

The 2006 Cohort of College Students

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Abstract

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan implemented a curriculum reform in 2002 known as Yutori Kyoiku the aim of which was to relieve the pressure on students and broaden their perspective and creative abilities. In this curriculum, the volume of content and vocabulary in English instruction was reduced. In the same year, “Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities” was proposed for responding to the needs of a globalized society. The content, teaching materials, and teaching methods were designed to emphasize communicative skills.

Currently universities in Japan are approaching a period of full admissions, in which all applicants are being accepted due to the declining number of 18 year olds. This situation, decreased competition among students, has been blamed for the declining academic level of new students.

In April 2006, universities first accepted new students who studied English under the new curriculum. The present study investigates the characteristics of these new students in terms of their English abilities and their attitudes toward English. Comparison with the second year students identified the following: 1. New students have more confidence in their speaking and listening skills, but not reading and writing skills. 2. The second year students have more positive attitudes toward English learning. 3. Hours devoted to studying for English in the senior year of high school were very low in both groups, and those of the first-year students were extremely low. 4. Although the curriculum was reformed, the classroom activities participants engaged in were still geared to translation and preparation for college examinations.

The study concludes that careful examination and evaluation of new students' characteristics as well as their abilities are urged to plan and implement effective college English instruction.

Key Words : curriculum reform, Course of Study, the 2006 cohort
globalization, English as a communication tool
second language learning

Introduction

In the 21st century, Japanese society is expected to become more globalized. Since English is the common international language and a tool for communication, English mastery has become an increasingly important skill for Japanese children to acquire than ever before.

Considering this situation, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT) in Japan has reformed English instruction in junior and senior high schools. In January 2001, MEXT organized a committee for reforming English education. Attention was paid to the following three points :

1. Promote students' communications skills
2. Promote students' positive attitudes towards English
3. Consider and use English as a tool of communication

Moreover, the committee focused on student motivation as a key element of success in learning English, it discussed ways to enhance motivation. As a result, English curriculum reform was implemented in 2002 at the junior high school level and in 2003 at the high school level.

April 2006, marked the first time Japanese universities accepted new students who had been educated under this new curriculum in high school. However, previously often heard complain was that after receiving six years of English instruction, Japanese college students had not mastered enough English to communicate, and were not ready for academic English. Recently, the decline in students' English ability at the college level has become more prominent. This is partially due to demographic changes: the total number of students is declining with the result that universities are recruiting more aggressively. In their effort to recruit students, many universities have adapted new entrance systems such as AO (Admission Office) in which students are admitted without taking entrance examinations. The decline in students' English language skill is also attributed to the curriculum reform at the secondary school level, begun in 2002. Educational reform, so called 'Yutori kyoiku,' endeavored to increase students' motivation by deemphasizing memorization, but in the end resulted in a decrease of English learning materials, vocabulary in the classroom. Such situation has led to report a decline in English skills for many new college students as well as a huge proficiency gaps among these students. To compensate for this situation, some colleges provide remedial courses for students who do not attain a certain level of English mastery ; others have decreased their curriculum requirements for English.

However, if the reform is working, then universities can expect that these new students are better equipped to master communication skills. At the same time, it

would be possible that with improved communication skills, these students are fairly motivated to use and learn English.

Consequently, the university curriculum can be modified, adding academic reading and writing, speech, discussion, debate and presentation, to help students in the globalized society. However, before implementing the new curriculum, it is necessary to investigate characteristics of new students. Understanding what these new students bring to university classrooms is the basis for implementing an effective curriculum.

Therefore, the present study is designed to elucidate the characteristics of new students who received English instruction under the new curriculum, enforced in 2003. It investigates students' previous learning experiences, while comparing them with other university students, who received English instruction under the former curriculum. The following research questions were addressed :

- (1) What are the students previous English experiences?
- (2) How do the students assess their own English language skills, as well as their strengths and weaknesses?
- (3) Where do they find difficulties?
- (4) What are their attitudes toward learning English?

An investigation of the above four questions will lead to a comparison of the two student groups.

Research hypothesis

There are differences between the two groups of students in terms of their English experiences, their motivation, attitudes, and self-evaluation since the different approach in English instruction was introduced in the new curriculum guidelines by MEXT.

