

English As A Global Language: Empirical Study on Japanese University Students In Kansai

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Based on 'the World Englishes model' created by Braj B. Kachru, Japan is a member of expanding circle, regarding the language is for the use of international communication. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the four English skills, referring to listening, speaking, reading and writing among Japanese undergraduate students and the concept of English language while reflecting students' opinions on English education curriculum. The study consisted of participants' observation, group interview and questionnaire using convenient sampling method. The study found that students are not able to exercise all skills and are lack of confidence, owing to teaching style of English teachers as well as evaluation style and skills being emphasized in National examination and English education curriculum implemented nowadays is not able to eradicate the western image that is attached to English language user properly. It is necessary to further research on which materials are the most effective ones to motivate students in learning the language to raise their English abilities, which eventually supports Japanese students to operate cross-cultural communications in English with people all over the world, while keeping their cultural identity using the language in research and informal occasion. The paper is able to provide pros and cons of English language education, offering opinions on English education from the aspect of local students and the concept of the English language from a non-native speaking country's perspective by using diverse research methods and instruments.

INTRODUCTION

Ideally, a language is supposed to be utilized freely by the users if they are able to exercise four skills; namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing for the purpose of cross-cultural communication and knowledge acquiring. Braj B. Kachru has invented a model to elaborate the function of English worldwide. The model is comprised of three different circles. Countries in the inner circle use English as their first language. Countries in the outer circle institutionalized English as a second language and countries that belong to the expanding-circle treat English as a foreign language. Japan has been regarded as a member of expanding- circle in English language learning and teaching, meaning that the country view English as a foreign language for international communication. The nation has noticed the importance of learning English since the 19th century for the purpose of acquiring foreign knowledge.

More recently, in order to be part of the international community, government of Japan regards English as a global language. Japanese students are required to learn English from 3rd year in public elementary school till the end of high school education and the government of Japan hopes English education policies would help students to develop speaking and listening skills and enable the students to learn foreign culture through English at the same time. Besides, the government of Japan designed a JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) programme that attracts foreigners to assist with English teaching and international exchange in a community level and make the foreign teachers work together with the Japanese English teachers to advance four skills. These policies and programme implicated that Japanese students would expect to have 9 years of English education learning experience and has the ability to utilize the skills in daily life for the purpose of communication.

Nevertheless, in reality, the four skills aren't developed in balance among Japanese students. Education curriculum nowadays mainly focuses on introducing foreign cultures as well as reading skills and grammar for writing skills according to their English

textbook. In addition, English is not yet to be part of academic study in their curriculum policies for Japanese students, instead it is regarded as exploratory programme, an “activity” course. Researchers mentioned that Japanese National Center Examination is the factor that contributes to such unbalance of language skills development because the evaluation of writing and speaking skills are being excluded in the examination. Research studies also showed that there was an English proficiency gap for both foreign teachers and English teachers in Japan^[1].

There is previous research study focusing on the discussions of present situation and the teaching method of English language in the Japanese education. However, it scarcely evaluates the pros and cons of the implemented English education policies through the observation of exposing Japanese students in an English class taught by native-English professor and discuss about students’ concept of English language as well. In response to this research gap, the purpose of this study is to evaluate whether English is taught as a global language successfully and suggest improvement for English education curriculum by focusing on the research questions below:

1. What are the advantages of English Education curriculum of Japan?
2. What are the disadvantages of English Education curriculum of Japan?
3. What are students’ opinions about the current English education in Japan?
4. What is Japanese students’ opinion on English language?

Literature Review

English textbook in Japan

According the book and the article published by Yamada (2015) and (2010) owing to globalization, English is perceived as a language that to communicate in the international community^[2,3]. These studies implied that Japanese government does not believe English merely belongs to the countries of inner-circle, members from native English-speaking countries.

Table 1. Distribution of continents and countries applying Kachru and Nelson’s model in English textbook for high school students.

Categories of nations	1980s	1990s	2000s
N=lessons (100%)	N= 123	N=118	N=87
Total inner circles	66.00%	45.70%	48.20%
	England	England	US
	US	US	Canada
Example(s)	Canada	Canada	Australia
	Australia	Australia	
	New Zealand	New Zealand	
Total outer circle	4.80%	5.90%	1.10%
	India	India	Singapore
Example(s)	Malaysia	Malaysia	
	Africa	Africa	
		Singapore	
Total Expanding circle	41.40%	47.40%	50.50%
Asia	27.60%	40.60%	40.20%
	Japan	Japan	Japan
Example(s)	China	China	China
		Korea	Korea
		Turkey	Nepal
		Thailand	Thailand
Countries other than Asia	13.80%	6.70%	10.30%
	France	Austria	Austria
	Norway	France	France
Example(s)	Switzerland	Norway	Easter Island
	Sweden	Peru	
	Egypt	Brazil	

English teachers in Japan and JET Programme

According to research done by Amaki (2008), 97% of the elementary schools in Japan do not offer foreign assistants, language teachers or English textbooks^[1]. Moreover, the Japanese English teachers have low English-speaking proficiency and lack of confidence which make the them have to teach English using Japanese, such situation led to a negative impact on foreign

teachers teaching performance as well because they have a tendency relying on using Japanese language for teaching English class and it makes students neglect the needs to and the strong desire of studying English language.

