
Active Learning and English-Only Environments for Japanese Learners: Benefits and Challenges

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Abstract

The purpose of our investigation is to identify some of the effects of teaching English to Japanese English majors using the target language as the medium of communication. We also aim to gain insight into students' and teachers' attitudes regarding their own use of English as an object of study and as a means of communication inside and outside the classroom, and to identify any problems that may arise as a consequence of using mostly English as the language of teacher-student communication. To this end, two separate surveys were administered to the English teaching staff and to the students. Our findings indicate that teachers make sustained efforts to implement the English-only policy in the Communication Faculty of Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB)¹, and, although students' TOEIC scores and English communication confidence show a progress, most students do not seem confident enough to use English extensively in the classroom.

Introduction and background of study

We will briefly review the current situation of English education in Japan, with a particular focus on Japanese Ministry of Education Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT) English education policies and measures to be implemented by 2020, the situation of Japanese learners in terms of English communication competence, after which we will present the particularities of teaching English at NUCB, a profile of students and teachers, and the measures teachers in the Communication Faculty are taking to tailor the English-only policy on the specific needs of our students.

MEXT English education policy and the current situation

In 2013, MEXT introduced the “English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization” (MEXT, 2013). The plan, expected to be implemented incrementally by 2020, the year of the Tokyo Olympic games, includes targets and measures aimed at nurturing English communication competences among Japanese students. Among the most ambitious measures there are introduction of English in primary education, and then, from lower secondary school, enabling students to develop communication skills by conducting classes in English, which would be centered on communication activities, such as “presentations, debates, negotiations” (ibid.). What is worth mentioning here is that at “lower secondary level” (junior high school) and “higher sec-

1 The present paper is based on a presentation given at the NUCB Faculty Development meeting of December 14th, 2016.

ondary level” (senior high school), English classes will be conducted “in English”, and, starting from senior high school, “with high-level linguistic activities (presentations, debates, negotiations)” (ibid.). It appears that English education must take a huge step ahead, from a system where teachers use mostly Japanese in English classes and learning is based on memorization of word lists and reading and translating difficult texts into Japanese. In so doing, the MEXT wishes “to promote the establishment of an educational environment which corresponds to globalization”, in other words, to improve Japanese students’ English communication competence. However, at present, in junior and senior high school the goal of English education is more about obtaining a passing score in the entrance examination, and less about teaching useful English communication skills. As Table 1 below shows, teachers tend to place a great emphasis on input (reading, grammar, listening, Japanese translation), and give less attention to activities which encourage students to use English in meaningful contexts, such as presentations, discussions or debates.

	Reading (%)	Pronunciation (%)	Grammar explanation (%)	Listening (%)	Translation into Japanese (%)	Speech / Present. (%)	Discuss (%)	Debate (%)
Jr.high	88.2	78.6	71.4	64.6	41.6	9.1	0.6	0.2
Sr.high	79.8	68.7	46.8	53.2	42.9	3.8	1.7	0.8

Table 1. English language learning activities in Japanese junior and senior high schools according to Japanese teachers of English (Source: Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute 2015).

Moreover, the above data show that, at the junior high school level teachers often involve their students in activities such as reading, pronunciation, grammar, listening, translation; however in senior high school, there is an increased focus on these activities. The survey conducted by the Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute in 2015 also indicates that teachers’ use of English in the classroom is higher in junior high school than in senior high school. Thus, in junior high, almost 60% of teachers use English more than half of classroom time, compared to 42% of teachers in senior high school (Benesse, 2015). These findings tend to confirm the findings of a survey conducted by the same institute one year earlier, when junior and senior high school students were questioned regarding their English learning in schools (Benesse, 2014). The 2014 survey found that as the students’ grade increases, their confidence and interest in English decreases (Benesse, 2014).

As Figure 1 below shows, more junior high school students (56%) believe that they are good at English compared to senior high school students (46%).