At this moment, there is little or no research on this new college student. Therefore, this study endeavors to be a starting point for further investigation on the short and long-term effects of the educational reform.

Chapter 1 Literature review

1-1-1 Overview of Japanese education

In Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Technology (MEXT) is responsible for determining standards of school education, from kindergarten to upper secondary schools. MEXT designs and implements curriculum based on national standards so that quality and equal education is provided throughout Japan. The Course of Study is a guideline which specifies objectives, goals, content, and a standard number of school hours to be devoted to each subject. In these regulations the Ministry

sets forth a title of subjects to be offered in upper secondary schools. In addition, textbooks are recommended here. The Course of Study is formulated and pursuant to educational laws in Japan. Although each school is urged to consider local circumstances as well as abilities and future perspectives of individual students, schools in Japan organize their curriculum in accordance with this Course of Study. The Course of Study is revised about once every ten years.

1-1-2 *Educational Reform and current movement*

Japan's economical growth and success in the 1970's and 1980's were considered a result of its successful of education system. Receiving high quality education, Japanese students showed great achievement, ranking either at the top or near the top in international tests. However, despite such success, there has been a widespread dissatisfaction in the educational system in Japan. Many claimed that Japanese schools are too stressful and too rigid. When problems arose, such as bullying, school violence, students' withdrawal from school or society, the educational system has been blamed. Many urged educational reform, focusing on flexibility and responsiveness to better served the needs of individual students. In response to such social demands, the new teaching guidelines, the so-called 'Yutori kyoiku,' were introduced in April 2002. These guidelines include the reduction of the school curriculum by 30% and the implementation of a five-day school week. The goal of this reform is to develop children's individualized interests and motivation for learning. Despite great expectations, four years after the introduction of the new reform, many Japanese believe that it has failed. Even before the reform was implemented, some policy makers and practitioners were concerned that the reform would contribute to a decline in students' academic skills. Some claimed that the reform created a huge gap among students. Parents worried that their children would learn less due to a reduced curriculum content. Some send their children to private schools which have not instituted reforms, or they send their children to private cram schools after regular school or on weekends. However, there are some who cannot afford such costly education. Even at the university level, there was evidence of declining academic abilities. In this way, the efficacy and effectiveness of the reform in 2002 is now being questioned, and the need for change in Japanese education is now being sought.

Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners are concerned that the Japanese education system can support children so they may keep up with the rapid and dynamic societal changes wrought by globalization, internationalization, and the development of information technology. It is believed that children need to acquire communicative English skills. MEXT introduced a strategic plan to cultivate "Japanese

with English abilities” and worked for reform in English education.

1-1-3 *New curriculum guideline/aims*

MEXT has been trying to implement various measures in the new curriculum. One was seen in the revision of the Course of Study. The current Course of Study for English was introduced in April 2002 for the lower secondary level and in April 2003 for the upper secondary level. This revision aimed to cultivate students' basic and practical communication abilities, including positive attitudes toward English. To achieve such a goal, the new Course of Study for English had some distinctive characteristics. According to the Ministry of Education, communication abilities mentioned in the Course of Study include the ability to conduct daily conversation and exchange basic information in a foreign language. Such skills are required of all students. As a result, foreign language has become a required subject in lower and upper secondary school.

1-1-4 *Comparisons of Course of Study*

The following compares three Courses of Study in 1989, 1993, and 2002.

Table 1 : Comparison of overall objectives for English instruction by each grade level

Grade levels	1989	1993	2002
Lower Secondary level	To develop students' basic ability to understand a foreign language and express themselves in it, to deepen their interest in a language, and to foster a basic understanding of the daily life and ways of thinking of foreign people.	To develop students' basic ability to understand a foreign language and express themselves in it, to develop a positive attitude toward communicating in a foreign language, and to develop interest in language and culture which may become a foundation of building international understanding.	To develop students' basic practical communication abilities such as listening and speaking, deepen the understanding of language and culture, and foster a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages.
	1989	1994	2003
Upper secondary level	To develop students' ability to understand a foreign language and express themselves in it, to deepen their interest in a language and to understand the daily life and way of thinking of foreign people.	To develop students' basic ability to understand and express themselves in a foreign language, and to deepen their interest in a language and culture which may become a foundation for building international understanding.	To develop students' practical communication abilities such as understanding information and the speaker's or writer's intentions, and express their own ideas, deepen the understanding of language and culture, and foster a positive attitude toward

			communication through foreign languages.
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Table 2 : Standard number of hours per week for English instruction in the lower secondary level