Detail features about Japanese English teachers included in Galloway (2009); they viewed themselves as an expertise in memorization and grammatical skills^[4]. Additionally, only less than 10% of Japanese English teachers majored in English teaching and learning education in university. These Japanese English teachers were also not fond in lecturing the class in English; therefore, they teach the foreign language in Japanese. They also see themselves as a production of Asian culture, and trying to achieve a harmony atmosphere and general value collectivism as a main goal being an instructor. They do not encourage Japanese students to express themselves and have critical thinking.

Foreign teachers on the other hand, according to JET (2015), the foreign language assistances system (ALT) are cooperated with JET (The Japan and Exchange Teaching programme) established by Japanese government in 1987^[5]. Purpose of this programme is to bring internationalization into the community level and build up the mutual understanding at the same time. The typical duties for these foreign assistants are mainly team-teaching, assisting with classes taught by English teachers in Japan^[6]. These foreigners do not necessarily have to be born in a native English-speaking country, as long as; individuals have a functional command of the English or Japanese language. Amaki (2008) further pointed out that, foreign teacher assistants do not necessarily need teaching experiences or a certification in the education of teaching, having at least a bachelor degree is required to be hired as a member of ALT System.

Effectiveness of student performance by hiring foreign teacher for teaching English class in Japan

Galloway described (2009), to employ foreign teacher for English class is supposedly helpful for practicing students' communication skills and increase opportunities for comprehensible input, speaking and interaction and learnt about foreign cultures. Nonetheless, the interactions were actually built based on impetus of getting good grades. The researcher assumed that there isn't true intention exists in the learning of improving English communication skills.

Furthermore, the paper evaluated the effectiveness of the ALT system by conducting questionnaires survey to 428 students in a high school in Gunma Prefecture. The results shown that communicative activities, such as games, conversation, self-introductions, watching movies, pronunciation practice, and answering questions are the most popular activities conducted in team-teaching classes. These activities were also the most enjoyed activities in these classes and 240 (56.07%) students reported this as their favourite activity. It is stated that, 188 (43.92%) of the students said they listened to a lot of music.

Concurrently, 20 (4.67%) students enjoyed not using the textbook, the relaxed atmosphere, the chance to offer their opinion and the ability to study things different to normal class. Besides, in order to be more clearly about the effectiveness of the use of materials in class, the researcher examined the relationship between motivation and general interest in English by calculating the correlations coefficient of enjoyment of foreign films and music were not high merely 0.23 and 0.22 respectively^[7]. The researcher also pointed out the many foreign movies are dubbed; therefore, it cannot be regarded as a valid indicator for examine the attitudes towards English learning.

Additionally, the results of the Galloway (2009) pointed out that the more Japanese the ALT speaks; the less the students would enjoy the class. Paradoxically, the increasing number of opportunities of interacting with foreign teachers has also led to a negative consequence. As noted in the outcome of the survey that 360 (84.11%) of the students responded their anxiety, for instance, "Don't understand what the teacher says" and "All explanations are in English, so I think it a little difficult for everyone in the class to understand". In addition, nine students (2.10%) referred to the cognitive challenge of the subject, including references to spelling and writing as well pronunciation difficulties. A few of students also being reported having difficulties with the nature of the class, such as those activities when they have to move around the class. The researcher of this particular study concluded that students may not actually have more chances to speak English. This may also explain their lack of confidence, although they are able to offer their opinion.

The examination style in Japan

A research done by Menking, (2015), Japanese National Center Examination does not examine the writing and speaking ability; instead, grammar, listening and reading skills are tend to be emphasized. It makes the students have more anxiety on these two skills, in order to pass the national proficiency in English subject. The backlash of the entrance exam in Japan is the main cause of imbalance development of English skills among Japanese students. Similarly, mentioned in the study of Sakamoto (2012), that the reasons for English learning and teaching are not able to switch from traditional content that focus mainly emphasize the importance of grammar and mechanical writing skills on communicative Mckenzie language teaching and learning are because of the entrance exams of high school and university^[8]. They led to a consequence that students being competence in literacy skills but not enough skills for oral and aural skills.

Furthermore, multiple choice is dominate examine style in current English education in Japan. As mentioned by Omura, &Takahashi (1975), this was influenced by America after World War II. America has been designing many different kinds of test through the application of psychology and for the purpose of testing intelligence and aptitude in entrance examination. However, the reason that Japan choose to apply multiple choice as a examine method is that this method is relatively objective comparing

to other kind of methods, such as essays; also, it is easier to count the score within a short time. Even though both countries use same assessment style, the way of counting the score for multiple choices is different. Students in Japan merely needs to choose the best choice among all given choices, thus, students have the possibility to get the correct answer by coincident; in contrary, students in America will get minus points if they chose the wrong answer. It is designed to prevent students from guessing the possible answer and to evaluate students' real understanding.

