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The Effectiveness of English Teaching in Japanese Elementary Schools: Measured by Proficiency Tests Administered to Seventh-year Students

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Abstract ■ The effectiveness of early English education was investigated in this study to determine if English should be taught formally in Japanese public elementary schools. We administered English tests and questionnaires to 1466 elementary school students in 2004 and 2005. The results showed significant differences between the English-education-experienced and non-experienced students and indicated positive effects of early English education. Although we confirmed the effects, some researchers claim that the effects may diminish at the junior high school level. To examine the above claim, we conducted a proficiency test and gave questionnaires to the seventh-year students of two junior high schools in 2006. As most of the students of the two elementary schools, at which we had conducted our research for the previous two years, entered the two junior high schools, the results of our new research gave us follow-up data on how the English ability of these students changed. The results showed a significant difference between the English-education-experienced at elementary schools and non-experienced and also between the experienced outside of school and non-experienced. It was also found that early English education helps to enhance students' interest toward English and facilitates learning motivation toward English after entering junior high school.

Keywords ■ elementary school, English learning motivation, English teaching effects, junior high school, proficiency tests, questionnaires.



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Introduction

As the role of English as an international language is expanding in the world, English education is spreading and children are starting to study English at earlier ages in many Asian countries. The importance of English is recognized not only in Malaysia and Singapore, where English is ESL (English as a second language), but also in East Asia countries, where English is EFL (English as a foreign language). In South Korea, English education at elementary school started in 1997 with third-grade students and the starting year will be lowered to first grade from 2008. In 2001 China also started English education from the third grade in elementary school in big cities. Taiwan formally started English learning from fifth grade in 2001 and from third grade in 2003.

In Japan, which is behind the other Asian countries in terms of English education, English education started at public elementary schools in 2002 as an optional rather than compulsory subject. Since it is optional, some elementary schools teach English on a regular basis while others do not. As a result, the number of English class hours differs from school to school; some schools offer two classes per a week while others do not offer any classes at all. On average, the English learning time of sixth graders was reported as 14.8 hours per year in 2006 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (<http://www.mext.go.jp>), meaning that, on average, students receive one English lesson per month.

Some researchers claim that teaching English to young children for this amount of time per year is not as effective as people expect. Little research on the effects of early English education on students' English ability, however, was carried out and data lacks on this issue. Reflecting this, in order to gain data to give a picture of early English education in Japan, we administered an English proficiency test to two groups of students (those who had English learning experience at elementary school and those who had not) and verified its effects by comparing them in this study.

In the following section, we will examine some of the literature dealing with the effects of early English education and clarify the purposes of this study.

Literature Review

Although little research has been done in Japan, some EFL countries have done research on the effects of early English education. For example,

according to the results of the Global Test for English Communication (GTEC) and an English assessment test given by the Benesse Corporation, there was a 40-point score gap (448.6 [in 2004] – 408.6 [in 2003]=40.0) between Korean tenth graders in 2003 and in 2004. While the gaps found between these two groups of Japanese and Chinese tenth graders during corresponding years were 7.9 points (408.0 [in 2004] - 400.1 [in 2003]=7.9) and 15.3 points (453.5 [in 2004] – 438.2 [in 2003]=15.3), respectively. We see that Korean tenth graders in 2004 attained a much higher score than that in 2003. Korean tenth graders in 2004 were the first students who had received English education in elementary school, while students of 2003 had not received it.

From the score gap observed between these two groups of students, the Korean government asserted the positive effects of early English education in Korea. This data is astonishing for Japanese English teachers, because the score gap between Japanese and Korean tenth graders was only 8.5 points in 2003, however, it increased to a shocking 40.6 points in 2004. These data are available at (http://fine.cab.infoweb.ne.jp/es/gtecmag/contents/vol15_1.htm).

Although little research has been done on the English ability of Japanese elementary school students, some exists. For example, the Chu-o Institute for Educational Research (2002) administered an English fluency test to 818 students from the third to sixth grade. The test included items of 'vocabulary', 'phonological recognition', 'letter recognition', and 'conversation comprehension'. The test revealed that the students with English learning experience inside and outside of school such as private conversation schools showed better test scores than the students without English experiences in 48 of the 50 total questions. Moreover, the test showed a statistical difference in score in 39 of the 40 vocabulary recognition questions.

Butler and Takeuchi (2006) conducted an examination based on the Junior STEP Bronze Test¹ with 4,231 fifth and sixth graders. Those students had received English lessons on a regular basis at their elementary school. They found that, on average, the test score exceeded 80% and concluded that basic aural communication ability was acquired by the students who had received English lessons regularly.

In our previous research, Katsuyama, Nishigaki and Wang (2006) administered an English proficiency test, which was modelled after the Junior STEP Bronze, Silver and Gold Test, to 1,466 students from the first to sixth grade. The examinees were two groups of students: one was

receiving English lessons regularly at school, the other was not. We found that the score gap between the two groups of students were statistically different indicating the positive effects of English learning at elementary school.