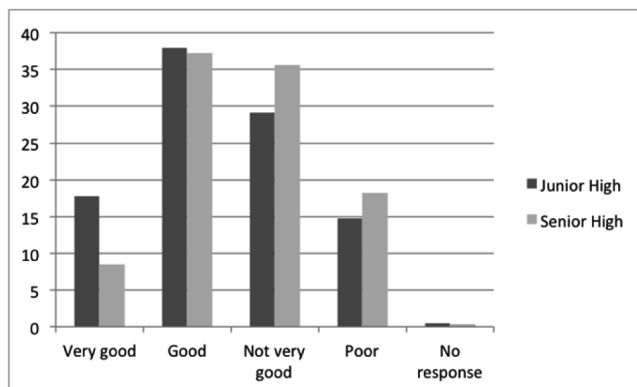


Fig. 1. Student confidence in English at junior and senior high school levels (Source: Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, 2014).

According to the same 2014 survey, the English skills students have the most problems with are grammar, writing, listening, and speaking (ibid. 2014).

	Grammar (%)	Writing (%)	Listening (%)	Vocabulary (%)	Speaking (%)
Jr. high	68.5	65.7	60.2	59.0	56.3
Sr. high	79.2	77.5	70.9	67.7	72.9

Table 2. English skills students find most challenging (Source: Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, 2014)

As can be observed in Table 2 above, although the percentage of junior high school students who find English grammar, writing, listening, vocabulary, and speaking difficult is rather high, the numbers of senior high school students who report difficulties in coping with learning these skills is much higher, which can be considered a consequence of the teachers' decreasing interest in these, especially in English speaking at the senior high school levels presented earlier in Table 1.

These data suggest that, while at the lower secondary level there seems to be a certain preoccupation towards a relatively rigorous English education, as reflected in teachers' responses and students' confidence levels, at upper secondary level the situation is not so positive, and it appears that, instead of showing progress, more confidence, and an increased interest in learning English, most senior high school students and teachers seem to put less effort in English education altogether. Some of these students end up in universities, which, faced with a chronic shortage of students, are forced to grant a large number of poorly prepared students entrance in their foreign language departments. Nagoya University of Commerce and Business is an example in point.

Use of target language (TL) in foreign language education – pros and cons

The use of target language (TL) in foreign language education has been widely debated in the literature. Some authors stressed the benefits of maximizing exposure to TL (Ellis, 1984; Krashen, 1982; Cullen, 1998), especially in environments where there is little contact with TL. Exposure to TL is not the only goal of English only policy. As Macaro (2001) pointed out, "The over-arching pedagogical tool should, therefore, be learners' use of the TL, not teacher use of the TL" (p. 184). On the other hand, other authors oppose the idea of completely abandoning L1 from the language classroom. Cook argues that languages coexist in a multilingual speaker's mind, and, therefore, it is impossible to completely isolate TL from learner's native language (Cook, 2003). Some authors point out that the use of learner's first language may be beneficial in task preparation activities, such as instructions, checking for understanding, explaining cooperation, teaching grammatical rules, or even building relationship with the learners (Auerbach, 1993; Atkinson, 1987; Wilkerson, 2008; Cook, 2001; Bateman, 2008). Macaro (2006) pleads in favor of codeswitching, arguing that, although regarded by the majority of bilingual teachers as "unfortunate and regrettable, but necessary" (p. 8) it helps ease the burden on learners' memory while enabling cognitive processing. Some authors observed that the balance between the use of L1 and TL is influenced by learners' proficiency (Macaro, 1997; Crawford, 2004).

With regards to how learners feel about being taught in TL or using L1, the existing research has found that, in principle, learners are happy with teachers using L1, irrespective of quantity (Duff & Polio, 1990). Levine (2003) points out that, contrary to expectations, there is a negative correlation between use of TL and student anxiety. Nevertheless, his findings show that, despite a largely TL-oriented approach, both students and teachers in his study tend to switch to L1 in situations which call for explaining "grammar, class assignments, course policies, and the like" (p. 354).

English only policy: a blessing or a curse?

