
Kanagawa University students' views on their English learning and their motivations

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Introduction

Since communicative language teaching (CLT) came to play a dominant role in language teaching in the 1980's (Richards and Rodgers, 2001), use of language, rather than knowledge of language, has been a main focus in the instruction of target language. As the world becomes globalized in terms of communication, especially English seems to have a more crucial position as lingua franca. Japan is no exception.

For example, Ministry of Education (MOE) initiated two major reforms in English teaching at the secondary school level. The first is the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) program, in which Native English speaking ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) teach public school English classes in communication-oriented settings in collaboration with JTEs (Japanese Teachers of English). The second is the modification of curriculum. In 1994, a new high school subject called 'Oral Communication' was introduced to cover three courses: listening, speaking, and discussion/debate. Furthermore, teaching materials such as textbooks were arranged on communication basis.

Despite the changing trend, there still seems a factor that counters it. That is, university entrance examinations appear to have an undesirable effect on communicative instruction as many researchers mention (Ike,

1995; Law, 1995). Since a priority is placed on leading students to pass the entrance examinations, secondary level language syllabuses and teaching methodology seem to be molded into the exhibition of 'strong preference for lists of language items over discursive texts, for peripheral over core forms, and for linguistic knowledge over linguistic performance' (Law, 1995, p. 217).

Gorsuch (1998) relates the examinations to *yahudoku* and the grammar-translation method in that great standards of accuracy and focus on exceptions to the rules of grammar are involved with English instruction in order to get students to gain higher scores. As Locastro (1990) argues, the underlying reason seems to be that the examinations assess knowledge of and the ability to translate into Japanese a variety of English that is not commonly used. Therefore, 'the richness and depth of natural spoken and informal written language is lost and the range of topics of contemporary discourse is absent' (Locastro, 1990, p. 352).

Moreover, a close look at learners' beliefs about language learning would provide a clear picture of the classroom setting. Matsuura *et al* (2001) conducted a 36-item questionnaire with over 300 students and 82 college teachers to assess their beliefs about language learning and teaching respectively. It was found that a majority of the students preferred more traditional styles of language teaching, for example, 'learning isolated skills, focusing on accuracy, and learning through a teacher-centered approach' (p. 86). On the other hand, the teachers' responses were different. They tended to express a preference for more communicative instruction such as 'a focus on communication, learner-centered activities, integrated skills, and a focus on fluency rather than accuracy' (p. 86). The discrepancy between the students' and teachers' beliefs seems to indicate that although teachers try to help learners get more involved with communicative use of language at classroom, learners might have a difficulty in adjusting their learning style to communicative instruction due to their conservative attitude toward language learning.

This paper tries to explore affective part of English learning for Japanese

learners of English. The author is currently teaching English at Kanagawa University. The present study is expected to shed light on Kanagawa University students' views on their English learning and their motivations.

Research Questions

1. What do Kanagawa University students think of their English learning?
2. How was their English learning until they graduated from high school?
3. What do they want to learn at university English classroom?

Methodology

Participants

Those who took part in the present study were the first-year students of Business Administration (BA) (n=131), and the second-year students of Science (S) (n=55) at Kanagawa University. According to the results of the placement test, which students take before a semester begins, they are allocated into a certain level of English proficiency slot so that they study with peers whose proficiency levels are similar to each other. The survey was conducted in each of the two semesters: Spring and Fall semester. Some students take the same level of classes in both semesters due to their almost identical scores of the placement test. Thus, seven students of BA and eight students of Science were overlapped in the data. It must be noted that it was impossible to identify the overlapped data because of their anonymity. The author takes charge of six English classes as in the following table.

The levels of the classes targeted

Business Administration					Science		
Period *1 Level	Tue: 2nd	Tue: 4th	Fri: 1st	Fri: 3rd	Period *2 Level	Tue: 3rd	Fri: 2nd
Advanced-a					a		
Advanced-b					b		
Intermediate-a		●			c	●	
Intermediate-b					d		
Intermediate-c	●				e		●
Intermediate-d					f		
Intermediate-e				●	g		
Intermediate-f					h		
Beginner-a					i		
Beginner-b					j		
Basic-a			●				
Basic-b							

The mark '●' is a kind of class the author teaches.

*1&2 In both class types, proficiency levels decrease in an alphabetical order.

They were asked to fill out a questionnaire during the first ten minutes of the first English class. They had not been informed of this survey in advance.

Materials & Tasks

The questionnaire was given to each participant in the class. The questions had been derived from the questionnaire administered at Obirin University (Matsuda, 1993) and arranged for the current study. Since open-ended questions were discarded as unnecessary qualitative data, the current questionnaire, written in Japanese, consisted of five types of questions, four of which has a rating scale (see Appendix for reference to its example):

1. Do you like English?
2. What do you think of your English proficiency?

3. What do you think of the English classes you had taken by the time you graduated from high school?
4. Do you have any qualifications of English?
5. What do you or don't you want to study?

