

Receptive Vocabulary Size of Japanese University EST Students

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Introduction

Knowing the relative size of students' vocabulary helps inform program instructors on the academic readiness of students to handle classroom tasks, and reduces some guesswork when determining the appropriate level of difficulty of lessons. This research is part of a longitudinal project to assess the approximate vocabulary size of Japanese university students.

The Vocabulary Size Test

- The VST developed by Paul Nation and David Beglar (2007) was used as the measuring instrument. This test measures students' receptive vocabulary for general English reading.
- The 100-item test was delivered in-class with a time limit of thirty minutes either through the university's e-learning system (WebClass UEC) or in the paper-based format.

Results

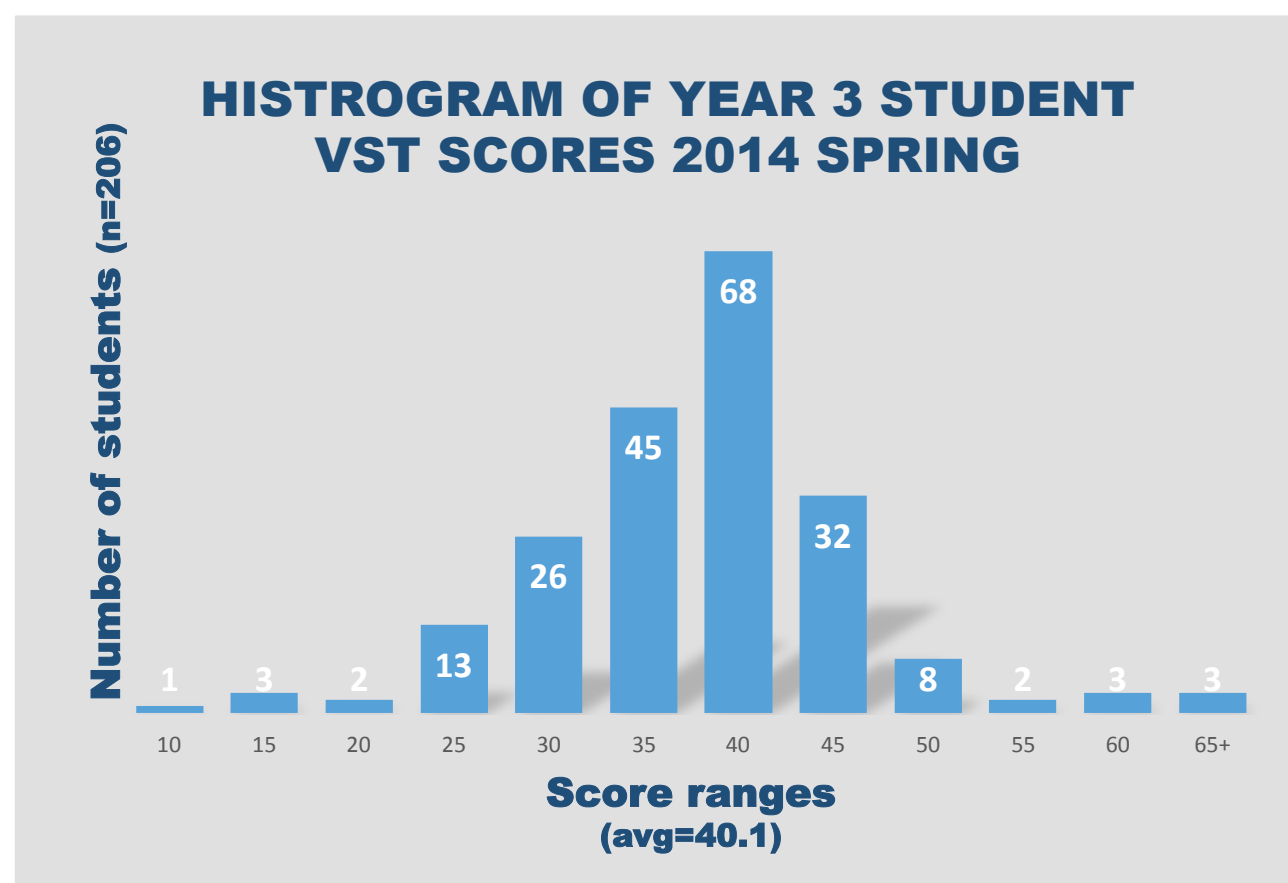


Figure 1. VST data from third-year students in Spring, 2014 (n=206)