In addition, the students were divided into four groups: (1) students who had English instruction both at school and outside of school; (2) students who had English instruction only at school; (3) students who had instruction only outside of school; and (4) students who did not have any English instruction. Test scores among these groups were compared and the data showed that students in Group (1) outperformed students in the other three groups, and students in Groups (2) and (3) outperformed students in Group (4). Furthermore, the results outlined how the English ability of students for each of the four groups improves year by year from the first grade to the sixth grade. We found that the score gap among the groups became larger and larger along with the advancement of their English learning experiences.

Since the government discourages teachers giving English tests to elementary school students, some researchers carried out English tests to two groups of *junior high school students* to measure the effects of English education they had received at elementary school; one group was students who had received English lessons regularly at elementary school and the other was one that had not. Most of these studies revealed that the effects of English education at elementary school is *not* evident. For example, Shirahata (2002) gave English tests to 308 first-year students of junior high school eight months after they started learning English at junior high school. He found no statistically significant difference in the ability of phoneme discrimination, correctness of pronunciation or the number of words in a free talk between the two groups of students.

In other study, Takada (2004) gave listening tests to 90 first-year junior high school students and found no statistical difference between the two groups of students. Kajiro (2005) gave pronunciation tests to students eight months after they started learning English at junior high school and also found no statistical difference between the two groups. Kanatani, Ota and Kajiro (2005) found no statistical difference in conversational ability or positive attitude toward interaction in English between the two groups. From the results of these studies, it was concluded that the superiority of English ability which was observed in the students with English-learning experience would disappear after several months of English learning at junior high school. On the other hand, other researchers argue that the test

items given in these tests were not the targets of English education at elementary school; therefore the tests were not necessarily fair.

According to the guideline of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2001), the major aim of English education at elementary school in Japan is to have students acquire aural English ability. From the results of our research on the previous research (Katsuyama, Nishigaki and Wang, 2006), we identified the superiority of listening ability of elementary school students with English learning experience over those without experience. On the contrary, some English tests given to junior high school students did not show the effects of early English education: these results and our results contradict. Therefore, we wanted to conduct follow-up research to measure how English education the students had received in elementary school would affect their improvements in English listening skills afterward. We planned to administer an English proficiency test which focused on listening ability and to observe whether the ability of students without English experience would ‘catch up’ with students who acquired a certain amount of proficiency in elementary school or the abilities of students with experience in elementary school would remain superior.

Purposes of the Study

Based on the results of literature reviews, we set up the following objectives for the present research project:

1. To measure and validate the effectiveness of early English education given at elementary schools.
2. To measure and validate the effectiveness of early English education given outside of elementary schools.
3. To measure how early English education affects students’ inclination towards English and English learning

Method

Participants

As shown in Figure 1, a total of 274 seventh-grade students at two junior high schools participated in this study: Junior High School A (JH A) and Junior High School B (JH B). The sample size of JH A was 87; most of the students of JH A were graduates from either Elementary School A1 (ES A1) or Elementary School A2 (ES A2). Students from ES A1 received

English lessons about 72 hours from the second to the sixth year and students from ES A2 learned English for about 60 hours from their third to sixth years of school.

The sample size of JH B was 187 and most of them were graduates from Elementary School B1 (ES B1), Elementary School B2 (ES B2), or Elementary School B3 (ES B3). The students from these schools had taken four or fewer English classes per year: they received only occasional English lessons. Eight of the students had lived in a foreign country. The data of these students were excluded from the analysis. The imbalance of the sample sizes due to the physical limitation was unfortunate but unavoidable. But as we shall see later, this did not have a major effect on the conclusions of our study.

Our main interest in this study was to examine the possible effects caused by the differences in English learning experiences at the elementary school level on the students' achievements in English in junior high schools.

Chiba Prefecture close to Tokyo. Because both schools are located in similar residential areas, we assumed that the students' academic abilities are approximately the same.

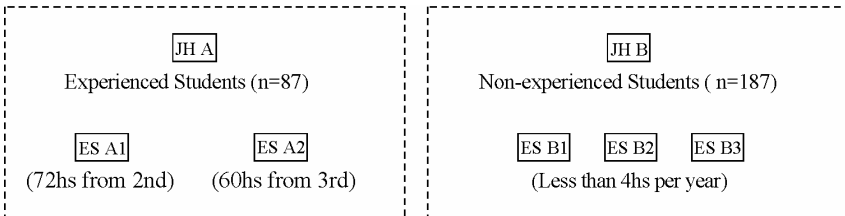


Figure 1. *Participants n=274*

Proficiency Test

To achieve our goal we created an English listening proficiency test. Since listening is the primary skill among the four language skills at the elementary school level, we believed that this would measure a significant part of students' English communication ability.

