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Who is Responsible for Students' Learning?

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要旨

学びというのは人にとって生涯必要であるスキルである。近年、日本では2020年の東京オリンピックの影響も受け、グローバル化が進み、英語学習が必修になっている。文部科学省では英語力を上げるため、小学校の中学年から外国語活動として、児童が英語に慣れ親しむため、授業が行われる。小学校で受けた英語の授業は中学校・高等学校で行う授業と異なるため、英語に対する苦手意識が生まれ、生徒から離れない。英語をなぜ学ぶのか、自分で決めた理由や目的がなく、生徒は英語を学び続け、大学生や社会人になっても英語恐怖症になったりする。本研究では、女子大学生にアンケート調査を行い、英語学習者としての目的や英語学習に対する姿勢を研究した。

キーワード

英語学習, 生涯学習, グローバル化の影響, 学習目標

Abstract

Many English language learners in Japan are known for having a strong dislike towards the subject. The lack of unawareness in the Ministry of Education leaves school students pressured and stressed to cram more information than they can process. These students continue having their strong resistance towards English language for as long as they are educated. Many universities require students to continue studying English and so students are given more stress. One of the biggest reason as to why this is the case is because students cannot imagine themselves using the English language in the future. Often times students cannot relate to the target culture and do not feel the need to relate, resulting in lack of purpose for studying the language. Without a strong purpose, students will not participate in class and will not feel responsible for their learning. In this research, 322 students in a Japanese women's university were asked to participate in an anonymous survey. This survey aimed to learn more about the current stance in university students towards their learning.

Keywords

EFL, Japanese university, purpose, ideal L2-self

Learning is a lifelong activity. With the right learning habits, learners are able to acquire knowledge and eventually become a skill that will only be beneficial in so many life settings. Every learner, regardless of what they

are trying to acquire, must have a purpose or goal. Without a solid goal, learners will not be open to the information begin presented or taught and therefore will not be able to retain the information in the long run.

Currently in Japan, the Ministry of Education is pushing towards introducing students to English language education from a young age. The term teachers and lawmakers often use is “global-ka”, which means to become global or international (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Website, 2017). Japanese nationals currently enrolled in college or university would have had at least seven years of English language education exposure. In a perfect world, seven years of English language education would be enough to carry out native-like conversations and comprehend a film in English without running Japanese subtitles. In reality, though, students are unable to perform due to the cramming of information by junior high school and high school teachers. Likewise, teachers, especially in public schools, are required to teach an enormous number of subjects they do not feel comfortable in. The pressure on both the students and the teachers has negatively influenced the way English language education is perceived by the learners in school settings. It is only natural for students to start disliking and rejecting English as a subject.

Another common characteristic that is seen frequently in Asian contexts (where countries study English as a foreign language, not as a second language) is the learner’s inability to construct an image of an ‘ideal L2-self’, (L2-self refers to the second language learner identity) (Miyahara, 2014; Apple & Da Silva, 2017). Miyahara (2014) argued that if learners can construct an identity of their future selves as using the L2, learners will feel a stronger sense of motivation and desire to acquire the second (or target) language. In order to construct an ideal L2-self, learners must feel that they can connect and relate to the target language and its cultures associated with it.

Moreover, King (2014, p. 234) characterized that the Japanese societal and cultural norms and expectations play an important role in shaping learner’s anxiety. Because reserved and silent behaviors are not seen negatively but praised upon, these traits get carried over to their learning environments and almost reinforcing students to avoid or minimize the opportunities of wanting to stand out or speak out in public (King, p.

241).

In this study, university students were asked to participate in an anonymous survey that aimed to find out if students had a purpose of studying English and how responsible they are towards their own learning. This research would be relevant as this general knowledge could apply to other learning settings as well.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study aimed to find the answers to two research questions:

1. Do the students have a purpose in studying English and are they putting effort in trying to achieve their purpose?
2. How much do students actually feel responsible for their own learning?

If students have a clear goal and or purpose in studying the English language, students would be actively participating in class, putting effort in acquiring the foreign language. If students do not have a reason to study, this will likely affect their learning habits and not put their effort in learning. Students may rely on the teacher and think that teachers have a higher responsibility in their acquisition. This study hypothesized that more than half of the students will be studying English for no other reason other than to pass their English courses. The study hypothesized that there will be few students who are studying English for personal purposes. With that being said, students will not put in effort in trying to achieve acquisition because extrinsically motivated students will not see the need and will depend on the teacher for students’ ability to comprehend the material being taught. In other words, students may not feel a sense of responsibility towards their learning.

Methodology

Participants

For this study, 322 university students enrolled in a women’s university in Japan answered the questionnaire. These students were from five different departments (Nutrition, Social Welfare, Psychology, Education, and Nursing). To find out if there were any trends and or

differences in their responses, students from first to fourth year were asked to take part in the survey. Majority of the students were Japanese nationals with a couple of non-Japanese students.

