail addresses conditionally supported teacher collection of student e-mail addresses, but expressed concern over information leakage. For example:

I'm happy as long as my teacher applies secure control.

I have no objection to the collection of e-mail, but I am indeed worried about information leakage.

Out of 12 participants who responded negatively to the collection of student e-mail addresses, 5 claimed that since there were other means to communicate with students, e-mail collection was not necessary (e.g., "The Bulletin Board is adequate"). Four participants expressed potential distrust of their teachers, for example:

I don't want to give my e-mail address to the teacher whom I don't like.

There may be some teachers who will abuse my e-mail address.

Japanese Students' Attitudes towards Online Learning Activity Being Monitored

Question 5, which also employed a 5-point Likert scale, investigated whether Japanese students perceived their learning activity and progress being monitored by their teachers as an intrusion of their privacy. The data revealed that students understand the necessity of teachers supervising their online learning activity. Altogether 107 (42%) participants responded with 5 (*strongly support*) or 4 (*support*); 105 (41%) with 3; while only 43 (17%) responded with 2 (*oppose*) or 1 (*strongly oppose*) (Figure 2).

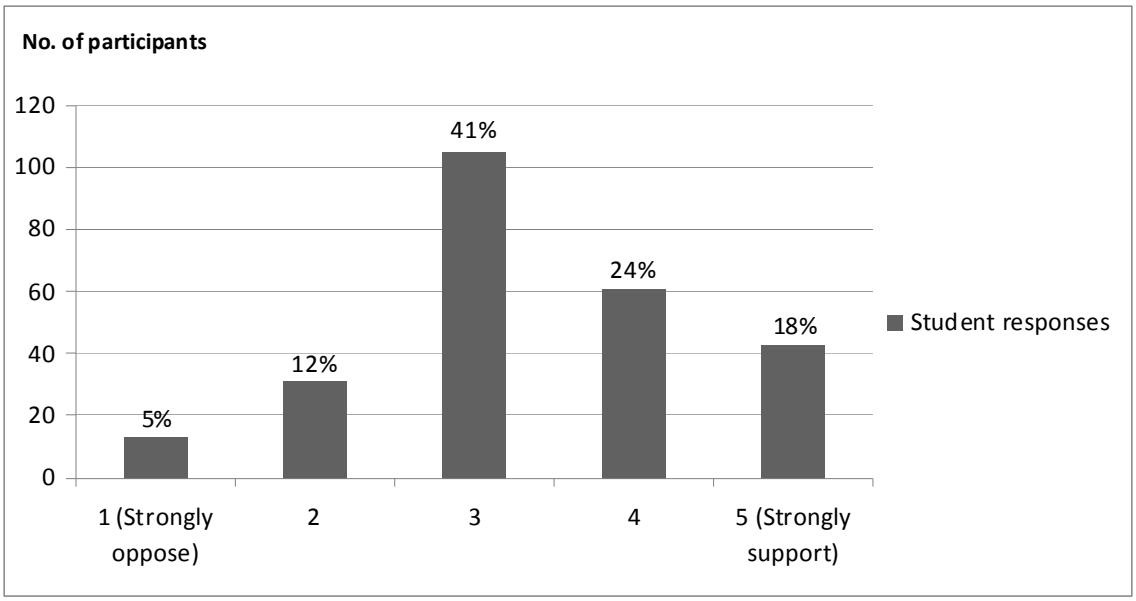

Figure 2: Japanese Students' Attitude Towards Monitoring of E-Learning Activity

Fifty-four students chose to write reasons for their responses, all of whom were students who had responded with 5 (*strongly support*); 4 (*support*); or 3 (unfortunately, there were no comments from students who opposed teachers monitoring their online activity). The reasons given by students fell into two categories. In the first were comments that made the point that monitoring student online activity allows teachers to help students. For example:

> Teachers can see when we have problems.
>
> Teacher can give me advice about my English study.

In the second were comments where students noted that they would not do online activities that were not monitored. For example:

> Teachers cannot give us a grade if they do not see what we are doing. Why should I do the work?
>
> I probably would not do the online study if the teacher does not know.

