

English Education in Japan
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私の作文は英語の教育に関しています。日本はグローバルの国になりたいそうです。英語は非常にグローバルの道具として学びます。しかし、たくさんの日本人は英語が話すことが上手ではありません。なぜかという、日本社会に、英語の教育を行うのは大変です。

私は英語の先生になりたいと考えます。今、英会話で英語を教えます。英語の教育が面白くて、将来、日本で英語を教えたいと思います。もちろん、いい先生になりたいですから、英語の授業を分かりやすく教えなければなりません。日本の生徒によく教えるために、現代の教育方法も、歴史的に効く教育方法も大事で、先生として学ばなくてはならないと思います。

自分の経験とインターネット、インタビュー、アンケートを使って、研究しました。二人の岡山大学で英語を教える先生と一人の岡山大学の日本人学生にインタビューをしました。二十人の岡山大学の日本人学生はアンケートを答えました。研究によると、日本で英語の教育は社会では大変な問題だということが分かります。一般的に、英語の教育によくなることは難しいようです。しかし、たくさんの生徒は英語の先生が好きで、その応援で英語の教育はきっとよくなれるでしょう。

English education in Japan is seen as part of becoming a more globally oriented country and improving this education is considered important by the the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, MEXT, as well as many English teachers and even students. In fact, increasing the overall English ability of Japan has been a goal of the government for decades, with unfortunately so-so results. I chose to research English education because it is such a salient issue and because I have a personal interest in teaching English as a Second Language. I've used my personal experience as an English conversation partner and teacher at Okayama University's L-Cafe as well as at an off campus English conversation school, interviews with two Okayama University English teachers and one Japanese student, a questionnaire handed out to Okayama University Japanese students, and some internet research to delve into this topic.

English education in Japan began in 1947 with the goal of “gain[ing] knowledge from native English speakers via listening and speaking.” However, this communicative approach was changed in the 1960s, when the focus was shifted to grammar rules and language structure, in order to help students pass college entrance exams. The Tokyo Olympics were held in 1964 and proved to be an English disaster--Japan was woefully underprepared to handle the influx of English speaking foreigners. This event spurred forward the push for improving English education; the 1970s saw a push to return to the communicative approach. In the 1980s, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, JET, was established to bring native English speakers to Japan to assist in English teaching. Unfortunately, despite MEXT describing developing communicative abilities as the “central purpose” of English education and mandates in 2009 and 2011 to conduct English classes in English and to balance grammar and experiential language techniques, Japan still ranks lowest in average English ability out of all its neighboring countries, particularly in speaking. Now, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics are approaching, so there is an even greater push to increase communicative English ability. Though it’s still too early to see the complete effects, in 2014 elementary schools began including English in their curriculum and more emphasis was placed on teaching English in English.

To try and gauge English education based on students, I decided to do a questionnaire. Twenty students answered it, aged eighteen to twenty-five. Between all the students, the average time spent studying English was nine years, with the lowest time spent studying English being three years and the highest time seventeen years. I asked all the students to report their own English levels as well; three felt they were advanced, ten intermediate, and seven beginner. Years spent studying English had apparently little to do with who rated themselves as advanced or intermediate, though all beginners studied for less than ten years.

If you look at pie chart a), you can see a fairly even split between students who felt mostly satisfied with their English teachers and students who felt mostly unsatisfied with their English teachers. None felt that all their English teachers had been bad and boring, but three did feel that most of their teachers had been bad and boring. The most popular responses were “So-so, most were average teachers. Often English classes were boring” and “Yes, most were interesting and good teachers.” Only two of the students were completely satisfied with all English teachers they’d had. Pie chart b) shows that, according to students, the majority of time in English classes is spent on grammar. Despite this grammar focus, pie chart c) does show that the majority of those interviewed do like learning English in class, which I think is a hopeful sign for English education in Japan.

