

*Motivation and Attitudes Towards Learning and Using English Outside the
Classroom Environment: A Study of the Library and Information Science
Undergraduates at the University of Tsukuba*

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Abstract

This purpose of this study is to investigate the different social and cultural factors related to Japanese university students' motivation and attitudes towards speaking English outside the formal classroom environment. A self-constructed questionnaire was administrated to a group of third- and fourth-year undergraduate students in June 2012. These Japanese students were learning English as a foreign language, and they were all majoring in library and information science at the University of Tsukuba in Japan. The questionnaire asked a total number of 112 students across their proficiency levels, their preferences and attitudes towards speaking English, as well as their self-confidence in interacting with the native English speakers, based on their daily-life experiences.

The survey results indicated that although many of them had learned English for minimum 8 years, a large number of them experienced anxiety and lacked the necessary self-confidence while speaking English outside the classroom environment. In fact, owing to their fear and lack of self-confidence, a majority of them tended to shy away from English-speaking situations, i.e., to avoid as much as possible to have any direct interactions with other foreigners. This study also reflected that the student respondents in general had very limited exposure to English outside of the classroom. It was the unique cultural differences, as well as the other social predispositions that often resulted in these Japanese students' reluctance in using English more often for daily communication needs.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

- *“Why do my students become so shy and nervous when they need to speak English, both in and outside of the classroom?”*
- *“How can I help these students overcome their anxiety, and help them find English speaking a more enjoyable experience?”*
- *“Why are the Japanese students so passive, in their way of learning? Why are they so unwilling to take part in discussions?”*

These are some questions and challenges that I have been constantly facing as a teaching staff of the English-language library science programme at a university in Japan. I have been trying to find ways to motivate the students, to help them take part more actively in basic discussions, or even just to ‘chit chat’ with other foreign students on campus, without feeling embarrassed or being fearful of making mistakes in front of others. However, before such solutions are identified, I need to first find out the root causes of their ‘problems’, i.e., what attitudes they have towards the learning, as well as the daily use of the English language outside the formal learning environment. What are the social and culture factors behind such attitudes and their reluctance?

Background & Research Questions

English language learning and teaching are never separated from its social and cultural and educational contexts. Careful investigation of students’ attitudes and the root causes will help clarify the ways in which English education can be best adapted to suit the students’ needs and requirements. This study aims to contribute new information on the Japanese university students’ attitudes towards using English for daily communication purposes, via identifying different cultural and educational factors that are hindering students’ language proficiency and self-confidence. The following are the research questions of this study:

- (1) What are the relationships between self-confidence and their level of oral English proficiency amongst the student participants?
- (2) To what extent did the Japanese students experience the English-speaking culture or opportunities in their daily life outside the university?
- (3) How did students’ attitudes and perceptions affect the students’ motivation and attitudes towards English learning?

RESEARCH POPULATION

The participants of this study were third and fourth-year undergraduate students at the University of Tsukuba in Japan. These Japanese students were learning English as a foreign language, and they were all majoring in library and information science. A printed questionnaire (with both open and close-ended questions) was developed, and administered to the participants in June 2011 during their classes. The questionnaires were administered anonymously, with students not being required to identify themselves on the instrument. In all, a total number of 112 questionnaires were received, representing 24% of the entire undergraduate population at the Faculty of Library, Information and Media Science. Out of all 112 students surveyed, 60% were female, while the remaining 40% were male, with age ranging from 21 to 23 years. They all spent at least 8 to 10 years learning English in Japan. In fact, a majority of them (75.7%) have been learning English since junior high school (see Table 1).

Learning English Since:	No. of Respondents	%
Senior high school	2	1.8%
Junior high school	84	75.7%
Elementary school	21	18.9%
Kindergarten	2	1.8%
Unknown	2	1.8%

FINDINGS

Students' Perceptions of the English Language & English Learning

A large number of the student respondents found English to be a difficult language, but being important at the same time, especially for their future employment (see Tables 2 & 3). Meanwhile, many of them agreed to treat English as the international language, since English is so widely spoken outside Japan (see Table 4). Such results indicated that students viewed English being an increasingly important job skill in Japan that is facing increasing demands of internationalization. No doubt, with globalization and the role of Japan plays in the international market, English proficiency is naturally viewed as a desirable skill that will lead to better job opportunities after graduating from university. In fact, the results reflected that a majority of the Japanese students who have studied English for at least 8 years in Japan still have a difficult time in carrying out simple conversations with native English speakers. Reasons behind students' language difficulties and their lack of self-confidence will be discussed in the following sections (see Tables 2, 3 & 4).