As Japan is confronted with ageing population and a rapidly shrinking birthrate, outsourcing, as well as at-

tracting foreign workforce are vital for ensuring the country's competitiveness. As more Japanese companies like Uniqlo, Rakuten, Honda, and Nissan have introduced it as the official language (Borzykowski, 2017), and are making a TOEIC score of 600 and over a condition for hiring and promotion (Ujiie, 2016), English communication competence has become a necessity. During the past decade, MEXT is making efforts to internationalize higher education in an attempt to attract more foreign students to Japan. The program known as "Global 30", carried out between 2009-2013, offered financial support to thirteen Japanese core universities that were committed to internationalization (Kato, 2014). The thirteen universities "have been implementing a variety of approaches to internationalize academic systems and campuses such as developing degree programs conducted in English" (MEXT, 2012, para 2). Following in these universities' footsteps, more and more universities are developing programs where English is taught in the target language. However, the commodification of university education, combined with a rapid shrinking of the numbers of high schools graduates, has forced many universities to accept students whose English communication abilities are quantitatively and qualitatively insufficient for getting the required number of credits (Berger, 2011; Ford, 2009; Kato, 2014). An English only environment supposes that most of the communication between teacher and students be conducted in English, and all class instructions, assignments, explanations be done in the target language. How can universities reconcile the English only policy with the decreasing academic performance of their students?

English only policy at NUCB

Although according to Kusuyama (2013), the English program offered at NUCB may not be as rigorous or comprehensive as the programs of other well-known universities, it is "a language-focused, English communication program instructed through the "target language only" teaching methodology", based on the assumption and belief that using the English only policy has a positive influence upon students' communication competence and TOEIC performance (Kusuyama, 2013, p. 3). The teaching staff, comprised of native and non-native English speakers, uses English most of the time, and incorporates interactive and collaborative methods such as pair or group language practice, project work, peer feedback, interactive use of web learning software, debates, and so on. In order to test students' reading and listening progress, compulsory IP TOEIC tests are conducted two times a year, in June and in December.

The 2015 IP TOEIC scores show two positive aspects. First, the average TOEIC scores obtained by students in years 2, 3, and 4 are higher than those of freshmen. In 2015, first year students' score average was 308 and 495 in Year 4 (Fig. 1).

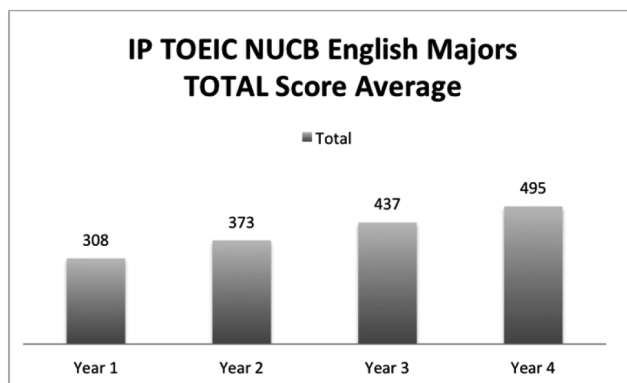


Figure 2. IP TOEIC NUCB English Majors Total

The second positive aspect is that the listening scores show a gradual increase for years 2, 3, and 4. Thus, the listening average score obtained by fourth year students (299) was higher by 110 points than the average score of freshmen (189) (Fig. 3). However, the reading average score of fourth year students was only 76 points higher than the one obtained by freshmen, which suggests that our students benefit substantially from the extensive input offered by the use of TL almost exclusively inside and outside classroom.

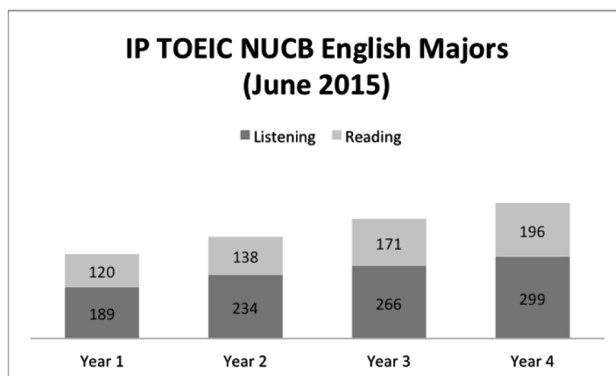


Figure 3. IP TOEIC scores of NUCB English majors (June 2015)

Comparing NUCB English majors' results with the national university students IP TOEIC average in Fig. 4 below, it can be observed that, although our students' TOEIC scores cannot reach the nationwide average of English majors (570), they come close to those of university students.

