

# **The Communicative Block in Japanese Learners of English**

## **The preliminary survey**

by

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### **Purpose of the study**

In society, students learn cultural values from parents and other people, as they grow up. Culture is the expression of a society and cultural values control the society. Japanese culture operates as *block* when Japanese people learn languages. The term *block* means that something intervenes when Japanese learners of English try to communicate with people in English. In this paper this interference is called a *block*. The cultures which Japanese students bring into the classrooms block them from learning English there. Teachers of English also bring their cultures into the classrooms, and their cultures also become blocks. These cultures are cohesive behaviours, or what Holliday calls “small cultures.”

### **Aims of the study**

The aims of this research are to investigate the small cultures which both Japanese learners of English and their teachers bring into the classroom and seek a suitable teaching methodology for Japanese learners of English.

#### **I. Background of the problem**

##### **A. How the problem came to be recognized**

Since the Meiji period, 1868 - 1912, till today, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Culture (MESSC) has devised various reforms to enhance Japan's English education, but these educational policies seem not to work, as the improvement still seems small. MESSC has borrowed teaching methodologies and approaches from Western countries, mainly Britain, Australia and North America without investigating: 1) what happens in classrooms; 2) how culture affects the learning of languages; 3) what Japan's society expects in education; and 4) how the government, business world and schools cooperate to enhance English language learning. The MESSC has implemented various reforms coercively for a very long.

## **B. Factors contributing to the problems**

### **1. The history of English education in Japan**

#### **1.1. From the Meiji period to the pre-war period**

The English language education system was implemented in schools by the Ministry of Education from the Meiji period, Koike and Tanaka (1995) give the reasons for English to have been taught in Japan:

The main purpose of teaching English was to catch up with the advanced civilization of the Western world and to modernize the nation (p.16).

According to Shimahara et al. (1992), schooling proved a formidable tool throughout the nation's early modernization and the leaders of the Meiji period used it skilfully as they forged the new nation. Shimahara states that about 170 foreign specialists were invited to teach in the early Meiji period. One of them was H. E. Palmer, a lecturer at the University of London, who was invited as "Linguistic Adviser" to the Ministry of Education in 1922. His four recommendations were: 1) Emphasis more on oral comprehension and speaking rather than reading and writing; 2) Teaching materials based on student's interests, 3) class size of less than thirty; 4) An ideal number of six English class hours per week (Koike and Tanaka, 1995, p. 17). However, the intervention of World War II and the Pacific War prevented this implementations until the post-war period. Koike and Tanaka describe what happened in English education at this time.

During the War, English was completely dropped from the girls' middle-school curriculum, and the program was reduced to four hours per week in boys' middle schools. English was regarded as the enemy's language and the learners as spies against the nation.

English language teaching was almost dead. However, it is interesting to note that the Naval Academy taught English to the students, as if to prepare them for reconstruction of a new Japan (p. 17).

#### **1.2. The post-war period**

After the war, America occupied Japan, and Japan experienced drastic school reforms. The 6-3-3-4 coeducational system was established under the influence of the USA. This system entitles students go to primary school for six years, then go on to junior high school for three years, and senior high school for a further 3 years, ending with four years at the university. Compulsory education for students covers the six years of studying at primary school and junior high school. In 1947, national educational guidelines were issued influenced by Harold E. Palmer's Oral Method.

#### **1.3. From the 1950s to the present period**

During the 1950s and the 1960s, the audio-lingual approach was widespread among junior high schools. However, Koike and Tanaka (1995) state that teachers at senior high schools and students did not accept this new method, because of the needs of the university entrance examinations, which determined the

content of high-school English teaching.

Senior high-school teachers as well as students were not receptive to the new method.

The university entrance examinations put their main stress on reading, translation, grammar and composition, neglecting listening and speaking ( p. 18).

In 1960, the Ministry of Education established the Council for Improvement of English Teaching to review the direction of English language teaching in Japan. It emphasized language activities using all the four skills of language. As a result, university entrance examinations have been criticized for not testing listening and speaking skills. About Japan's entrance examination system, Gorsuch criticizes MESSC for not evaluating individual university entrance examinations;

Individual university entrance exams are not under the purview of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (except for the Center Exam, a preliminary screening exam taken by applicants aspiring to public universities and high-ranked private universities) (TESOL Quarterly, 2000, p. 681).

In 1975, the Council announced four recommendations: 1) one-month intensive in-service training for leading English teachers; 2) two-month overseas training of selected English teachers; 3) installing language laboratories in senior high schools across the nation; and 4) expansion and establishment of specialized English courses or programmes in senior high schools. However, in spite of those proposals by the Council, the situation of English language teaching in Japan, unsurprisingly, remained without much improvement.

Since 1947, the Ministry of Education has implemented many reforms to enhance English education (Table 1), though they still seek for better methods nowadays.

Table 1 The brief history of innovations from the post-war period to today

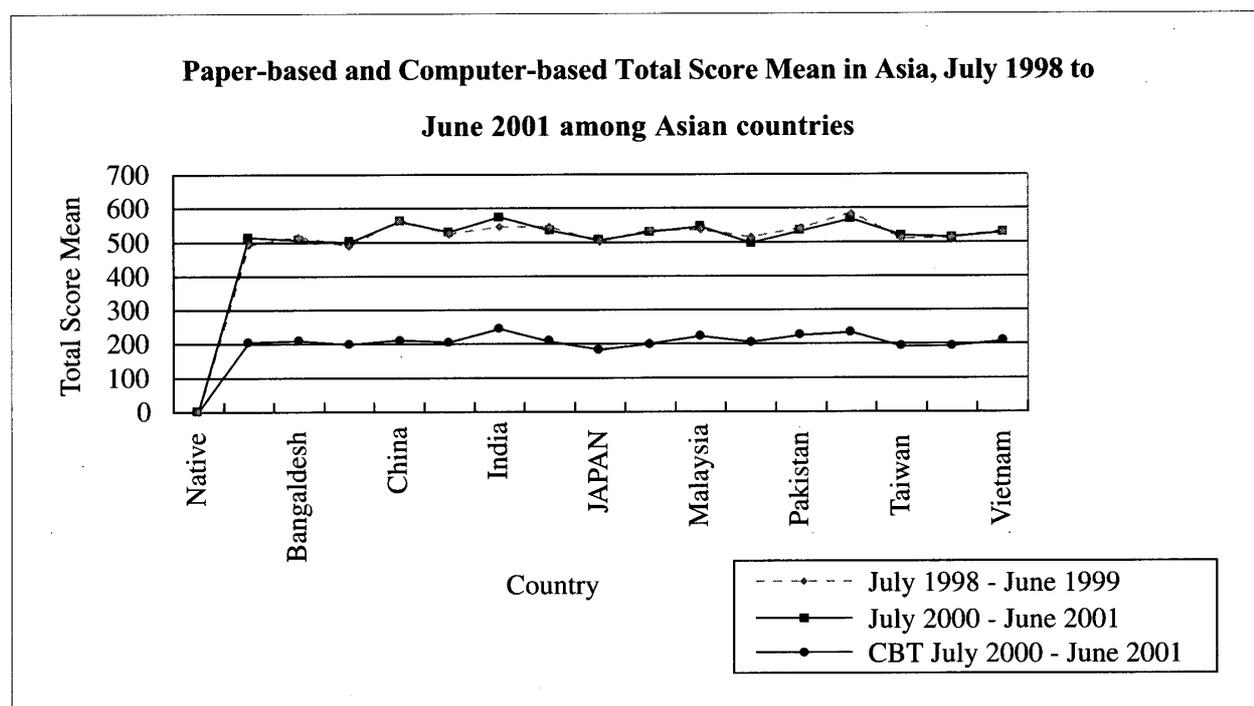
| Year  | Events  |
|-------|---|
| 1947  | Recommendations for emphasis on oral comprehension and speaking   |
|       | 1) Teaching materials based on students' interests<br>2) Class size of less than 30<br>3) Six English classes per week  |
| 1950s | Audio-Lingual approach  |
|       | Senior high schools teachers and students did not welcome the new method, as Japanese English teaching was so conditioned by the university entrance examination system |

