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Learning Japanese Using Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)

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Abstract

A public university has shifted the Japanese language teaching method from using full textbooks to the application of combining textbook and online platforms. This shift is in lieu of the transition in teaching and learning patterns initiated by the rapid development of IT and the effects of pandemic. What motivates the researchers to embark on this study is that with the change of learning face-to-face to online learning, foreign language instructors need to prepare more interesting online materials to ease online teaching and learning. Generally, this study is aimed to introduce yet another online teaching materials for the teaching and learning of Japanese. Specifically, this study is to explore how the students learned Japanese online with the assistance of Minato, employing quantitative methods. A forty-seven-item questionnaire, with questions related to behaviour (13 items), situational (20 items) and cognitive (14 items) factors was administered, and 37 students participated in the survey. Based on the findings, it had been illustrated that out of 47 item questions; eleven (11) items recorded the highest score of 4.6 mean points. Eight (8) of the highest means are items from Situational Factors and three items from Cognitive Factors. The sub-factors for Situational Factors consist of learning about culture and learning about lifestyle. Out of eight (8) items with the highest means; three (3) items from culture and five items from lifestyle. The sub-factors for Cognitive Factors are learning vocabulary, learning pronunciation and learning grammar. Out of three (3) items with the highest means consists of two (2) items from learning vocabulary and one item from learning pronunciation. The lowest mean of 3.5 points is from Cognitive Factors and the item is learning grammar. Therefore, this study has proven that teaching and learning using videos and photos are the most effective methods for learning Japanese culture and lifestyle through an online platform, whilst learning grammar still need teachers-students' face-to-face interactions in class.

Keywords: Minato, Japanese language, Behavioural, Situational, Cognitive

Introduction
Background of Study
The teaching of the Japanese language has evolved in tandem with the development of technology from the blackboard and chalk era to online and distance learning era. Since

Covid-19 pandemic hit the whole world, online learning methods are a necessity to ensure that the teaching syllabus can be delivered as well as possible and learning sessions are not hindered. Therefore, educators should equip themselves with various and suitable online teaching methods that can help improve the quality of the teaching and learning process.

Xuexin (2019) proposed an integrated audio-visual approach to the Japanese language and culture as a catalyst to achieve acculturation as an expected learning outcome. The study discussed the importance of using audio-visual materials as teaching strategies, suggested the suitable application of such materials in teaching and learning in the classroom, stated the role that teachers should play in an audio-visual classroom and proposed methods of using audio-visual materials. Xuexin (2019) also stressed that it was necessary to use technology and integrate it into the foreign language curriculum for more meaningful and successful learning.

Hendy et. al (2017), used Marugoto Plus Japanese Learning Starter (Level A1) and PowerPoint slides to observe the advantages and disadvantages of Basic Japanese online learning through Skype and Zoom application. They discovered that Zoom was more preferred compared to Skype and the online learning medium could be effectively conducted for grammar and conversation lessons. According to them, the advantage of the synchronous class via Skype and Zoom was that the participants could interact written and orally and could share their presentation on screen.

The Japan Foundation, which is responsible for creating and enhancing Japanese-language education environments worldwide, does not lag with their innovations. It introduced its latest innovative method of learning Japanese through Marugoto books and an online platform through the e-Learning website 'Minato' in 2014.

Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture, is a comprehensive series of coursebooks for learning Japanese language skills as a foreign language based on the JF Standard for Japanese Language Education. It is designed with an emphasis on using Japanese to communicate, and on understanding and respecting other cultures (The Japan Foundation, 2014).

Minato, on the other hand, is the online course version of Marugoto and offered on the e-Minato website. 'Minato' (literally means 'Port') is a place where anyone can learn Japanese with online courses and interact with people from all over the world through an online community. This e-Minato website aims to help the learners of Japanese to learn the language more fluently and get more information about the accurate Japanese language. Minato also aims to provide opportunities for those who want to learn but do not have a place or school to study. It provides a variety of required courses suitable for them to start learning. Apart from the self-study courses, there are also tutor courses provided to assist with assignments, assessments and direct or interactive teaching with teachers (The Japan Foundation, 2014).

A study conducted by Taku et. al (2021) investigated the case of using Minato as self-learning. The respondents of this study were the beginner of Japanese learners at the Vocational School, Diponegoro University. The number of respondents was 108 students who were randomly divided into three classes. Instruments in this study was questionnaire, pre-test, and post-tests. The result showed that Minato has been the most effective medium for self-learning and suitable as an ICT teaching medium. Through this research, it has proven that the opportunity to recognise "student style" of education could be done by providing the right media through ICT. An independent learning was not only beneficial for students but also beneficial for teachers. The finding also showed that Hiragana and Katakana teachers found the self-learning method is a contemporary method that needed to be applied to a variety of subjects.

Hence, in line with the rapid development of IT and the pandemic that has changed the direction and pattern of teaching and learning, the public university in this study is taking steps to change the way of teaching Japanese from using textbooks completely to a hybrid pattern incorporating textbook and e-learning platform.

Statement of Problem

The teaching and learning of Japanese as a foreign language was conducted through traditional classroom pedagogy before the bloom of IT technology and language teacher was the main facilitator to transfer new knowledge to the students.

Matsumoto and Okamoto (2003) stated that the Japanese language textbooks chosen as the source of primary teaching materials were not very effective. Their findings showed that the textbooks tend to simplify the sociolinguistic aspects in Japanese communicative styles, level of speech and standard Japanese against regional dialect. As a result, it created a gap in the real linguistic diversity which learners might encounter when interacting with Japanese in the real-world situations.

Quintos's (2021) study about the difficulties in learning Japanese as a foreign language discovered that time and resource constraints, learning materials appropriateness and sufficiency and teaching strategies has led to the students' difficulties in learning Japanese. In addition, insufficient teaching materials for teaching and learning Japanese abroad can be a factor of student difficulties in learning Japanese especially on Japanese culture and sociolinguistic aspects.

Even though good language teachers and textbooks could successfully contribute to the teaching of Japanese in the past, in the present situation various teaching and learning materials that be accessed by students from online resources would play a major factor to more effective learning.

Research on the need to use IT such as teaching and learning software or online materials in Japanese language teaching at the tertiary level was conducted by Nguyen (2021). The study was trying to identify which suitable teaching method should be applied to teach Japanese. Nguyen (2021) suggested that applying IT in classroom would help learners to memorise, understand and promote their creativity effectively, and at the same time create a simpler and more active environment for learners to actively explore the new knowledge.

Before adapting Marugoto and Minato, the public university in this research had been using textbooks written by their Japanese language lecturers. The books did not contain audio and online learning materials. To remain relevant and competitive, as well as to improve the Japanese language teaching and learning process, the public university had decided to use Marugoto and Minato from Semester September 2019-February 2020.

Objective and Research Questions

Generally, this study is done to explore how Japanese is learnt online. This study is specifically done to answer the following questions:

1.1.1   How do Behaviour factors influence the learning of Japanese online?
1.1.2   How do Situational factors influence the learning of Japanese online?