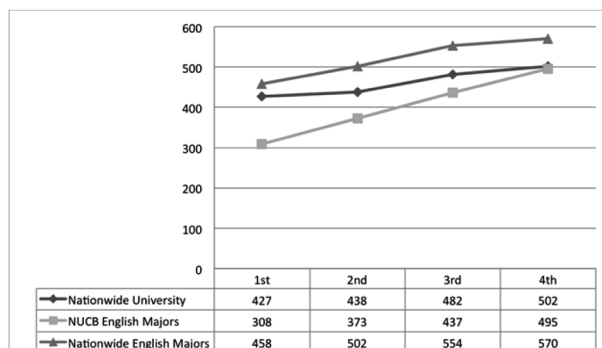


Figure 4. Comparison of IP TOEIC Averages 2015

(Source: http://www.toeic.or.jp/library/toeic_data/toeic/pdf/data/DAA.pdf)

As Kusuyama (2013) also pointed out, in 2008 the average scores of first year students were much lower than the nationwide ones (p. 6). As a matter of fact, the year of 2015 has not an exception. It can be noticed that, unlike nationwide English majors and university students, NUCB English majors start off with very low scores in Year 1, and the improvement over the four years is substantial. A further look at the averages obtained by our students in reading and listening shows that the listening score surpasses the national average (a fact also pointed out by Kusuyama in her 2013 paper), while the reading score does not come close to the national average (Fig. 5).

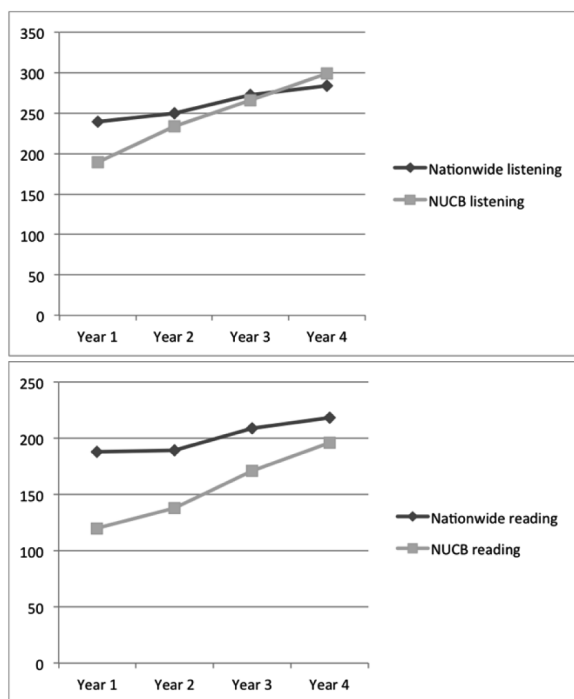


Fig. 5. IP TOEIC Listening and reading scores (June 2015) – comparisons between nationwide averages and NUCB English majors averages (Source: http://www.toeic.or.jp/library/toeic_data/toeic/pdf/data/DAA.pdf)

As seen above, the NUCB English majors' communication competence, although rather low compared to other English majors, is showing improvement across all years of study. This can be attributed to the English only policy, which has been used in the English department since its inception. In our research we attempt to investigate how teachers and students feel about using target language as the medium of instruction.

Methods

The instrument

For our research we have used a questionnaire which is based on the one developed by G.S. Levine regarding student and instructor beliefs and attitudes about target language, first language and anxiety (Levine, 2003). In our questionnaire, the stress was placed more on teacher and student attitudes about teaching English using the target language and first language, and less on the anxiety component. Two separate questionnaires were developed using Google Forms and distributed online to the teachers of English in the Communication Department of NUCB and to the English majors in years 1 to 4 of the same department. The teacher questionnaire was designed in English and the student questionnaire was in Japanese. The teacher questionnaire, containing 24 items, was sent to 16 teaching staff members at the Communication Department, and it returned 15 usable responses (94%). The student questionnaire, which contained 12 items, was sent to 330 first to fourth year English majors of the department. It returned 190 usable responses (58%).

The items of the teacher questionnaire were comprised of yes/no type questions (5 items), five point Likert scale items (16 items), one item inquiring into the teachers' Japanese proficiency, and two items eliciting free comments regarding strategies the teachers use in their English language classes. The student questionnaire

contained 12 items, out of which five point Likert scale items (10 items), and two items inquiring in the students' year of study and gender. Most of the five point Likert scale responses are anchored by 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree', or 0-20% (1) to 80-100% (5).