Grade levels	1989	1993	2002
7	3	3 to 4	3 for required course 1 for elective course
8	3	3 to 4	3 for required course 2 for elective course
9	3	3 to 4	3 for required course 2 for elective course

Table 3 : Standard number of credit for English instruction in the upper secondary level

	1989	1994	2003
Subjects	Standard number of credits	Standard number of credits	Standard number of credits
English I	4	4	*3
English II	5	4	*4
English II A	3	Not available	Not available
English II B	3	Not available	Not available
English II C	3	Not available	Not available
Oral Communication A	Not available	2	Not available
Oral Communication B	Not available	2	Not available
Oral Communication C	Not available	2	Not available
Reading	Not available	4	4
Writing	Not available	4	4
Oral Communication I	Not available	Not available	2
Oral Communication II	Not available	Not available	*4

* For 2003, students have to choose one of these three as a required course.

Summary of comparison

When comparing the objectives in the above table (Table 1), the following key words were found in the new Course of Study.

communication skills / understand the language and culture / positive attitudes / practical skills / integration of four skills / nurturing / understanding of message of senders (speakers, writers)

In terms of the standard number of hours for the lower secondary level, there were

no changes in the 7th grade while 1 hour per week was added for the elective in the 8th and 9th grades (Table 2). In terms of the standard number of credits for the upper secondary level, new subjects, Oral Communication I and II have been added. Although it was not described in the table, the MEXT's guideline directs that students have to complete Oral Communication I in order to take Oral Communication II in the new Course of Study, which means that there is a level difference between the two courses whereas Oral Communication A, B and C in the previous course of study was not based on the level of mastery.

There are some differences which do not appear in the above tables, but do appear in the guidelines. In the previous course of study, for the description of subjects and units, foreign language is mentioned. However, in terms of required units, there is no description or specification for foreign language. On the other hand, in the new Course of Study, Foreign language is mentioned as a required course. Under this guideline students have to take English as a foreign language, 2 units minimum from either Oral Communication I (2 standard units) or English I (3 standard units).

1-1-5 *Issues relevant to the comparison*

In the previous Course of Study, foreign language was not a required course although many schools provided English courses. Standard units of English under this guideline were 4 units. On the other hand, the standard units of English under the new guidelines were reduced to 3 units. At the same time, the level and the content of English in junior high school were reduced under the principle of 'Yutori kyoiku.' For example, the number of vocabulary words required for mastery at the junior high school level was reduced from 1,000 to 900. In high school, the number of necessary vocabulary words was reduced from 1500 (1000 in junior high school and 500 in high school) to 1300 (900 in junior high school and 400 in high school).

Moreover, the guidelines limit analysis or explanation of English materials and direct teachers to introduce situations in which the students actually use the language.

It is questionable whether the students who have received English instruction under the new Course of Study—one which reduced the standard units and limited vocabulary and materials—are ready for academic English at the college level.

It is claimed that the university entrance examinations in Japan are based on the high school curriculum. In other words, high school curricula are designed to fit the content of the examination. As is widely known, the Center Examination introduced a listening test in 2006 as a reflection of the curriculum change. The Ministry also recommended universities to accommodate their methods in the selection of applicants. Some universities now use an AO system in which applicants are accepted without a formal

entrance examination. However, many university entrance examinations still rely on multiple choice questions and oral or writing skills are usually not tested. Thus high school curricula may be in conflict with standards required by the entrance examination. Although students are given more choices of English courses under the new guidelines, it is reasonable that they would only take those subjects that are applicable to the entrance examination rather than be challenged by new courses.

1-2 *L2 learning and theories*

30 years of research and theories of second language development have produced no conclusive or consistent results in this field. However, it is widely admitted that learners have certain characteristics which affect second language learning easier or more difficult. These differences are considered as influential factors on second language learning. Such factors include intelligence, aptitude, motivation, attitude and age. The discussion on magnitudes of influence and on relations of each factor still continues since learning occurs in the dynamic interaction of various factors.