Japanese Students' Concerns over Teacher Ability to Securely Store Personal Information

Question 6 asked how worried students were about their teacher's ability to keep their personal information securely stored online, using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*extremely worried*) to 5 (*not worried at all*). Seventy-one (28%) participants responded with 5 and 48 participants (19%) responded with 4, making a total of 47% of students expressing little or no concern that their personal data would be stolen from or passed on to a third party by their teacher. This result, when added to the 93 (37%) students who gave a neutral response, gives a total of 211 (83%) participants indicating that they were not particularly worried about trusting their teacher with their personal information (Figure 3).

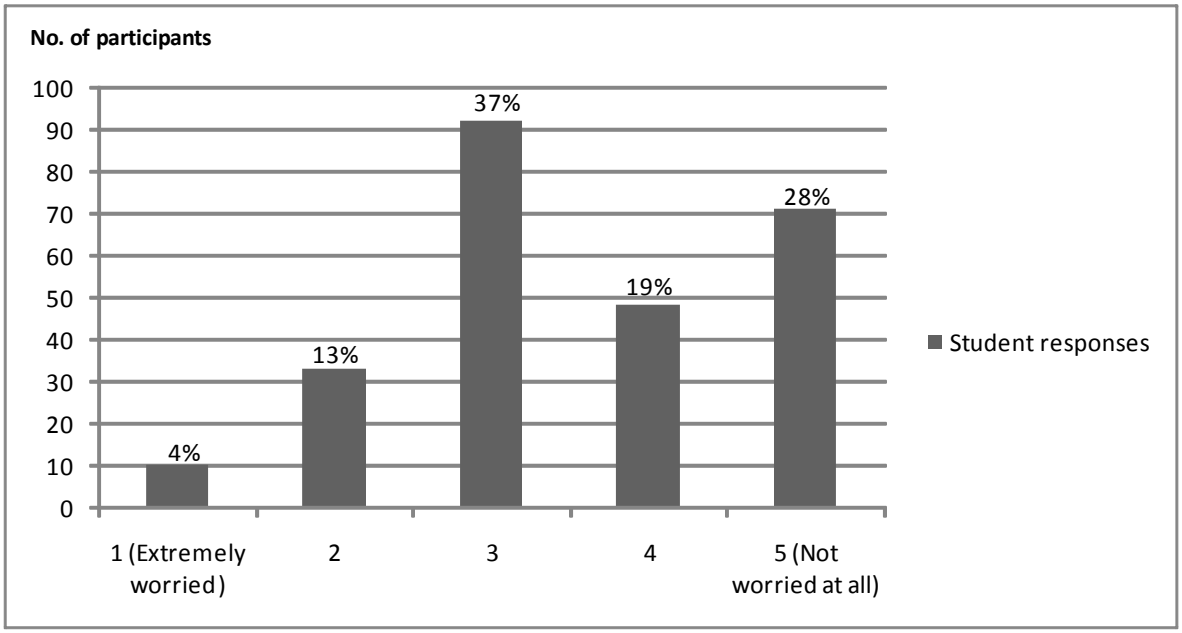

Figure 3: The Degree Japanese Students Worry about Personal Data Leakage

Japanese Students' Preferences Regarding How They Are Contacted

Question 3, asked students to indicate whether they preferred mobile phone email, computer (PC) email, or either of the two when they are sent course-related email. One hundred thirty four (52%) participants responded that they preferred to be contacted by email on their mobile phone, 45 (18%) indicated they preferred to be contacted by PC email, and 76 (30%) responded that either means of contact was fine.

32 students wrote reasons for their responses. 26/32 of these responses were from students who preferred, or did not mind, emails being sent to their mobile phones. All of these 26 students wrote that they either did not use a PC for emailing (17 students); or wrote that it was more convenient to receive emails on their mobile phones (9 students). However, the students who wrote that receiving emails on their mobile phones was more "convenient" did not specify why they felt so. The remaining 6/32 reasons were provided by students who preferred emails to be sent to their PC. Of these, 2/6 simply wrote that they did not want to use their mobile phone (without further elaboration); and 4/6 indicated that they did not want to use their mobile phones for school purposes. For example, "I use my mobile for fun things and my note PC [provided by the school] for [school] work. It is separate."