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| 1960s | <b>Council for Improvement of English Teaching</b>  |
|       | Recommendations for emphasis on language activities in terms of four language skills, use of textbooks written in modern English, audio-lingual aids, and sentence practice and for the enhancement of the teacher-training curriculum for university students  |
| 1975  | <b>Further recommendations</b>  |
|       | 1) Further recommendations for one-month intensive in-service training for leading English teachers<br>2) Two-month overseas training of selected English teachers<br>3) Installing language laboratories in senior high schools across the nation<br>4) Expansion and establishment of specialized English courses or programs in senior high schools  |
| 1978  | <b>Reduction of English class hours</b>   |
|       | Three per week at the junior high-school level to give some free time to students and teachers  |
| 1984  | <b>National Council on Education Reform</b>   |
|       | asked to review the post-war system and to draft plans for a third major reform of education  |
| 1985  | <b>Japan Exchange and Teaching Program</b>  |
|       | JET was launched  |
| 1987  | <b>National Syllabus</b>  |
|       | Recommended: 1) To carry out the transition to a lifelong learning system<br>2) To place more emphasis on the importance of individuality<br>3) To make Japanese educational systems and practices cope with contemporary changes.<br>As far as the secondary schools are concerned, international communication should be the ultimate goal with much emphasis on the four skills, and that four elective class hours per week should be permitted in junior high schools. The course was called Aural/ Oral Communication |
| 1991  | <b>University Council on Education Reform</b>   |
|       | First drastic revision since the new university system was inaugurated after W.W. II.<br>Colleges and universities determined their own requirements regarding courses and credits  |
| 1992  | <b>The Council of Study for Senior High School</b>  |
|       | To promote development of students' communicative skills  |
|       | <b>Early childhood English education started</b>  |
|       | Experimentation in two public primary schools in Osaka  |

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 1993 | Early childhood English education  |
|      | Experimentation in two public primary schools in other prefectures                                       |
| 1994 | Early childhood English education  |
|      | The addition of twelve more schools officially announced with three consecutive years of experimentation |
|      | Revision of the Course of Study for English  |
|      | To develop students' communicative competence  |

Even these suggestions, the English language ability of Japanese students is still not high enough. The world-famous English test, TOEFL (Test of English for Foreign Language) results shows about the total score mean in Asia are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Paper-based and Computer-based Total Score Mean in Asia, July 1998 to June 2001 (ETS 1999-01 Editions)



At <http://www.toefl.com> and <ftp://ftp.ets.org/pub/toefl/10496.pdf>

Among Asian countries, the score mean Japanese learners of English is not high enough, in spite of the reforms and the investment of money and time.

To conclude, despite the above attempts to improve it, Japan's English education remained little changed. Notwithstanding all these reforms, MESSC still is seeking better policies and plans, such as The Education Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, "The Rainbow Plan", based on the recommendation of "The Final Report of

the National Commission on Education Reform.”

Though the Japanese government has tried to borrow ideas, language policies, and teaching methods from the Western world, it has not achieved good results. In fact, in all these years' language policies, the following considerations have been absent from the proposals for improvement: 1) what happens in the classrooms; 2) the way in which culture affects on learning of languages; 3) what Japan's society expects of education; 4) the co-operation of the government, the business world and schools to enhance English language learning.

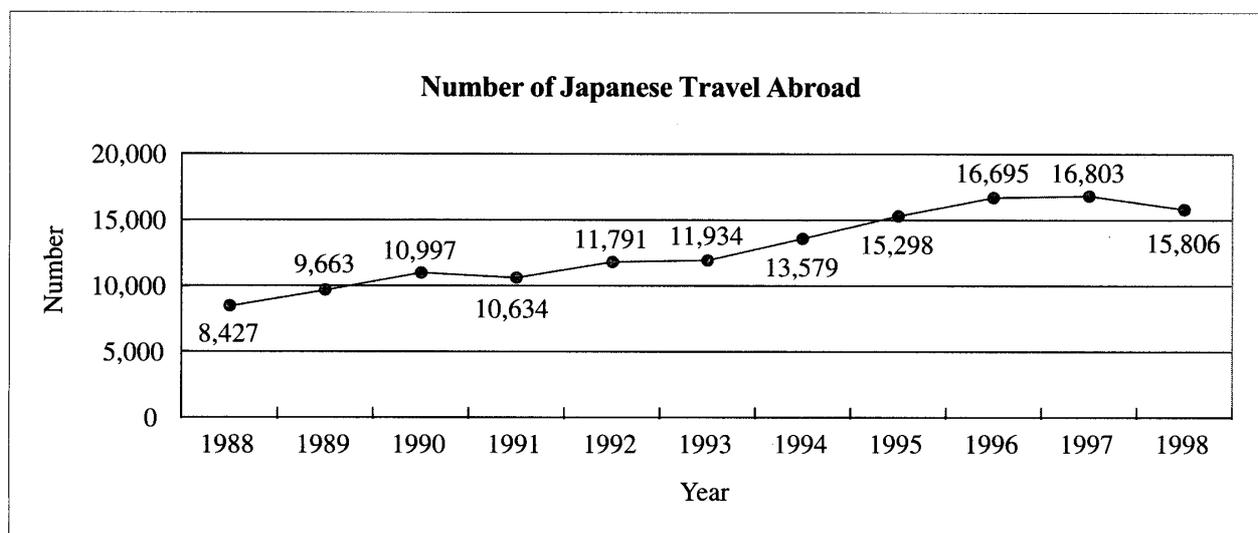
## 2. Data on foreign travel, school trips and the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme

### 2.1 Data on foreign travel

In the present century, the number of Japanese people who want to speak English is increasing drastically. Japan's economic growth has allowed its people to access the world more easily.

During the past few decades, more Japanese have visited foreign countries and more foreigners have come to Japan in order to work than ever before. Figure 2 shows how many Japanese have travelled to foreign countries since 1988 to 1998.