Stephen Krashen is one of the most influential linguists, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development. Although it is controversial, Krashen's Theory of Second Language learning is widely known and accepted in the field of linguistics. According to Krashen, affective filters such as anxiety, self-confidence and motivation influence second language achievement (1982). A lower filter, such as lower anxiety level, high confidence and motivation allows learners to be more open to language. Although motivation is a complex phenomena and difficult to define, Gardner and MacIntyre defined it as desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in the direction, and satisfaction with the task. Attitudes are also defined as an evaluative reaction of some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent. Over the years extensive research found consistent relationships between language attitudes, motivation, and L2 achievement (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1990).

Research on anxiety in language learning has also been extensive over that last three decades (Gardner et. al., 1985; Howitz at al, 1986). Many agree that high anxiety interferes with language learning (MacIntyre, 1995; Horwitz, 2000). Horwitz (1986) describes language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors." Richardson (1990) suggests that having high self-esteem and confidence can reduce the level of anxiety. Other studies focus on self-efficacy or self-confidence in relation to motivation (Martinez-Pons, 1990; Bandura, 1986). These studies suggest self-efficacy can influence task choice, effort and persistence. Therefore, it could be a key to successful language learning. Other studies focus on previous

experience in relation to motivation. Horwitz (1987) suggests that previous experiences may also influence language learning. Truitts' study on Korean students (1995), Tateyama's study on Japanese students (2002), and Sawir's study on Asian international students in Australia (2005), all suggest that previous English learning experience and knowledge are related to beliefs about language learning and motivation to learn. Language acquisition contexts are also studied in relation to motivation. It is argued that the surrounding environment in which individuals learn a second language can be considered as an influential factor. How the target language is viewed and used in that particular society is closely related to individual motivation and attitudes in second language learning (Altan, 1997). As described above, much research has been done on such learners' characteristics. However, there are difficulties deriving conclusions from this type of research. This is due to the difficulty to measure these characteristics, and the lack of a unified definition of each characteristic. Different research uses different measures for determining these factors and for labeling individuals. Moreover, these characteristics are not independent. These different factors interact with each other. Therefore, the effects of each characteristic or whether the causal relationship such as successful learning produces high motivation or high motivation will lead to successful outcome can not be exclusively determined (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989). However, available research suggests that practitioners have taken account of various learner's characteristics in curriculum implementation. Such consideration is believed to optimize students' learning.

1-3 *L2 learning (motivation) in the Japanese context*

Although various difficulties in research are discussed above, careful consideration should be done in studying second language learning in Japan. Language learning in Japan is influenced by a number of factors. One of the most influential is the structure of the university entrance examination which often determines a student's future. Reflecting such a situation, the content of the English instruction in secondary school is geared to pass the examination. Students' motivation in language learning is closely related to passing the examination. However, recent demographic change has brought other issues into Japanese universities.

In Japan, the 18-year-old population has been decreasing over the last ten years, and such a decrease is expected to continue. In such a situation, many universities have trouble recruiting students. As a result, current universities in Japan show two distinctive shifts; one is changing the form or role of the entrance examination and another is the growth of remedial education. To recruit more students, many universities have changed their entrance examination system in which students are

accepted more easily than before and such a situation has caused problems when these students could not keep up with the usual freshman academic standards. It is claimed that students' academic skills as well as their motivation toward learning have been falling (Berwick et al. 1989: Benson, 1991). Responding to such problems, many universities started having remedial programs. A survey by the Japan Institute of Lifelong Learning (2006) showed that about 26.7% (N=131) of universities offer English remedial programs for those who have limited English abilities. Similar research on remedial programs in Japanese universities has been conducted and found that more universities now offer some kind of remedial programs for students with low academic skills (Sakai, 2006: Yamamoto, 2001). Beyond individual university levels, the Japanese Association for Developmental Education was organized in March 2005. The organization insists that universities need accurate and objective information on their students in terms of academic skills.

As described above, in recent years Japanese universities have come to a difficult phase in terms of English education. One reason for lower motivation to learn English may be due to the reality in which students have little opportunities to see it rewarded (Yuen, 1995) despite the emphasis on the use of English as a common language in global society.