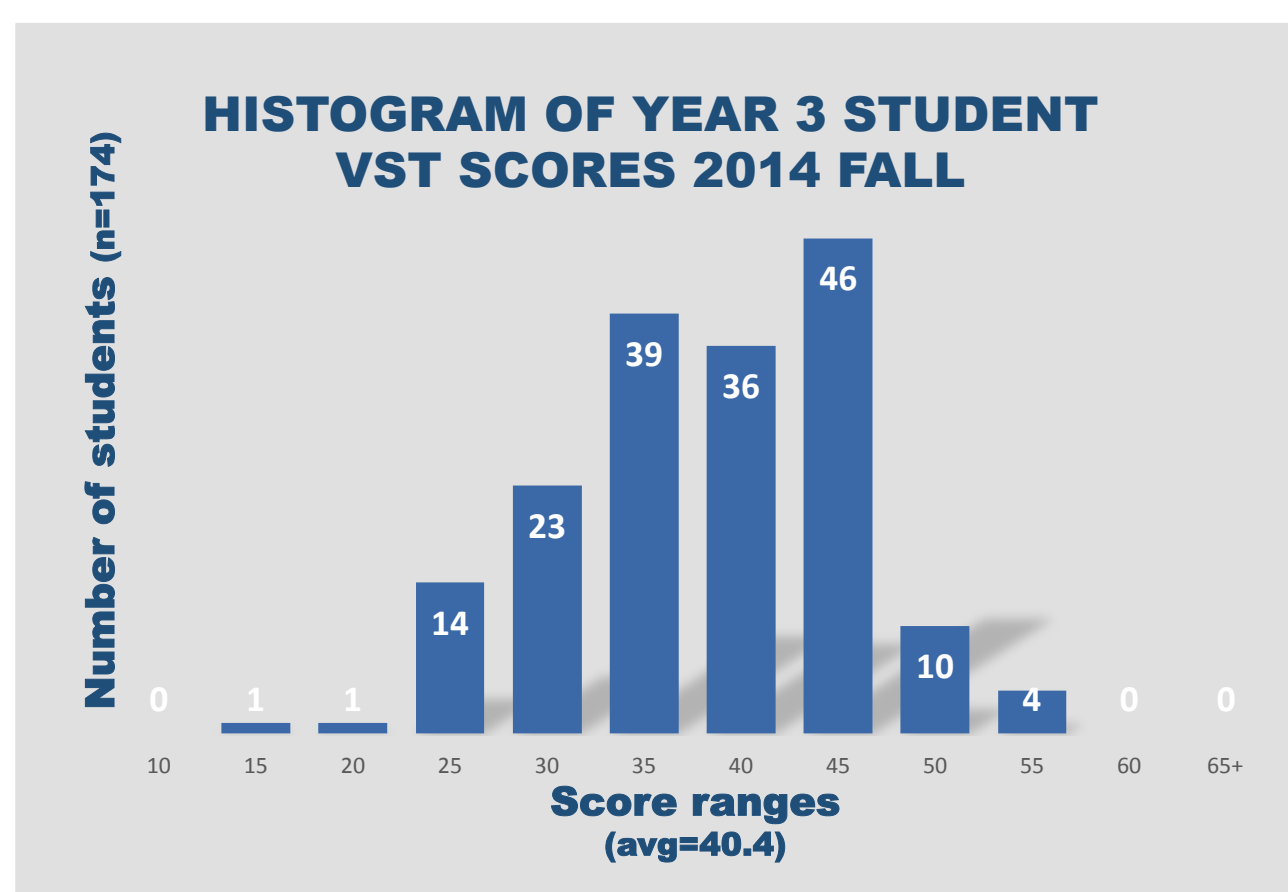


Figure 2. VST data from third-year students in Fall, 2014 (n=174)