Figure 2 Number of Japanese Travel Abroad



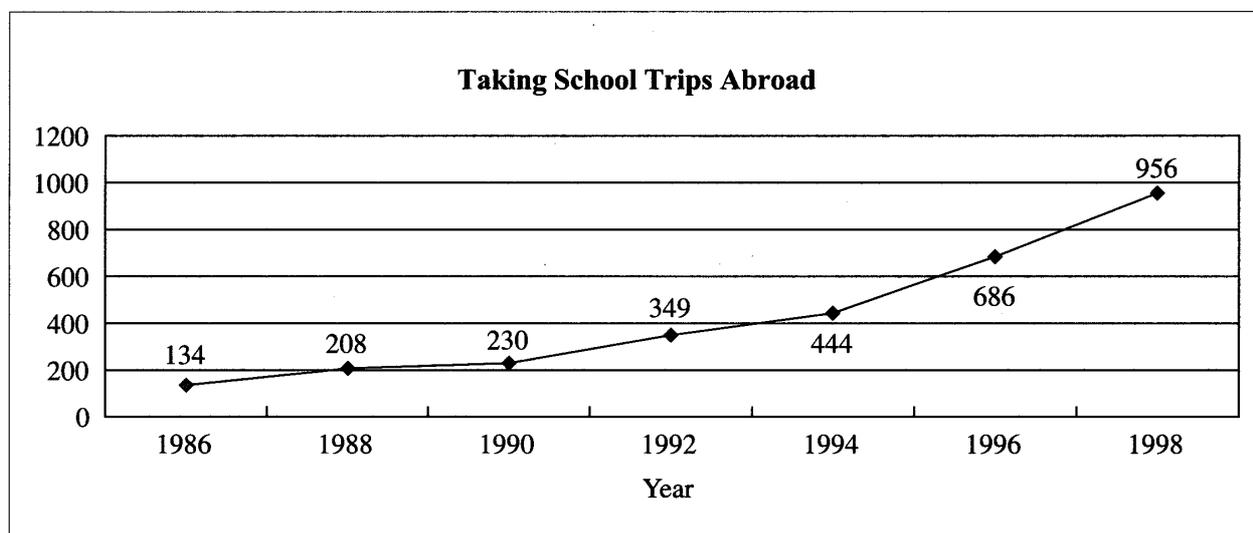
(Japan Almanac 2000, p. 272)

From 1988 to 1998, the number of the Japanese travelling overseas very much increased; in fact the number almost doubled. Japanese people are exposed to real English and they realise how important it is to communicate with people in English everywhere in the world.

## 2.2 Data on school trips

Figure 3 shows the number of Japanese school trips to other countries.

Figure 3 Taking School Trips Abroad



(Naigai Kyooiku, 1989, p.2)

These figures show that more and more schools are taking their students on foreign journeys. The number of students who go overseas to study either long-term or short-term is also increasing. Naigai Kyooiku also states that 404 Japanese schools had an overseas sister or brother school in 1988. Therefore, Japanese people are now able to easily gain access to other countries, and to learn their values, and languages, and, through advanced technology, they are broadening their knowledge of the world and the English language.

According to the preliminary survey, Figure 8, showing the answer to the question, "In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems facing your Japanese English teacher?" suggests that the Japanese learners of English believe that Japanese teachers of English do not pronounce English well and their teaching is not creative nor their teaching method suitable, and finally that teaching grammar is not what the students want. There is a mismatch between what teachers are doing and what students require of their English education in class.

Through the five-volume General Survey of English language Teaching in Japan, 1983-1990, Koike et al. (1990) concluded that "TEFL within the Japanese educational system is not very effective." According to these authors, there are seven factors characterizing foreign language education in Japan: 1) the natural environment, the isolated geographic location, overpopulation, scanty natural resources, four seasons; 2) the Japanese social psychology characterized by group consciousness; 3) communication strategies specific to Japanese people; 4) the hierarchical social structure; 5) the structures of the Japanese language;

6) the high level of the Japanese educational system; and 7) the prevailing traditional translation method. The Ad Hoc Committee for English Reform in 1984 also concluded that TEFL in Japan was not very efficient despite of much effort (Koike & Tanaka, 1990, p. 19). The proposals about English education made by this committee are: 1) English class size and allowing enough class hours per week, requested reconsideration of the objectives for teaching English and a communication-centred approach in secondary schools; 2) need more reliable tests to evaluate students' abilities in English; 3) establishing intensive language programmes for those who have done poorly on the test; 4) organizing an in-service training program for teachers of English; and 5) establishing in local and central governments the policy of hiring more native English teachers at all levels.

It may be said about these recommendations that the first one is very similar to what Palmer recommended in Meiji period. MESSC has not so far succeeded in implementing Palmer's recommendations. About the second and third recommendations, surprisingly, they still want to test students' ability in English, instead of seeking a suitable methodology for Japanese students, and they try to place students according to their test results without stating clearly what kinds of tests, or what kinds of skills they want to evaluate and the purpose of the tests. About organizing an in-service training programme, MESSC has first to find a suitable methodology for Japanese learners of English, otherwise, teachers won't able to learn how to teach. Finally, hiring more native English teachers is very problematic, because the students' evaluation of such teachers is not high. The qualification of native speakers of English who teach English in Japan seem to be questionable. This recommendation, in any case, says nothing about the qualification of native speakers of English.

### **2.3 Data on the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme**

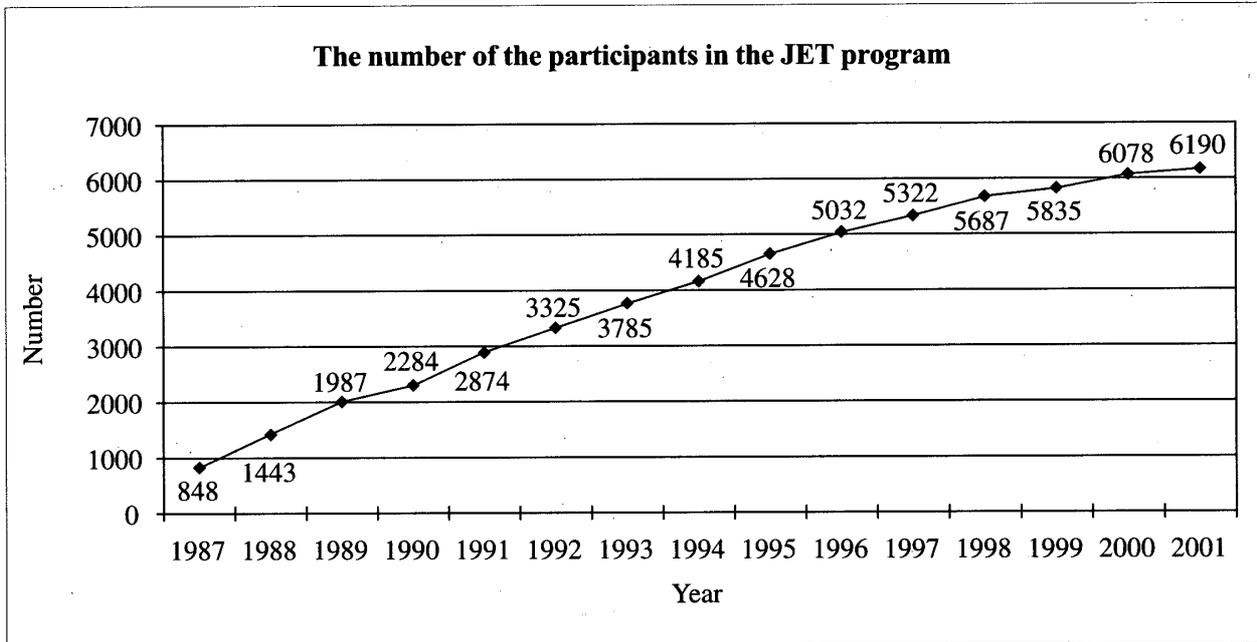
Figure 4 shows the number of JET participants from 1987 to 2001. The JET (the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme) enhances foreign language education in Japan, and seeks to promote international exchange at the local level. The objectives of the programme are: 1) the opportunity to serve in local government organization as well as public and private junior and senior high schools. The purposes of the programme in their Web-site:

The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme seeks to help enhance internationalisation in Japan, by promoting mutual understanding between Japan and other nations. The programme aims to enhance foreign language education in Japan, and to promote international exchange at the local level through fostering ties between Japanese youth and foreign youth. (file://M:/About%the%20the%20JET%20Programme.htm)

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1987-2001, the number of the JET participants has increased dramatically. If they become assistant English teachers (AETs), they must work with Japanese

English teachers in a collaborative way, called Team teaching.