1.1.3   How do cognitive factors influence the learning of Japanese online?

Literature Review
Social Cognitive Theory
Bandura (1986) proposes that three factors interact in the learning process. A learner's experience (through his/her) behaviour and his/her cognition are influenced by the environment he /she is in. This environment provides the situational factors to the learner (refer to figure 1). According to Rahmat (2018), The cognitive factors include the learners' perception on his/her success or even failure towards the learning. Learners' behaviour is largely influenced by his/her surrounding environment. This means a positive environment can create a positive outcome and vice versa. Finally, the behaviour of the learner will result from the existing environment coupled with his/her cognitive perception of the learning process.
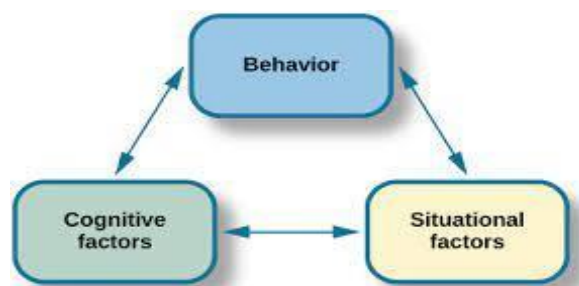
Teaching and Learning Japanese Online
There has been some discussion on a few studies on the teaching and learning of Japanese language virtually and most studies have focused on blended learning.

Lee and Chong (2008) conducted research on different learning dimensions to figure out a combination of pedagogic approach and teaching media for effective language learning. The case study focused on an intermediate Japanese language course involving 42 undergraduate students. Four language skills: writing-vocabulary, listening skills, reading-grammar and oral skills and the problems faced in traditional classrooms referring to the distinctive linguistic features of Japanese language and how the quality of learning and teaching could be improved after blended learning applied to the courses were discussed. Lee and Chong's (2008) observation on the implication of blended learning in Japanese language studies revealed that the student's vocabulary and listening skills could be improved by offering more input with web-based learning. However, for grammar and oral skills it was suggested to maintain more on teacher-students' face-to-face interactions in the classroom.

Even though online learning can be a useful tool to motivate students on independent learning, some studies also showed tendencies of learners to face any difficulties with online learning strategies.

Sun (2014) conducted research on language learner's perspective on online learning. Its objectives were to find difficulties students would face during full online lesson in computer-mediated communication and collaboration among learners to complete the task, to study behaviours toward online pedagogies and computer-mediated communication, and how learners perceive the contents of the language courses. The participants consisted of 46

students and this study was employing quantitative methods in the form of 32 questionnaires and qualitative parts consisted of 13 open-ended questions. The survey asked students to share their personal experience in full online language learning: online participation/collaboration and self-regulation of learning. Sun (2014) identified student difficulties in full online learning, namely following the schedule and studying regularly, getting hold of classmates and finding suitable time to work together, pairing/teaming up and working collaboratively, ensuring constant engagement with the class, keeping self-motivated and being a self-directed learner and socialising. However, the study showed a high level of awareness and appreciation of various pedagogical features on students' perception of online materials content: task-based, authentic, learner-generated materials, development of real-life-problem solving and critical thinking skills.

The above two studies by two researchers showed different findings. Lee and Chong (2008) mentioned that vocabulary and listening skills could be improved with the help of web-based learning. However, Sun (2014) pointed out that students would have difficulties participating in full online learning sessions.

Past Studies
Past Studies on How Japanese is Taught Online
Several studies have been conducted to find out how teachers taught Japanese online. The first study was done by Maserah et. al. (2014) to identify the effectiveness of utilising Web 2.0 applications versus textbook. Respondents were students studying the Japanese language course at the School of Language Studies and Linguistics in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia from February to December 2012 for 2 semesters. The sample consisted of 55 male and female students from various faculties. Instruments of this study were questionnaires, interviews, tests and observations. The findings showed that Web 2.0 applications had a positive effect on the teaching and learning of Japanese.
The second study by Dian et.al (2018) was done on development of multimedia teaching material for teaching Japanese at the Senior High School using Adobe Flash CS5 Apps which consist of vocabularies or sentence pattern's introduction, etc. The media was also equipped with Japanese words pronunciation practice using Online Japanese Accent Dictionary (OJAD). The participants in this study were 22 Japanese language teachers and eight students from various Indonesian senior high schools majoring in Japanese language. This study was done using a survey questionnaire method and a short interview. Findings of this study showed that Flash Player was an attractive and user-friendly media because it was easily accessible and could be used all the times by the students. Furthermore, the attractive contents and features provided in this media was an effective way for teachers to teach Japanese. From this study, it was learnt that Adobe Flash CS5 Apps was very useful not only for teachers as a teaching material, but also for students who have been interested in learning Japanese independently. Studies done by Maserah et. al (2014); Dian et.al (2018) provided evidence that online applications have an impact on the teaching and learning of Japanese.

Past studies on what make learners like learning Japanese
Some researchers conducted the study on matters that would make the learners like to learn the Japanese language. Muhammad et. al. (2019) in their research of the use of interactive multimedia websites in learning basic Japanese, explored and gathered information on the needs of an interactive multimedia website for the acquisition of Japanese vocabulary and

grammar in Universiti Putra Malaysia. The respondents were 15 male and 15 female students learning Japanese at the beginner level as an elective subject. From the interviews and observations, it was shown that students could learn better and effectively if various media elements were used during the process of disseminating learning information through static and dynamical graphical presentation. This study emphasised that the use of interactive multimedia websites had a positive effect on learning basic Japanese language as it enhanced understanding, reinforced memory, and stimulated the senses so that learning became more meaningful especially among the students with low level of linguistic competence.

The study conducted by Imelda et. al (2021) aimed to investigate the learners' initial attitude of learning communicative-based Japanese using Zoom and multimedia-based methods. The survey was conducted to 30 middle school students who had been learning Japanese for more than two years. The results of the study stated that communicative-based Japanese learning using Zoom and Multimedia for students had been very positive ever since it began. Besides, usage of Zoom and multimedia-based methods could increase variations and learning strategies in Japanese learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the two studies above, we have gathered evidence that the use of interactive multimedia websites contributed a positive effect on learning basic Japanese and could increase variations and strategies in learning Japanese.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 below presents the conceptual framework of the study. This study is rooted from social cognitive theory by Bandura (1986). Behavioural factors are portrayed through the communicative learning activities that the learners go through. These activities were done so that learners can practice their language functions. The language functions include ideas of likes and dislikes, describing people, places and things as well as describing actions. Next, learners experience situation factors through the learning of culture and lifestyle of the target language. Finally, learners use their cognition to learn vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.
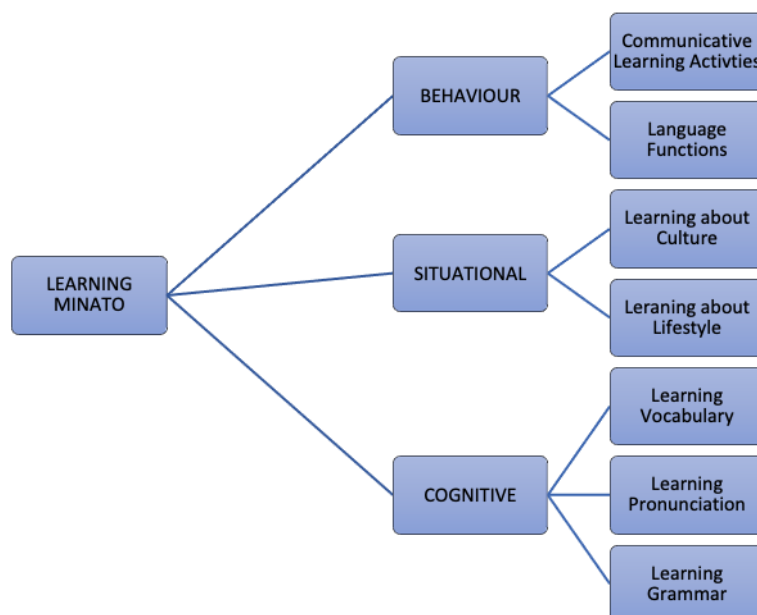

Figure 2 - Conceptual Framework of the Study: LEARNING MINATO

Methodology
Method of Data Collection and Data Analysis
This quantitative study is done to explore the use of MINATO (learning Japanese online). 37 students participated in this study. The instrument used is a survey (Table 1). It is designed from the theory of Bandura (1986). Section A looks at the demographic profile. Section B has 13 items on behavioural factors. Section C has 12 items on situational factors and section C has 14 items on cognitive factors.