(Table 2)			
Q. 6. Do you think English is important?			
<i>(multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)</i>			
	Male	Female	Total
Yes, I think English is very important.	27	34	61
Yes, I think English is only important for my future work.	11	16	27
Yes, I think English is only important in school & university.	3	9	12

(Table 3)			
Q. 7. What do you think of the English language?			
<i>(multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)</i>			
	Male	Female	Total
I think English is a very difficult language.	13	31	44
I think English is important for my future job/career.	13	20	33
I dislike/hate learning English, but I have to for my current area of study at university. And I will CONTINUE learning English even after university.	10	17	27

(Table 4)			
Q. 13. What do you think about English as the international language?			
<i>(multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)</i>			
	Male	Female	Total
I think it is logical to make English the international language, since English is so widely spoken in many parts of the world.	22	27	49
This is why I want learning English so much.	9	14	23
No comment.	8	12	20

English Learning Outside the University

Given the current education system is not performing adequately in Japan, and students in general lacked the necessary confidence and initiatives to converse directly with foreigners, a majority of them did not see the benefits and the need of attending a private language school outside the university. In fact, the results indicated that many students actually saw such private and small-class English teaching as a waste of time and money, as well as being too expensive (see Tables 5 & 6). Such results are supportive to Seki's finding (2004), indicating that, a majority of the Japanese students did not attend a private language school.¹ Seki further explained that the high tuition fees are probably the main reason why a majority of the students chose not to attend these private language schools 'more often'.²

¹ SEKI, Taeko. (2004) *Attitudes to and Motivation for Learning English in Japan: with Special Reference to First-Year University Students*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation. Institute of Education, University of Stirling, pp. 139.

² Ibid.

(Table 5) Q. 10. Apart from your University seminars & lectures, how often you speak English in a week? (n = 108)			
	Male	Female	Total
Not so often. Because I am NOT so confident to speak English.	22	35 ³	57 (52.8%)
Never! I just dislike/hate speaking English.	6 ⁴	11	17 (15.7%)
Not so often. Because I feel embarrassed & worry that other Japanese people might laugh at me.	7	4	11 (10.2%)
Never! Because of other reasons.	2 ⁵	8 ⁶	10 (9.3%)
Not so often. Because I feel embarrassed & worry that other native English speakers/foreigners might laugh at me.	2	5	7 (6.5%)
Very often, almost every week.	3	3	6 (5.6%)

(Table 6) Q. 9. Are you currently taking any private English lessons (outside the University)? (multiple answers are accepted, only the top 4 most chosen responses are presented)			
	Male	Female	Total
No, I don't want to waste my time & money for private English lessons.	23	30	53
I want to take private English lessons, but I am already too busy with university assignments.	10	12	22
I want to take private English lessons, but private lessons are too expensive.	5	17	22
I think the English lessons/classes offered by the University are already good enough. There are no needs for extra lessons.	6	10	16

Difficulties in Learning English Faced by Japanese Students

In terms of difficulties faced by the Japanese students, not surprisingly, “Listening & conversation” was the most common response amongst the respondents (see Table 7). At the same time, most students indicated their desire for the ability to communicate effectively with the native speakers, i.e., including being able to engage in basic conversations, as well as having the ability to understand and be understood amongst foreigners. Unfortunately, results indicated that students lacked the necessary language proficiency, as well as the self-confidence to do so. According to Adachi (2009), *“it is not so common for Japanese people to communicate in any foreign language on the street. Japanese students also seldom have any personal intercultural contacts with foreigners, experts for their foreign teachers.”*⁷ Gudykunst

³ Although not required, one of the female respondents gave reason why she did not need to speak English, *“Almost all people whom I met are Japanese, so I do have the opportunity to speak English.”*

⁴ Although not required, one male respondent also gave reason explaining why he did not need to speak English, in addition to disliking the language, i.e., *“I don't have to”*.

⁵ One male respondent gave reason for not having to speak English, i.e., because he had *“NO opportunity”* to do so.

⁶ Some of the female respondents provided reasons for *“Never”* having to speak English outside of the university lectures, and they are as follows:

- *“I don't have to speak English, because my friends are Japanese.”*
- *“I don't have opportunity.”*
- *“Because I do not have the opportunity.”*
- *“There are not the opportunities.”*
- *“I'm learning English in class.”*
- *“I'm busy with job finding.”*
- *“時間がないから = Because I have no time.”*

⁷ ADACHI, Rie. (2009) “Motivation of English Learning and Intercultural Communication: a Case of Japanese College Students.” *Bulletin of Universities and Institutes*, Vol. 37, pp. 123. (119-143).

(1998) further explains that the Japanese have a collective culture and use high-context communication, and they have a comparatively homogeneous community.⁸ That leads them to use Japanese style communication strategies most of the time, and they end up having difficulties making people from other cultures understand.⁹ Another reason for their lack of self-confidence could be a result of a lack of practice. Pease (2006) explains that students memorize English vocabulary, learn grammar, and translate passages from the textbook in much the same ways as ancient Latin text was studied¹⁰ (see Tables 7, 8 & 9). As highlighted by Ohtaka (1996), the need for English phonetic training is not actually practiced in the classrooms in Japan for the following reasons:

- (1) grammar translation instruction is emphasized for entrance examination;
- (2) actual opportunities of speaking outside of the classroom are not increasing;
- (3) Japanese English educators have low confidence in their own English pronunciation;
- (4) English instructional theory is underdeveloped.¹¹