Figure 4 The number of JET participants from 1987 to 2001



At [http://www.mofa.go.jp/j\\_info/visit/jet/participants.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/jet/participants.html)

Though the Japanese government has tried to borrow ideas, language policies, and teaching methods from the Western world, it has not achieved good results. In fact, all these years MESSC has not considered the way which Japanese culture affects language acquisition, nor has it carried out any classroom research.

### Problems

Though MESSC has invested much effort in improving English education, the results has not been encouraging. Therefore, there is a need to investigate what is happening in the classroom, where both teachers and learners bring their cultures, and to establish a suitable methodology for the Japanese learners of English. Added to this, the cultures of the institutions in society and the government should be investigated. Therefore, MESSC should examine how the cultures of the these three organizations can co-operate to enhance Japanese English education, and break down the *blocks* for learning English.

## 3. Findings from the preliminary surveys

### 3.1 Results from the Japanese students' responses

A preliminary survey was made to find out what was happening in classrooms among Japanese learners of English from October, 1998 to January, 1999. The interviewing and class observation took place from April to June, 1999. Nine male Japanese university students and 11 female Japanese university students, one male Japanese English teacher, five male native-speaking English teachers (3 part-time), one female

native-speaking English teacher and two female Japanese English teachers (part-time) were interviewed; in addition, nine English classes at five Japanese universities were observed.

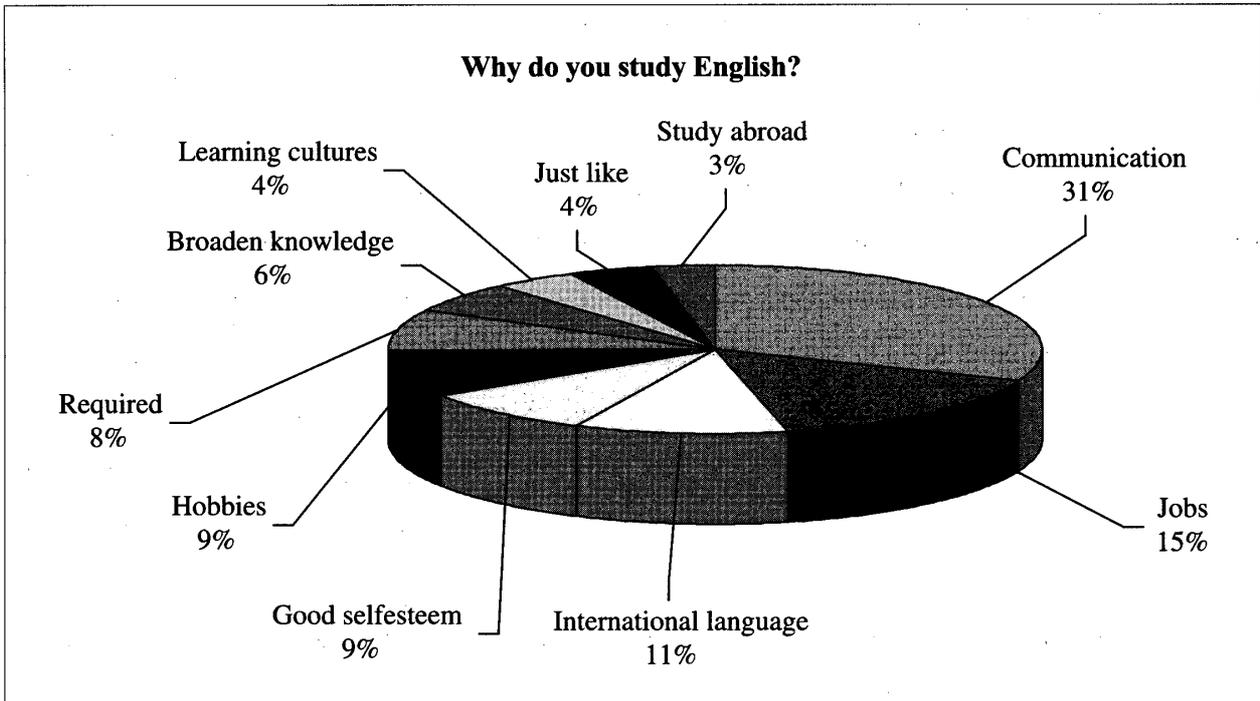
The statistics of the participants in the preliminary survey (1998-1999) are as followed: 1) 12 Japanese universities in 10 prefectures and 538 students; 2) 88 English teachers who teach English at universities were selected at random from the lists of the language associations in Japan. The questionnaire questions were sent by mail to 12 universities and the English teachers administered them during their English classes. By February, 1999, 59 English teachers out of the 88 teachers had returned their responses by mail. Table 2 shows the response rates and the participants.

Table 2. The response rates and the participants

| Schools | Majors                 | Sending Qs | Returned Qs | %      | National/<br>Private schools | 4-or 2-year | Prefectures |
|---------|------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| A       | Economics              | 110        | 99          | 90     | P                            | 4           | Shiga       |
| B       | International Studies  | 70         | 65          | 92.85  | N                            | 4           | Hiroshima   |
| C       | Various courses        | 31         | 27          | 87.09  | N                            | 4           | Hokkaido    |
| D       | English                | 50         | 26          | 52     | P                            | 4           | Chiba       |
| E       | English                | 55         | 55          | 100    | P                            | 4           | Chiba       |
| F       | Business Management    | 33         | 33          | 100    | P                            | 2           | Kyushu      |
| G       | International Politics | 63         | 48          | 76.19  | P                            | 4           | Kyushu      |
| H       | English                | 100        | 49          | 49     | P                            | 2           | Aichi       |
| I       | English                | 34         | 34          | 100    | P                            | 4           | Okinawa     |
| J       | Social Welfare         | 80         | 20          | 25     | P                            | 4           | Hokkaido    |
| K       | General and English    | 60         | 63          | 105    | N                            | 4           | Shikoku     |
| L       | Japanese               | 50         | 19          | 38     | P                            | 2           | Miyagi      |
| Total   |                        | 736        | 538         | 73.09% |                              |             |             |

Among the students' questionnaire, four questions are quoted in this paper: 1) Why do you study English? 2) In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems in learning English? 3) In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems facing your Japanese teacher? 4) In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems facing your native speaker of English teacher? The responses are shown in figures.