Table 1- Distribution of Items on Survey

SECTION	FACTORS	SUB-FACTORS	NO. OF ITEMS
A	Demographic Profile		
B	Behaviour	Communicative Learning Activities	6
		Language Functions	
		a. Ideas Likes/Dislikes	3
		b. Describe people/places/things	3
		c. Describe action	1
C	Situational	Learning about Culture	6
		Learning about Lifestyle	6
D	Cognitive	Learning Vocabulary	8
		Learning Pronunciation	6
		Learning Grammar	8

A reliability analysis was done on the instrument to reveal a Cronbach alpha of .976; thus, showing a high internal reliability for the instrument. Data is collected via goggle form and analyse using SPSS version 26 to reveal the percentage and mean scores.

TABLE 2 - Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.976	47

Findings
Introduction
This section begins with the analysis of data in the demographic profile using percentages and presented in the form of pie charts. The next section presents the analysed data in the form of mean scores and presented in the form of bar charts.

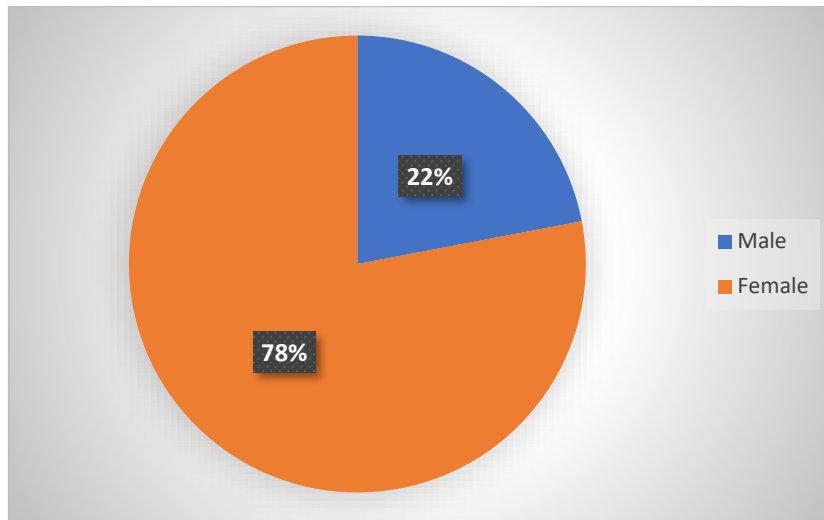**Findings for Demographic Profile**

Gender

Figure 3 - Percentage for Gender

Figure 3 delineates the percentage for gender of the 47 respondents, where 78% are female and 22% are male students.
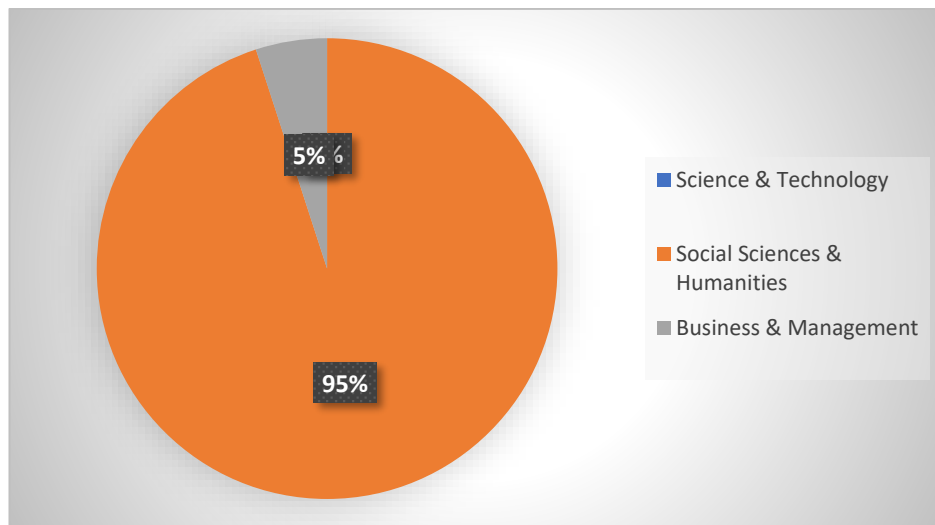
Faculty

Figure 4 - Percentage of Faculty

Based on Figure 4, the percentage of faculty shows that the majority of 95% of the respondents are from the Social Sciences and Humanities faculty and only 5% of respondents are from the Faculty of Business and Management. There are no respondents from the faculty of Science and Technology.
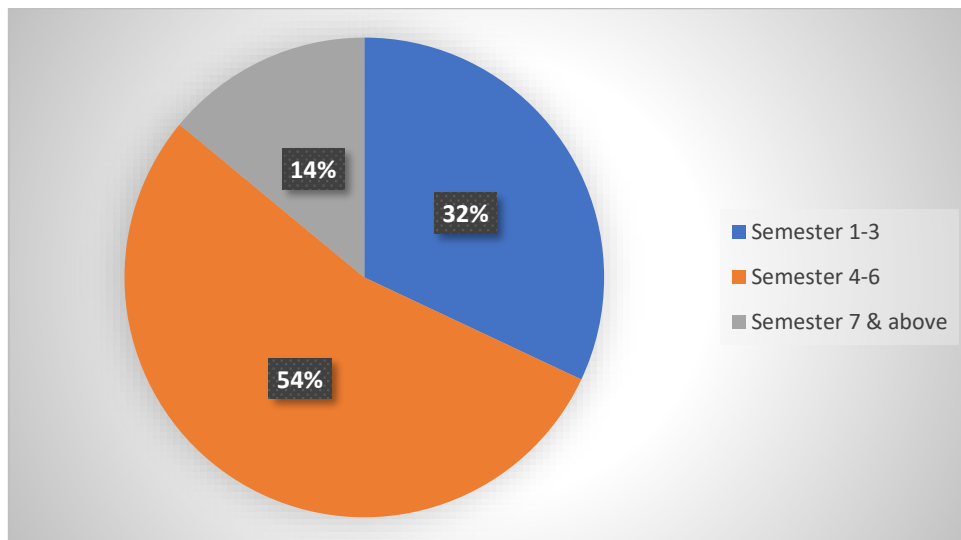
Current Semester