METHODS

Research Design

The study was conducted in the private university in Kansai in December 2015. The study instrument and methods consisted of questionnaires, participants' observations as well as field work. All of the questionnaire respondents, students involved in participants' observation and interviewees all belong to the same department of the university but are all different people.

Participants and sampling procedure

The numbers of respondents for the questionnaire are 24 and they all voluntarily participated in the research. Originally the study targeted to all grade levels using convenient sampling, but the numbers of valid response for questionnaire in return, eventually become 19 (90.48%) from sophomore and two (9.52%) from students that belongs to other year grades. Among all samples, one respondent received international education in high school (4.17%) and two respondents who submitted incomplete answers (8.33%) are being excluded. The respondents of the questionnaires all are students from the same department.

Secondly, the participants' observation was done in English class of the same department of the university with a total number of 30 sophomore students who have the highest English ability among all the students in the same year. The purpose of participants' observation is to evaluate the four English abilities, including reading skills, writing skills, speaking skills and listening skills of the Japanese students through class activities such as class discussions, debate and presentations. Thirdly, the group interview was conducted on December 17 in 2015 in a classroom to three interviewees from the same department. The purpose of group interview is to find out whether Japanese students have stereotype towards English language and English language user.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire has a combination of short-answered questionnaire and multiple choices questionnaires. The questions of the questionnaire focus on English education background in high school and university. For example, "How much English class do you have per week in high school?" and "Where your English teacher in university comes from?" As well as to find how common that English is used to communicate out-side Japanese students' home country, in order to prove that English is served as an international language for cross-culture communication. For instance, "Do you have study abroad experience?" or "Travel abroad experiences" and "Do you communicate with the local people in English?" Further question of the questionnaire please refer to appendix (p.34).

RESULTS

The research has found that even though more than equal of the respondents (66.67%) have been taught by foreigners in high school and most of their teachers are from countries declaring English as an official language in their countries, for instance, U.S.A, Canada, New Zealand, India and Australia (**Figure 1.1**) and over half of the students (68.42%) answered that their English professors are from nations such as Canada, England or Kenya (**Figure 1.2**), However, students do not have enough oral communication skills and listening skills. On the contrary, students have relatively better writing and reading skills.

During class participation students were not able to understand professors request or questions, due to the the speed of the professor is speaking and the lack of vocabularies, therefore, it is hard for the class to continue dicussion activities. It is common to hear that students asking each other "What should we do now?" or "What does the professor just said?" as well as "Does professor mean that we have to discuss about... now?" and sometimes students ask professor, "Professor, what does the word.....mean?" or "Professor, what do you mean by...?" On the other hand, speaking of oral ability, students were not able to do small group discussion using English to express their opinions.

It happened often that students cannot help but to use Japanese to finish their statement. It was hard for the students to speak in a full English sentence because they were lack of vocabularies and practices, therefore, students also tend to express in single terms. Such an consequence makes students expect that vocabularies (33.33%) and making students have chances to dicuss a topic in English (28.57%) (**Figure 2.5**) to be two top items in one of the categories of the questionnaire that current English education has to improve in. Besides, if they are able to create sentences, they expect that they are able to understand a daily conversation (85.71%) (Figure 2.1) and both do a daily coversation (76.19%) as well as to do a presentation (38.09%) (**Figure 2.2**).

Other than the advice for improving the drawbacks of English education curriculum, it is still significant that students do have better literal skills they were able to read the lecture handout and wrote down sentences in correct sentence structure; nevertheless, students are still expecting more improvements on their skills more academically. According to the results of the

questionnaire, over half of the respondents (61.90%) (Figure 2.3) expect that they can have the ability to produce academic essays and reports and slightly higher than a half of respondents (52.38%) (Figure 2.4) expect that they would be able to develop comprehensive skill of reading academic articles.

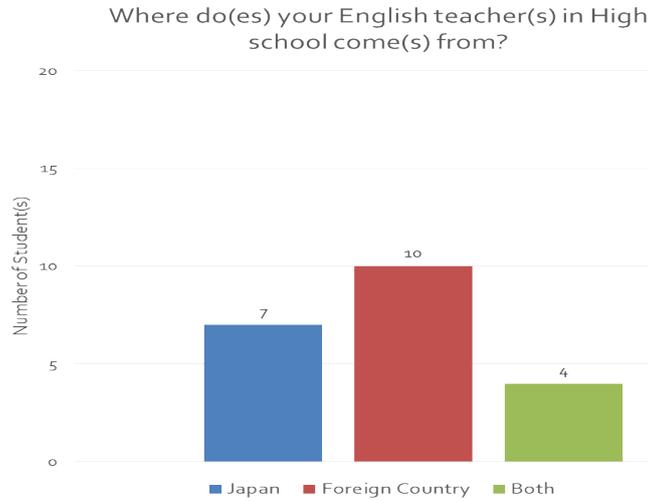


Figure 1.1. English education in high school: Where do(es) your English teacher(s) come(s) from?