The test was made on the basis of the listening section of the STEP English Test, which has as much authority as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) in Japan.² We designed the test with five parts and all the questions in the test measured the listening comprehension skills with multiple choice questions. Each of the five parts in the test was composed of five to 15 questions as shown in Table 1. For instance, the ten questions

in Part I measured the student's vocabulary ability using a picture while the five questions on the last part (Part V) measured the students' listening comprehension skills of a few sentences.

Table 1. *Structure of Proficiency Test*

<i>Part</i>	<i>Question No.</i>	<i>Test Items</i>
I	10	words (with pictures)
II	15	sentences (with pictures)
III	10	questions and answers
IV	10	dialogues, questions and answers
V	5	sentences, questions and answers
TOTAL	50	

For each question in Part I, the examinees listened to three isolated words once and were supposed to select the right answer with the help of a picture. Figure 2 shows the picture used in Question 3 of Part I. In this problem the students were offered three possibilities, '1. Zebra; 2. Giraffe; 3. Hippo.'

To answer each problem in Part II, the examinees listened to three alternative descriptions of a picture twice. For instance, the description of question 23 as shown in Figure 3 was '1. Mother and son like coffee. They are drinking it and eating spaghetti; 2. Father likes hamburger steaks very much. But his daughter doesn't like hamburger steaks, so she is eating spaghetti; 3. Father, mother and two children are having dinner at a restaurant. They are eating some wonderful Japanese food.'

Questions in Part IV are of conversation type. Following a short dialogue, three choices were offered to the students. For example, question 36 was as follows.

A: How do you go to school, Paul?

B: I walk to school.

Question: Does Paul go to school by bus?

Answer: 1 Yes, he does; 2 He goes to school; 3 No, he doesn't.

We administered the same test at JH A in March and at JH B one week later. March is the last month of an academic year in Japan, thus the participants took the test after one year of English education at junior high school.

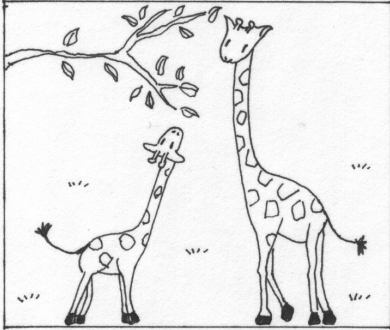


Figure 2. Part I: Question 3

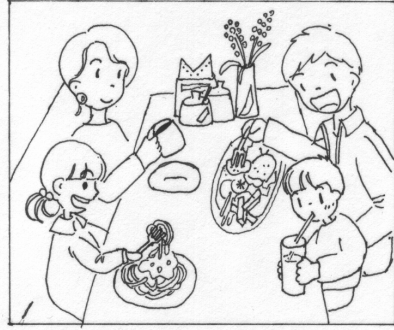


Figure 3. Part II: Question 23

Questionnaires

After the tests, we also administered a questionnaire to the participants, to gather auxiliary information for further analysis. The questions (set in Japanese) included the following items:

1. Do you study English or have you learned English at a juku (after-school cram schools) or private English conversation schools? If so, how long?
2. Have you ever lived in foreign countries? (excluding an experience of less than three months)
3. Have you ever made any overseas trips? If so, how many countries and which countries?
4. Did your kindergarten have English lessons regularly? If so, how many years?
5. Which elementary school did you graduate from?
6. Did you receive English lessons at your elementary school? If so, how many years?
7. Do you like English?
8. Do you want to study English more?
9. Do you think English ability is useful? If yes, why?
10. Was English learning at elementary school good?
11. Was English learning at elementary school useful in your English learning at junior high school?

Results and Discussion

Test Reliability

We calculated the Cronbach's α coefficient of reliability, a statistic measuring the extent to which a set of test items can be regarded as measuring

the single latent variable of students' ability (Cronbach 1951), and examined the internal coherence of the Proficiency Test. The α was found to be 0.86 and this shows that the test used in this study can be reasonably recognized as reliable.

Test Validity

As previously mentioned we developed a listening test for this study to measure the effectiveness of English instruction given to elementary school students. As is described in the guidelines announced by the government, English lessons given at elementary school focus on spoken English, not written English. Therefore the test was designed to specifically measure the students' receptive skills of aural English.

The test consists of five parts as shown in the METHOD section. Each part of the test measures listening comprehension in various question formats. We included all types of questions using 'when', 'which', 'what', 'where', 'who' and 'how'. Questions which must be answered with 'yes/no' were included as well. To properly measure the abilities of more advanced students, we also included questions using 'why' in Part V. The test covered topics of home, school, social lives, facts and events in nature. Consequently, we think that the test with such well-balanced questions can be regarded as valid for the purpose of this study.

While most questions in this test were designed for the average seventh grader, some questions were intended for students of higher grades. Balanced questions were included using the present, the present progressive, the future and the past tenses.

Data Obtained from Listening Proficiency Test

First, we examined how English instructions which students received at their elementary schools affect their English proficiency when they become junior high school students.