The first three questions were expected to draw some inferences about students' motivation for learning English. The next question was to indicate their English proficiency and the last was to show what they hope to learn or not to learn at university English classroom.

Results

All the data on the questionnaire were quantified and analyzed. Table 1 shows the participants' view on English in terms of if they like or dislike it.

Table 1. The students' views on English

	BA	S	TOTAL
I like English.	66 [50.4%]	23 [41.8%]	89 [47.8%]
I dislike English.	65 [49.6%]	32 [58.2%]	97 [52.2%]
Total	131	55	186

The overall data tell us that the number of those who dislike English exceeds that of those who like by eight. In addition, whereas all the BA students are almost equally split up into half in terms of whether they like English or not, about 58% of Science students do not like English, which infers a tendency to dislike English. However, the difference is still small.

Table 2 shows that how confident students are in their English skills.

Table 2. The degree of the students' confidence in their English ability

	BA	S	TOTAL
confident	2 [1.6%]	0 [0.0%]	2 [1.1%]
somewhat	26 [20.2%]	10 [18.2%]	36 [19.6%]
not very	64 [49.6%]	34 [61.8%]	98 [53.3%]
not at all	37 [28.7%]	11 [20.0%]	48 [26.1%]
Total	129	55	184

The majority of the students (53.3%) are not very confident in their English ability and about 26% of the students are not confident at all. This indicates that about 80% of the students have a negative impression on their English ability. Moreover, each department of the students shows a similar tendency.

Table 3 shows what the students think of the English classes they had taken by the time they graduated from high school.

Table 3. What they think of the English classes they had taken by the time of high school graduation

	BA	S	TOTAL
interesting	28 [21.4%]	13 [23.6%]	41 [22.0%]
uninteresting	70 [53.4%]	15 [27.3%]	85 [45.7%]
uninteresting, but useful*	27 [20.6%]	24 [43.6%]	51 [27.4%]
others	6 [4.6%]	3 [5.5%]	9 [4.8%]
Total	131	55	186

*useful for university entrance examinations

About 46% of the students think the previous English classes are not interesting. When the third category, which is 'uninteresting, but useful for university entrance examinations,' is included, about 73% of the students consider the English classes to be uninteresting. On the other hand, the second and third categories show that BA and Science students have opposite attitudes toward practicality. That is, while about 74% of BA students think that the English classes were uninteresting, and only about 28% of the students who think so consider the classes to be useful, about 71% of Science students think that the classes were uninteresting, but about 61.5% of the students who think so consider the classes to be useful.

Table 4 shows the number of students who have a qualification of English.

Table 4. The number of the students who have a qualification of English

	BA	S	TOTAL
Eiken 2nd	2 [1.5%]	2 [3.6%]	4 [2.2%]
Eiken pre 2nd	22 [16.8%]	11 [20.0%]	33 [17.7%]
Eiken 3rd	27 [20.6%]	9 [16.4%]	36 [19.4%]
Eiken 4th	2 [1.5%]	4 [7.3%]	6 [3.2%]
Eiken 5th	0 [0.0%]	1 [1.8%]	1 [0.5%]
others	4 [3.1%]	0 [0.0%]	4 [2.2%]
Total	55 [42.0%]	25 [45.5%]	80 [43.0%]

Overall, 43% of the students have a qualification of English. Most of them (95%) hold Eiken (Test in Practical English Proficiency). The majority of them have either Eiken pre second-degree (17.7%) or Eiken third-degree (19.4%). There seems to be any big difference between both groups.

Table 5 shows what the students want to learn in English classes and what they don't. In addition, Table 6 shows the top five things they want to learn and the top five things they do not want to learn.

Table 5. What the students want to learn and what not in university English classes

	BA		S		Total	
	O	x	O	x	O	x
Conversation	72 [55.0%]	16 [12.2%]	25 [45.5%]	4 [7.3%]	97 [52.2%]	20 [10.8%]
Listening	78 [59.5%]	13 [9.9%]	21 [38.2%]	4 [7.3%]	99 [53.2%]	17 [9.1%]
How to read newspapers	73 [55.7%]	15 [11.5%]	22 [40.0%]	4 [7.3%]	95 [51.1%]	19 [10.2%]
Translation from E to J	59 [45.0%]	18 [13.7%]	19 [34.5%]	3 [5.5%]	78 [41.9%]	21 [11.3%]
How to write letters	40 [30.5%]	25 [19.1%]	9 [16.4%]	9 [16.4%]	49 [26.3%]	34 [18.3%]
Translation from J to E	50 [38.2%]	20 [15.3%]	12 [21.8%]	9 [16.4%]	62 [33.3%]	29 [15.6%]
Grammar	63 [48.1%]	18 [13.7%]	17 [30.9%]	6 [10.9%]	80 [43.0%]	24 [12.9%]
Reading long passages	48 [36.6%]	27 [20.6%]	21 [38.2%]	11 [20.0%]	69 [37.1%]	38 [20.4%]
Songs	54 [41.2%]	27 [20.6%]	20 [36.4%]	9 [16.4%]	74 [39.8%]	36 [19.4%]
Movies	77 [58.8%]	10 [7.6%]	25 [45.5%]	4 [7.3%]	102 [54.8%]	14 [7.5%]
Pronunciation	55 [42.0%]	16 [12.2%]	11 [20.0%]	6 [10.9%]	66 [35.5%]	22 [11.8%]
Discussion	19 [14.5%]	57 [43.5%]	5 [9.1%]	20 [36.4%]	24 [12.9%]	77 [41.4%]
Debate	12 [9.2%]	57 [43.5%]	2 [3.6%]	23 [41.8%]	14 [7.5%]	80 [43.0%]
Speech	11 [8.4%]	73 [55.7%]	4 [7.3%]	24 [43.6%]	15 [8.1%]	97 [52.2%]
Others	5 [3.8%]	2 [1.5%]	3 [5.5%]	0 [0.0%]	8 [4.3%]	2 [1.1%]
Total	716	394	216	136	932	530