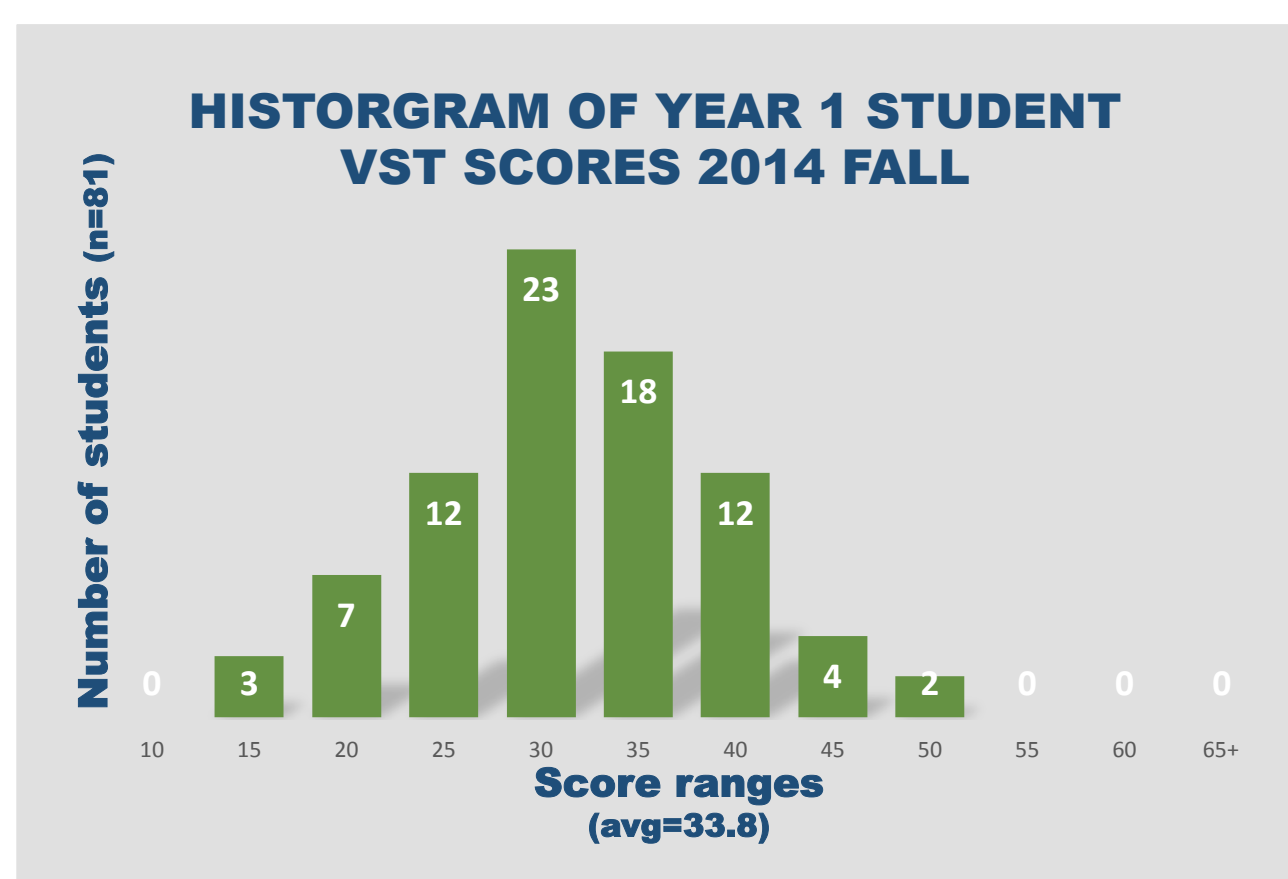


Figure 3. VST data from first-year students in Fall, 2014 (n=81)

Figure 1 shows the distribution of VST scores for 206 third-year undergraduate students in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program obtained in the spring semester of 2014. The average score is 40.1 which suggests an approximate vocabulary size of 8,000 words. In the fall semester, the VST was administered to seven classes (n=174), and students' scores are distributed as in Figure 2. In addition, a smaller group (n=81) of first-year students also sat the VST (Figure 3).

The average scores from the third-year students remain fairly consistent, only differing by 0.3 points between semesters. However, the score from the first-year students only average 33.8, about 6 points less than the average of third-year students. This score indicates that the general vocabulary size of students in the third-year is roughly 1,200 words larger than those of first-years.

Figure 4 summarizes data of the average scores broken down into respective departments and years. For third-years, Department A has the highest average, whereas, for first-years, it is outperformed by two other departments. The reason for this should be investigated further, and obtaining a larger sample size of first-year students needs to be considered.