The test scores obtained from JH A and JH B students were compared (Figure 4) at the 0.05 level by a two-sided t-test. A significant difference in the scores of the two groups was found ($t(264)=4.74^{16}$, $p<.05$). Recall that while students of JH A received English instruction at their elementary schools on a regular basis, JH B students did not receive any regular English lessons at elementary school.

To further analyze the effects of English instructions given at elementary schools, we compared the mean scores of the students according to the elementary schools from which they graduated (Figure 5).

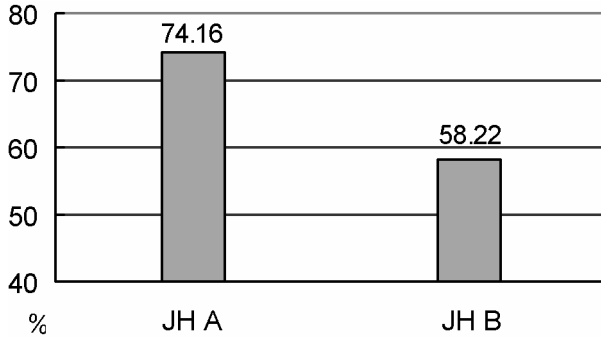


Figure 4. Scores of Student at the Two Schools

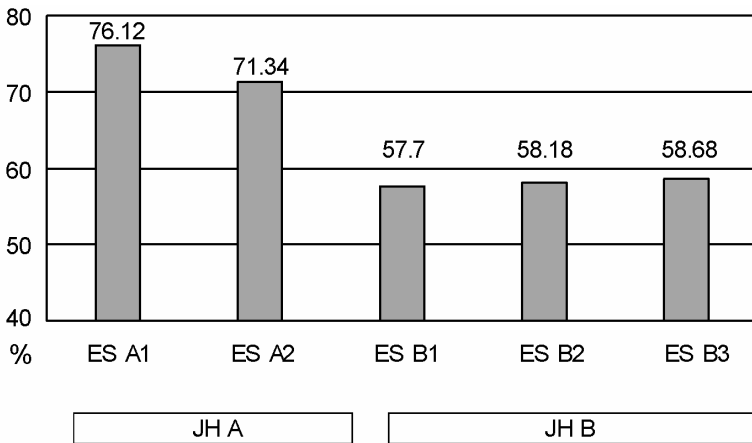


Figure 5. Scores of Students from Each Elementary School

From Figure 5 we can observe that there was not a large difference in the scores between the groups of ES A1 and ES A2. Both groups received English lessons at school when they were elementary school students. Large score differences were not found among students in groups ES B1, ES B2 or ES B3 of JH B either. From the results of Figure 4 and 5 we can assume that English education given at elementary school improves the English listening ability of learners and the effects carry over to junior high school.

Classification of Students according to the Amount of English Exposure
Some of the students in JH A and JH B learned English outside of their elementary schools such as at cram schools, private English conversation

schools and kindergartens, etc. Therefore, we classified the students of JH A and JH B according to the possible amount of English instruction they have received inside and outside school.

Table 2 shows the classification of their English learning experiences. The second column shows English lessons the students received at elementary school, and the third, that of outside school. The fourth column shows the result of the classification; 52 students of JH A received English instruction outside school and are described as 'JH A⁺'; 35 students of JH A received no English instruction outside school and are described as 'JH A⁰'; 111 students of JH B received English lessons outside school and are described as 'JH B⁺'; 68 students of JH B did not receive any English instruction inside and outside school and are described as 'JH B⁰'.

Table 2. *Classification of Students*

<i>School</i>	<i>English Learning Experiences</i>		<i>Group (# of students)</i>
	<i>Elementary School</i>	<i>Outside School</i>	
<i>JH A</i>	Yes	Yes	JH A ⁺ (52)
	Yes	No	JH A ⁰ (35)
<i>JH B</i>	No	Yes	JH B ⁺ (111)
	No	No	JH B ⁰ (68)

Figure 6 shows the mean scores of the four groups in Table 2. The scores of the four groups were statistically analyzed using SPSS. Since the students in JH A⁰ and JH B⁰ did not receive any English instruction outside school, the comparison of the results of these two groups should show the effectiveness of English instruction given inside school. The results obtained from the analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a significant difference between JH A⁰ and JH B⁰. ($F[3,262]=32.84, P<.01$).

Therefore we can conclude that English instruction at elementary school has effects on students' listening ability.

The effectiveness of English instruction obtained outside school was measured by comparing the test scores of JH B⁰ with that of JH B⁺, and also that of JH A⁰ with JH A⁺. Significant differences were found between Group B⁰ and Group B⁺, and also between Group A⁰ and Group A⁺. Thus we can conclude that English lessons students received outside of school are also effective. Combining these results we may conclude that English listening ability improves as exposure to English increases.