Japanese Students' Preferences Regarding When They Are Contacted

Question 4 asked that if contacted by mobile phone e-mail, when students would prefer to be contacted so that their privacy would be least affected. Four choices were given: 1) evening or night; 2) lunch break; 3) anytime; 4) other time (specified by student). In retrospect, this question was poorly designed. Email sent to students' mobile phones can be checked anytime, and students are always in a position to control when they would like to communicate. The primary concern was that during a telecollaboration project students respond to emails promptly, preferably the same day received. Therefore, Question 4 should have been worded as, "When would you prefer to receive email, in order to ensure you could respond within the same day?" Responses to Question 4, as worded in the survey, showed that over half (147 or 58%) of the participants felt that emails could be sent anytime, 56 (22%) preferred emails to be sent in the evening, and 43 (17%) preferred to be contacted on their lunch break. The remaining 9 (3%) students had more specific times when they wished to be contacted, such as only between 7:00 and 9:00 pm (Figure 4).

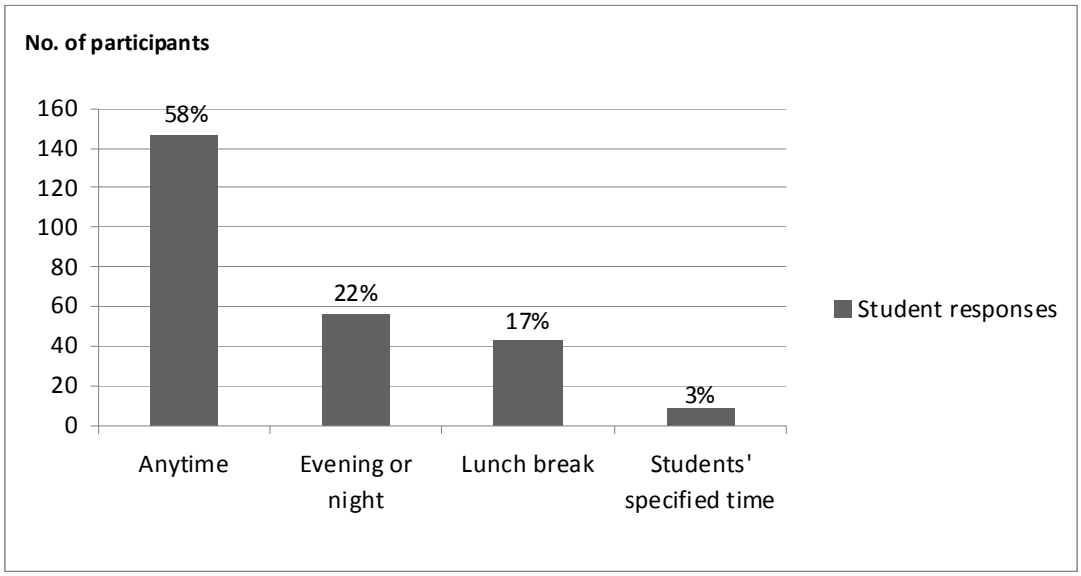

Figure 4: Japanese Students' Preferred Time to Be Contacted by Mobile Phone Email

Participants were also requested to give reasons for their preference. Students who indicated that e-mails could be sent to their mobile phones anytime; felt that when emails are sent was irrelevant with regards to their privacy (i.e., their "right to be left alone"):

> E-mails can be sent to mobile phones any time and there is no intrusion of my privacy as I just read mobile messages when I want to read.
>
> I can leave my mobile phone on manner [standby] mode when I am busy. Therefore there is no influence on my privacy at all.
>
> Because it is an e-mail, I do not need to respond in real-time. Teachers can send me e-mails anytime they want.

In contrast, students who preferred to be contacted on their lunch break cited that their evenings were their private, non-school related time, and/or claimed that they would simply be too busy in the evening with part-time jobs or university club activities to check their email. Students who preferred to be contacted in the evening cited that during the day, they would be too busy on campus to check their email.