Furthermore, following the nationwide trend of "hate" towards English, the students in this university showed disinterest and hate towards learning the English language.

Settings

In this private Japanese university, students are required to take general English courses regardless of their field of study. The number of English class credits required for graduation varies among departments and students can choose to take more general English classes or other foreign language classes. If the students pass, or get a high score in an approved English proficiency examinations (such as STEP EIKEN, TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, and the like), their English credits are waived. Even with such incentive, however, only a handful of students at the university were eligible.

The general English classes are year-long courses with about 20 to 30 students per teacher. In the first two semesters of English, students review the basic grammar learnt from junior high and high school. In addition, the first two semesters aim to solidify the student's foundations of English knowledge. In the third and fourth semesters of English, students study reading skills and gain reading comprehension skills. The fifth and sixth, are elective among some departments, students explore various writing styles. In the final semesters of English, students are challenged with activities that encourage communication among themselves using English.

For this study, students enrolled in compulsory classes were asked to participate in the survey.

Survey Questions

A survey was distributed to students during their general English classes in the beginning of the first semester (April to May 2017). The survey contained both closed and open questions and they were written in Japanese to ensure comprehension and to avoid misunderstanding or unanswered surveys. Instructions, meanings, and comments were given in Japanese and questions from the students were answered accordingly.

20 questions were printed on both sides of an A4 paper and estimated five to ten minutes to complete. Five questions were extracted for this study:

1. What is your purpose in studying English?
2. Do you actively participate during English class?
3. Do you put effort in studying English?
4. Do you think learning English is your own responsibility?
5. What do you think your level of responsibility is to your teacher (you : teacher) ?

Questions 1 and 5 were open ended questions and questions 2, 3, and 4 were closed ended, yes or no questions. Question 3 aimed to find out whether students were taking time outside the classrooms to review and prepare for English classes. Question 5 aimed for students to write the ratio of their individual responsibility as learners to their English language teacher's responsibility in their learning.

Results and Discussion

Question 1: What is your purpose in studying English?

The responses were all categorized into five categories: to pass the English course, to be able to communicate to English speakers, to learn because English is an important skill for the future, to study or work abroad, and no reason. Of the five purposes, three suggests that students were intrinsically driven to study English. Graph 1A (refer to Appendix) shows the distribution of responses. 12% of the students responded they had no reason to study English. While one third of the student responded with "to pass the English course". Graph 1B (refer to Appendix) shows the distribution of departments. Students from the Nutrition and Social Welfare departments were the two highest departments, possibly because students will not be required to use English in their future workplaces. Students studying Education and Nursing will likely be required to use English in their future workplaces, therefore students were studying English with and for a purpose that will most likely be beneficial.

Question 2 : Do you actively participate during English class?

Table 1 shows the distribution of yes and no responses

by department. 88% of the respondents marked “yes”. Similar to the results in Question 1, a relative high number of students that marked “no” to this question were students from the Nutrition, Social Welfare, and Psychology departments. 12% of the Nutrition and Psychology students that participated in the study responded they do not actively participate in class and 16% of the students were in the Social Welfare department. Only 2% of the student respondents from the Nursing and Education departments said “no”. The set of responses from Question 2 is correlational to the results obtained from Question 1. The student’s willingness to participate in class will reflect on whether the student has a purpose for studying English.

Table 1
Response distribution to Question 2 : Do you actively participate in class? (n=322)

	Nursing n=39	Education n=35	Nutrition n=104	Psychology n=41	Social Welfare n=103
Yes	38	34	91	36	86
No	1	1	13	5	17

Question 3 : Do you put effort in studying English?

Although in the previous question, 88% of the students responded that they actively participate in class, only 14% of the students put effort in studying English (refer to Table 2). 86% of the students do not put effort in spending time outside their classrooms reviewing and preparing for English class. Again, following the trends from the previous questions, Nutrition and Social Welfare departments marked the lowest with 9% and 12% respectively. One in three students in the Nursing department responded in putting effort outside the classrooms. The overall figures across departments were very low, which could mean that students may not be taking English classes seriously compared to other compulsory classes.

Table 2
Response distribution to Question 3 : Do you put effort in studying English? (n=322)

	Nursing n=39	Education n=35	Nutrition n=104	Psychology n=41	Social Welfare n=103
Yes	13	10	3	7	13
No	26	25	101	34	90

Question 4 : Do you think learning English is your own responsibility?

97% of the students responded that learning English is their own responsibility. 3% of the students responded

that the teachers are responsible for their learning. None of the respondents from the Education department wrote “no”. This could be because these students are studying to become educators themselves, therefore the students know that the teachers should not be held fully responsible for the students’ comprehension and acquisition of the subject.