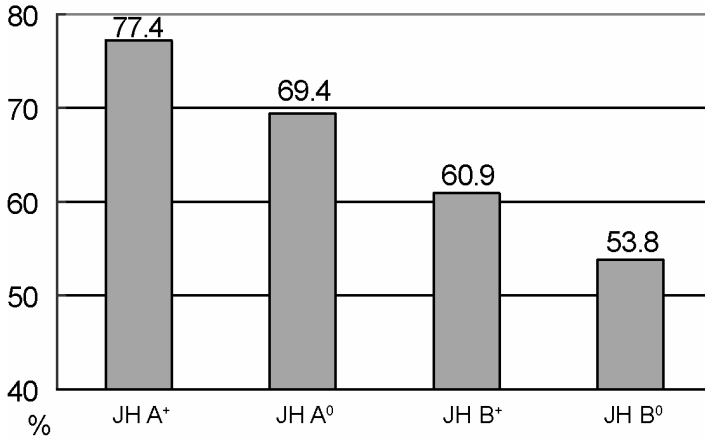


Figure 6. Mean Scores Grouped by the Amount of English Exposure

Score Differences among the Four Groups in the Five Parts of the Test

As shown in Table 1, the test created for this study consisted of five parts. Table 3 shows the mean scores which the students achieved in the test. The left column shows the classification of the four groups of students. The second to sixth columns show the mean score for each part. The column on the far right shows the total mean scores. The bottom line of the table indicates the difference between Group B⁰, which was assumed to receive the least amount of English exposure, and Group A⁺, which was assumed to receive the most.

In Table 3 the smallest score difference was found in Part I. The questions in Part I measured whether students know how the target word is pronounced and what meaning this target word form signals (Nation 2001: 27). English abilities which involve these aspects of vocabulary, that is acquiring pronunciation and meaning of a word, are presumably acquired more easily and better than other components of ability such as listening to a series of sentences, which is tested in other parts of the test.

Table 3. Scores Gained in Each Part

Part	I	II	III	IV	V	Total
Question Style	Words	Sentences	Q & A	Dialogue Q & A	Sentences Q & A	
JH A ⁺	80	88	83	63	58	77.4
JH A ⁰	72	79	75	62	37	69.4

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<i>JH B⁺</i>	67	71	62	48	40	60.9
<i>JH B⁰</i>	62	65	49	43	36	53.8
<i>Difference</i>	18	23	34	20	22	23.6

A Longitudinal Study of the Four Groups

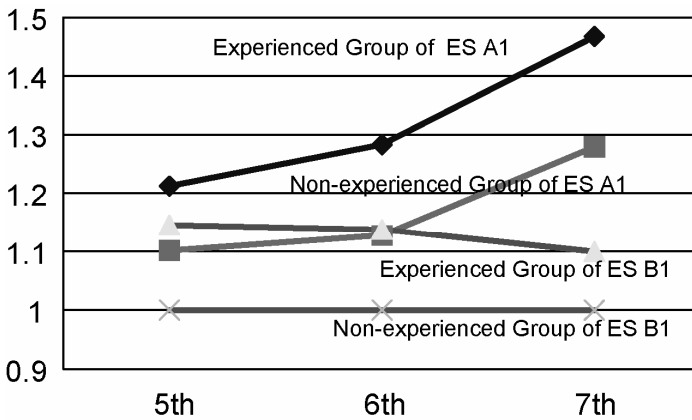
The seventh-year students from ES A1 and ES B1, who took the proficiency test for this study (Test 3), had taken our English proficiency tests in the past (Test 1 and Test 2). Test 1 was conducted two years before Test 3 when they were fifth graders. Test 2 was conducted one year before Test 3 when they were sixth graders. Table 4 shows the test scores of these three tests: Test 1, Test 2, and Test 3. The figures in the table show the percentage of the correct answers of the student groups classified by their English learning experience. ‘Experienced’ stands for the student groups with English learning experience outside of schools. ‘Non-experienced’ stands for the student groups without it. Thus the test scores of students from ES A1 and ES B1 were traced to look at their improvement in English proficiency along with the years of English learning (Table 4)³.

The figure in parentheses beside each score indicates the proportion of the score compared to the non-experienced group at ES B1 by adjusting each score of the non-experienced group at ES B1 to ‘1’. The students in ES B1 did not receive any English lessons inside or outside of elementary schools. Figure 7 plots the score proportion of each score in Table 4 to the non-experienced groups at or from ES B1.

It can be seen that the scores of the experienced and the non-experienced groups of ES A1 improved year by year compared to those of ES B1. Interestingly, improvement was more prominent during seventh grade than during sixth grade. From these results, we can conclude that the junior high school students (seventh graders) who had received English lessons at elementary school improved their listening ability more effectively than the students who had *not* received it. Since the major aim of English education shifts from oral English to written English from elementary school to junior high school, JH B⁺ and JH B⁰ students have had less exposure to ‘oral English’ in their process of learning English and were not as successful as JH A⁺ and JH A⁰ in improving their English listening abilities. Therefore it can be concluded that English education given in elementary school would increase the amount of exposure to oral English and provide learners with opportunities to enhance listening ability, which English education at junior high school has emphasized less. Regarding the increase of exposure to oral English, English education in elementary school plays a very important role in EFL education.