(Table 7)			
Q. 15. Which is/are the most DIFFICULT aspect(s) of the English language? (multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)			
	Male	Female	Total
Listening & conversation.	25	29	54
Grammar vocabulary.	14	28	42
Writing.	15	14	29
(Table 8)			
Q. 16. Which is/are the most IMPORTANT aspect(s) of the English language to you? (multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)			
	Male	Female	Total
I want the native speakers & other foreigners to understand me well, without causing confusions.	19	34	53
Basic pronunciation & correct accent is important, but correct pronunciation is almost impossible.	17	22	39
Pronunciation & the correct accent are very important to me & I think I could achieve that by hard work.	7	12	19
(Table 9)			
Q. 17. What is/are most important English task(s) for you? (multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)			
	Male	Female	Total
Basic able to listen & understand English native speakers & other foreigners.	21	30	51
Basic conversations with English native speakers & other foreigners.	17	32	49
Being able to read newspapers & academic journals.	17	20	37

Students' Desire in Studying Aboard

The survey results also reflected that for most students, studying abroad is not something they would likely consider in their near future. Only a very small number of the respondents (mostly male) indicated that they planned to go overseas to further their studies. According to the *Japan Times Weekly* (2011), the number of Japanese

⁸ GUDYKUNST, W.B. (1998) *Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication*. (3rd ed.) Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.

⁹ KNOWER, R. (2002) "Japanese Communication in Intercultural Encounters: the Barrier of Status-Related Behavior." *The International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 26, pp. 339-361.

¹⁰ PEASE, Eleanor J. (2006) *The Role of Affect in Japanese Adolescents Learning English*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation Walden University, pp. 56.

¹¹ OHTAKA, H. (1996) "English Speech Sounds Education in Japan – Its History and a Prospect." *K.G. Studies in English*, Vol. 25, pp. 87-111.

students studying abroad has been falling.¹² The results also indicated that in terms of planning to study overseas, male students seemed to outnumber their female counterparts (see Table 10). According to the explanations provided by Nishio (2001), both Japanese male and female students were equally concerned about the lack of language proficiency, but female students tended to have more concerns than males, and could be related to indeterminateness. According to Nishio (2001), the issues concerning the female students, especially among single female students with financial support from their parents, were whether they would marry and their parents' continued well-being and happiness. In addition, the age concern also worsened their worries about whether they would find a job, and whether they would be able to have children later.¹³

(Table 10) Q. 26. Do you plan to continue your education in an English speaking country, e.g., America, Australia, New Zealand, USA or Canada? (n = 107)			
	Male	Female	Total
No, I don't. If I want to continue my education, it will be in Japan.	18	42	60 (56%)
Yes, I have thought about it, but don't know exactly when.	6	11	17 (15.9%)
I don't know.	8	8	16 (15%)
Yes, I am planning to go very soon	4	0	4 (3.7%)
Yes, I plan to go in a few years	7	3	10 (9.3%)

Japanese Students & Their Anxiety in Speaking English

The results indicated that a majority (59%) of them (and mostly female) only got to speak English a few times a year. On the other hand, 26% of them said that they would only talk to Japanese-speaking people. Meanwhile, 9.9% of them said that when foreigners wanted to talk to them, they would pretend “not understanding English”. The results also indicated that the female students apparently had more contacts with the native-English speakers in comparison to the male students. Not surprisingly, only a small number of them got to speak English on a weekly or daily basis. According to Nitta (2004), her description of Japanese young people attending a Japanese school stated that they study all subjects in Japanese with Japanese teachers dispatched by the Japanese government, speak Japanese at home with their parents, and socialize primarily with other Japanese outside of school¹⁴ (see Table 5). Such results further verify the notion that students' language deficiency and their lack of self-confidence were a result of a lack of practice (see Tables 5 & 11).

Shyness and Discomfort in Speaking English in Public Places

¹² “Fear of Studying Abroad.” (8th January, 2011) *The Japan Times Weekly*. Available at: <http://weekly.japantimes.co.jp/ed/fear-of-studying-abroad>

¹³ NISHIO, A. (2001) *Issues Facing Japanese Postgraduate Students Studying at the University of London with Special Reference to Gender*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

¹⁴ NITTA, K. (2004) *Developing Communicative Competence in Japanese Fourth-Grade English Language Learners*. Dissertation Abstracts International. (UMI NO. 9315947), pp. 111.

(Table 11) Q. 20. Have you ever talked with the native English speakers or foreigners outside the classroom? (n = 111)			
	Male	Female	Total
Yes, but only a few times a year.	3	63	66 (59.4%)
Never, I prefer to only to talk to people who can speak Japanese.	1	28	29 (26.1%)
Never, when native speakers or foreigners want to talk to me, I pretend that I do NOT understand English.	8	3	11 (9.9%)
Yes, I talk to every week	3	1	4 (3.6%)
Yes, very often, almost everyday	1	0	1 (0.9%)

Not surprisingly, the results indicated that students in general felt uncomfortable (embarrassed) and lacked the necessary self-confidence in speaking English in public places. Despite of that, a large number of them indicated that they would still ‘give it a try to help’, even though they did feel not so confident. Meanwhile, a small group of them indicated that would only speak English when they are not amongst Japanese friends. 3 respondents indicated that they did not have the opportunity to speak English in public places (see Tables 5 & 12). Hayashi and Cherry (2004) also reported similar risk-avoidance tendency amongst the Japanese students.¹⁵ According to them, Japanese students tend to show a more ‘authority-oriented’ method of learning, and may be because they are more familiar with this ‘traditional’ style of learning. The teacher is considered the source of knowledge in Confucian heritage, thus, students strongly rely on the teacher’s instructions and beliefs. In other words, instead of initiating their own learning activities, Japanese students would rather wait passively for the teacher to provide the answers. *“This may be explained in cultural terms as Japanese collectivism, or a general shyness and unwillingness among Japanese students to take risks. The reluctance to be more active, particularly during speaking activities, has been reported by researchers, and is clearly at odds with the communicative approach”*.¹⁶