Table 6. The top five things they want to learn and they do not

	BA		S		TOTAL	
	want to learn	not want to learn	want to learn	not want to learn	want to learn	not want to learn
1	Listening	Speech	Conversation	Speech	Movies	Speech
2	Movies	Discussion	Movies	Debate	Listening	Debate
3	How to read newspapers	Debate	How to read newspapers	Discussion	Conversation	Discussion
4	Conversation	Reading long passages	Listening	Reading long passages	How to read newspapers	Reading long passages
5	Grammar	Songs	Reading long passages	How to write letters/ Translation from J to E/ Songs	Grammar	Songs

They seem to have a preference for receptive skills such as listening and reading and have a tendency to avoid handling productive skills such as speech and debate. When each department is given a close look, similar phenomena can be seen.

Discussion

Although the data collected by means of a questionnaire were not analyzed with a complex statistical method, interesting phenomena seem to be observed. The majority of Kanagawa students do not possess a positive impression on their English ability, which may lead them to think they do not have a preference for this subject.

Their negative attitude toward English learning seems attributed to their past learning. About 73% of students think the English classes they had taken by the time of high school graduation were uninteresting. With regard to the difference between both departments in this respect, the Science students tend to consider the previous English classes to be more useful for university entrance examinations than the BA students though they think the classes were uninteresting. In other words, it seems that the Science students had a tendency to be grounded in instrumental motivation, which is more practical, rather than integrative motivation, which is based on a desire to know more about the culture and community of the target

language group (Dornyei, 1990). It may be interesting to investigate the relationship between their preference for English and what they think of the previous English classes.

Furthermore, the qualifications the students hold seem to indicate that their English ability is not sufficient for university level due to the fact that only about 2% of the students possess Eiken 2nd, which are designed for a level of high school graduates. However, this might be too early to say so because the fact that those who do not take English proficiency tests does not guarantee that their English ability is not sufficient.

Similar to Matsuura *et al* (2001), the students seem to prefer studying receptive skills to productive skills even though the importance of English communication has been widely accepted. This seems to infer that when we implement communicative tasks into classroom, we must provide them for the students with much care, considering that the majority of the students have a negative attitude toward their English learning.

Conclusion

As for classroom situations, Dornyei (2001) states "although there is ample indirect evidence that the teacher's own level of motivation is 'infectious', that is, it has a significant impact on the students learning commitment, hardly any research has been done in the past to explore this relationship" (p. 50). Although it is very challenging to measure personal factors such as motivations, no doubt can be cast to the importance of affective domains in the theory of second language learning (Brown, 2000) from learners' and teachers' perspectives. It is hoped that the present study will play a role in helping Kanagawa University teachers plan, execute, and assess their communicative teaching.

References

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Appendix

Questionnaire

該当する番号に○をつけ詳しいことは（ ）に記入してください。

A. 英語は好きですか。

1. はい 2. いいえ

理由（ ）

B. 自分の英語能力をどう思いますか。

1. 自信がある 2. ふつう 3. あまり自信がない 特に（ ）が苦手
4. 全く駄目

C. 高校までの英語の授業をどう思いますか。

1. 面白かった 2. つまらなかった 理由（ ）
3. 面白くは無かったが受験には役に立った
4. その他（ ）

D. 英語の資格（TOEFL、TOEIC、英検等）を持っていたら書いてください。

例（ TOEIC 505 点 ）

E. 大学の授業でやってみたいことには○、やりたくないことには×をつけてください。

この授業に限らず全般的に答えてください。（複数回答可）

1. 英会話 2. リスニング 3. 英字新聞の読み方 4. 英文和訳 5.
英文レターの書き方 6. 和文英訳 7. 文法 8. 長文読解 9. 英語
の歌 10. 洋画 11. 発音 12. 英語でのディスカッション 13.
ディベート 14. スピーチ
15. その他（具体的に ）

F. この授業は Listening & Speaking を扱いますがどのような内容を期待しますか、

また具体的にどのような技能を身につけたいと思いますか。

例（英語で日常会話ができるようになりたい。）

Thank you for your cooperation.