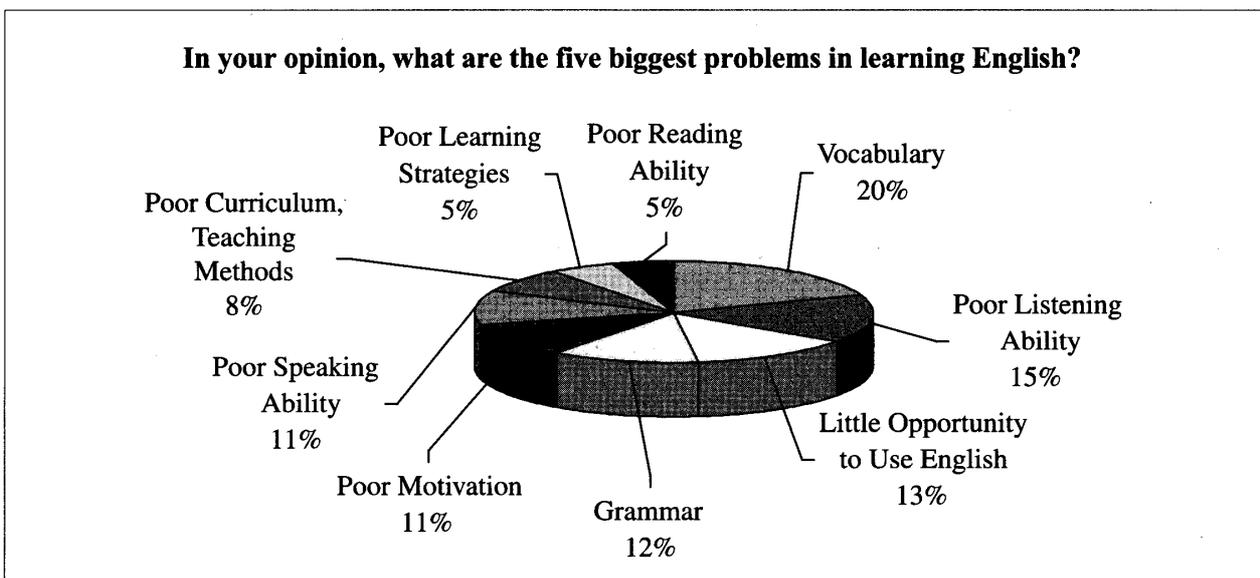
Figure 5 Why do you study English?



The figure shows that the university students want to learn English for practical reasons, and they want to communicate with people in English and they want to learn it because English has become an international language.

Figure 6, the answers to “In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems in learning English?” suggest that students want to learn more vocabulary, and improve their listening ability; and they want to use English in everyday life. Their purpose in learning English is communication.

Figure 6 In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems in learning English?



This figure shows that Japanese learners of English lack enough vocabulary, good listening ability, and many opportunities to use English and learning grammar.

Figure 7, the answer to “In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems facing your Japanese English teacher?” assesses the ability of the Japanese English teachers to teach English. The students know that the pronunciation of Japanese English teachers seem not good enough, and they do not try to be creative when they teach and they focus on teaching grammar. Thus, they do not have to speak much English in class. This reduces their chance to improve their speech. This comment about Japanese English teachers suggests that they do not have a good command of communicative skills. The students also consider that the curriculum and teaching method are poor adapted to their purpose in learning English. The students claim that the Japanese English teachers do not create a good atmosphere for learning, and do not devise teaching materials. As a result, students feel bored in class. This may reduce their motivation to learn English.

Figure 7 In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems facing your Japanese English teacher?

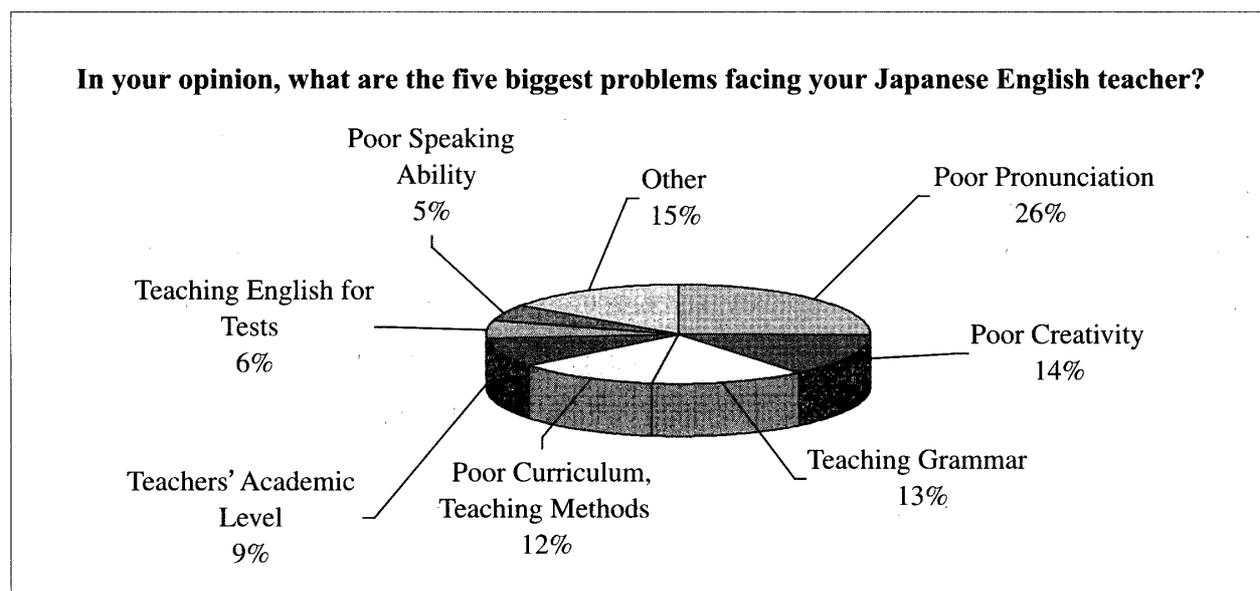
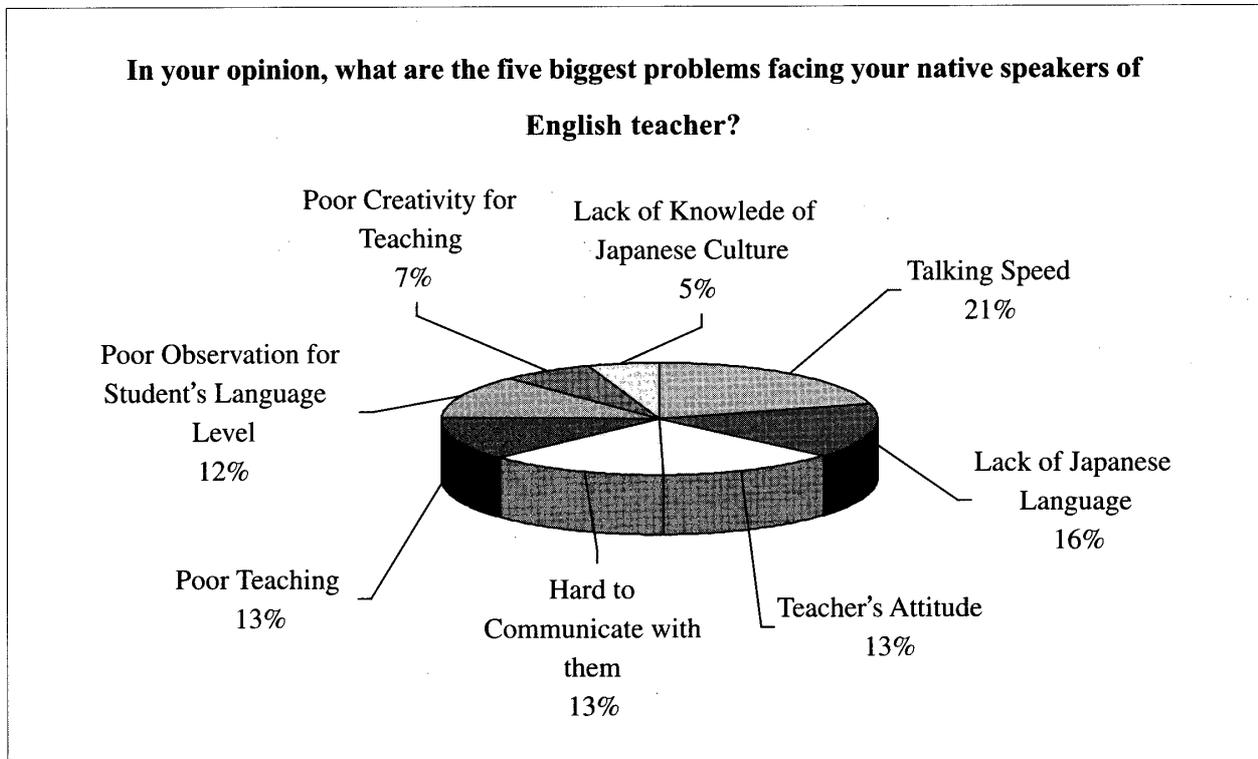


Figure 8, “In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems facing your native speakers of English teacher?” shows how the Japanese students evaluate them.