Japanese Students' Attitudes towards Disclosure of Specific Items of Personal Information

Questions 7 and 8 required students to choose an item which they were most reluctant (Question 7) or least reluctant to disclose in an e-learning system (Question 8). Participants were required to choose only one item, but they could write down an item they felt was important which was not listed on the questionnaire. The choice of items included: e-mail address, mobile phone numbers, birthplace, age, postal address, facial photos, personal homepage/blog site (i.e. personal URL), chat ID (instant messenger account), and place of birth.

Most students (93%) answered Questions 7 and 8; however, 18 participants did not answer either question and 2 participants wrote that "nothing" concerned them. Just over half (121 or 51%) of the 237 respondents answered that they were most reluctant to upload their personal photos to an e-learning system. Mobile phone numbers came in a distant second, as did postal addresses, each selected by 40 (17%) students as the personal information they were most reluctant to disclose. The third most selected item of personal information students were reluctant to upload was "other", selected by 17 (7%) students. "Other" included personal information not included in question 8, such as hobbies or nicknames. Only a few students selected e-mail address (7 students or 3%), personal URL (4 or 2%), chat ID (4 or 2%), birth place (2 or 1%), or age (2 students or 1%) as items of personal information they were most reluctant to disclose (Figure 5).

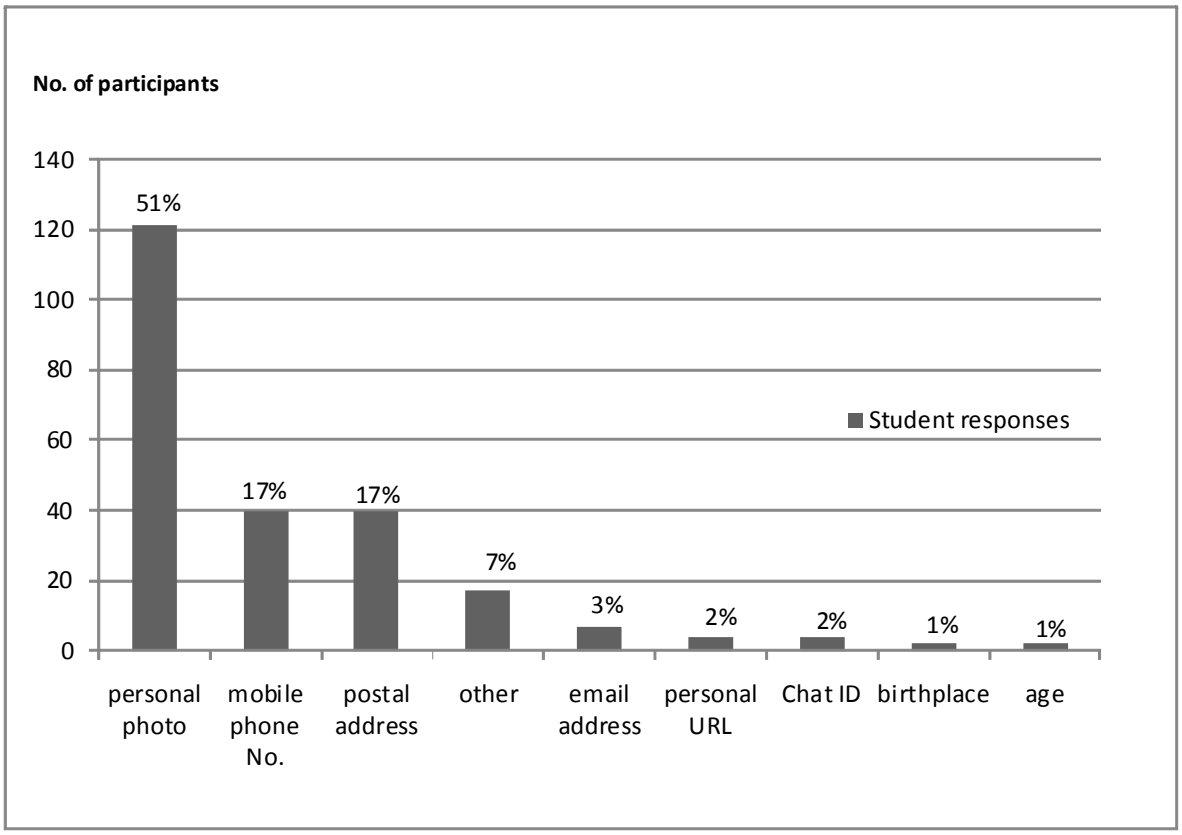

Figure 5: Personal Information Which Japanese Students Are Most Reluctant to Disclose