Table 4. *A Longitudinal Study of the Four Groups in Three Years*

Test	Grade	ES A1		ES B1	
		Experienced	Non-experienced	Experienced	Non-experienced
Test 1	fifth	76.4 (1.22)	69.4 (1.11)	72.1 (1.15)	63.0 (1)
Test 2	sixth	87.8 (1.29)	77.1 (1.13)	77.8 (1.14)	68.4 (1)
Test 3	seventh	79.8 (1.47)	69.6 (1.28)	59.8 (1.10)	54.4 (1)

Figure 7. *Adjusted Group Scores in Three Years*

Results of Questionnaire

In the questionnaires, personal information such as names and English learning experiences was collected. At the same time, students' attitude and preference toward English learning and the evaluation of the English activities they had experienced in elementary schools were investigated. In the following sections, we will analyze the results of the questionnaire given to the students. The analysis in this section was performed on the basis of the classification given in Table 2: JH A⁺, JH A⁰, JH B⁺ and JH B⁰.

1. Question 1: Do You Like English?

Figure 8 shows the result of Question 1. As we can see, the percentage of students who answered 'very much so' or 'so so' increased in the order of JH B⁰, JH B⁺, JH A⁰ and JH A⁺; the more students had been exposed to English, the more prone they were to show a liking for English.

The same question was asked to the students at ES A1 and ES B1 in the previous year when the seventh graders were sixth graders. 77% of the students who were sixth graders at ES A1 answered ‘very much so’ or ‘so so’ while 60% the students who were seventh graders at JH A answered similarly. 79% of the students who were sixth graders at ES B1 and 32 percent of the student who were seventh graders at JH B answered ‘very much’ or ‘so so’.

From these results we can assume that the experience of English learning and communication in English at an early age would be helpful to keep students interested in English even after entering junior high school. However, students who have less English learning experience at an early age may loose interest in English when they start learning English at junior high school.

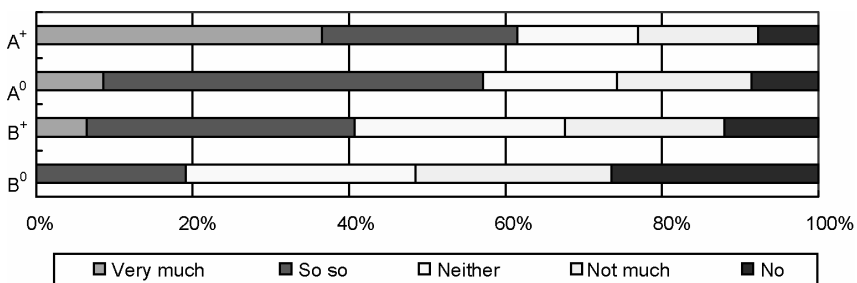


Figure 8. *Question 1: Do You Like English?*

2. *Question 2: Do You Want to Study English More?*

Figure 9 shows the result of Question 2. Comparing with Figure 8, we can see from Figure 9 that more of the students in all four groups chose ‘very much’ or ‘some more’ in Question 2 than in Question 1. We also see that the level of enthusiasm for learning English increases from JH B⁰ (33.8%) to JH A⁺ (73.1%) in Question 2 as we see in Question 1. These results indicate that the students who have more English learning experience are likely to want to learn English more.

The same question was asked to the students at ES A1 and ES B1 in the previous year when they were sixth graders as in the above Question 1. 77% of students who were sixth graders at ES A1 and 71% of the students who were seventh graders at JH A answered ‘very much so’ or ‘so so’. 79% of the students who were sixth graders at ES B1 and 48% of the students who were seventh graders at JH B answered ‘very much so’ or ‘so so’.

From these data we can draw similar conclusions to those made in Question 1. The experience of English learning and communication in English at early age would be helpful to keep students' motivation for English learning high even after entering junior high school. However, students who have less English learning experience at an early age would lose their motivation for learning English when they start learning English at junior high school.

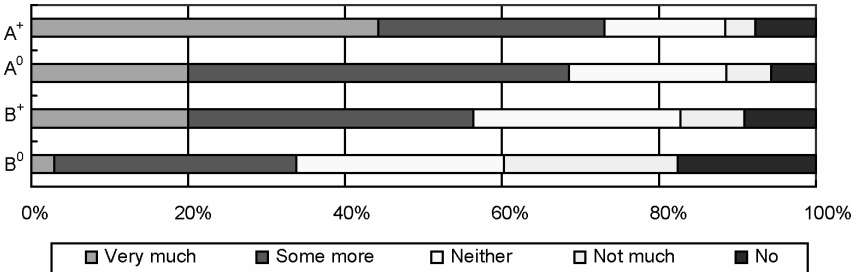


Figure 9. Question 2: Do You Want to Study English More?