Figure 8 In your opinion, what are the five biggest problems facing your native speakers of English teacher?



As judged by the Japanese students, the native speakers of English teachers have low teaching skills. This may be the reason why they ignore the language level of the Japanese students and tend to speak too fast. As most native-speaking English teachers do not understand Japanese, students feel that it is hard to communicate with them when they want to ask questions or build bridges between teacher and student. Not knowing how native speakers of English teacher should behave or teach in the classroom, they tend to repeat what they used to do or the ways that they taught in their own countries. This may surprise their Japanese students, who in consequence withdraw from learning English. Here, cultural blocks on the part of both students and teachers crush the growth of the language skills in the classroom.

To conclude, five problems are found in the results of the preliminary survey of Japanese students: 1) the mismatch between the purpose in learning English and teaching methods; 2) the unsuitable curriculum; 3) the lack of knowledge about Japan and its people; 4) poor teaching skills; and 5) lack of creativity. Therefore, these problems must be considered before English education in Japan improves.

### 3.2 Results from the English teachers' responses

The preliminary questionnaires were sent out in October, 1998 and the responses were returned by January, 1999, to teachers who teach English at universities selected at random from the lists of two language associations such as JACET (The Japan Association of College English Teachers) and Pac SLRF list

(Pacific Second Language Research Forum). Table 3 shows the response rate of the questionnaires.

Table 3 The response rate

|          | Sent | Returned | %  |
|----------|------|----------|----|
| Teachers | 88   | 59       | 67 |

The English teachers' nationalities are shown in Figure 9. Among native speakers of English, 35% of them are Americans, and this probably shows that there are more teachers of English from the USA than from other nationalities. Students seem to listen to American English more than other varieties of English.

Figure 9 The nationalities of the English teachers in Japan

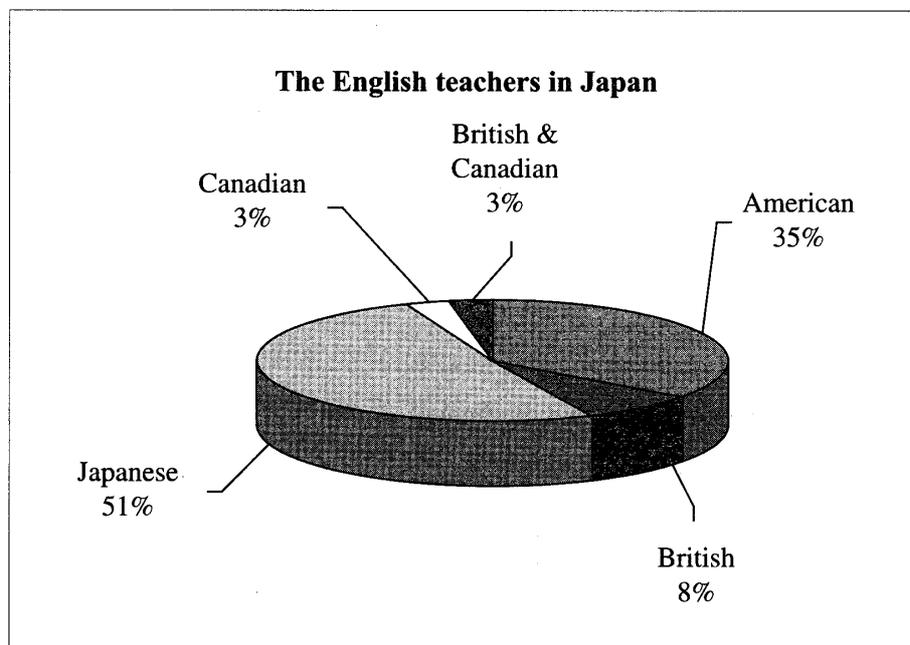


Figure 10 shows the five most serious problems which English teachers face when they teach. Teachers of English say that their students' motivation to learn English after they have passed the entrance examination is not good. However, according to the students' responses, they want to learn English as a tool for communication, and this is their purpose in learning English. They seem, then, to be motivated to learn English. The contradiction presented here is that the opinion of teachers of English about their students differs from the result, because students like studying English as a tool for communication. It suggests that there is a need for classroom research.

Teachers of English make the criticism that there is little interaction among other English teachers in different courses and different department at their institutions. Here, there is a need for teachers to co-operate with one another in sharing, discussing, or solving problems to improve their programmes and courses. In reality, teachers seem not to have opportunities to discuss their problems. Lack of

co-operation in the planning of programmes and courses probably causes a poor curriculum. The problems of class size, and class hours and number of meetings are also reasons for an ineffective curriculum, though Palmer offered solutions in Meiji period. Among the students, there is a varieties of needs, goals, abilities, and interests for one English teacher to handle in the classroom, and also different teaching methods which each English teacher uses might confuse students.

Figure 10 In your opinion, what are the five most serious problems you face teaching English in your institute?

