

How students' goals for learning English change after taking an English-only class.

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This study analyzes the goals of students taking an English-only class at the Okayama University of Science. Students wrote their goals for learning English at the beginning and end of their first 16 week semester at the university. At the end of the semester, more students wrote goals that included a desire to travel to other countries or a desire to talk to foreigners. The result indicates the students had increased interest and confidence in speaking English after taking an English-only class.

本稿は、岡山理科大学の英語のみで行われる英語クラスを受講した学生の学習目標を分析することを目的とする。学生は、週に1回・16週行われた対象授業において、初回授業と最終授業で英語を学習する目標について記述した。最終授業では、より多くの学生が海外旅行をすることや、外国人と話したいという望みを記した。この研究結果は、英語のみで行われる英語クラスを受講後、学生は英語を話すことについて興味や自信を高めたということを示している。

Keywords: English-only, goals, Communicative English, travel

Introduction

At the Okayama University of Science, first year students are required to take two different English classes: Communicative English (発信英語), which is taught by a native English speaker using only English, and Integrated English (総合英語), which is taught by a Japanese speaker using a mix of Japanese and English. For Communicative English, the textbook, worksheets, homework and tests are all completely in English, so it is a form of immersion learning. Teachers of Communicative English speak only English during class and everything written on slides and the chalkboard is only in English. In rare cases, some Japanese might be used in one-on-one conversations with students who do not understand

important instructions, but that is not necessary in most classes. Communicative English is mostly focused on speaking and listening skills in English, but the students also have to do some reading and writing tasks.

For most students at the Okayama University of Science, Communicative English (発信英語) is the first English-only class they have taken at any level. Students may have had some experience with native English speakers as ALT's (Assistant Language Teachers) in their primary or secondary education, but those classes are still usually taught by Japanese teachers who use mostly Japanese when teaching. Therefore, students are often fairly nervous at the beginning of the Communicative English

course because they are not used to immersion language learning.

At the end of each semester, the University encourages students to complete an anonymous online survey in Japanese about the course. At the end of the course survey, there is a comment section for students to write anything they want about the course or the teacher. The comment section is not required, and most students do not write any comments, and the ones who do usually write in Japanese. Some students wrote that they were nervous at the beginning of Communicative English because it was English-only, or that they thought they weren't good at English, but over the course of the semester or year, they were able to improve their understanding of English. While most of the comments didn't specifically use the word "confidence" (in English or Japanese), the comments implied a greater confidence, which was also noticeable in observing the students over the course of the semester and school year.

At the beginning and end of the Spring semester (16 weeks), students were asked to write 2 goals for learning English. Before comparing their goals at the end and the beginning of the semester, the hypothesis was that more students would include traveling to other countries or talking to foreigners as goals at the end of the semester because they would have increased confidence in their ability to communicate in an English-only environment after completing an English-only class.

Methods

The following question was written on a worksheet on the first day of class and again at the end of the semester for Communicative English (発信英語1A/1B) in the spring semester:

 What are your goals for learning English? (Please write 2 goals in English)

1. _____
 2. _____
-

At both the beginning and end of the semester, the question was not presented as a survey question, and the students were not given specific choices to use for their goals. The students could write any goal they wanted. At the end of the semester, the students did not look back at the goals they wrote at the beginning of the semester. Furthermore, it is unlikely that many students remembered writing goals at the beginning of the semester, so they were not influenced by what they wrote at the beginning. They were given 5 minutes to think about and write their goals, and they were allowed to use a dictionary if they wanted. All students wrote their goals in English.

For analysis in this study, the goals written by students were categorized into the following groups:

Goals that mention...

- Traveling to other countries
- Talking to foreigners (no specific mention of travel)
- Other

The number of students who wrote goals that fit in each group were counted. For this study, the two groups of interest were the students who included "Traveling to other countries" or "Talking to foreigners" as one of their goals. Since the students could write anything for their goals, placing their goals in a particular group required some judgement. For example, one student wrote, "I want to talk to foreign people". This comment was placed in the "Talking to foreigners" group since they did not specifically mention travel. It is possible that the student meant that they wanted to talk to foreign people while traveling in other countries, but since they didn't specifically write anything about travel, it was not counted for the "Traveling to other countries" group. In cases where a student wrote about wanting to travel to other countries for one goal and talking to foreigners as a second goal, the student was only counted for the "Traveling to other

countries" group in order to differentiate between students who wanted to travel to other countries from those who just wrote about talking to foreigners, which would not necessarily require travel. Some students wrote vague goals, such as "I want to speak English" which was counted as "Other" since they didn't specifically mention talking to foreigners or travel.

In addition to the question about goals, the students were also asked the following question at the end of the Spring semester:

 What English skill do you think improved the most in the spring semester? Circle one:

Reading	Writing
Listening	Speaking

 Most students followed the instructions and only circled one skill. For students who circled more than one skill, their answer was not included in this analysis.