Throughout this section, overview of Japanese education and its reform, L2 learning research and the current situation of universities have been discussed. Emphasis on communication instead of forms of English is a response to the internationalized and globalized change in our society. Associated with such changes, how people view English (English education) may have changed. Responding to such social change, the field of education has been reformed. In such a situation, it is important to investigate if the current changes have had any impact on students. The present study explores students' previous English experiences and their attitudes toward English learning. A comparison of two groups, the first year students who received English under the new curriculum and the second year students who received it under the former Course of study, is done to identify the influence of curriculum reform. The following questions guided the comparison :

1. What are the students' previous English experiences?
2. How do the students assess their own skills, their strengths and weaknesses?
3. Where do they find difficulties?
4. What are their attitudes toward English?

The paired t-test was used for some of the analysis of this comparison.

Chapter 2 Research design and methods

In order to investigate the above four questions guiding this study, a research design was developed.

Instruments

Data was collected using a questionnaire consisting of 49 items, written in Japanese. At the end of the questionnaire, students were asked to write an essay (free style). The topics of the essay are 'my spring vacation' (for those who are currently taking English II) or 'my high school days' (for those who are taking English I). The first 49 questions included various types of questions such as multiple choice with one answer or with multiple answers, Yes/ no questions, descriptive questions and 5 point likert scales. The questions were developed by the investigator and written in English first. Then they were translated into Japanese so that students could understand them.

(The questionnaire is available upon request from the author.)

Data collection procedure

The survey was given to undergraduate Japanese students at one private university in Japan during April 2006. The investigator read each statement (questions) and the participants responded on the questionnaire. Students were allowed to pose any questions about the survey at any time. They were also allowed to read and respond at their own pace (that means they did not have to follow the investigator's reading statements.) Data from a total of 197 responses were processed using Excel software.

Participants of this study

197 participants in this study were enrolled in English I and English II, taught by the investigator, at a private university in Yamanashi in Spring 2006. All were native Japanese speakers and taking these courses as part of their Foreign Language requirements. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30. The total number of students was 197, which included 69 students who received English instruction under the new curriculum, implemented in 2003, and 128 students who received English instruction under the former curriculum. Among the 128, 30 were from the department of Physical Therapy and the rest were from the department of Welfare and Psychology. Before completing the questionnaire, the subjects were given the following information :

1. This questionnaire is for the author's research to improve English instruction.
2. It is anonymous.
3. If they do not want to participate, it is completely all right.

Chapter 3 Results

For the presentation of this chapter, first, the profile of two groups will be described. Then, the findings will be discussed in accordance with the four research questions.

Profile of Two groups

Among the 197 participants, 69 studied English under the new curriculum guidelines in high school (Group I) and 128 received English instruction under the former guidelines (Group II). The majority of students in both groups received 6 years of English instruction before entering university. (Group I = 88.4% Group II = 88.3%) In terms of college entrance examinations, about a half of both groups did not take the English examination (Group I = 52.7% Group II = 49.6%).

Findings

1. What are the students' previous English experiences?

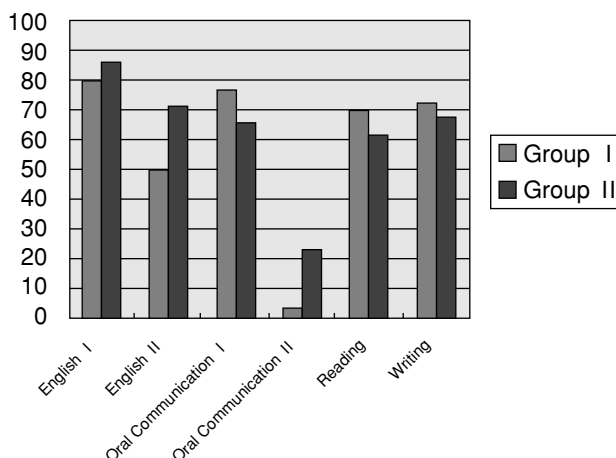
Students' previous exposure to English: Previous exposure to English includes English instruction in high school, Assistant Language Teacher (ALT - Native English instructors who teach English in a supporting role) experience, and experience outside the classroom, including self-study at home.

Kinds of English courses students took in high school

As shown in Figure 1, the numbers of students who took English I (79.7%) and Oral communication I (76.8%) was almost equal in Group I. On the other hand, in Group II more students took English I (86%) than Oral Communication I (65.6%). Although Oral Communication I was taken by more of Group I students, other courses such as English I, II, and Oral communication, were taken by more of Group II students.