(Table 12) Q. 22 Have you ever talked English at the public places? (n = 105)			
	Male	Female	Total
No, I’m not confident to speak English at public places, when I see foreigners in public, I try to walk away.	15	19	34 (32.4%)
Yes, when foreigners ask me for directions or other information, I speak English to them, although I am not confident.	14	19	33 (31.3%)
No, I feel embarrassed to speak English at public places, I only speak English in public, when I am not amongst Japanese friends.	4	13	17 (16.2%)
Yes, I feel confident in talking English in public places. I only talk to foreigners when they come to talk to me first.	7	7	14 (13.3%)
Yes, I feel confident talking English in public places. When I see a foreigner in public places, I go to them & ask if they need any help.	2	2	4 (3.8%)
Others	0	3 ¹⁷	3 (2.9%)

¹⁵ HAYASHI, Masato & Donald CHERRY. (2004) “Japanese Students’ Learning Style Preferences in the EFL Classroom.” *Bulletin of Hokuriku University*, Vol. 28, pp. 83-93.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 90.

¹⁷ Others:

- (1) “NO opportunity to do so.”
- (2) “NO, I haven’t had such a chance.”
- (3) “I have never been to public places, where I must speak English.”

Reasons Behind Students' Anxiety When Speaking English

With reference to students' anxiety and embarrassment when facing English-speaking situations, the most common response was that they were "afraid to make mistakes in public when speaking English. Japanese students do not want to make mistakes & cause confusions in public..... In Japan, it is rude to leave someone in confusion & not being able to answer their questions". The second and the third most common responses were that students were "too shy to speak English" and they worry "that other English native speakers & foreigners will laugh at them" (see Table 13). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), speaking publicly in the target language is extremely anxiety-provoking'.¹⁸ McCoy (1979) also mentioned that, "students frequently enter the second language classroom with fears and anxieties".^{19 20} Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that anxious students tend to fear making mistakes while speaking and feel frustrated about their inability to present their ideas and express themselves in the target language.²¹ In addition to risk avoidance, Price (1991) also pointed out that, "their fear of being laughed at" or "making fools of themselves" were the major factors that made students anxious. Price (1991) also reported that students worry about their non-native accent and making pronunciation errors.²² According to Hayashi and Cherry (2004), "the face that making mistakes in front of others is considered to be especially embarrassing in Japanese culture may at least partly account for this concern with accuracy".²³ Both Horwitz (1986) and Price (1991) also reported that Japanese students in general tend to suffer from a high level of anxiety - as they first need to translate ideas and construct sentences in English within a limited time is a significant factor in inducing anxiety.^{24 25} Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) further explained that foreign-language anxiety is closely associated with the inability to present one's idea and opinions, which can undermine self-esteem and threaten one's self-image.²⁶ In addition, such inability to pronounce words correctly or use correct grammar can lead to negative evaluation by others, and the inability to comprehend spoken questions can lead to confusion and embarrassment about how to respond or act.^{27 28 29}

¹⁸ HORWITZ, E., HORWITZ, M. & COPE, J. (1986) "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 2, pp. 125-132.

¹⁹ DONLEY, P. (1999) "Language Anxiety and How to Manage it: What Educators Need to Know." *Mosaic*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 3-9.

²⁰ MCCOY, I. (1879) "Means to Overcome the Anxieties of Second Language Learner." *Foreign Language Annals*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 185.

²¹ HORWITZ, E., HORWITZ, M. & COPE, J. (1986) "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 2, pp. 125-132.

²² PRICE, M. (1991) "The Subjective Experience of Foreign Language Anxiety: Interviews with Highly Anxious Students." In E. HORWITZ & D. YOUNG (Eds.) *Language Anxiety*. Englewood, Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, pp. 101-108.

²³ HAYASHI, Masato & Donald CHERRY. (2004) "Japanese Students' Learning Style Preferences in the EFL Classroom." *Bulletin of Hokuriku University*, Vol. 28, pp. 85. (83-93)

²⁴ HORWITZ, E.K., M.B. HORWITZ & Jo Ann COPE. (1986) "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 2, pp. 125-132.

²⁵ PRICE, M. (1991) "The Subjective Experience of Foreign Language Anxiety: Interviews with Highly Anxious Students." In E. HORWITZ & D. YOUNG (Eds.) *Language Anxiety*. Englewood, Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, pp. 101-108.

²⁶ HORWITZ, E.K., M.B. HORWITZ & Jo Ann COPE. (1986) "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 2, pp. 125-132.