Figure 5 - Percentage of Current Semester

Figure 5 above for the percentage of current semester shows that 54% respondents are from semester 4-6, 32% respondents are from Semester 1-3, and 14% respondents are from semester 7 and above.
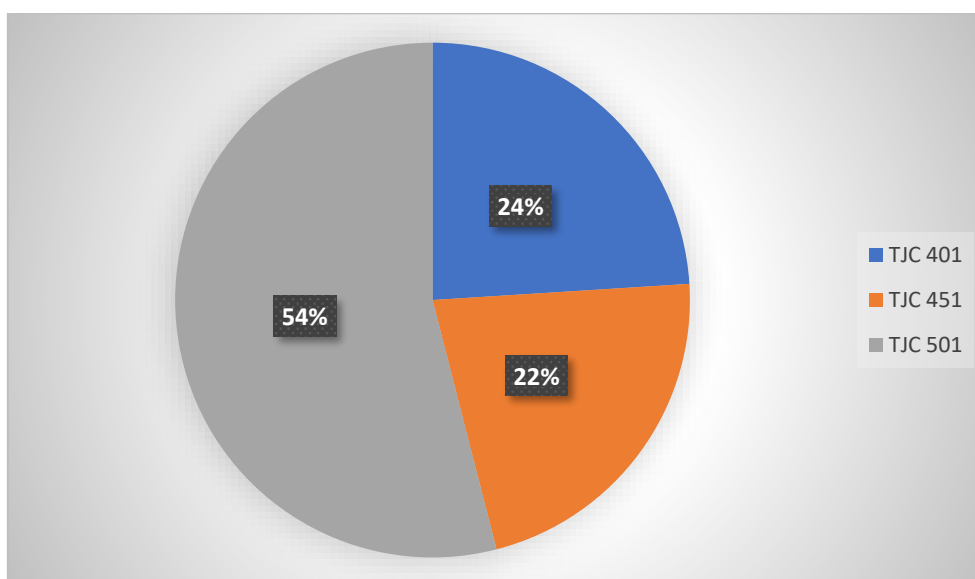
Level

Figure 6 - Percentage of Level

The percentage of Level in Figure 6 depicts 54% of the respondents are learning Introductory Japanese III (TJC 501), 24% of the respondents are learning Introductory Japanese I (TJC 401) and 22% of the respondents are learning Introductory Japanese II (TJC 451).

Findings for Behaviour
This section presents to answer research question 1: How do Behaviour factors influence the learning of Japanese online? In the context of this study, behavioural factors are (a) communicative learning activities, (b) language functions. In addition to that, (b) language

functions look at items for (i) ideas for likes/dislikes, (ii) describing people /place/things, and (iii) describing actions.

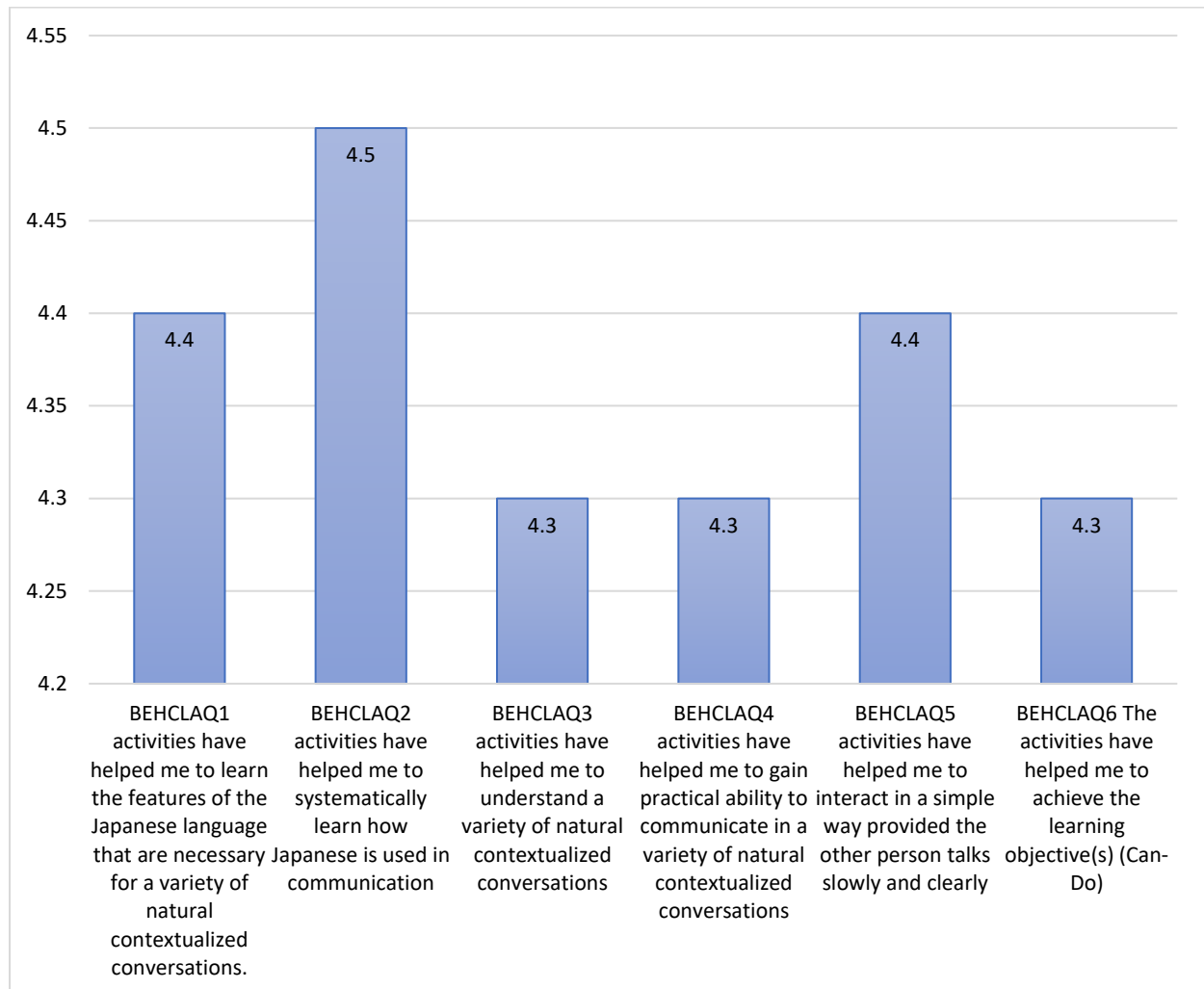(a)   Communicative Learning Activities in the Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)

Figure 7 - Mean for Behavioural Factor

Figure 7 above shows the mean for Behavioural Factor. Findings show that the highest mean of 4.5 is for item Question 2. This is followed by the mean of 4.4 for item Question 1 and Question 5. The lowest mean of 4.3 is for items Question 3, 4 and 6.