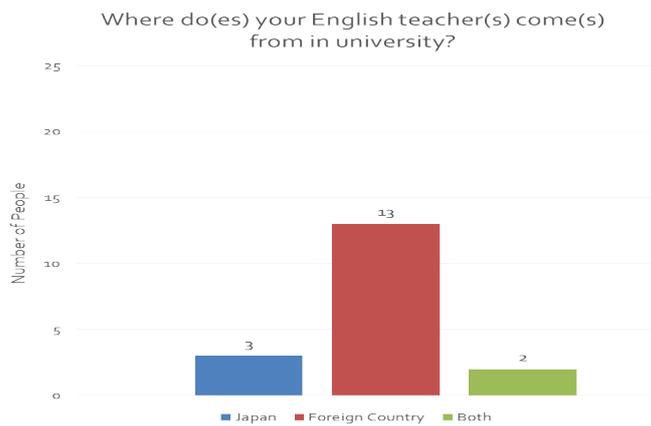


Figure 1.2. English education in university: Where do(es) your English teacher(s) come(s) from?

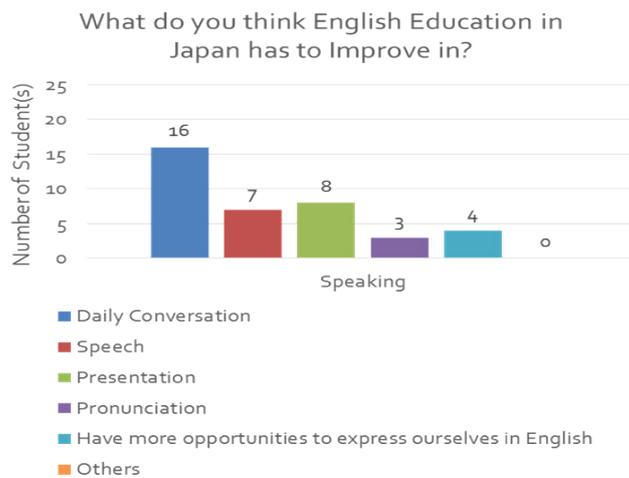


Figure 2.1. Opinions on English Education in Japan (Listening).

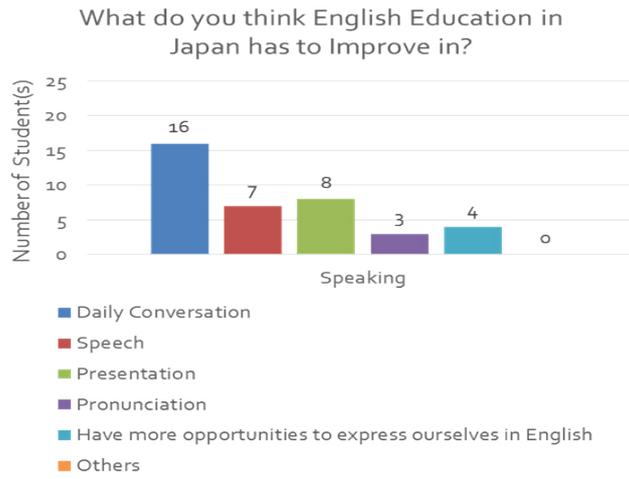


Figure 2.2. Opinions on English Education in Japan (Speaking).

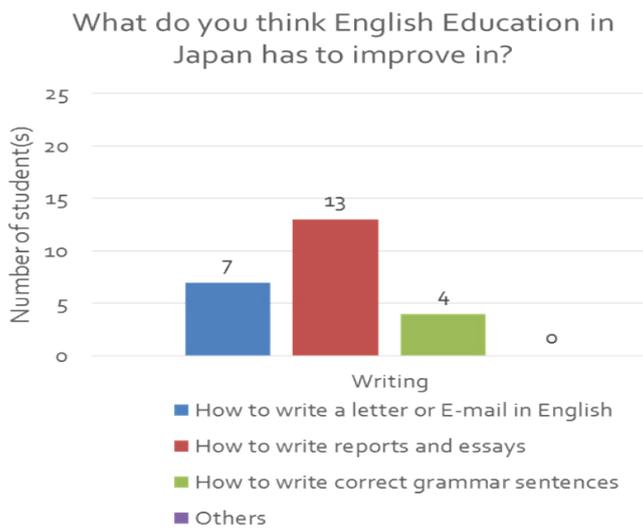


Figure 2.3. Opinions on English Education in Japan (Writing).

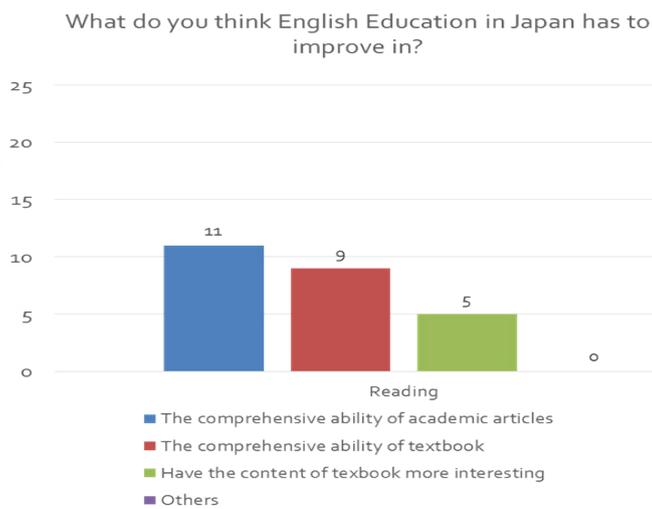


Figure 2.4. Opinions on English Education in Japan (Reading).