Cronbach's alphas for 10 items of the student survey and 16 items of the teacher survey were .833 and .825 respectively, indicating that the internal consistency of each of the two questionnaires is acceptable.

Sample demographics

Student sample

		N=190	Mean	SD
Year of study	Year 1	67	2.23	1.116
	Year 2	47		
	Year 3	42		
	Year 4+	34		
Gender	Male	61	1.68	0.46811
	Female	129		

Teacher sample

		N=15	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	11	1.27	0.45774
	Female	4		
Native vs. Non-native English speaker	Native	6	1.4	0.50709
	Non-native	9		

Table 4. Teacher sample demographics

Students' responses

Q3. TOEIC performance (June 2016) (M=2.67, SD=1.199, N=190)

1. ~ 300	2. 300 ~ 400	3. 400 ~ 500	4. 500 ~ 700	5. 700 ~
36 (18.9%)	56 (29.5%)	45 (23.7%)	40 (21.1%)	13 (6.8%)

Q4. What is, in your opinion, your English communication proficiency? (M=3, SD=1.313, N=190)

1. I have just become used to listening to English	2. I can speak a little in broken English	3. I can speak a little, but with some difficulty	4. I can express myself, but sometimes I can't understand my interlocutor	5. I can speak fluently, although sometimes I don't understand words / grammatical structures
33 (17.4%)	26 (13.7%)	77 (40.5%)	16 (8.4%)	38 (20%)

Questions regarding English only (N=190)

0-20%	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%	M	SD
Q5. The teacher uses English in classroom about ___% of the class time						
1 (0.5%)	2 (1.1%)	10 (5.3%)	44 (23.2%)	133 (70%)	4.61	0.687
Q6. I use English in classroom about ___% of the class time						
28 (14.7%)	48 (25.3%)	59 (31.1%)	20 (10.5%)	35 (18.4%)	2.93	1.299
Q7. I understand about ___% of the teacher's explanations						
14 (7.4%)	18 (9.5%)	51 (26.8%)	65 (34.2%)	42 (22.1%)	3.54	1.153
Q8. How much do teachers speak in an ordinary classroom?						
3 (1.6%)	7 (3.7%)	28 (14.7%)	108 (56.8%)	44 (23.2%)	3.96	0.819

Q9. How much do students speak in an ordinary classroom?						
24 (12.6)	74 (38.9%)	63 (33.2%)	27 (14.2%)	2 (1.1%)	2.52	0.924
Q10. How much English do you use at school when talking to your teachers?						
20 (10.5%)	26 (13.7%)	37 (19.5%)	58 (30.5%)	49 (25.8%)	3.47	1.296

Students' opinions about English only in classroom (N=190)

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	M	SD
Q11. English only classes are effective and fun						
5 (2.6%)	17 (8.9%)	6 (13.7%)	72 (37.5%)	70 (36.8%)	3.97	1.051
Q12. English only classes are beneficial and worthwhile						
6 (3.2%)	113 (6.8%)	29 (15.3%)	58 (30.5%)	84 (44.2%)	4.06	1.075

Teachers' responses

Current situation of teaching using English only (N=15)

0-20%	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%	M	SD
Q7. I use English to communicate about _____% of the time in the classroom.						
2 (13.3%)	0	0	1 (6.7%)	12 (80%)	4.40	1.404
Q10. I use English to communicate with students within topic-based / thematic activities about _____% of the time we spend on those activities.						
2 (13.3%)	0	0	1 (6.7%)	12 (80%)	4.40	1.404
Q11. I use English to give directions for activities about _____% of the time.						
2 (13.3%)	0	0	1 (6.7%)	12 (80%)	4.40	1.404
Q12. I use English to communicate with students outside of class time (e.g., office hours, in the hall, before / after class _____% of the time.						
2 (13.3%)	0	0	2 (13.3%)	11 (73.3%)	4.33	1.397

Teachers' opinions of students' English use in classroom (N=15)