3. Question 3: Do you Think English Ability Is Useful?

Figure 10 shows the results of Question 3. We can see that most of the students of the all four groups agreed that the English ability was useful in the future. Interestingly, the percentage of students who answered ‘yes’ increases from JH B⁰ (77%) to JH A⁺ (98%). Therefore we can assume that the more English learning experience students have, the more they find English useful.

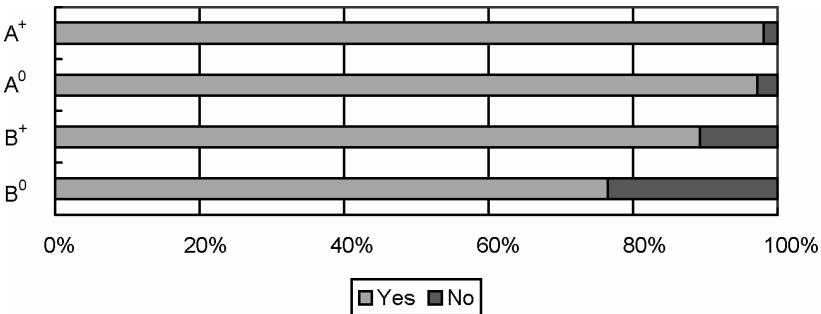


Figure 10. Question 3: Do You Think English Ability Is Useful?

4. Question 4: Why Do You Think English Ability Is Useful?

The upper row of Table 5 shows the reasons why students think that English ability is useful and the lower row shows the percentage of the students who agreed with each reason. Students chose one or two answers among the five alternatives. Table 5 shows the results of answers gained from the four groups of students. As a result, 41.7% of the students thought that English is useful because they can talk with foreigners; 36.5% of them thought that it is useful when they travel abroad; 34.9% of them thought that it is useful when they take entrance examinations; 18.4% of them thought that English is useful to read English books and newspapers; 9% of them thought that it is useful to get a job using English. Figure 11 shows the details of the results in each group classified by English learning experience.

Interestingly, more students of JH A⁺ and A⁰ thought that English is useful to talk with foreigners than those of JH B⁺ and B⁰ did. On the other hand, more students of JH B⁺ and B⁰ thought that English is useful to travel abroad than those of JH A⁺ and A⁰ did. From these results, we can assume that students who have experiences communicating with Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in English at elementary school are more likely to identify the sense of usefulness of English when speaking to foreigners. And the students who did not receive any regular English lessons at elementary school find that travelling abroad is the occasion they would use English.

Table 5. *Question 4: 'Why Do You Think English Ability Is Useful?' (Overall)*

<i>To speak to foreigners</i>	<i>To travel abroad</i>	<i>To take entrance exams</i>	<i>To read books and newspapers</i>	<i>To get a job where English is used</i>	<i>Others</i>
41.7%	36.5%	34.9%	18.4%	9.0%	4.2%

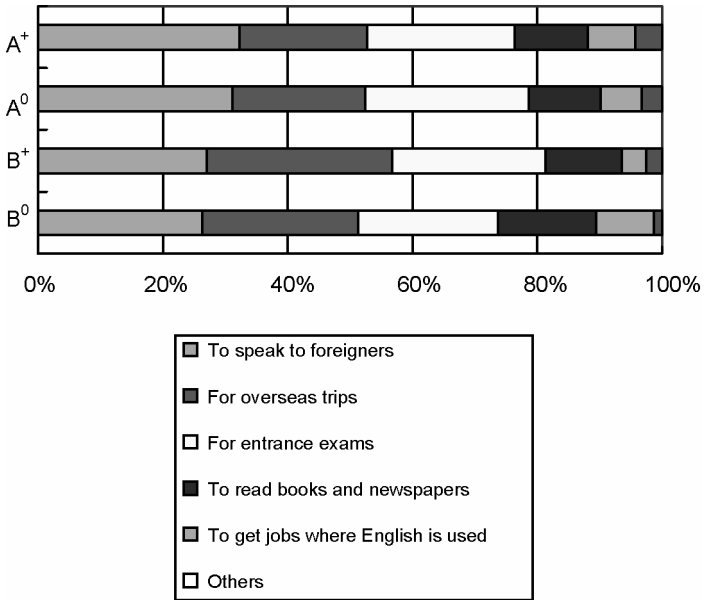


Figure 11. Question 4: Why Do You Think English Ability Is Useful? (By Groups)

5. Question 5: Was English Learning at Elementary School Good for You?

Figure 12 shows the result of Question 5. Many of the students in Group A⁺, A⁰ and B⁺ thought English learning at elementary school was good. In particular, 80% of A⁺ appreciated English lessons they had received in elementary school. On the contrary, no one in JH B⁰, who did not receive any English lessons when they were elementary school students, thought that English learning at elementary school was very effective and only 36% of them thought it a little effective.