²⁷ HORWITZ, E.K. & D. YOUNG. (Ed.) (1991) *Language Anxiety: from Theory and Research to Classroom Implications*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

(Table 13)			
Q. 28. Why do you think so many Japanese university students are so afraid OR become very nervous to speak English both in & outside of classroom? (multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)			
	Male	Female	Total
Because they are afraid to make mistakes in public when speaking English. Japanese people do NOT want to make mistakes & cause confusions in public.			
Because for Japanese people to say something to someone, they have to ensure that everything has to be correct including regardless it is English or Japanese.	13	27	40
In Japan, it is rude to leave someone in confusion & not being able to answer their questions.			
Because they are too shy to speak English.	13	18	31
Because they worry that other English native speakers & foreigners will laugh at them.	10	15	25

According to Koba et al. (2000), Japanese students tend to have anxiety about speaking in front of other students, and they are likely to be afraid of ‘taking risks’. They often do not speak until they are called on.³⁰

Methods of Self-Learning Preferred Amongst Student Respondents

When students were asked what learning activities they undertook for improving their English skills on their own, a majority preferred a more passive and non-communicative style of learning, i.e., reading books and magazines in English. By contrast, out of all 112 respondents, only 4 of them would choose to converse directly with the native English-speaking foreigners for enhancing their oral skills (see Table 14). Koba (2000) also pointed out that English teaching in Japan still focuses on grammar and translation exercises, although there is an increasing demand to improve communicative competence. Given the historical and social contexts, if interactions are not fostered and encouraged within the classroom, it will rarely occur outside the classroom.³¹

(Table 14)			
Q. 21. What are you doing to improve your English skills? (multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)			
	Male	Female	Total
Read English books, newspapers & magazines.	18	31	49
Watching English movies OR TV programmes.	12	19	31
Do nothing. I'm too lazy to learn English.	8	16	24
Converse with native English speakers or foreigners	1	3	4

²⁸ HORIWITZ, E.K. (2001) “Language Anxiety and Achievement.” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 21, pp. 112-126.

²⁹ YOUNG, D.J. (1999) *Affect in Foreign Language and Second Language Learning: a Practical Guide to Creating a Low-Anxiety Classroom Atmosphere*. Boston, Mass.: McGraw-Hill College.

³⁰ KOBAYASHI, N., N. OGAWA & D. WILKINSON. (2000) “Using the Community Language Learning Approach to Cope with Language Anxiety.” *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 11, pp. 1-5. Available at: <http://iteslj.org/articles/koba-CLL.html>

³¹ Ibid.

(Table 15)			
Q. 29. What do you think could help Japanese university students to overcome their fear to speak English? (multiple answers are accepted, only the top 3 most chosen responses are presented)			
	Male	Female	Total
Students should find their own ways to learn since everyone's learning style, pace & interests are different.	10	21	31
Japanese schools/university should hire more native English teachers to help students (one-to-one or small group) with their English skills.	11	18	29
Don't know & don't care.	8	10	18

SUMMARY & DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Parallel to McConnell's statement (1999), the results highlighted that students felt nervous and embarrassed when they had to speak English in public places, as they worried about making mistakes in the presence of others. In addition to their fear of being ridiculed, Japanese people often face difficulties in expressing their opinions. In fact, many researchers pointed out that Japanese people in general are not used to people or things which are different from the homogenous Japanese norm. Japanese people are also not comfortable with uncertainty.³² As explained by Aiga (1990), expressing one's opinions or ideas or participating in group discussions is not common in Japan. It is believed that this is closely related to the Japanese culture, where it is not the custom to express one's opinion. For example, the old Japanese proverb says "go along with others"³³, and they especially will not express their opinion to someone of higher status, e.g., their teachers.^{34,35} Based on Hayashi study (1997), when the Japanese students were asked what made a good student, they responded that good students do not interrupt the procedure of the class and should be quiet.³⁶ Kindaichi (1978) also reported similar findings, i.e., Japan's linguistic homogeneity, and group oriented culture could make foreign language learning difficult. Japanese people are reluctant to offer opinions, debate, or stand out for either making a mistake or being more capable than their peers, even in their mother tongue, let alone in a foreign language.³⁷

³² PEASE, Eleanor J. (2006) *The Role of Affect in Japanese Adolescents Learning English*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation. Walden University, pp. 39.

³³ AIGA, Y. (1990) "Is Japanese English Education Changing?" *Cross Currents*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 139-146.

³⁴ HALL, E. (1959) *The Silent Language*. New York, N.Y.: Doubleday.

³⁵ GUDYKUNST, W.B. (1997) "Cultural Variability in Communication." *Communication Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 327-349.

³⁶ HAYASHI, M. (1997) "Cross-Cultural Conflicts in the EFL Classrooms in Japan." *Bulletin of Hokuriku University*, Vol. 21, pp. 151-159.

³⁷ On one occasion (in May, 2012), I asked a third-year female student why Japanese students are so reluctant to speak out in class, and she gave the following explanation in her own words:

- "Firstly, Japanese tend to reserve from stating their opinion till they think that they understand 100%. We tend to aim to perfect in public (I mean, in front of another person). So, if foreigners speak to us in English, most of the time we would remain silent because we are left in confusion. Secondly, we are raised with telling, "You shouldn't do things that spoil the harmony among the members" or "Stand out from the crowd and you just invite trouble for yourself." So most Japanese dislike to standout. That's why they don't tell voluntarily. Thirdly, people tend to extremely dislike being humiliated (we think making mistakes in front of another person is typical of that) in the cultural climate of Japan. We become extremely frightened because of that fear. Fourthly, I'm in this case, they might have small vocabulary or cannot find relevant words to express something they want to say, and we are left in confusion. As stated above, we tend to aim at perfection. So we become very nervous because we think of ourselves as

With reference to their language-learning environment, access to proficient English users outside the university is often found difficult. Many did not have an opportunity to study or to use English outside the classroom environment, as most of these Japanese students are living in an entirely Japanese-speaking context, and they rarely get to meet English speakers on a daily basis (see Tables 5 & 11).