(English II: 49.3% of Group I 71.1% of Group II Oral Communication II: 2.9% of Group I and 23% of Group II).

Figure 1 Kinds of English courses students took



Activities in previous classrooms

The following table shows the three most used activities in high school. Both groups show similar patterns. However, in terms of studying for entrance examinations more of Group II students showed their commitment (Group I = 63.8% Group II = 75.8%).

Table 4 Most used activities in high school

Group I	Group II
translation (94.2%)	translation (94.5%)
tape CD (91.3%)	pronunciation (88.3%)
pronunciation (87%)	tape CD (85.9%)

ALT Experiences

It was found that the majority students experienced ALT in junior high school (Group I 94.2%, Group II 85.9%). The number of students who received ALT instruction in high school decreases in both groups (Group I 84.1% Group II 77.3%). A slightly higher percentage of Group I students experienced ALT instruction in both grade levels. Although more than a half of both groups responded that they enjoyed the ALT instructions (Group I 53.6% Group II 60.9%), a lower percentages of students believed such instruction was useful (Group I 42.0% Group II 50.0%). Positive responses of the enjoyment and usefulness of ALT instruction were slightly lower in Group I, as compared to Group II.

Experience with English outside classroom

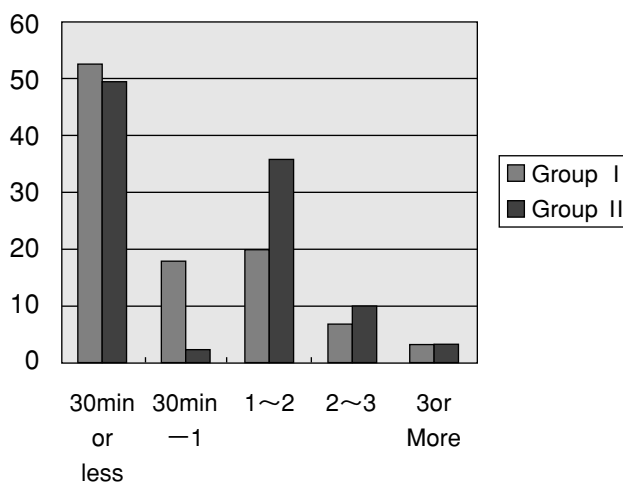
Using English

More than a quarter of both groups (Group I 27.5%, Group II 34.4%) responded that they traveled overseas. In terms of experience of using English outside school, more students in Group II reported having spoken English outside the class (Group I 30.4%, Group II 40%) and writing English (Group I 5.8%, Group II 10.2%). It seems Group II students had more opportunities to use English outside the class.

Hours of study

As shown in Figure 2, 52.5% of Group I and 49.5% of Group II students claimed that they studied English less than 30 minutes a day when they were high school seniors, while 18% of Group I and 2.2% of Group II studied less than 1 hour per day.

Figure 2 Hours of Study of High School Senior



2. How do the students assess their own skills, strengths, and weaknesses?

Self-evaluation of the participants' English skills

In order to gain this information, the participants were asked to rate their skills in four areas of English which are reading, writing, listening, speaking, on a scale of 1 to 5.5 indicates that their skills are excellent, while 1 indicates that they are poor. The mean responses and standard deviation for students' self-rating each skill are showed in the following table.

Table 5 Students' self-rating on each skills

skills	Reading		Writing		Listening		Speaking	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Group I	2.39	0.878	2.01	0.899	2.60	0.93	2.01	0.88
Group II	2.26	1.015	2.00	0.998	2.09	1.06	1.73	0.98

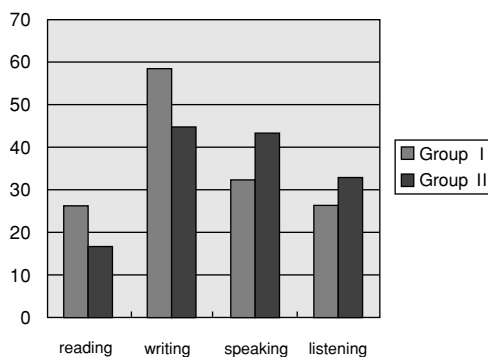
M= mean SD = standard deviation
t value.01 level = 2.576.05 level = 1.960

To determine if there were significant group differences in each skill, a t-test was performed. Group I students rated higher on these skills than Group II students in reading, listening and speaking skills. With exception of writing skill ($t = 0.157$ $p < .05$), all skills such as reading ($t = 2.407$ $p < .01$), listening ($t = 8.36$ $p < .01$) and speaking ($t = 4.94$ $p < .01$) showed significant differences. Such differences are especially apparent in listening and speaking.