0-20%	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%	M	SD
Q8. My students use English to communicate with me about _____% of the time in the classroom.						
1 (6.7%)	0	2 (13.3%)	3 (20%)	9 (60%)	4.27	1.163
Q9. My students use English to communicate with each other about _____% of time in the classroom.						
3 (20%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	2.80	1.320
Q13. While students are working with partners or groups in my English class, they switch to Japanese as soon as they are through with a particular activity about _____% of the class.						
2 (13.3%)	0	4 (26.7%)	4 (26.7%)	5 (33.3%)	3.67	1.345
Q14. My students understand what I am saying in English about _____% of the time.						
1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)	3.67	1.345
Q15. When my students do not understand what I am saying in English, they request that I repeat or clarify about _____% of the time.						
4 (26.7%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	2.67	1.447
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	M	SD
Q20. I believe that my students generally feel anxious using English, especially in the first year of instruction.						
1 (7%)	0	2 (13%)	6 (40%)	6 (40%)	4.07	1.10
Q21. I believe that my students generally find it frustrating communicating in English.						

1 (7%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	7 (47%)	1 (7%)	3.27	1.10
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Teachers' opinions regarding English only policy (N=15)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	M	SD
Q16. I believe that the more English students use in the classroom, the better they will be at communicating in English.						
0	0	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	9 (60%)	4.53	0.640
Q17. I believe that in order to really master/acquire English, students must use English a great deal in the classroom.						
0	1 (6.7%)	0	6 (40%)	8 (53.3%)	4.40	0.828
Q18. I believe there are no situations in which Japanese should be used in the classroom.						
1 (6.7%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	4 (26.7%)	3.07	1.387
Q19. I believe that, regardless of how much English students choose to use, the instructor should use English at all times.						
0	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	6 (40%)	7 (46.7%)	4.27	0.884
Q22. I believe that my students generally view it as a rewarding and worthwhile challenge when they have to use English to communicate (rather than fall back on Japanese).						
0	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	7 (47%)	4 (27%)	3.80	1.014

Findings and discussion

Among the most significant findings of our study is the shared opinion of teachers and students about the benefits of using the target language for English instruction almost exclusively. Thus, as shown in Figure 6 below, while both teachers and students consider that English only is rewarding and worthwhile, it was surprising to find that more students than teachers (44%) thought that the English only is beneficial.

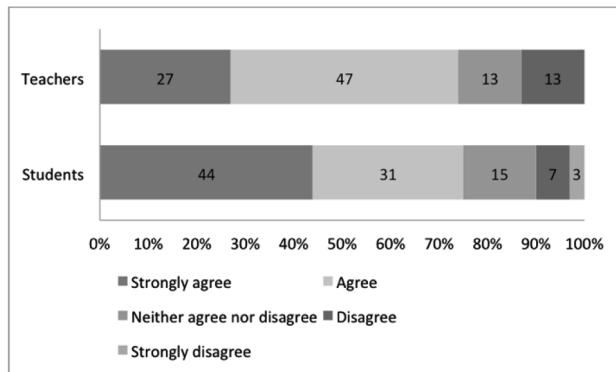


Figure 6. Teachers' and students' opinions regarding the benefits of English only classes.

Another important finding is that most students are relatively confident in their English speaking skills. A large number of students (41%) thought that they "can speak a little, but can't express as much as I want" (Fig. 7).

Combined with more confident students (28%), this makes for a substantial number of students who consider that their English communication skills are acceptable.

However, from students' and teachers' responses, several issues became evident. One of them is the reluctance of students to use English in classroom. Despite the teachers' efforts to expose students to the target

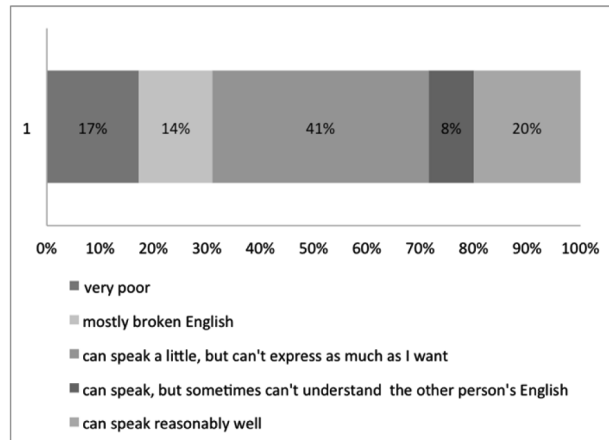


Figure 6. Students' perceived confidence in their English communication skills

language as much as possible, students' use of English in the classroom does not appear to be as substantial as expected (Fig. 7).