With reference to the regular learning mode amongst the Japanese students, Seki (2004) explained that the teaching of more communicative skills, such as speaking and listening, and more student-oriented learning, such as group study and creative work is indeed very rare in Japan. In addition, a majority of the English teachers are Japanese. Though this varies with the university, smaller and more communicative classes (usually taught by native English speakers) are usually optional and accept only limited numbers of students in any year.³⁸ Consequently, Japanese students tend to speak and understand English based on this Japanese communication patterns (i.e., including their different choice of vocabularies, sentence structures and pronunciation, etc.)³⁹ – all these are causing difficulties for the Japanese people to communicate with any non-Japanese speakers. As the survey results indicated that the biggest problems with English for these Japanese students are listening and conversation, followed by grammar and vocabulary (see Table 7).

For most Japanese students, using English could be an intimidating experience, which they felt, with discomfort, high anxiety and low confidence, embarrassment, as well as a lack of initiatives for direct oral communications with foreigners. And self-confidence is related to self-esteem, self-efficacy, and even anxiety.⁴⁰ In addition, their fear of negative reactions, loss of face, and feelings of incompetence and helplessness amongst their peers are the other compelling reasons for the students to remain silent or to shy away from any English-speaking situations.

imperfect.

³⁸ SEKI, Taeko. (2004) *Attitudes to and Motivation for Learning English in Japan*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation. Institute of Education, University of Stirling, pp. 157.

³⁹ KATSUMATA, Eriko. (2003) *Re-Contextualizing English as a Foreign Language Instruction: the Case of English Instruction in Japan*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation. Faculty of Claremont Graduate University and San Diego State University.

⁴⁰ PEASE, Eleanor J. (2006) *The Role of Affect in Japanese Adolescents Learning English*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation. Walden University, pp. 62.

CONCLUSION

The current results are in parallel to findings of other studies that were carried out 10 to 20 years ago, meaning that no significant changes have been made by the Japanese Government for improving the situations in the past decades. The Japanese education policy has proven to be ineffective, because it still merely includes basic grammar, inadequate, and rarely includes conversation. Implications for the students are that they seriously need to increase their contacts with both the English language and especially with native speakers outside the classroom. Because the English language is an essential tool to communicate with other people around the world and obtain information over the Internet. Avoiding English entirely is not a realistic option for these Japanese students, because English language competency is essential to the Japanese, as both the economic globalization and international trade will no doubt continue to expand. Such fearful attitudes about speaking English amongst the Japanese students need to be changed.

The logo for the International Association for Language Acquisition (iafor) is centered on the page. It consists of the lowercase letters "iafor" in a light blue, serif font. The logo is surrounded by a large, stylized circular graphic composed of several overlapping, curved lines in shades of light blue and light red, creating a sense of motion or a globe.

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(Appendix I)

**Questionnaire on Attitudes Towards English Learning
 Amongst Japanese University Students**

Questionnaire Designed by: Patrick LO
Date: 14th June, 2012

Notes:

- You may write your answers in either Japanese or English.

Questionnaire	
1.	I am: 1. Male 2. Female
2.	Year Group – I am a: 1. First-Year Student 2. Second-Year Student 3. Third-Year Student 4. Fourth-Year Student 5. Others: _____
3.	Age: I am _____ years old
4.	I have learnt English for _____ years.
5.	I have been learning English since: 1. Kindergarten 2. Elementary school 3. Junior high school 4. Senior high school
6.	Do you think English is important? (multiple answers are accepted) 1. Yes, I think English is very important 2. No, I don't think English is important at all 3. Yes, I think English is only important in school & university 4. Yes, I think English is only important for my future work 5. Yes, I think English is important for our daily life 6. I don't know & don't care 7. No comment

7.	<p>What do you think of the English language? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I think English is a very difficult language2. I think English is easy to learn3. I think learning English is fun4. I dislike/hate learning English, but I have to for my current area of study at university. And I will CONTINUE learning English even after university5. I dislike/hate learning English, but I have to for my current area of study at university. And I will STOP learning English as soon as I graduate from university6. I think English is only important at school/university, but I will never get to use English once I graduate7. I think English is important for my future job/career
8.	<p>Why do you want to learn English? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Because learning English is fun & I enjoy it2. Because I want to participate in English-speaking circles/clubs at the University3. Because the University force me to learn English, otherwise, I cannot graduate4. Because I want to be able to understand English TV & movies5. Because I want to be able to read English novels & newspapers6. Because I want to be able to participate in classes taught in English7. Because I want to be able to give presentations & ask questions in English8. Because I want to be able to write reports & articles in English9. Because I want to be able to understand, talk to & interact with the native English speakers & other foreigners10. Because my professor CANNOT speak Japanese, hence, I have to speak English to him/her11. Because my friends/boyfriend/girlfriend do not speak Japanese, hence, I have to speak English to him/her