These results are consistent with the answers to Question 8, which asked which item of personal data were learners least concerned about disclosing. That is, the overwhelming majority of students cited age, birth place, personal URL, chat ID or e-mail address as the item they were least reluctant to disclose (Figure 6).

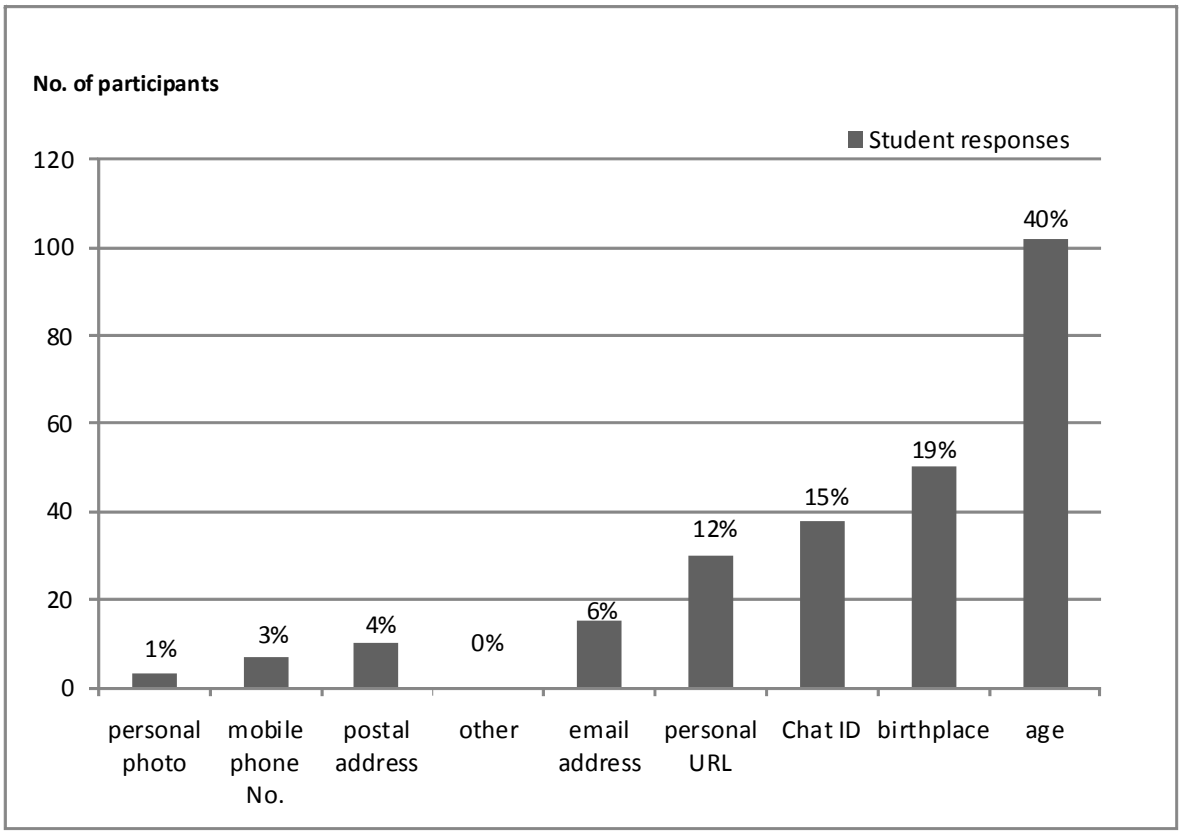

Figure 6: Personal Information Which Japanese Students Are Least Reluctant to Disclose