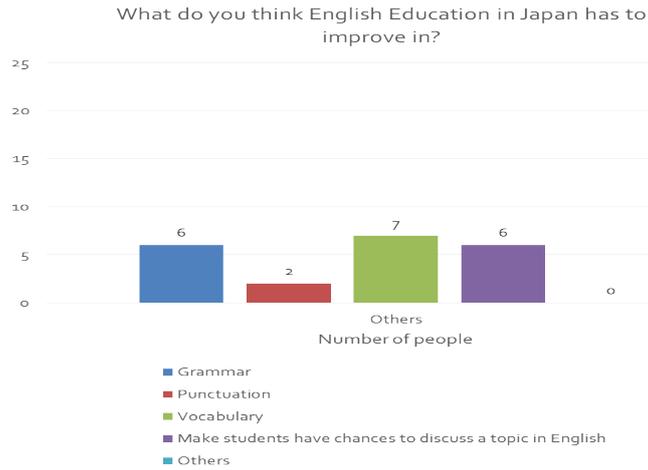


Figure 2.5. Opinions on English Education in Japan (Others).

Thirdly, based on the results of the questionnaire, the materials use for teaching in class varies, including movies, songs and textbooks as well as websites; and among these materials, textbook has been the most commonly used material that used for developing students’ English abilities in both high school (95.24%) and university (57.89%) (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Not to neglect, the materials which are used for teaching in class varies and quantity differs from each individuals, there are students who think it is not helpful for improving English abilities. Among themselves, there are students either taught by one materials during high school or university think that the material is useful or not useful.

Meanwhile, there is also student who were taught by three materials personally think that it is not helpful for developing English abilities. They merely don’t want to suspend the long-term English education experience received in the past (Figures 3.3 and 3.4).

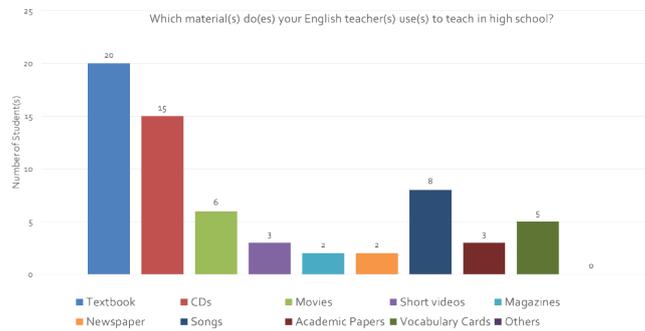


Figure 3.1. English Education in High School: Which material(s) do(es) your English teacher(s) use(s) for teaching in high school?

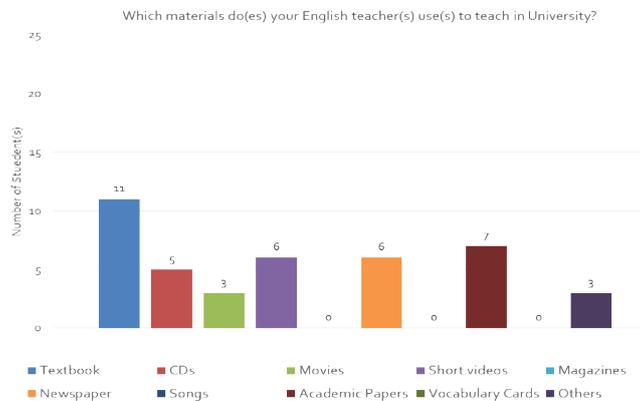


Figure 3.2. English Education in university: Which material(s) do(es) your English teacher(s) use(s) for teaching in university?

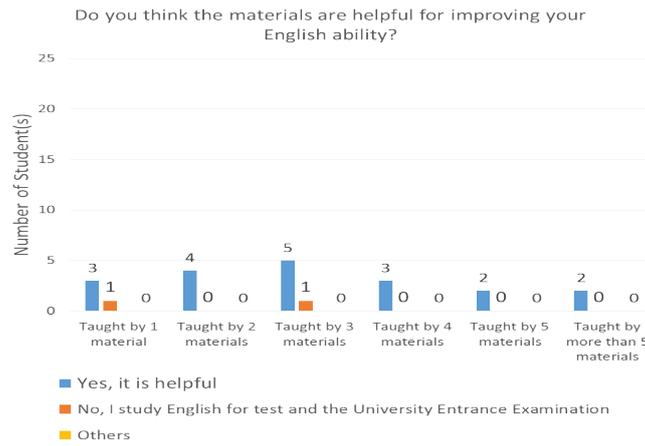


Figure 3.3. English Education in high school: Helpfulness of materials.