3. Where do they find difficulties?

The results show all students but one in each group believe English is difficult. The following figure shows the area of difficulty for students.

Figure 3 Difficult skills in English



* Y axis indicates percentages. The respondents are allowed to choose as many answers as they want.

In Group I many responded that writing was the hardest (58%), followed by speaking (31.9%), whereas listening and reading had the same percentages (26.0%). For Group II the two frequent answers were writing (44.5%), speaking (43%), followed by listening (32.8%). A larger percentage of Group I said reading is the hardest (26.1%), compared to Group II (16.4%). As the above table shows, Group I surpassed Group II in reading and writing whereas Group II surpassed Group I in speaking and listening.

4. *What are their attitudes toward English?*

Fondness of English

With regard to how the participants think about English, in Group I, the percentage of students who enjoyed English increased. In junior high school the number was 24.6%, in high school 27.5% and currently 33.3%. For Group II, the number was 33.6% in junior high school, 25.8% in high school, 46.1% currently. In both groups, fondness dropped from junior high school to high school. In both groups only about a quarter of the population claimed that they liked English. Then fondness increased in current status, especially in group II, where nearly half said they liked English.

English instruction in Japan and in the college curriculum

The majority believe that English education is a necessary element of Japanese education (Group I=91.3%, Group II=95.3%). However, fewer students in Group I (50.7%) and Group II (68%) claimed that English was necessary for them personally. When the students were asked their reason for taking English in college, the majority responded that it was because English was a required course (Group I=97.1% Group II =90.6%). The next frequent reason in Group I was believing would be needed in the future (59.4%), followed by wanting to improve English skills (52.2%). Group II also showed the same pattern (future usefulness – 64.8% – and for improvement – 50%). When the participants were asked if they take a non-required English course, more positive responses were found in Group II students. Those who said they would definitely take English were 18% for Group II and 5.8% for Group I. Those who responded that they would probably take it were 25.8% for Group II and 26.1% for Group I. On the other hand, those who said that they would definitely not take it were 8.7% for Group I and 6.3% for Group II. Those who said they would probably not take it were 17.4% for Group I and 10.2% for Group II.

Chapter 4 Discussion

The results of the present study show that more students in Group I took Oral Communication I whereas fewer took other English courses such as English I, II, and Oral Communication II, was compared to Group II. It seems that Group II students had more opportunities to explore a variety of English instruction. Although Group I students were trained in basic communication skills in Oral Communication I, they may have had less experience in learning other English skills such as reading or writing. Such speculation grows in which skills the participants found difficulties. More of Group I students believe reading and writing were the most difficult tasks, compared to

speaking and listening. On the other hand, more students in Group II said speaking and listening were difficult tasks. In terms of improving students' communication skills such as speaking and listening, one of the aims of the new curriculum seems to have been successful. However, the question remains how it can support students' reading and writing skills. Another concern related to Oral Communication classes is the study hours at home. The load of homework for communication classes may be less than other courses. Fewer hours of study for English at home during the high school senior years reported by more Group I students can be understood in light of this.

Regarding activities in English classes, even though communication skills are emphasized in the curriculum guidelines, the instructions the students have received seem to remain unchanged between the two groups; translations and preparation for entrance examinations were widely used. Moreover, the majority of both groups had ALT instruction during their junior high schools. It was found that ALT instruction decreased in high school. This may be due to rigid high school curriculum, aiming to help students pass the entrance examinations; ALT instruction often does not relate to entrance examinations.