From these results, it can be concluded that students who regularly learned English either inside or outside school find learning English to be effective. The students who have only occasional English lessons at school, however, think English learning at elementary school is less effective.

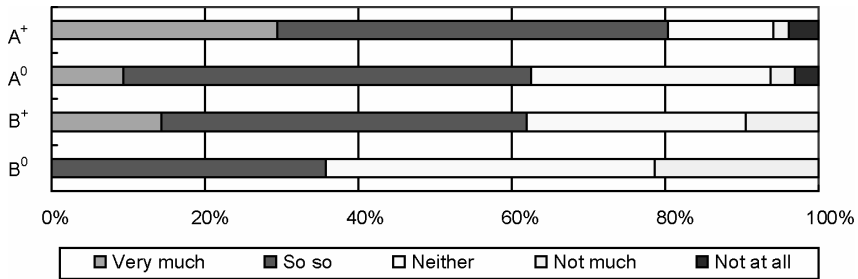


Figure 12. *Question 5: Was English Learning at ES Good for You?*

6. *Question 6: Was English Learning at Elementary School Useful in your English Learning at Junior High School?*

Figure 13 shows the results of Question 6. We can see that more than 60% of the students in JH A⁺ and A⁰ thought that English learning at elementary school is useful for their English learning at junior high school. On the other hand, in JH B⁺ and B⁰, who did not have any regular English lessons at elementary school, more students answered negatively to this question.

We can assume that English lessons at elementary school given from time to time are not sufficient to affect attitudes toward English learning at junior high school. Therefore, if English lessons are given at elementary school, sufficient hours of English lessons should be offered.

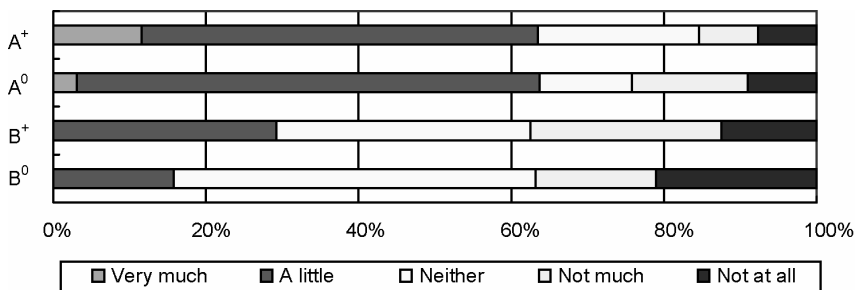


Figure 13. *Question 6: Was English Learning at ES Useful in your Learning at JH School?*

Conclusion

While English education has become more widespread in Japan, there is some research reporting that one cannot expect positive effects from

English education at the elementary school level. In our previous research conducted with elementary school students, it was found that English education at elementary school has some effects on listening ability. Because of the different results that arose from different studies, we felt that further investigation into this area of language education was warranted. Therefore, as a follow-up study of our previous research, we conducted an English proficiency test with junior high school students to verify the effects of English education which they received in elementary school. From the results of the test we found that there were significant differences between the groups that received English instruction at elementary school and that did not; the results gained from our previous study were confirmed by those of our current study and the positive effects on students' listening ability was verified with junior high school students as well as elementary school students. Thus we concluded that English education at elementary school had positive effects on students' listening ability.

We also found that there are significant differences between the group that received English instruction outside of school, such as cram schools and English conversation schools, and the group that did not. This result also confirmed the results gained in our previous study.

From the results of the questionnaire, we found that the more students were exposed to English, the more likely they were to be interested in English learning, to want to study English, and to think English ability is useful. Moreover, the students who had received English lessons at elementary school were more likely to maintain their interests toward English learning and to have stronger motivation after entering junior high school than those who had not. Therefore, we conclude that early English instruction has positive effects on students' preference towards English as well as their scores on English tests.

While early English education is becoming more popular in the world, arguments over its effectiveness are still ongoing in Japan. We would appreciate it if our research could provide something to make discussion more productive.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has some plans to promote English education at elementary school and is submitting the budget request to implement them. We hope early English education will keep growing in popularity and the English ability of Japanese people will be further enhanced.

1. The Junior STEP English Test is conducted by The Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) and has three grades as Bronze, Silver, and Gold, aiming to test aural English ability of children. Bronze is the most basic grade.
2. The STEP English Test is conducted by STEP and authorized by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. It is nationally accepted among junior high school students, high school students, college students, and adult learners. Some universities offer credits for their English courses according to the grades students gain through the STEP English Test. The test has seven grades and the two lowest grades were used as examples to create the proficiency test given in this study.
3. Note that the same student in both JH A⁰ and JH B⁰ may be allocated into JH A⁺ or JH B⁺ if he/she had English experience outside of school in later years.

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