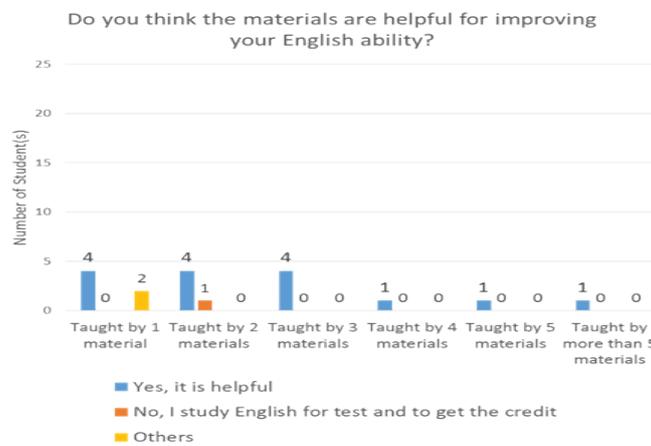


Figure 3.4. English Education in university: Helpfulness of materials.

Lastly, the sequences of the questionnaire and group interview showed that English is global language which is commonly used in many nations. Students mentioned in the group interview that English belongs to everyone and wherever the travel to English is a language that people are able to communicate with each other (Question 1.); likewise, the questionnaire results supported this idea. About half of the students (52.38%) (Figure 4.1) have study abroad experience, regardless of locations all students (100%) speaks English with local people during their study abroad (Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

On the other hand, among the majority of students (71.43%) who experienced foriegn travelling answered that Asia is the top contient (80%) that they visited to (Figures 4.4 and 4.5), including expamples like Taiwan, Koera and Thailand. Plus, over half of students (66.67%) revealed that they speak English with local residents; contrast to little above of quarter of students (26.67%) speak local language when they visit foreign countries, such as countries in Asia (Figure 4.6).

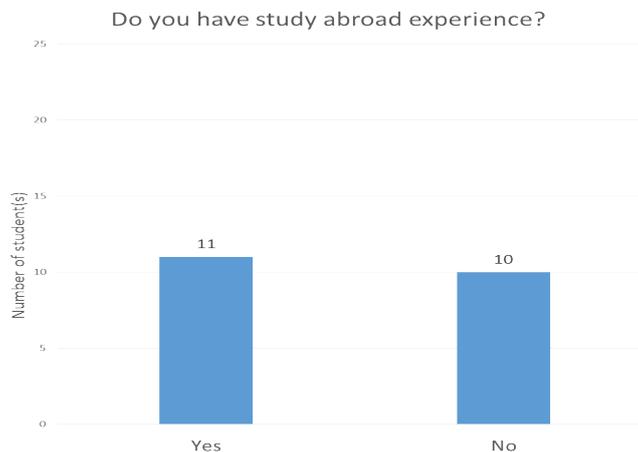


Figure 4.1. Personal experience(s): Study abroad.

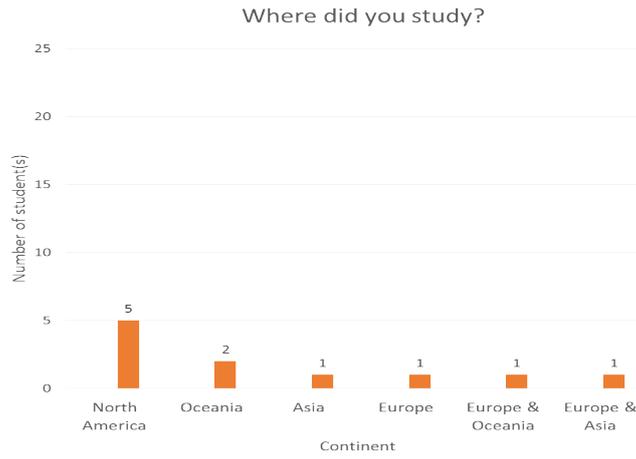


Figure 4.2. Personal experience(s): Study abroad location.

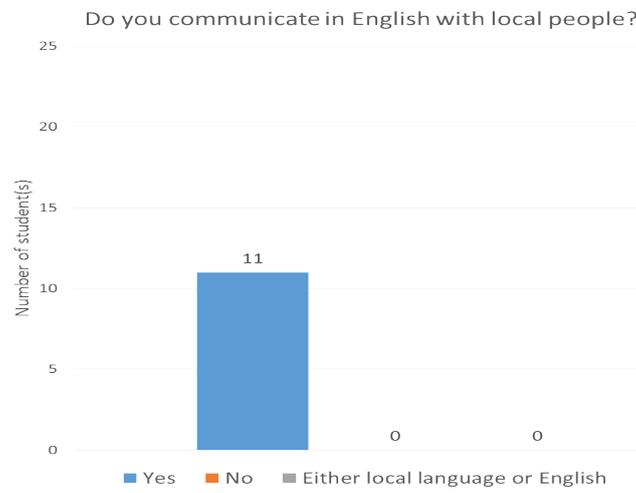


Figure 4.3. Personal experience(s): Language communication with local people during study abroad.