In the question of students' fondness of English, both groups followed a similar pattern: fondness dropped from junior high school to high school and goes up at the university level. The results are compatible with Berwick and Ross' study (1989) on college students' motivation. In their study, prior to beginning the English classes, the students' motivation was found to be low. However, after the completion of 150 hours of instruction, their motivation was improved. They suggested that such improvement may be due to students' exploring a variety of instructions as well as exchange programs with an American university. In fact, much research found that positive attitudes and motivation have a close relationship (Gardner, 1985; Lightbown and Spada, 1993). This pattern was much clearer in Group II. The Group II students also showed more positive attitudes toward college English courses. When they were asked whether they would take an English class even if it was not a required course, more students in Group II said they would definitely or most likely take such a class. In the question of the necessity of English education, the majority of students in both groups agreed that English was necessary for Japanese education. Although the number of positive answers decreased when it came to their own necessity, Group II students, again, responded more positively. More students in Group II believed English was a necessary skill for themselves and needed for their future. As described above, Group II students showed positive attitudes and perceptions toward English. In April 2005, when these Group II students started English class, many claimed they didn't like English. Therefore, the first aim of the author was to make them like English. Based on the principle of

Gardner's multiple intelligent theory (1983), the author planned various activities in the English I course. In his theory, Gardner proposed eight different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential. He argues that individuals should be encouraged to use their preferred intelligences in learning. Applying his theory into practice, implementation of instructional activities which appeal to different forms of intelligence and individuals should be the goal as a college instructor. If my instruction contributed to the positive attitudes of these Group II students, my efforts were rewarded. However, through experience and learning, these students are believed to gain knowledge and become more mature. Such a condition may be the main reason for their positive attitudes.

One of the main goals of the new curriculum is to promote students' motivation. However, Group II students, who were not under the new curriculum, have more positive attitudes, which are closely related to motivation.

Chapter 5 Implications and limitations of the study

Implications

Taken together, the shift brought by the new curriculum seems to have had an influence on students both positively and negatively. These new students may have better communication skills and confidence in such skills while they have difficulties in other skills such as reading or writing. At the same time, they may not have a positive attitude toward English classes. In the implementation of college English for these new students, there are several concerns. First, even though these students have better communication skills, such skills are most likely at the daily conversation level. However, the ultimate goal of college English is to help students in functioning appropriately in this global world. Therefore, instruction should be designed to help students improve their communication skills beyond the daily conversation level. Students may be required to read academic research papers, present own research in international conferences, and have debates with other people who speak different languages. Second, these students may have a limited vocabulary since the number of required vocabulary was decreased under the new curriculum. Their grammatical knowledge may not be sufficient due to the limited English courses they took. In such a situation, an academic English course in college may not be easy for new students. Such a difficulty can cause low motivation and negative attitudes toward English. Therefore, careful evaluation and recognition of students' abilities will be needed in curriculum design. Finally, these students study habits should be taken into account. The present

study found that these students' commitment to studying outside the classroom is extremely limited. Although many claim they want to speak English, they should recognize that taking one 90 minute-a-week class does not make them fluent English speakers. With the above mentioned concerns, the college instructors should plan and implement academic English instruction. Uchida et. al (2002) warns about the myth that individuals can communicate if they have listening and speaking skills. They argue that English education should be implemented so that all four skills are well-balanced and developed. English should be considered as a tool for communication and such a tool needs a solid foundation. At the academic level, in addition to the well-developed four skills, other knowledge in related fields, other cultures, as well as skills for conducting debate and presentation are valuable. Although it seems a difficult task to implement effective academic English courses in light of student's low motivation for learning English, the good news is that this new group of students have high confidence in their speaking and listening skills. Language instructors should be careful not to allow students to lose such confidence, while pushing for greater mastery in learning academic English.

Limitation of this study and suggestion for further research

For the participants of the present study, the number of Group I who received English instruction under the new curriculum guidelines was fewer (N=69) than those who received it before the reform (N=128). Moreover, the subjects were from two departments, which are physical therapy and welfare and psychology. Since the university is oriented to the field of medicine and welfare, the question remains about how much we can generalize the results of this study to other populations.

Moreover, self-evaluation of their English skills and self-determination of difficulties were used for this study. The concern of this self-evaluation measurement is related to the nature of Japanese culture. Japanese are known to be humble since its culture values modesty and moderateness. In such a situation, the results of self-evaluation should be treated carefully. However, the comparison of this study was conducted within the same culture, the strain from such cultural effects is believed to be minimized. In future research, evaluations or grades by instructors can increase the reliability of the study.

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