	<p>12. Because I want to go to summer schools/international internship in overseas</p> <p>13. Because I want to go to graduate schools (masters/PhD) in overseas</p> <p>14. Because all my friends & classmates are learning English, I am just following the trend</p> <p>15. Because other people say English is important, so I learn it. If people say Chinese is important, I would learn Chinese also</p> <p>16. Because English is very important for my future job/career</p> <p>17. Because I want to teach my own children English</p> <p>18. I want to learn, but I don't know why</p> <p>19. Other _____ reasons: _____ _____ (You may give your answer in either Japanese OR English)</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Are you currently taking any private English lessons (outside the University) (multiple answers are accepted)</p> <p>1. Yes, & I am now paying \$ _____yen / month for private lessons</p> <p>2. Yes, I am, but my English lessons are FREE of charge</p> <p>3. No, I don't want to waste my time & money for private English lessons</p> <p>4. I want to take private English lessons, but I cannot find the right teacher & the right school</p> <p>5. I want to take private English lessons, but I am already too busy with university assignments</p> <p>6. I want to take private English lessons, but private lessons are too expensive</p> <p>7. I think the English lessons/classes offered by the University are already good enough. There are no needs for extra lessons</p> <p>8. I think the English courses taught by the local Japanese lecturers/professors here are already enough. There are no needs for extra lessons</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Apart from your University seminars & lectures, how often you speak English in a week?</p> <p>1. Very often, almost every week</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Not so often. Because I am NOT so confident to speak English3. Not so often. Because I feel embarrassed & worry that other Japanese people might laugh at me4. Not so often. Because I feel embarrassed & worry that other native English speakers/foreigners might laugh at me5. Never! I just dislike/hate speaking English6. Never! Because of other reasons, e.g.: _____ _____ (You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)
11.	<p>Do you think learning English is fun?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. NO! I think learning English is boring2. NO! I think learning English is frustrating3. Yes, I think learning English is fun & interesting4. I think learning English is sometimes fun, but could be boring at times5. I think learning English is sometimes fun, but could be difficult at times6. I think learning English is sometimes fun, but could be frustrating at times7. I don't know8. Other thoughts: _____ _____ (You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)

<p>12.</p>	<p>Do you think learn English is important for your future? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I don't think English is important for my future, because I do NOT want to live or study outside of Japan 2. Yes, English is important for my future, because English is the second language in Japan 3. Yes, English is important for my future, because I want to continue my education in overseas 4. Yes, English is important for my future, because I want to work in overseas 5. Yes, English is important for my future, because I want to marry/fall in love with a foreigner, perhaps, a British or American person 6. Yes, English is important for my future, because of: _____ <i>(You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)</i> 7. I don't know & I don't care
<p>13.</p>	<p>What do you think about English as the international language?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think it is logical to make English the international language, since English is so widely spoken in many parts of the world 2. I think they should make Japanese the international language instead. Everyone outside of Japan should also learn to speak Japanese 3. This is why I want learning English so much 4. This is why I HATE learning English so much 5. No comment 6. Other _____ thoughts: _____ <i>(You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)</i>
<p>14.</p>	<p>Which is/are the most INTERESTING aspect(s) of the English language? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grammar & vocabulary 2. Listening & conversation 3. Reading