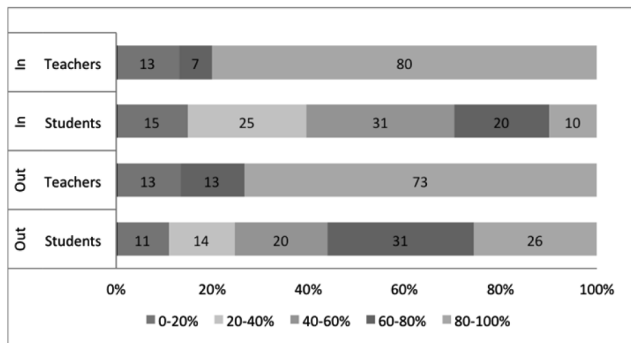


Figure 7. Teachers' and students' use of English inside and outside the classroom

As Figure 7 above shows, over 80% of the teachers use English more than 60% inside and outside the English classroom. As a part of the English only policy at NUCB, the teachers are encouraged to use English not only inside the classroom, but also during meetings and consultations with the students outside the classroom. On the other hand, the students seem less inclined to use English in the classroom. As Figure 7 indicates, most students use English less than 60% in the classroom. However, when it comes to using English outside of the classroom, in discussions with teachers, more than half of the respondents answered that they used English more than half of the time. It appears that students seem more reluctant to use English in classroom than outside. This idea is also reinforced by the fact that, according to the teachers' responses, students hesitate most of the time to ask the teacher to repeat or clarify whenever they have an English-related problem (Fig. 8). It appears that more than half of the teaching staff is confronted with the problem of students asking questions or soliciting clarification a lot less often than expected.

Several possible reasons, such as low confidence in their English communication skills, foreign language anxiety, and as well as cultural factors, such as a desire not to stand out and shyness can be connected to such

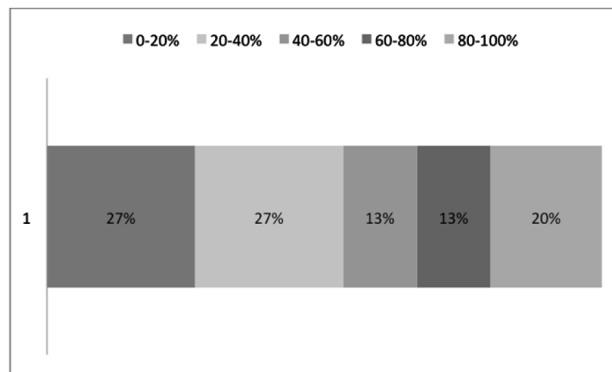


Figure 8. Teachers' responses regarding students asking for clarification or repetition

a behavior. As Ellis (1991) and Anderson (1993) pointed out, passiveness is a typical trait of Japanese students. Anderson (1993) suggested that it might have a cultural underpinning, as Japanese students are usually wary of appearing too smart or studious in front of their peers and thus risk being ridiculed. Cutrone (2009) pointed out that shyness might also be a reason for Japanese students' hesitation to speak, because it is perceived as a positive trait in Japanese culture. Perfectionism and the fear of making mistakes is, nonetheless, another factor which precludes Japanese students from being more outspoken in the classroom, and it has been found to originate in students' previous experiences of an exacting English education system based on tests (Nozaki, 1993; Doyon, 2000). It is, therefore, not surprising that most teachers agree that their students (especially first year students) feel anxious about using English in the classroom (Figure 9).

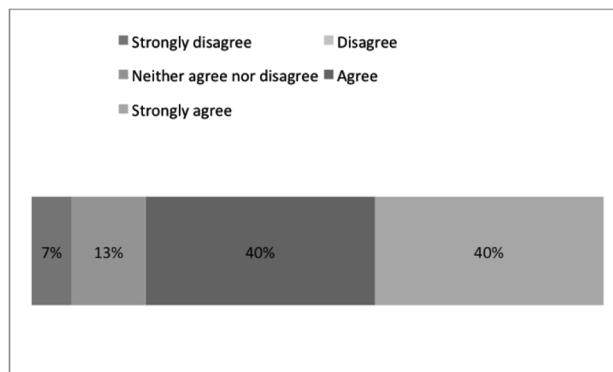


Figure 9. Teacher's opinions regarding students' English speaking anxiety

Foreign language classroom anxiety is a commonplace feature in the foreign language teaching literature (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Andrade & Williams, 2009). Speaking in a foreign language is perceived as the most threatening aspect of the language, and it has been found to be most serious among adult learners (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Ranging from mild to debilitating, foreign language anxiety, or the "affective filter" (Krashen, 1982) can greatly affect the learner's motivation (Gardner et al. 1976; Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). According to Kondo & Yang (2003), foreign language anxiety is manifest among learners with low proficiency, those who are wary of negative evaluations by peers, and during speaking activities. As it has been shown