(b)   Language Function in the Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)
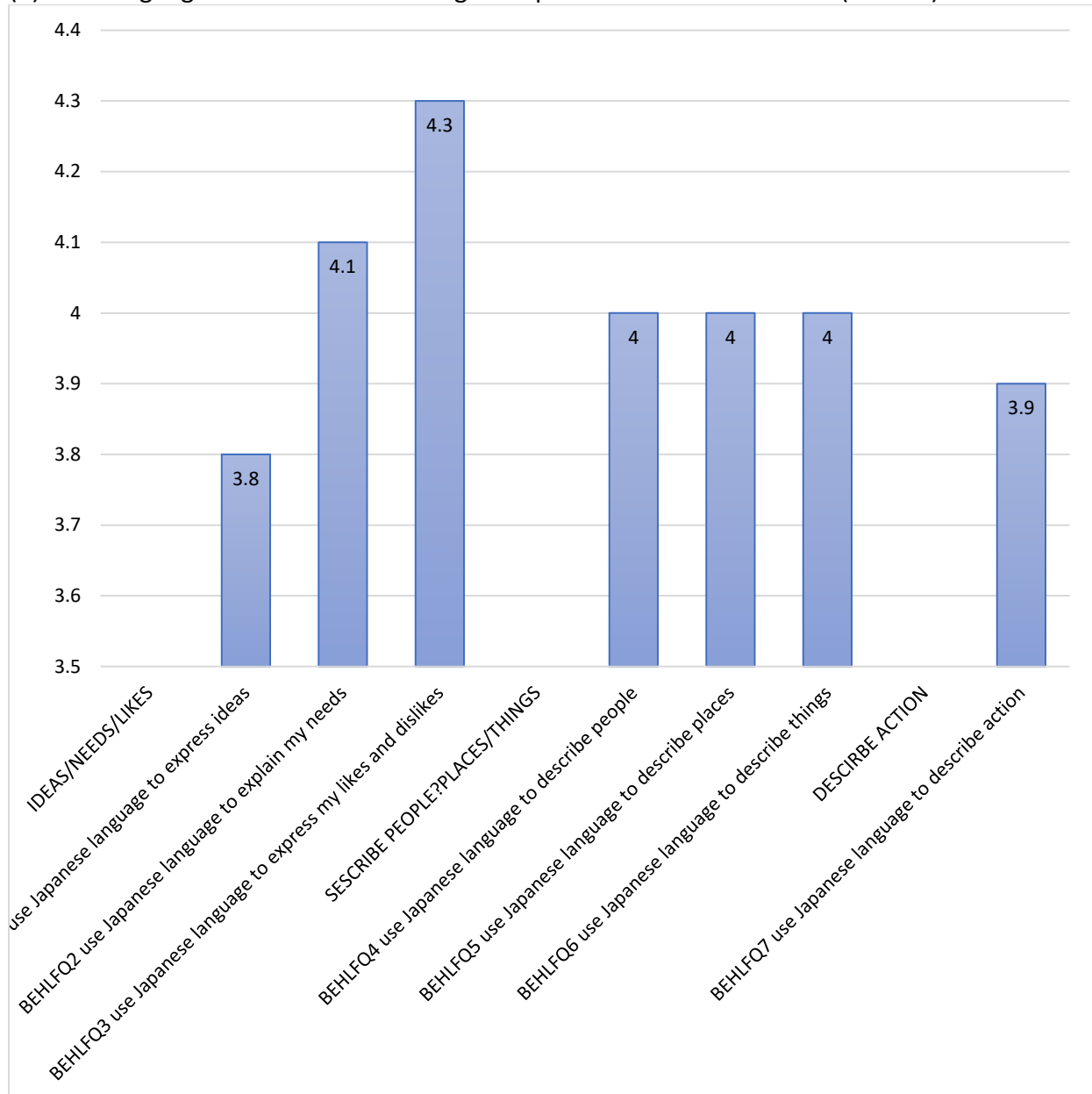

Figure 8 - Mean for Language Factor

Figure 8 above illustrates the mean for Language Factor. The highest mean of 4.3 is for item Question 3. Item Question 2 rank the second highest with the mean of 4.1. The third highest mean is for items Question 4, 5 and 6 with the mean of 4. This is followed by the mean of 3.9 for item Question 7. The lowest mean of 3.8 is for item Question 1.

Findings for Situational
This section presents data to answer research question 2: How do Situational factors influence the learning of Japanese online? In the context of this study, situation factors are supported by items on (a) learning about culture and (b) learning about lifestyle.

(a)   Learning Culture in the Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)
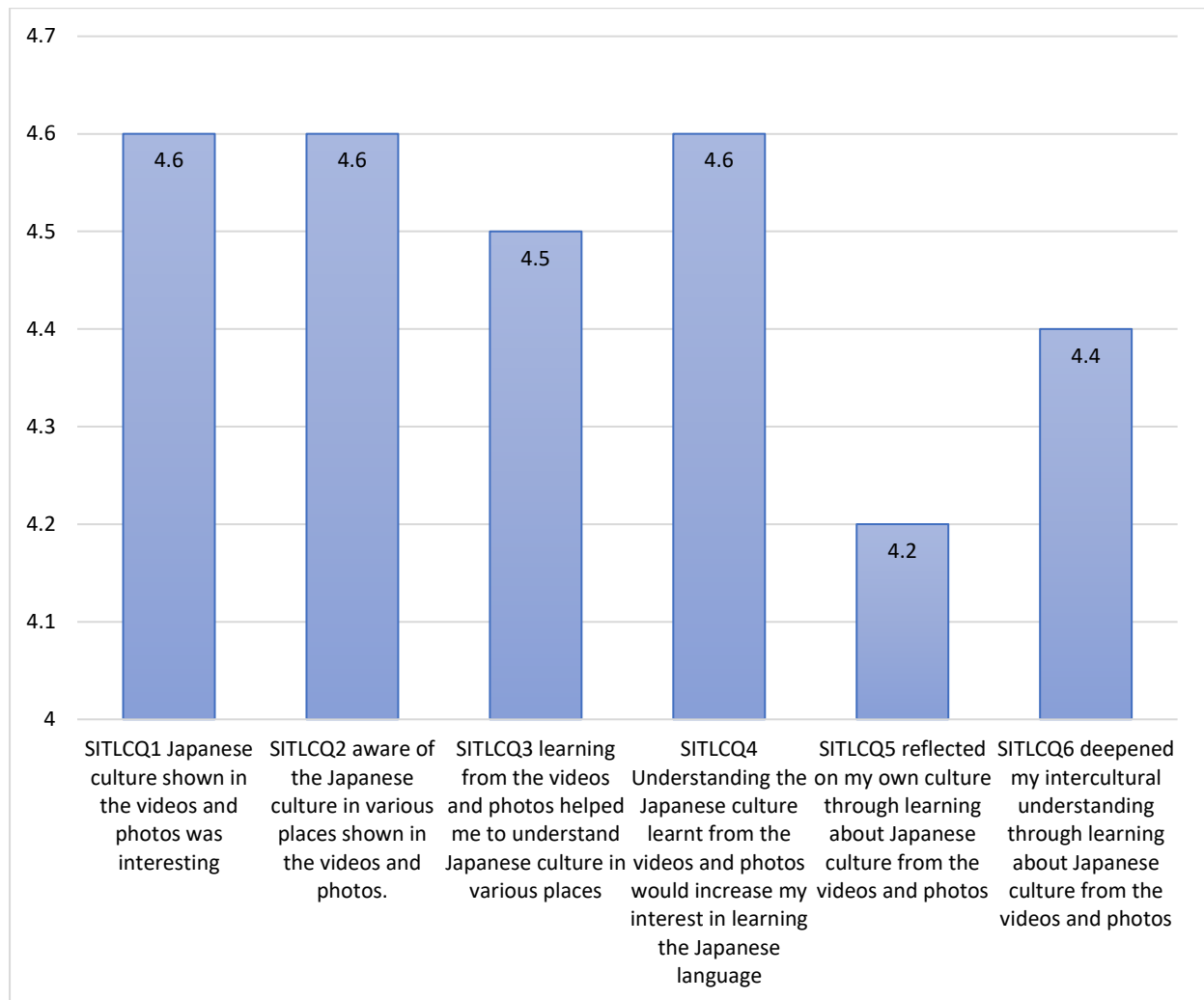

Figure 9 - Mean for Situational Factor - Learning Culture

Figure 9 above indicates the mean for Situational Factor - Learning Culture. It is clearly seen that the highest mean of 4.6 is for items Question 1, 2 and 4. The second highest with the mean of 4.5 is for item Question 3. The third highest mean is for item Question 6 with the mean of 4.4. The lowest mean of 4.2 is for item Question 5.