	<p>4. Writing</p> <p>5. Being able to understand & talk to native English speakers or other foreigners is most interesting</p> <p>6. I do NOT think English is interesting at all</p> <p>7. I don't know & don't care</p>
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15.	<p>Which is/are the most DIFFICULT aspect(s) of the English language? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <p>1. Grammar & vocabulary</p> <p>2. Listening & conversation</p> <p>3. Writing</p> <p>4. Reading</p> <p>5. Being able understand & talk to native English speakers is most difficult</p> <p>6. No, I think English is very easy</p> <p>7. I think grammar, vocabulary, wiring listening, conversation & talking to native speakers are all very difficult</p> <p>8. All of aspects listed above</p> <p>9. I don't know & don't care</p>
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16.	<p>Which is/are the most IMPORTANT aspect(s) of the English language to you? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <p>1. Basic pronunciation & correct accent is important, but correct pronunciation is almost impossible</p> <p>2. Pronunciation & the correct accent are very important to me & I think I could achieve that by hard work</p> <p>3. I want the native speakers & other foreigners to understand me well, without causing confusions</p> <p>4. Pronunciation is not important. I only need to understand & write English well</p> <p>5. It is NOT important at all. I will stop learning English completely once I finish university</p> <p>6. Other _____ aspects:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(You may give your answer in Japanese or English)</i></p>
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17.	<p>What is/are the most important English task(s) for you? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <p>1. Being able to listen & understand English native speakers & other foreigners</p> <p>2. Basic conversations with English native speakers & other foreigners</p> <p>3. Being able to write long essays in English</p>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Being able to read newspapers & academic journals 5. Being able to write short & clear emails to your professors & other non-Japanese students without causing confusions 6. Being able to understand the basic things (e.g., new vocabularies) in English 7. Being able to understand English movies & TV. 8. Being able to understand classes taught in English 9. Others: _____ <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)</i></p>
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18.	<p>Which statement best expresses your opinion about English?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I need to learn how to socialize with my overseas classmates 2. I need to communicate my teachers/professors, because some of them do NOT speak Japanese 3. It is important for my current university education 4. Just a lesson that fills my time 5. Learning English is fun, and it can help me find a good job once I graduate 6. Learning English is important, as I want to work for an international company in future 7. Learning English is important, as I want to find a job in overseas in future 8. Learning English is frustrating, but really useful for my current university studies 9. Learning English is frustrating, but really useful for my future career 10. Don't know & don't care 11. Others: _____ <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)</i></p>
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19.	<p>Have you ever been to any English-speaking countries, e.g., America/USA, Canada, UK, or Australia?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, I have been to _____ for _____ times 2. Not yet, but plan to in the future 3. Never & not interested. I prefer to stay in Japan 4. Never, I prefer to go to other Asian countries
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20.	<p>Have you ever talked with the English native speakers or foreigners outside the classroom?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, very often, almost every day 2. Yes, but only a few times a year
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Never, I prefer to only to talk to people who can speak Japanese 4. Yes, I talk with them almost every week 5. Never, when native speakers or foreigners want to talk to me, I pretend that I do NOT understand English
21.	<p>What are you doing to improve your English skills? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using online English Website sites, do online chatting with the native speakers or foreigner via Internet, etc. 2. Use online English learning resources (e.g., BBC English Learning Website) 3. Read English books, newspapers & magazines 4. Listen to English radio programmes 5. Watching English movies or TV programmes 6. Converse with English native speakers or foreigners 7. Do nothing. I'm too lazy to learn English 8. Others: _____ <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)</i></p>
22.	<p>Have you ever talked English at the public places?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, I feel confident talking English in public places. When I see foreigners in public places, I away go to them & ask if they need any help 2. Yes, I feel confident talking English in public places. I only talk to foreigners when they come to talk to me first 3. Yes, when foreigners ask me for directions or other information, I speak English to them, although I am not confident 4. No, I'm not confident to speak English at public places, when I see foreigners in public, I try to walk away 5. No, I feel embarrassed to speak English at public places, I only speak English in public, when I am not amongst Japanese friends 6. Others: _____ <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)</i></p>
23.	<p>Do you have friends/relative living who can only speak English? (including friends living outside of Japan)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, I have friends/relatives who can speak English only & I contact them regularly 2. Yes, I have friends/relatives who can speak English only, but I never I contact them 3. No, all my friends & relatives can speak Japanese 4. I don't know
24.	<p>Do you like listen to foreign (e.g., American or British or Australia) songs/music?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, I always listen to English songs, although I do NOT understand the lyrics in

	<p>English</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Yes, I always listen to English songs, because I can understand the English lyrics well 3. Sometimes 4. Yes, but I still prefer Japanese songs 5. No, I only listen to Japanese songs
25.	<p>Do you like watching English-language movies or TV programmes?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, I like watching English movies/TV, but they have to be dubbed in Japanese 2. Yes, I like watch movies/TV in original English language, but it has to have Japanese subtitles 3. Yes, I like watching movies/TV in original English language, even without Japanese subtitle 4. Yes, but I still prefer Japanese movies/TV 5. No, I only watch Japanese movies/TV
26.	<p>Do you plan to continue your education in an English speaking country, e.g., America, Australia, New Zealand, USA or Canada?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, I am planning to go very soon 2. Yes, I plan to go in a few years 3. Yes, I have thought about it, but don't know exactly when 4. No, I don't. If I want to continue my education, it will be in Japan 5. I don't know

27.	<p>Would you want to marry people, which can only speak English to you?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, if he is the right person, language barrier is not a problem for me 2. This foreigner will have to learn to speak Japanese first 3. I don't know 4. No, I don't want. I only want to marry someone who can speak Japanese
28.	<p>Why do you think so many Japanese university students are so afraid or become very nervous to speak English both in & outside of classroom? (multiple answers are accepted)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Because they worry that other Japanese people will laugh at them 2. Because they worry that other English native speakers & foreigners will laugh at them 3. Because they worry that both Japanese people & also English native speakers/foreigners will laugh at them 4. Because they are afraid to make mistakes in public when speaking English. Japanese people do NOT want to make mistakes & cause confusions in public. Because for Japanese people to say something to someone, they have to ensure that everything has to be correct including regardless it is English or Japanese. In Japan, it is rude to leave

	<p>someone in confusion & not being able to answer their questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Because their English pronunciation is very poor, & English native speakers/foreigners might NOT understand them. Japanese students are unable to clarify themselves if confusions are caused 6. Because they are too shy to speak English 7. Because they are too embarrassed to speak English 8. Don't know 9. Other reasons: <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(You may give your answer in Japanese OR English)</i></p>
29.	<p>What do you think could help Japanese university students to overcome their fear to speak English? <i>(multiple answers are accepted)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students should take private English lessons to make improvements on their own 2. Japanese schools/university should hire more native English teachers to help students (one-to-one or small group) with their English skills 3. The university/libraries should buy more English learning resources (e.g., books, CDs, AV, etc.) for students to learn on their own 4. Students should make efforts to go to English-speaking clubs to learn from other foreign students 5. Students should find their own ways to learn since everyone's learning style, pace & interests are different 6. Don't know & don't care 7. No comment