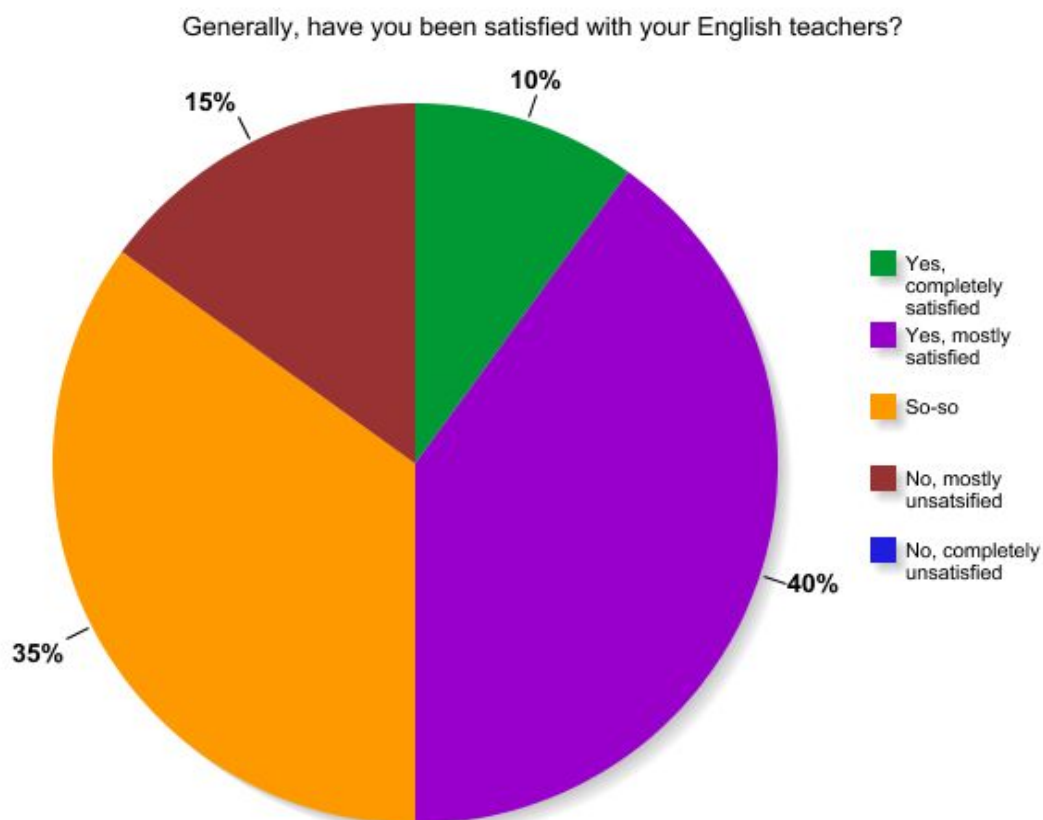
Twelve out of twenty students isn’t a very large majority, but at least more people like their English teachers and classes than do not, because there are many social problems in Japan that inhibit English education, according to the teachers and student I interviewed. One of these problems is the top down cultural system in Japan. MEXT has been mandating and encouraging a communicative approach to English education for decades, but the strict sense of hierarchy present in Japanese culture discourages discussion between the teachers and MEXT officials about what works and what doesn’t and why. Another problem is that Japanese students can be very shy and have a fear of making mistakes. Many students desire to master English before using it, which isn’t possible. I have experienced this myself during my own time teaching English. It can be difficult to get students to answer questions if they are unsure of the answer, because they are afraid of being wrong, or even carry on a conversation. As a teacher, with these students I had to spend time to create an environment that made them feel comfortable making mistakes and just trying their best. Within larger sized, more traditional, strict, and hierarchical Japanese classrooms, I think creating such an

environment is much more difficult. Teachers as well, have a fear of making mistakes. Many non-native English teachers say “my English isn’t good enough” to teach English in English or that they “don’t know how.” Non-native English teachers also complain that they are “too busy” to teach English in English. It takes a lot of extra time for a non-native speaker of a language to prepare a lesson plan almost entirely in that language, and Japanese teachers are often already overworked. In the Japanese school system before university, teachers each have a homeroom class for which they have some extra duties, including any counseling students might need, and after school, teachers are expected to oversee a club and often have to stay much later without pay. Many Japanese English teachers really are too busy to properly prepare English lesson plans. Even more, one of the biggest problems facing English education in Japan is how exam focused it is. One of the English teachers I interviewed said, “English is seen as just something to memorize for an exam, and this creates a negative attitude.”