(b)   Learning Lifestyle in the Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)
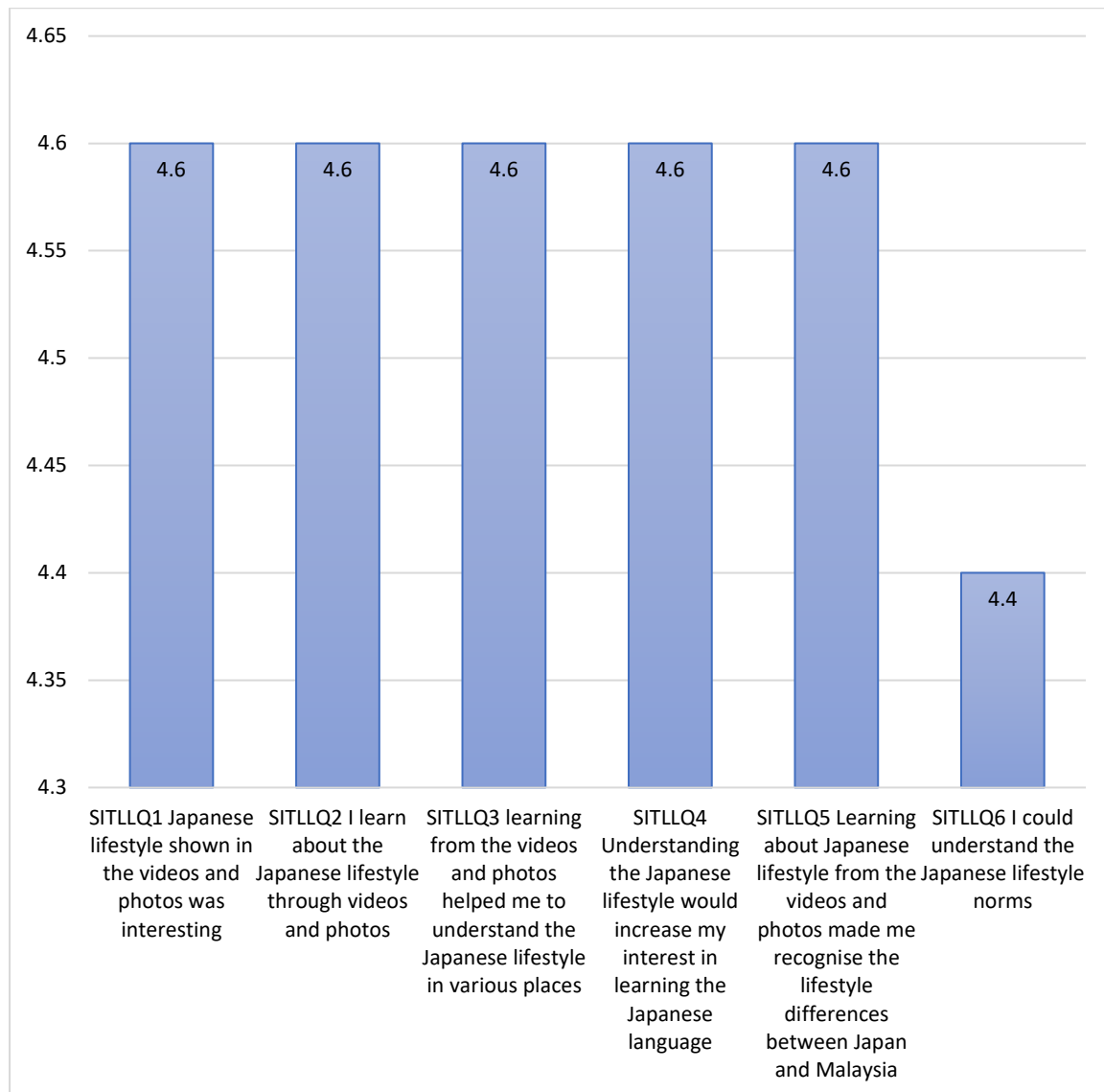

Figure 10 - Mean for Learning Lifestyle

Figure 10 above explains the result for Learning Lifestyle. It is obvious that the highest mean of 4.6 is for items Question 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 and the lowest mean of 4.4 is for item Question 6.

Findings for Cognitive
This section presents data to answer research question 3: How do cognitive factors influence the learning of Japanese online? For this study, cognitive factors includes (a) learning about vocabulary, (b) learning about pronunciation and (c) learning about grammar.

(a)   Learning Vocabulary in the Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)
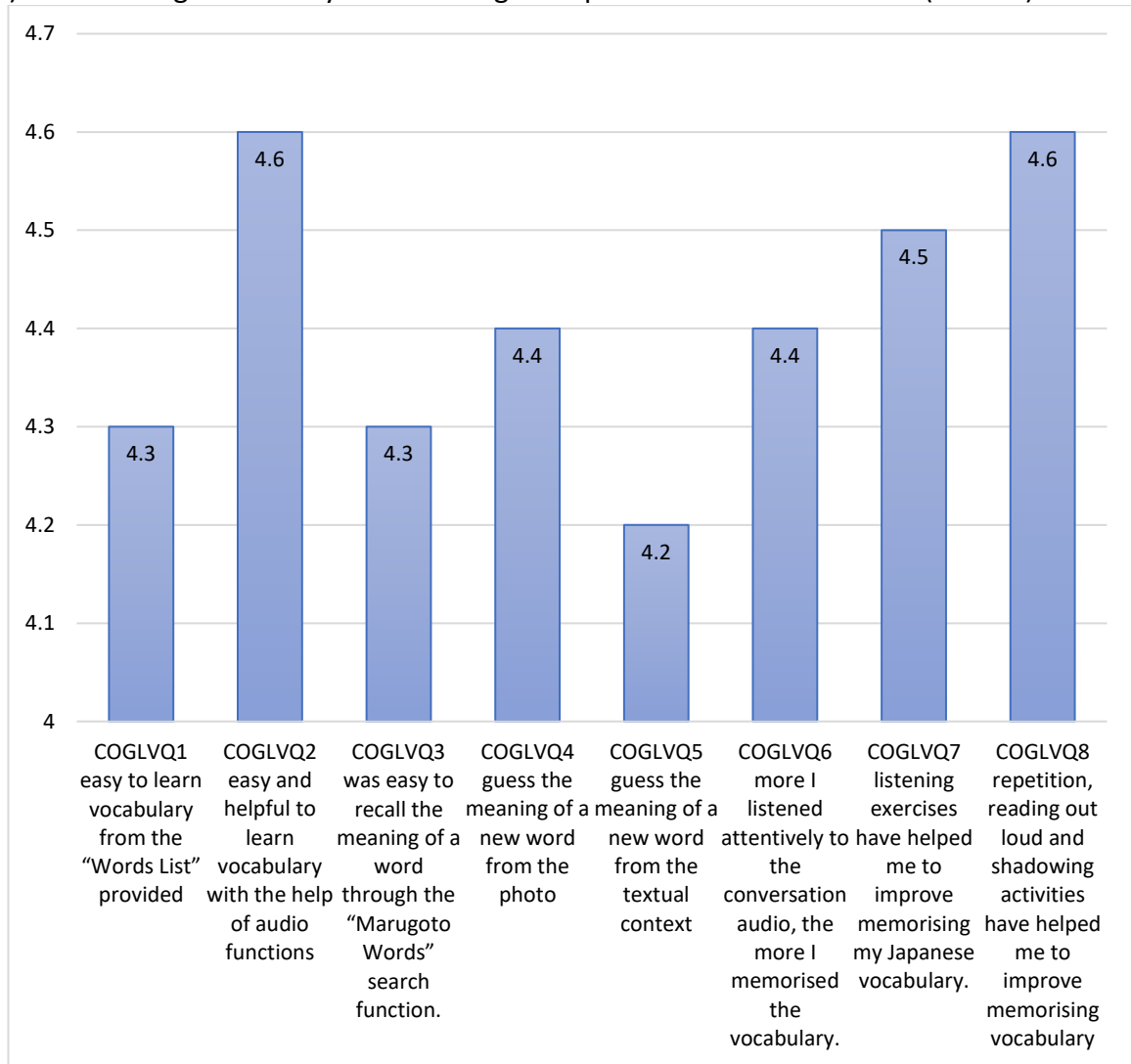