Additional Japanese Student Thoughts Regarding Privacy in E-Learning

The final questionnaire item was an open-ended, optional opportunity for participants to freely make additional comments on issues regarding e-learning and personal data use. Forty-one students chose to voice their opinions. Comments from 33 of the 41(80%) students revealed that most respondents were generally sympathetic towards the idea of personal data collection, but also showed a certain degree of concern over what data was collected and how securely the data was managed. Some examples were:

> Although we agree with the need for personal data collection in e-learning, we hope our teachers and our university can carefully handle the data.
>
> E-learning can be done either at home or on campus with no other materials and is convenient, but it is not desirable to collect more personal information than necessary.
>
> Perhaps some personal information must be provided if we want our teachers and others to contact us. The key is how to manage the personal information. I hope it will be carefully handled and not abused.

However, the opinions held by eight learners were different from the "conditionally supportive" comments given by the other participants. Five of these students were wholly opposed to disclosing personal information, such as:

> This survey investigated if we are concerned about disclosing personal photos, telephone number and home address. I do not think an e-learning system would need this kind of information. And to be honest, I do not want to tell any personal information to others.

Three learners felt that disclosing personal information was entirely unproblematic and even beneficial, such as:

> Nowadays people get too nervous and sensitive about personal information. This is not necessary. As it may be hard to keep students motivated, it is natural that teachers need to know who we are and how efficiently we are studying.

Discussion

Regarding Japanese students' responses to Questions 2, 5, and 6, the students' responses to Question 2 indicate that most Japanese students are willing to share their email addresses with their teachers, with many citing the convenience of doing so for teachers and students. Similarly, results form Question 5 show that students support or understand the need for teachers to monitor their online learning activity.

While I had not explicitly made any predictions as to what Japanese student privacy preferences would be, I had assumed that students from any culture would show considerable concern whether teachers could be trusted to safely store students' personal information. While this may be a concern among learners in countries like the United States (Phelps, Nowak, & Ferrell, 2000) and Europe (Jerman-Blazic & Klobucar, 2004), Japanese learners indicated they were not overly concerned about personal data being stored safely.

Email Contact Preferences: Japanese and Chinese Student Responses

Most Japanese respondents preferred learning-related e-mails to be sent to mobile phones, despite every 1st and 2nd year Japanese student in this study (n = 102) having been provided by their university with a notebook PC. These results are not surprising given the ubiquity of mobile phones in Japan combined with the younger generation in Japanese overwhelmingly using mobile phone for e-mail communication. It appears that among Japanese university students, habit and convenience outweigh notions of mobile phones being very personal belongings.

The majority of Chinese respondents either preferred email to be sent to their mobile phones (64/160 = 40%), or responded that emails could be sent to either PC or mobile phone email addresses (56/160 = 35%). Only 13 of these students wrote reasons for their preference, none of whom cited convenience. Rather, all 13 wrote that they did not have a PC at home and only had access to a PC at school. More Chinese students (40/160 = 25%) than Japanese students (18%) preferred email to be sent to their PC. None of these Chinese students wrote reasons for their preference. The large majority of Japanese and Chinese students would prefer, or are at least willing to, to receive emails on their mobile phones

Due to the poor design of Question 4, it is not surprising that 58% of Japanese students responded that they did not have a preference as to when emails were sent to them, rightfully noting that, as email is an asynchronous media, they could read emails at their leisure. However, it cannot be inferred from this that Japanese students would be slow to read and respond to emails. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the 91/160 (57%) of Chinese students responded that they preferred to be contacted only in the evenings (Figure 7).