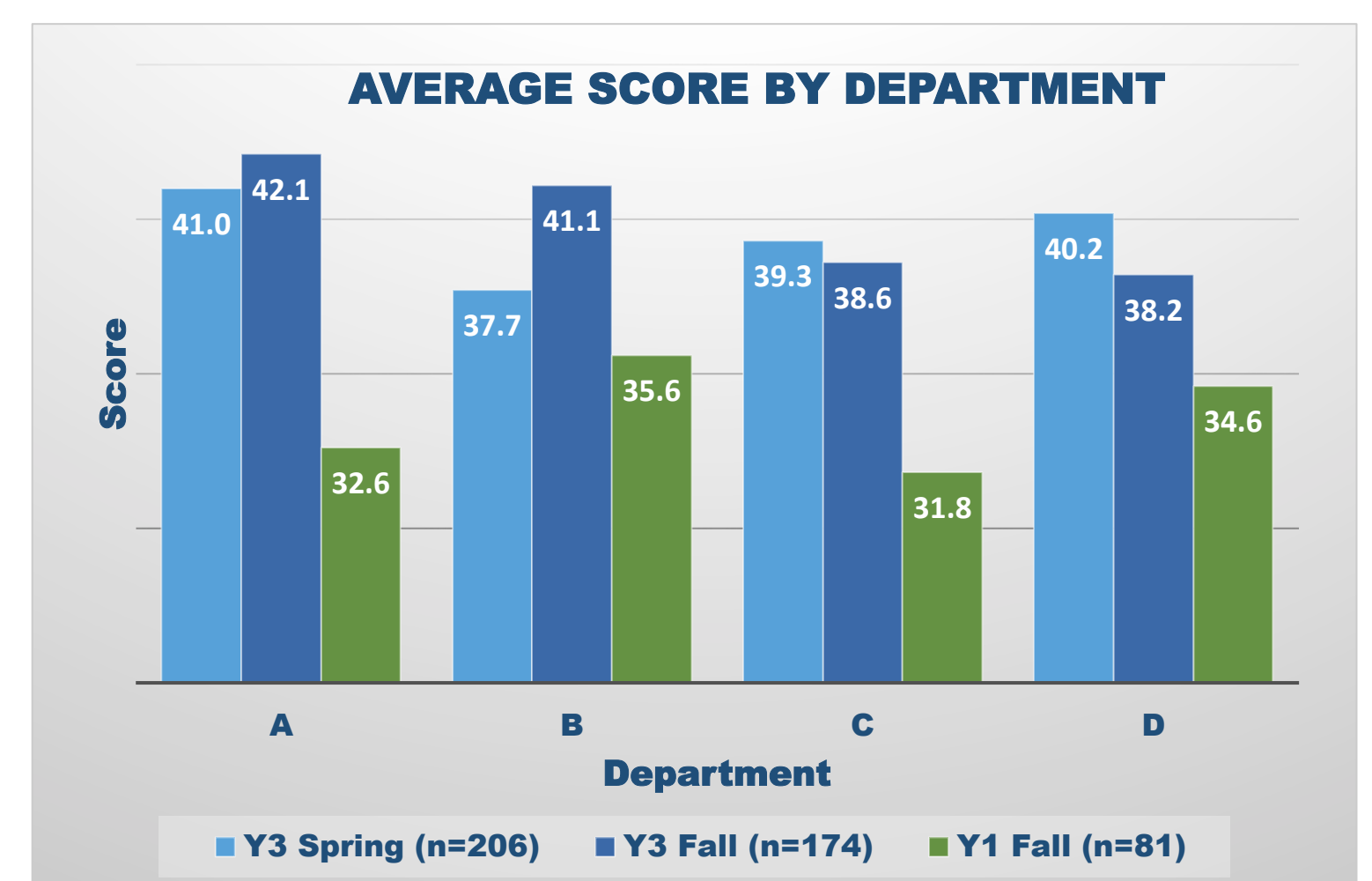


Figure 4. Breakdown of VST averages by department, semester and year.

In future studies, the researchers hope to gain deeper understanding of how to gauge the size of field-specific vocabulary that students possess so that more effective methods of ESP instruction can be achieved. This longitudinal study will continue to follow the development of the academic lexical competencies of the freshman students of this study.

Literature Cited

I.S.P. Nation & D. Beglar, *A vocabulary size test*. The Language Teacher, 31(7), 2007, pp. 9-13.