Results

The goals of 129 students were analyzed at the beginning of the Spring semester and 130 students at the end of the Spring semester (See Table 1). At the beginning of the Spring semester, 35 students (27.1%) included "Traveling to other countries" as one of their goals for learning English. At the end of the Spring semester, 32 students (24.6%) mentioned traveling to other countries, so there was a small decrease in the percent of students who specifically mentioned traveling abroad. However, there was a larger increase in the number of students in the "Talking to foreigners" group: 22 students (17.1%) had that goal at the beginning of the Spring semester and 36 students (27.7%) had that goal at the end. As mentioned above, the students who included talking to foreigners in their goals may have meant that they wanted to travel to other countries to talk to people, but since they did not specifically mention travel, they were not included in the "Traveling to other countries" group. However,

both goals ("Traveling to other countries" and "Talking to foreigners") demonstrate confidence in English communication skills, so if the two groups are combined, then there was an increase from 44.2% at the beginning of the Spring semester to 52.3% at the end of the semester.

Many of the goals written by students were general statements about wanting to improve their English, which was not very informative, so they were placed in the "Other" group. There were some other specific goals, in addition to "Traveling to other countries" and "Talking to foreigners", such as goals that mentioned getting good scores on TOEIC or similar standardized tests, but the number of students who wrote other specific goals was relatively low, so making and analyzing other groups was difficult. Therefore, in this study, the analysis was focused on the "Traveling to other countries" and "Talking to foreigners" groups.

There was an additional question at the end of the Spring semester that helped to indirectly measure students' confidence in their speaking and listening ability. The question was, "What English skill do you think improved the most in the spring semester?" This question only had four choices for an answer: Reading, Writing, Speaking, or Listening (see Table 2). Out of 116 students, 56.0% thought their speaking had improved the most, followed by 31.0% who thought their listening had improved the most, resulting in a combined number of 87%. The remaining students chose reading (8.6%) or writing (4.3%) as the skills which they thought improved the most.

Conclusion

The original motivation for asking university students about their goals for learning English was mainly to get the students to do some self reflection. For many of them, in middle school and high school, English was just one of the subjects they were required to learn and their English goals were most likely focused on getting a good score on university entrance examinations. Now that they are

finished with university entrance examinations, they may not have thought about goals for learning English, so they were asked about their goals in order to encourage them to think about how they want to use English in the future. It was expected that students' goals would change over the course of their first semester at a university. Therefore, the students were asked about their goals again at the end of the semester to see how their goals changed. Before analysis of the results, the expectation was that students would gain confidence in their English speaking and listening ability after finishing an English-only class taught by a native English speaker and more of them would include traveling abroad as one of their goals for learning English at the end of the semester. However, when counting only goals that specifically mentioned travel, there was a small decrease (27.1% to 24.6%) in the percent of students that included travel abroad as one of their goals. If the group is expanded to include students who mentioned talking to foreigners as one of their goals, then there was an increase at the end of the semester (44.2% to 52.3%). Since the original hypothesis was based on confidence in speaking and listening ability, it seems appropriate to include the students who want to talk to foreigners, since that also indicates confidence in their English ability. Furthermore, as mentioned above, those who want to talk to foreigners may have meant they wanted to talk to foreigners while traveling.

At the end of the Spring semester, students were also asked which English skill they thought had improved the most during the semester. This was another indirect way to look at the students' confidence in their speaking and listening skills. Some students may not be interested in traveling to other countries or talking to foreigners even if they are confident in their English ability. The results showed that 56.0% thought their speaking had improved the most, and 31.0% thought their listening improved the most, which supports the idea that students had more confidence in their speaking and listening ability after taking an English-only class.

Learning more about the English goals of students is also very helpful for teachers. As mentioned above, the students could write anything they wanted for their English goals, so they were not limited to certain choices for their goals. The open-ended nature of the question provided a chance to see how the students wanted to use English in the future, which will help in planning future lessons and activities for the Communicative English course. Since about half of the students are interested in traveling to other countries or talking to foreigners, more activities to help prepare them for that can be included in future lessons. This also aligns with the university's desire to prepare students for future jobs, which may include working for companies that need employees who can travel to other countries for business or interact with employees from partner companies overseas.

Next year, in order to continue this study, new students will also be asked about their English learning goals. The open-ended nature of the question about goals in this study provided a wide variety of responses from students, but in some cases, it was difficult to categorize some of the goals due to vague wording or incorrect use of grammar and vocabulary in some cases. For example, many of the goals were very general statements about wanting to improve listening or speaking. Therefore, to follow up the findings of this study, when the new students are asked about their goals next year, they will be given a list of specific goals to choose from rather than an open-ended question. The most common goals from this year's students will be selected and given to next year's students as choices for their English goals. There will also be some additional space provided for students to write other goals in case they have an important goal that is not included in the choices, and the students will be encouraged to write specific goals since that will help in planning lessons and activities that better match their goals.

Table 1. The number and percentage of students who included traveling to other countries or talking to foreigners in their English learning goals.

Group based on English goals	Beginning of semester (number of students)	Beginning of semester (percent)	End of semester (number of students)	End of semester (percent)
Traveling to other countries	35	27.1%	32	24.6%
Talking to foreigners	22	17.1%	36	27.7%
Total students	129		130	

Table 2. The number and percentage of students who chose Speaking, Listening, Reading, or Writing as their most improved English skill.

English skill	Number of students	Percent of students
Speaking	65	56.0
Listening	36	31.0
Reading	10	8.6
Writing	5	4.3
Total	116	