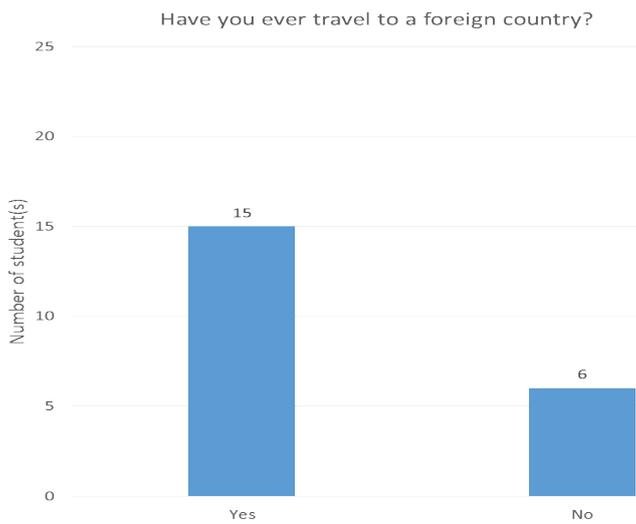


Figure 4.4. Personal Experience(s): Traveling.

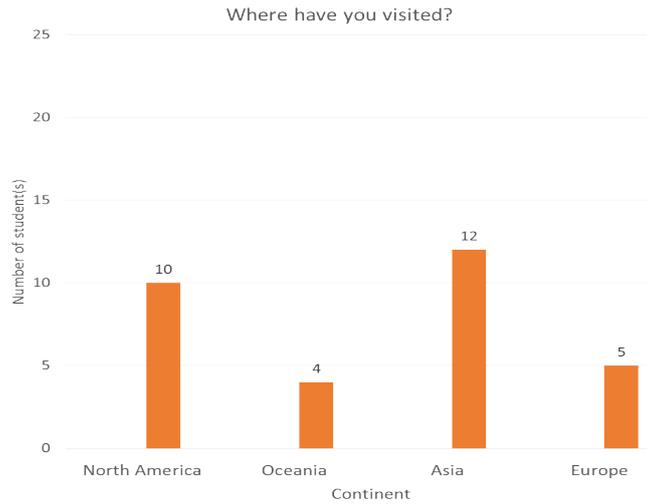
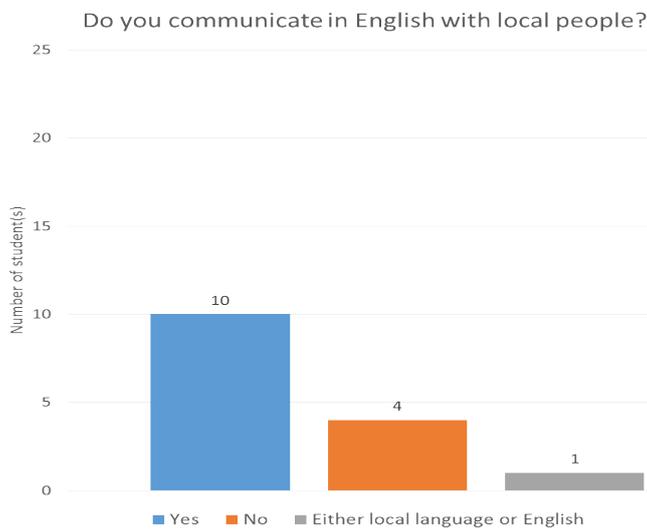


Figure 4.5. Personal Experience(s): Traveling location.



Question 1. Do you think that English is a global language?

“Yes, I think so, because you can communicate in English no matter where you go and now many people around the world use English to communicate, so I think that English is a global language.” (Sophomore, Male)

“Yes, I also have similar idea, because we can use English in many situations such as business, trading tourism and so on with people from many countries including Asian and other countries that speaks English.” (Junior, Male)

“I also think that English is a global language because many people around the world can communicate in using English.” (Junior, Female)

Figure 3.6 Personal Experience(s): Language communication with local people during traveling

However, when the students were asked about the image of English users and the standard of the language during the interview (Question 2.), their responses implied that social media countries or native English speakers, such as America and textbooks are the assess of forming.

Question 2. Who do you think English language belongs to?

“I think it belongs to anyone who tries to speak English (Sophomore, Male).”

“Same I idea, but many Japanese people think it belongs to certain people because of mass media, like news, TV programme and so on (Junior, Male).”

“It belongs to certain group of people because textbook has image of American (Junior, Female).”

the image that English belongs to people of western

Moreover, all of the interviewees supposed that the standard of “good English” exists (Question 3). Most of the students defined it as being able to communicate and eventually understand each other and one student referred it to pronunciation and being able to speak fluently. The answers of the follow-up question did reinforce the idea that language belongs to

Question 3. Do you think there is a standard to define “Good English”?

“Yes, I think there is. I think good English is to have good pronunciation and being able to speak fluently. If we cannot speak fluently and have good pronunciation we are not able to communicate. Because that person will keep on saying pardon, pardon. And we cannot continue speaking (sophomore, Male).”