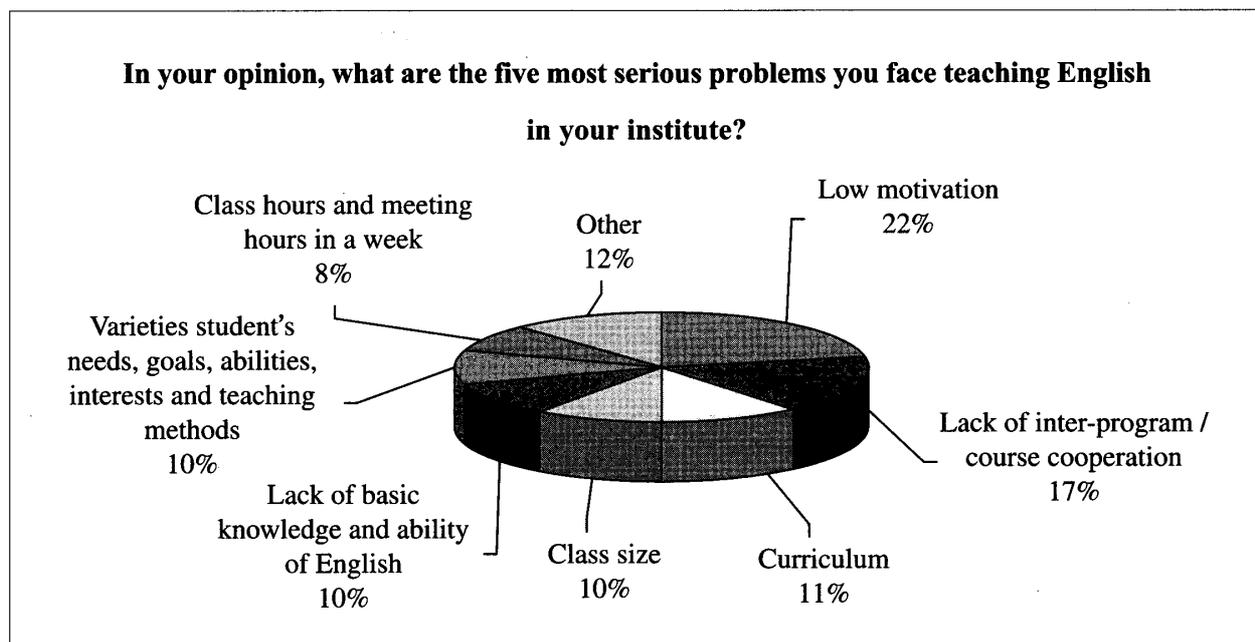
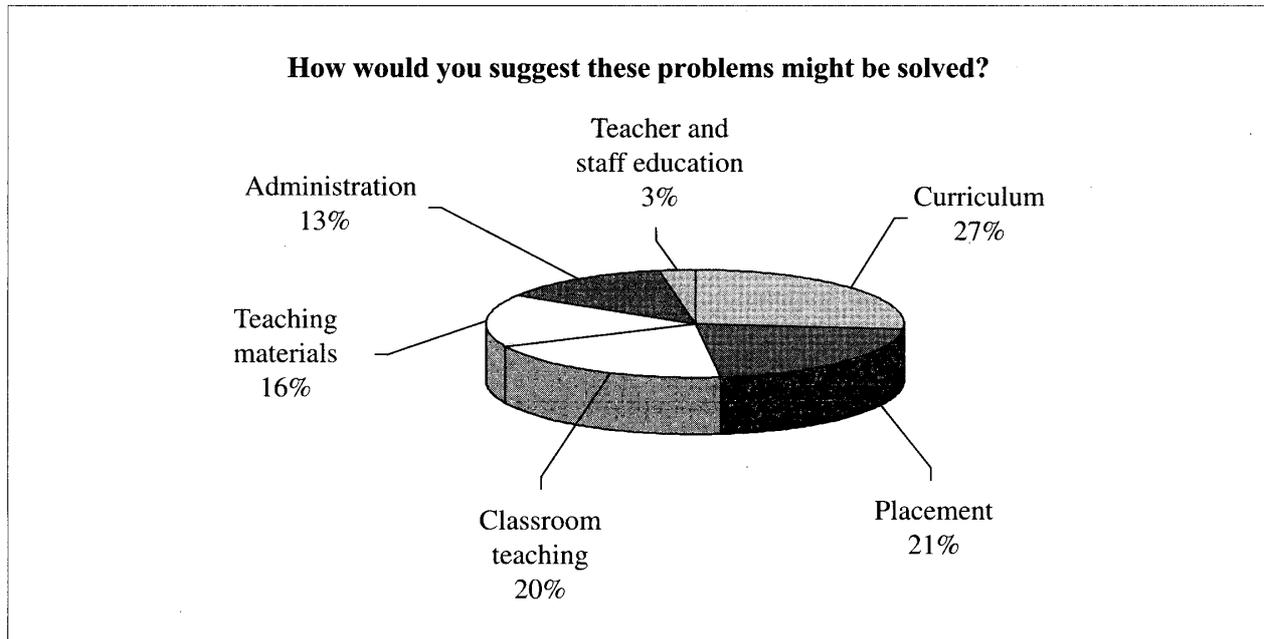


Figure 11 shows the way in which English teachers responded to the question, "How would you suggest these problems might be solved?"

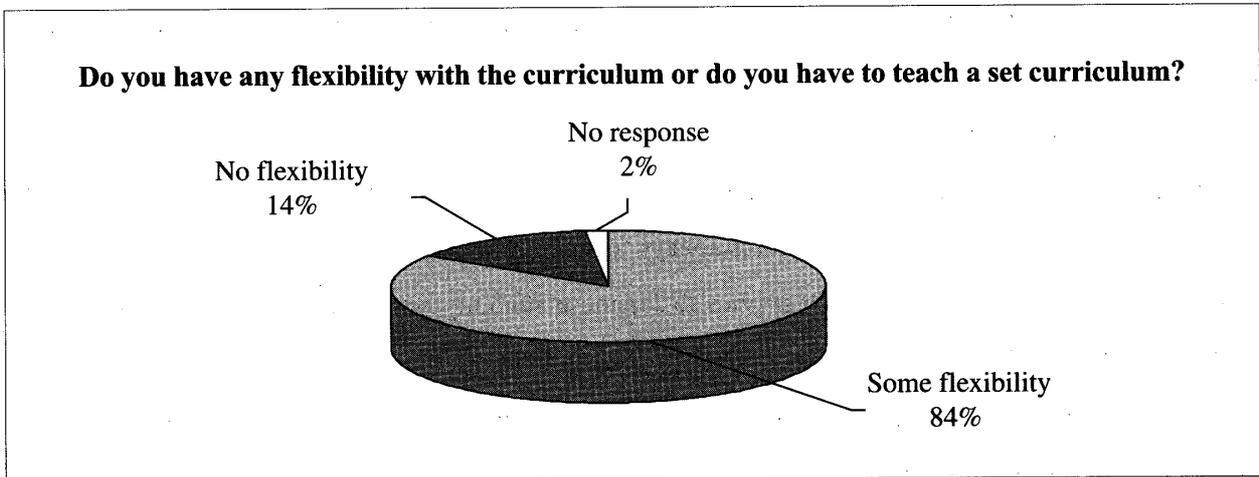
Figure 11 How would you suggest these problems might be solved?



Teachers of English suggest that a good curriculum should solve these problems. They seem to depend on their schools to establish a good curriculum for both teachers and students. For example, they want to have an unified, organized curriculum with clear guidelines, and meetings organized for English teachers to reach a consensus about goals and clear directions. They also suggest offering more electives for students. The second suggestion is “the student placement.” Teachers of English would like to have small classes based on students’ language levels and they want to teach motivated students. In the third suggestion, “Classroom teaching”, some teachers suggest having strict rules and regulations and increasing the number of times per week that the class meets. In the fourth solution, “Teaching materials”, there is an emphasis on using audio-visual techniques; teachers want to use tests to gauge the level of students’ proficiency and prefer to use textbooks. In the fifth suggestion, “Administration”, they want to have more teachers with qualifications, and see a need for bigger budgets to ensure a good curriculum. The need for “Teacher and staff education” is the least recognised among the suggestions. This contradicts the evaluation by the students of the problems they face with the teachers of English. Though the teachers of English suggest solutions, the results for the questions, “Do you have any flexibility with the curriculum or do you have to teach a set curriculum?” and “Do you have any flexibility with your teaching materials or do you have to use a set of teaching materials?” show a quite different solution. Figures 12 and 13 show the results.

Figure 12 Do you have any flexibility with the curriculum or do you have to teach a set curriculum? Mark with an X.

- I have some flexibility       I have to teach a set curriculum



The figure shows that 84% of the teachers of English have some flexibility with the curriculum at their institutions. However, in reality, they claim that the institutes should improve the curriculum so as to alleviate the teachers' problems. They do not give any concrete strategies for making improvements, but they could have proposed a better curriculum for their institutes.

Figure 13 Do you have any flexibility with your teaching materials or do you have to use a set of teaching materials? Mark with an X.