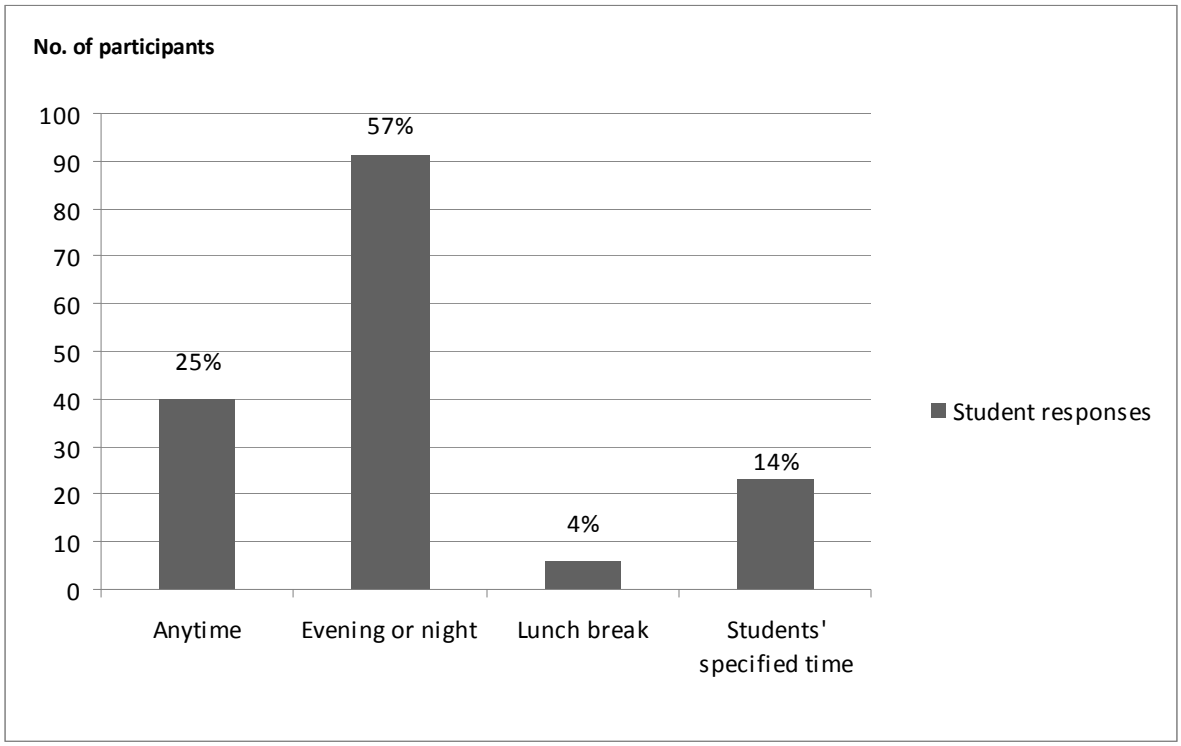

Figure 7: Chinese Students' Preferred Time to Be Contacted by Mobile Phone Email

Of these students, 27/91 wrote reasons for their preference for having emails sent to them in the evening. All of these 27 Chinese students wrote that they were too busy during the day to read their emails, and19 of these 27 students also wrote that they would not have time to respond to emails promptly after receiving them. The remaining 8 of 27 Chinese students wrote that in the afternoon they take their traditional afternoon nap; a tradition not shared by Japanese students.

Items of Personal Information Japanese and Chinese Students Were Reluctant to Disclose

Even with over 10 years experience teaching Japanese university students, it is difficult to account for the items of information Japanese students deemed most sensitive (personal). The main example being, given the popularity in Japan of social network sites such as Facebook, that so many students would be reluctant to register photos of themselves online. Yet a self-photo was the item most Japanese students (51%) students indicated they were most uncomfortable sharing in an e-learning environment. This reluctance among Japanese university student was especially surprising given that in Japan it is very common for students to affix stickers of photos of themselves and friends to the personal belongings they bring to class (this may also affect plans to use "my family" as an email exchange topic: students may be reluctant to upload family photos).

Overall, Japanese and Chinese students' attitudes were similar with regards to which items of personal information they were reluctant to share. The reluctance to share personal photographs among Japanese students was shared by 61/160 Chinese students (38%), making self-photos the item personal information they too were most reluctant to disclose (Figure 8). Japanese students did not consider age, birthplace, chat-ID (Instant Messenger ID), and e-mail address to be very sensitive, and neither did their Chinese peers; whereas, both Japanese and Chinese students were very concerned about uploading

their personal photos, telephone numbers, and physical (postal) addresses. One significant difference, however, was that while only 2% of Japanese students felt their personal URLs to be particularly private, 30 of 160 (19%) of Chinese students chose personal URLs as the item of personal information they were most reluctant to disclose. It is difficult to account for why for only 2 % of Japanese students, personal URLs—which can contain as much, or as little, self-revealing content as a student wishes—were not seen as particularly private, while 19% of Chinese students thought they were.