“Yes, I think there is also good English. But I don’t care about pronunciation to speak fluently. I think as long as the two people are able to communicate, it can be regarded as good English (Junior, Male).”

“I think good English is also be able to communicate with each other. Although they might first cannot understand and said pardon. But if the two people can understand each other or try to understand each other at the end and become able to communicate. This is good English (Junior, Female).”

Question 4. Do you think non-native speaker should speak like native speaker?

“If I can become as fluent as native speaker, I think it is a good thing. I want to try to speak as fluent as native speaker.” (Sophomore, Male)

“I don’t think non-native speakers need to speak like native speaker, because there are many kinds of English and many different accents. A language is a part of culture. It represents a person’s identity.” (Junior, Male)

“I think if people practice more they can be more fluent and speak like native speaker but they don’t have to.” (Junior, Female).

certain ethnic group, holding a certain image to the language and hoping to be like member of the ethnic group (Question 4).

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of participants’ observation indirectly correspond to the claims supported by Menking (2015)^[9]. Sakamoto (2012) that instructors teaching style, which was designed for entrances exams caused an impact on the development of each English ability. The results are also able to backup the claim that multiple choice evaluation is not able to ensure students’ true understanding of the language (Omura, &Takahashi, 1975) ^[10,11].

Moreover, the low ability to operate a discussion was able to support the assumption made by Gollaway (2009) that there isn’t a true intention exist in the learning of improving English communication skills, instead interactions with foreign teachers are built based on impetus of getting good grades back in high school. Therefore, this research deemed that it is necessary to investigate further on English teachers teaching method, involving use of language to interact with the students because students would have less desire in learning English if the teachers teach the class in Japanese and the games and the teaching style of Japanese English teacher do not provide enough opportunities for students to use English in class, result in a phenomenon that students are lack of confidence (Galloway,2009; Amiki, 2008).

The questionnaire presented that students have a motivation to develop their skills in both daily occasions and the academia. These results explained that the current English education in Japan teaches English as an activity (Sakamoto, 2012; Matsuoka, 2010) and that to be taught as an academic subject is necessary to Japanese students. Meanwhile, the study assumed that to have enough vocabularies and enhances the level of English terms plays a significant role to have better sequences of their abilities.

Equally important, the quality and the content of the materials for teaching matters more for training students’ English abilities and motivate their interest in studying English rather than the diversity of using materials for developing abilities or the quantity of English classes per week because the results of the questionnaire showed that the number of English in high school has dropped from 4.3 (SD: 1.68) to 1.2 (SD: 0.44) and that the students who think class materials are useful for improving their English decreases.

These outcomes produced through various research methods and research instruments were able to support the previous study results done by (Yamada, 2015) and Menking (2015) that English is a global language for cross- culture communication for both non-native and native English speaking countries. Besides, one student further mentioned during the interview that English is used in many situation such as business, trading, tourism and so on. The outcome is similar to the one brought up by previous study.

In discussion the image of the language, conversations in the group interview revealed that the current English language education fails to reach the goal of teaching it as a “global language”, since the stereotype of English language is for western people are shaped and ideally people should be able to speak like them during their daily access to mass media and textbooks, despite of the fact that the coverage of content in English textbook for Japanese high school students, which are credit by the

MEXT Textbook Examination Committee included countries in America, Europe and Asia as well as providing images outside these continents, and the proportion of Asia has increased to more than 50% in 2000's, this percentage is larger than the countries of inner circle, 48.2%. Therefore, the dialogues in the textbooks and how social media shapes language user without stereotyping it to specific group of people should be considered^[12].

It is necessary to find out why the censorship could not protect the image that English belongs to everyone and improve the system. In fact, the interviewee did interpret the idea of English as a global language as referring to cultural identity, which should be worth spread^[13].

CONCLUSION

The research explored whether English language is taught effectively as a global language by investigating on the output of four language skills among Japanese students and discover their concept of English language via different research methods and instruments. At the same time, reflecting the improvement of current language education from opinions of many education receivers. The research highlighted the development of skills are guided by the national evaluation style, majority focused on particular abilities and the teaching style, including methods and the use of language in class of English teachers. These factors has made Japanese students demonstrated better performance on reading and writing skills but not speaking and listening skills.

The study also presented that students hope English language education would be able to help them to apply it to both casual situation and academic areas. The research results assumed that quality of the functioning the class is more to be concerned than quantity of classes per week, hence, the content of each material and how teachers utilize materials will be able to raise the learning motivation and better performance and applying language skills should be further studied.

Furthermore, the study expects better censorship system for created English dialogues and the use of image on textbook, as well as, consideration on selecting language user for mass media broadcasting, in order to make Japanese people have a sense that English is a language for cross-cultural communication that allow people to represent own cultural identity.

Research limitation

The limitations of this research are that the questionnaire has not been translated into Japanese and the group interview has to be operated in English all because of personal language barrier and these have further resulted in that the study is not able to select samples more accurately and equally among the department of this university in Kansai. Therefore, the study method is replaced by using convenient sampling.

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