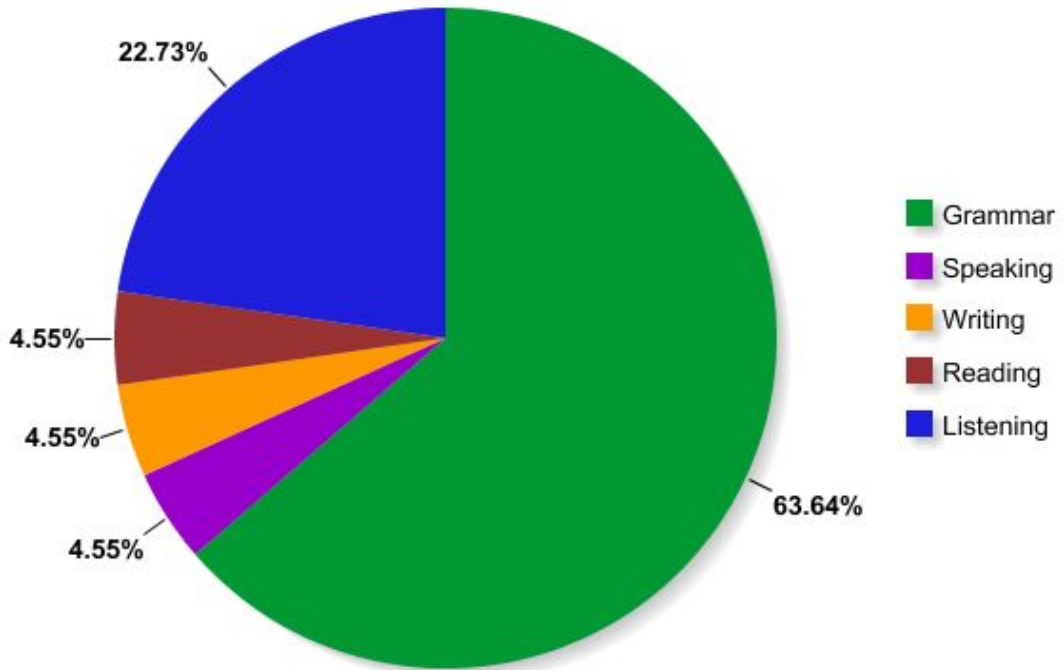
Many people advocate for more practical university entrance exams with speaking and listening portions to encourage teachers to teach these areas and students to study them. Interestingly, the tests are slowly changing to become more practical based, however, many teachers don’t know this because they don’t review the tests carefully. So, beyond reducing focus on exams in general, it is also important create awareness of changes happening to the exams. Another important change that could be made is to decrease extra duties for teachers, this would allow them to spend more time on their lesson plans. For those teachers unsure how to teach English in English, more Communicative Language Workshops could be held in various places. Currently, there are only three workshops held in Japan every year, and if this number were increased, more teachers would be able to attend and learn how to improve their teaching styles. Furthermore, both teachers and students should study abroad in English

speaking countries for extended amounts of time. This immersion is one of the best ways to improve English skill and many English teachers have never studied abroad during their careers or college life. While studying abroad is being encouraged by the government, many students and teachers go abroad for only two or three weeks, which isn't enough time to really improve language skills. Semester to year long study abroad placements should really be what is encouraged for English learners.

Certainly, I've gained a lot from my study abroad experience; my time in Japan as an English teacher has been very interesting and enlightening for me. I feel I have improved as a teacher over time and have been very pleased to know my students, even if some of them were shy. I hope that in the future, I will continue to have opportunities to help students improve their English and create better English learning environments.

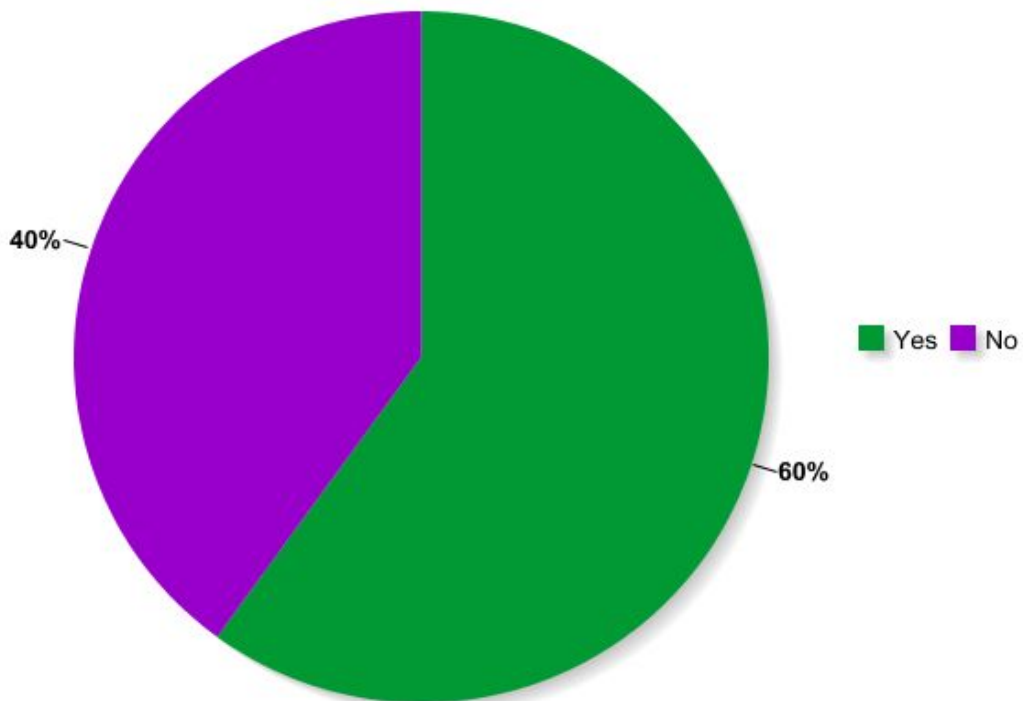


What do you spend the most time learning in class?



b.)

Do you like learning English in class?



c.)