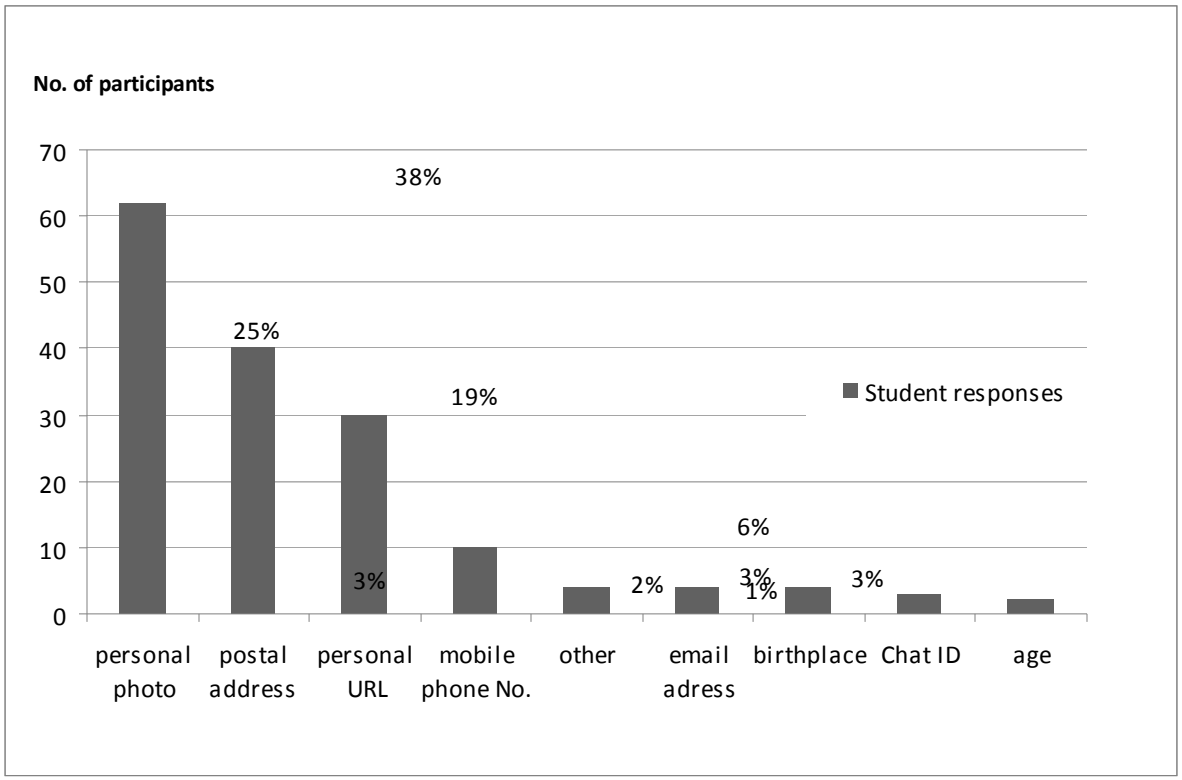

Figure 8: Personal Information Chinese Students Are Most Reluctant to Disclose

Conclusion

Teachers in other regions and culture are free to speculate whether their learners share the privacy preferences and concerns of Japanese or Chinese learners, but such speculation may prove to be wrong. Even a culturally experienced teacher can have difficulty accounting for, let alone predicting, what students perceive, or do not perceive, as intrusions of their privacy. This inability to foresee student attitudes towards the sharing of personal information can only be greater when working with students from cultures teachers have limited experience of. Furthermore, teachers cannot assume the privacy preferences held by learners in one culture will necessarily be held learners from another, as our brief examination of Chinese learner's responses show. The findings suggest that the safest course of action for would be that they determine learners' privacy preferences by direct inquiry before embarking on telecollaboration in their courses.

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