Figure 11 - Mean for Learning Vocabulary

For Figure 11 above, the mean for Learning Vocabulary shows that the highest mean of 4.6 is for item Questions 2 and 8. The second highest is by the mean of 4.5 for item Question 7. This is followed by the mean of 4.4 for item Question 4. The lowest mean of 4.3 is for items Question 1 and 3.

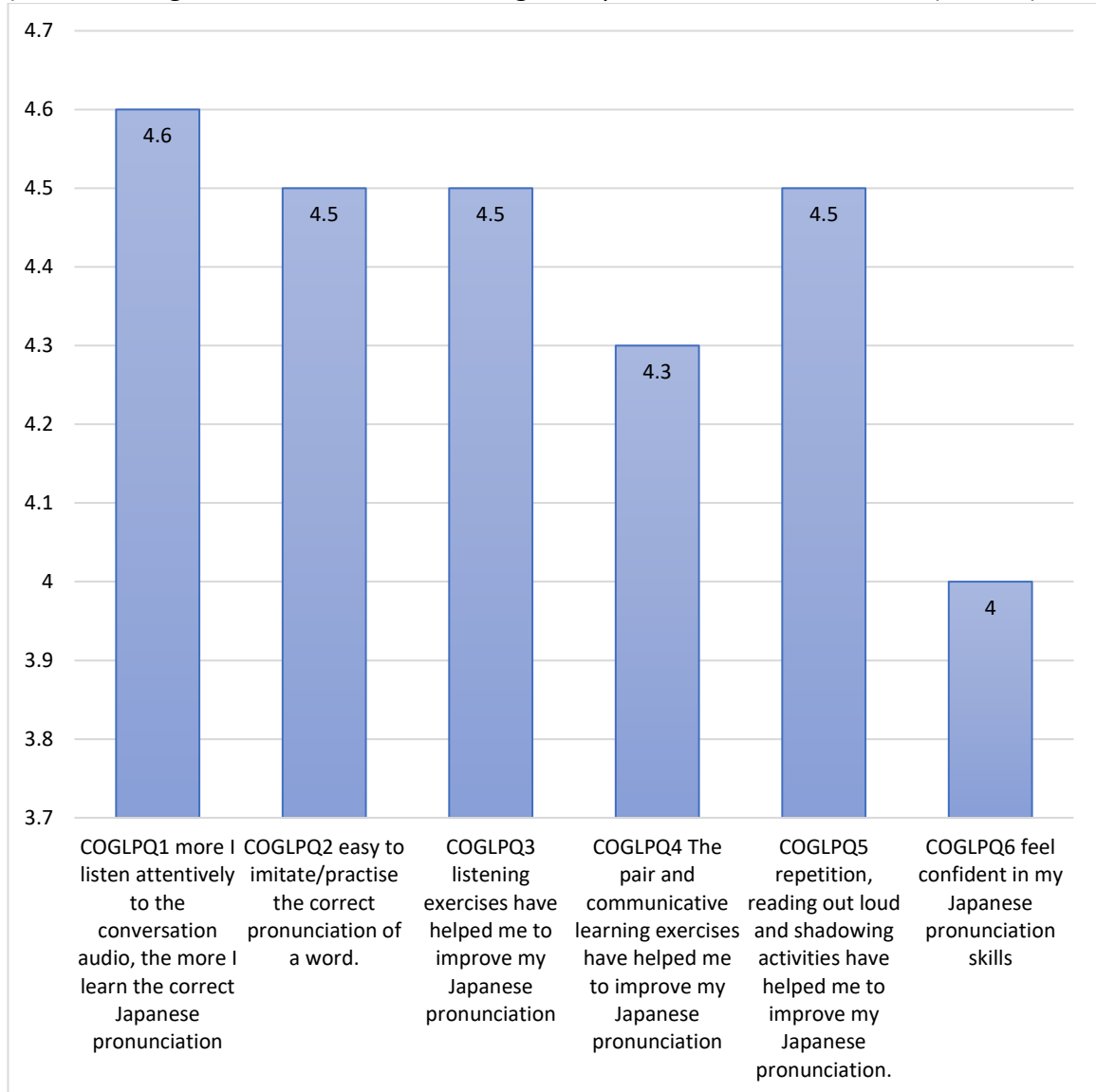(b)   Learning Pronunciation in the Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)

Figure 12 - Mean for Learning Pronunciation

Figure 12 above represents the mean for Learning Pronunciation. Finding shows that the highest mean of 4.6 is for item Question 1. This is followed by the mean of 4.5 for item Question 2, 3 and 5. The third with the mean of 4.3 is for item Question 4 and the lowest mean of 4 is for item Question 6.