Question 5 : What do you think your level of responsibility is to your teacher (you : teacher) ?

This question asked how responsible the students should be in their learning to how responsible they perceive their teacher should be. The results were categorized into 6 groups, as shown in Table 3 and in Graph 2 in Appendix. 13% of the respondents wrote that the teachers were more responsible for the student’s learning. Students in the Nutrition, Psychology, and Social Welfare departments wrote that teachers are more responsible for the student’s learning. This could infer that those students rely heavily to the teachers to provide them with knowledge and without much effort, acquire the English language. Very few of the students from these departments wrote that students themselves are highly responsible for their own learning. Moreover, in the previous questions, the students in these departments showed that they were not intrinsically motivated and that they did not have a strong purpose for studying English other than to pass the course. In contrast, students in the Nursing and the Education departments wrote that students were highly responsible for their own learning.

Table 3
Response distribution to Question 5: What do you think your level of responsibility is to your teacher (you : teacher)?

	Nursing n=38	Education n=34	Nutrition n=100	Psychology n=41	Social Welfare n=100	Total n=313
Less than 50%	3	3	16	6	11	39
50%	10	7	21	9	16	63
60%	5	6	9	5	17	42
70%	4	13	20	8	26	71
80%	7	2	26	7	21	63
More than 90%	9	3	8	6	9	35

In the first research question, “Do the students have a purpose in studying English and are they putting effort in trying to achieve their purpose?” , close to 30% of the students’ purpose seemed like an extension of their junior high school and high school purpose of passing.

Although slightly over 50% of the students responded with a purpose that showed English language learning as an integrative skill, a personal development, a skill to open opportunities. A high number of students responded positively towards class participation, however students did not seem to spend time to review and prepare for class outside the classroom. Perhaps this is because students may feel that class time would be enough to absorb the skills and knowledge needed to meet their purpose. In the second research question, "How much do students actually feel responsible for their own learning?", students showed that they feel responsible for their own learning. Only 13% of the respondents wrote that they feel that teachers are responsible for the student's learning. Although the teachers are required to provide comprehensible input, students are also required to be willing to understand.

Conclusion

If students have a purpose, other than to pass the course, then more students will take the initiative to participate in class and spend time outside their classrooms getting more exposure to English language. In order to foster more students to be less resistant towards English language learning, teachers should start by providing an agreeable explanation as to why the students will be learning and support students to building their own purpose of studying.

Instead of a teacher-centered classroom settings, classes should be interactive to promote more opportunities to exchange ideas and information that could stimulate each other's learning habits in and outside the classrooms. Through frequent interactions, students can begin to construct identities of themselves as language users which could reinforce their attitudes into a positive one.

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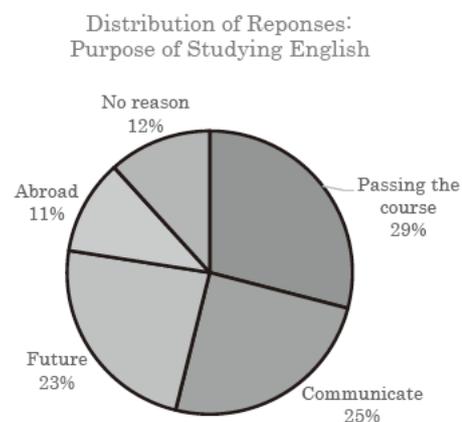
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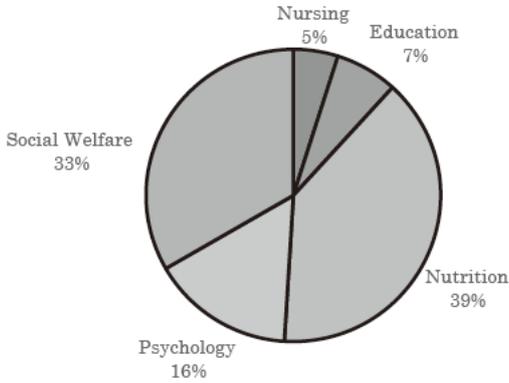
Appendix

Graph 1A : shows the distribution of responses: purpose of studying English. Of the 322 responses obtained from university students, 29% of them answered to pass the course, while 12% left the answer blank or wrote no reason. (Note: Communicate refers to: to be able to communicate with English speakers; Future refers to learn because English is an important skill for the future; and Abroad refers to wanting to go work or study abroad)



Graph 1B : Among those who answered to “pass the course” , about three quarter of the students were from the Nutrition and Social Welfare department.

"Studying English to pass the course":
Department Distribution



Graph 2 : Distribution showing the responsibility ratio that students perceive. (Note: St Resp. is short for student responsibility.)

Distribution of Student:Teacher Responsibility Ratio