earlier, the majority of NUCB English majors share these traits, and are prone to foreign language anxiety.

As possible strategies to ease anxiety, Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) suggest finding modalities to help learners cope with the situation which makes them anxious, or making the learning context less stressful. Levine (2003) and Dailey O’Cain & Liebscher (2009) pointed out the benefits of code switching as a strategy to ease learner anxiety. It is suggested that code switching should be resorted to when changing activities, topics, or participants, and should be employed for the purpose of assisting learners’ cooperation in the process of L2 acquisition. Indeed, our teachers’ responses indicate that students tend to switch to Japanese most of the time (over 60% of classroom time) when talking among themselves. Moreover, although using the target language is the official policy of the department, more than half of the teaching staff is in agreement that Japanese should not be completely banned from the English classroom (Fig. 10).

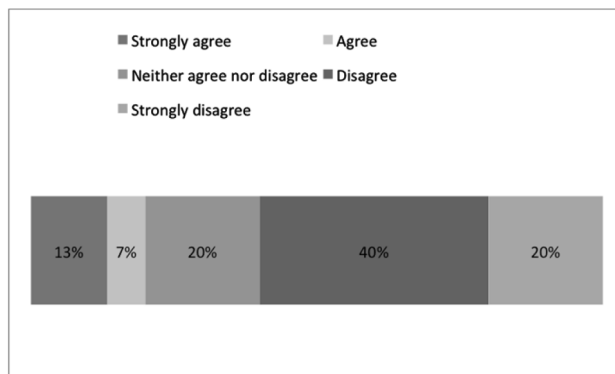


Figure 10. Teachers’ views regarding banning Japanese in the English classroom

Suggestions for improvement

In order to improve student participation and motivation, and to help relieve their foreign language anxiety, a possible solution would be to increase students’ exposure to foreign cultures through participation in overseas programs and language exchanges with the international students at NUCB. In addition, other suggestions for lowering students’ classroom anxiety would be the use of relevant teaching materials, with interesting contents they can relate to and they can discuss; scaffolding difficult learning tasks, so that even low-level students are able to complete the required tasks. Last, but not least, constant feedback is important to give the students a measure of how well they completed a task and motivate them to improve.

Pedagogical implications and conclusions

Given the characteristics of the English majors at NUCB (low academic skills and low English proficiency), and despite a wide recognition of the benefits of the English only approach by both teachers and students at NUCB, teaching English using exclusively the target language poses a number of challenges. Our study suggests that the English language policy at NUCB has produced two relatively positive effects. One is the improvement of the TOEIC score average in Years 2-4, compared to the low level Year 1 students. In particular, as a possible effect of being exposed to spoken English on a daily basis, the students’ listening scores show the greatest improvement, but they seem to fare poorly in reading, which requires more than just passive class attendance. Another positive aspect of the English language policy at NUCB is that almost 70% of the English majors consider they are able to express themselves more or less passably in English. This could be linked to the students’ exposure to English, not only through listening tasks, but also through presentations,

discussions and other speaking activities, which enable them to express themselves in English inside and outside the classroom. Unfortunately, students don't seem to use English in the classroom as much as they should, but prefer to talk in English more during private conversations with teachers, possibly because outside the classroom they can relax and not worry too much about their peers' judgment.

Our study presents a number of limitations, such as the low number of participants, and a tendency to view our student respondents as a homogeneous cohort. In reality, as Kusuyama (2013) points out, it is the high level students who are responsible for TOEIC scores that are the higher than nationwide averages. An in-depth investigation of the effects and challenges posed by the English only environment upon lower-level students is needed to identify the most appropriate strategies for improving these students' English communication competence.

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