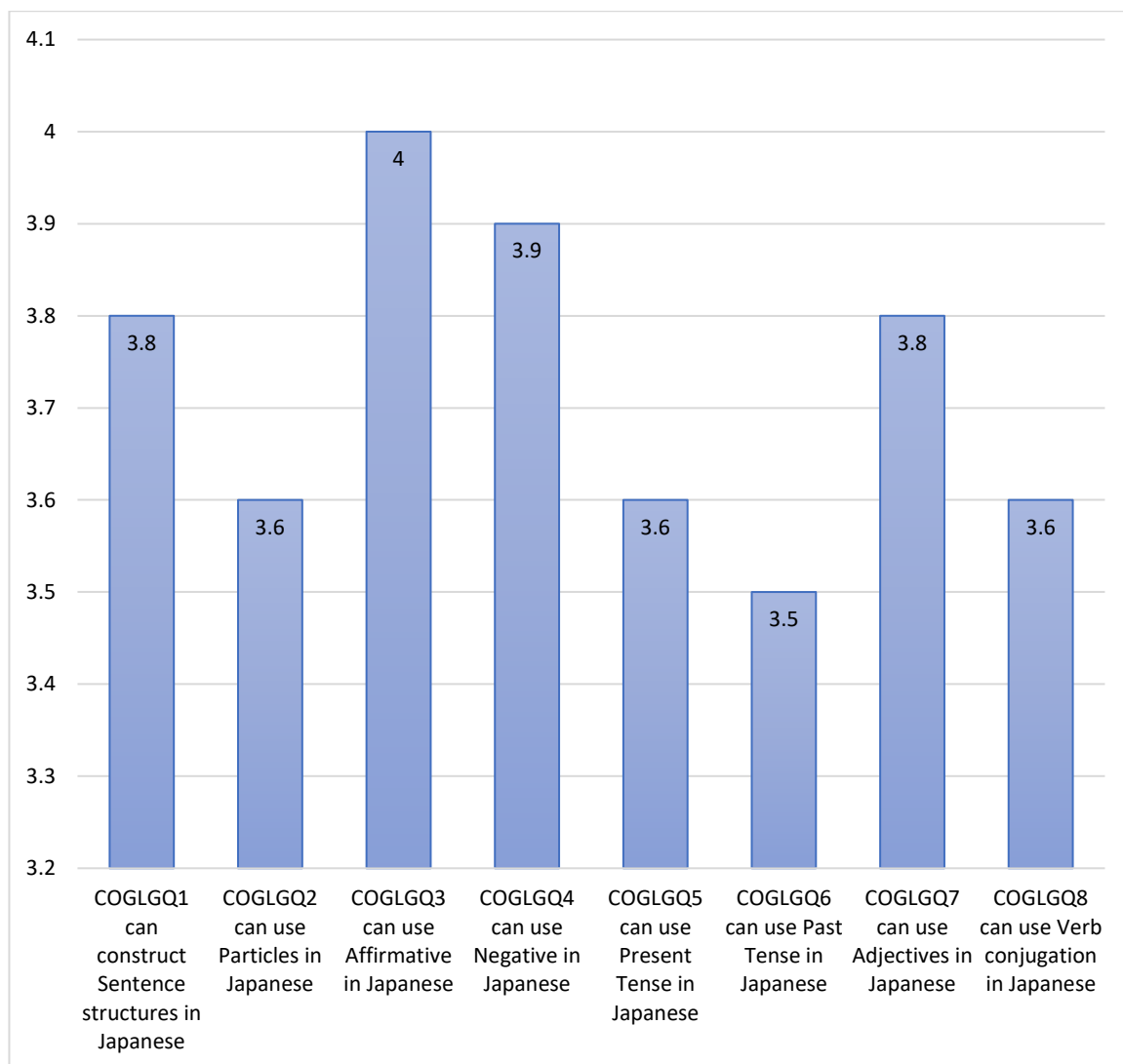(c) Learning Grammar in the Marugoto Japanese Online Course Site (Minato)

Figure 13 - Mean for learning Grammar

Figure 13 above shows the mean for Learning Grammar. The results show that the highest mean of 4 is for item Question 3. This is followed by the mean of 3.9 for item Question 4. Next is by the mean of 3.8 for items Question 1 and Question 7. Items Question 2, Question 5 and Question 8 are the second lowest by the mean of 3.6 and the lowest by the mean of 3.5 is for item Question 6.

Conclusion
Summary of Findings and Discussion
Findings for the Behavioural Factors affirms that the Communicative Learning Activities have helped the students to systematically learn how Japanese is used in communication. However, items on questions about communicative learning activities helps them to understand a variety of natural contextualized conversations, to gain practical ability to communicate in a variety of natural contextualized conversations and to achieve the learning objective(s) (Can-Do) are the students' three least preferred items. Question for the Language Function regarding ideas/needs/likes shows that the students use Japanese language to

express likes and dislikes as the preferred answer, whilst item use Japanese language to describe action is the least preferred choice.

This finding is in accordance with the study by Sato et. al (2017) who suggested that both online and face-to-face modes had their own contributions to language development in communication and cross-cultural comparisons, but the online mode was slightly more efficient.

For the Situational Factor, question asked on Learning Culture in Minato, findings reveals that the students agree that Japanese culture shown in the videos and photos is interesting, they are aware of the Japanese culture in various places shown in the videos and photos and understanding the Japanese culture learnt from the videos and photos will increase their interest in learning the Japanese language with the highest mean score. However, the item reflected on my own culture through learning about Japanese culture from the videos and photos scored the lowest mean. Result shows that the students favour the segment of Learning Lifestyle in Minato. The lowest mean score is the item I could understand the Japanese lifestyle norms. This finding is supported by the study done by Matsumoto and Okamoto (2003). Their findings showed the importance of culture and sociolinguistic aspects in communicative Japanese language learning. According to them, instead of introducing culture and lifestyle with pictures in textbooks, using media and video gave more impact on cultural understanding.

Results for the Cognitive Factor justify that the students find it is easy and helpful to learn vocabulary with the help of audio functions in Minato and the repetition, reading out loud and shadowing activities have helped them to improve memorising vocabulary but guessing the meaning of a new word from the textual context is rather difficult. They also agree that the more they listen attentively to the conversation audio, the more they learn the correct Japanese pronunciation which they chose as the most preferred item. On the contrary, they do not feel confident in their Japanese pronunciation skills. Items Learning Grammar ranks the lowest choice among other factors attributing to learning Japanese through Minato. The highest score is item "Can use Affirmative Sentences" and the lowest score is item "Can use Past Tense in Japanese".

This is proven by Lee and Chong's (2008) study on the implications of blended learning in Japanese language studies, which suggested that the student's vocabulary and listening skills could be improved with the help of web-based learning. But they suggested more face-to-face interactions in the classroom to learn grammar and speaking. Face-to-face interactions undoubtedly were still needed to learn foreign languages, especially to correct the pronunciation and intonation and for peer practice. Muhammad et. al (2019) also emphasised that the use of interactive multimedia websites had a positive effect for learning Japanese vocabulary and grammar.

In summary, out of 47 item questions, 11 items record the highest score by 4.6 mean points. Eight of the highest mean are items from Situational Factors and three items from Cognitive Factors. The eight items from Situational Factors with the highest means consist of three items from learning culture and five items from learning lifestyle. The three items with the highest means are two items from learning vocabulary and one item from learning pronunciation. The lowest mean is 3.5 points from the Cognitive Factors and the item is

learning grammar. It is evidence that teaching and learning Japanese online using videos and photos is the best way to learn about the culture and lifestyle.

These findings are supported by studies conducted by Selma et. al. (2011) and Maserah et. al (2014). The earlier stated that the use of mass media in learning and teaching sessions was beneficial for creating cultural awareness and a wide range of topics and vocabulary while the later found that Web 2.0 applications had a positive effect on the teaching and learning of Japanese.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

As IT technology has rapidly developed, internet and educational websites including online classrooms have become the new normal for language teachers and students. This would give more opportunities and benefits for the language teachers to implement online learning materials as synchronous or asynchronous for the language learning process. In comparison to the traditional classroom where the new knowledge transfer to the students carried out with limited time, space and conducive learning environment, online learning can give more flexibility to students' self-learning discovery. Online authentic media streaming can be useful materials to improve listening skill and understanding Japanese culture and lifestyle.

There are still more areas in the online language learning process could be discovered and future study or research could be conducted on matters such as online materials, its outcome, as well as the student's engagement and achievement.

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