- I have some flexibility.       I have to use a set of teaching materials.

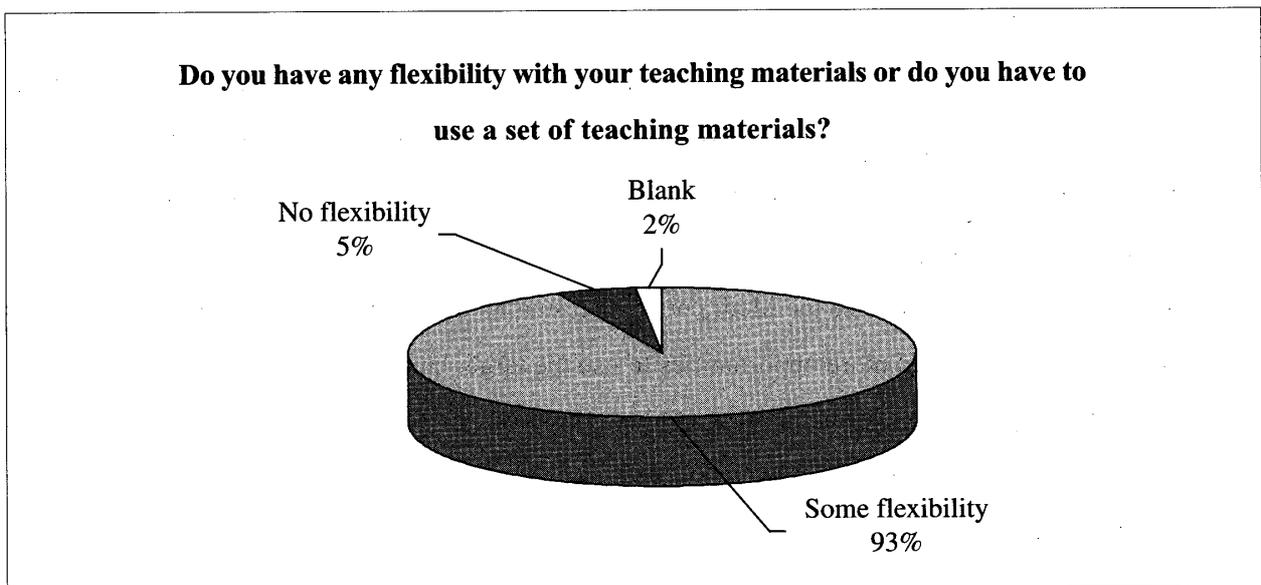


Figure 13 indicates that 93% of teachers of English have some flexibility in their use of teaching materials. To conclude, what these figures describe is that teachers of English are aware of the problems at their institutes and they have suggestions for remedying the problems. However, they seem not to take advantages for the flexibility which they have with the curriculum and not to create their own teaching materials. There must be some reason for them not to use this flexibility to improve their curriculum and to create teaching materials for use in class.

The teachers of English claim that the Japanese students do not have enough opportunity to use the language in their daily life. This situation is always found where English is taught as a foreign language. This means this is not a factor which applies to Japanese students alone, but other students elsewhere in the world who learn English as a foreign language. Teachers of English here again complain about not having a good curriculum for their students, though their institutes give them some flexibility. The third problem is low motivation or apathy to learn English. However, in Figure 5, "Why do you study English?" students were shown to have motivation and a desire to learn English for communication. Here, there is a mismatch between what teachers of English want to teach and what students want to learn. The third problem is the backwash of the entrance examination. After the students are enrolled into universities, they tend to relax their effort and this attitude may bring about low motivation for learning English. If there were some purpose in learning English after they had passed the entrance examinations, this would motivate students to go on learning the language. However, there appears no clear purpose in learning English in the university curriculum. English teachers in Japan also complain that the teaching methods, especially grammar-translation and non-communicative methods, are not good for teaching students. However, no suitable methodology has been created yet.

The fourth factor appears to be cultural inhibition, such as shyness, fear of mistakes, self-defeating beliefs, inferior complex and so on. The fifth one, "Poor basic knowledge of English" presents a serious problem as the students want to communicate with people in English. After 6 years of learning English, students should have a basic knowledge of English, and the fifth one proves the Japan's English educational reforms have not had much effect ever since the Meiji period. To sum up the results, if their English education is to be improved, students need more opportunities to use the target language and have to have a suitable curriculum which will give them the opportunity to speak English, and then they will be motivated to learn the language, even if they have some cultural inhibition. The government urgently undertake classroom research to improve English language education in Japan.

## **Conclusion**

There is a need for having a clear purpose in learning English at university and through classroom research to design to a good curriculum which will assist or improve the standards and motivate students to learn English.

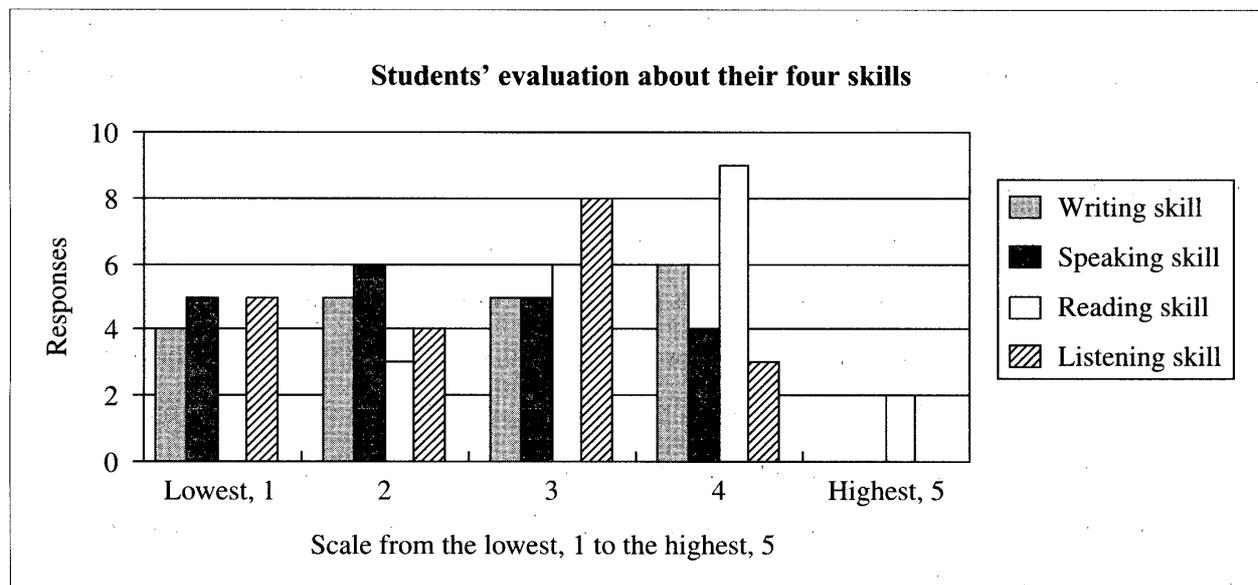
### **3.3. Results from interviewing**

Twenty students, nine male and eleven female students who were studying at two private and three national universities, were interviewed after class observation between April and June, 1999. Two girls and two boys were interviewed together, and so were a girl and a boy as they preferred to be interviewed with one another. The rest of the students were interviewed individually. The rooms were used teachers' office or regular classrooms at 3 national and 2 private universities. Class observation, at 3 national and 2 private universities, was made during May and June, 1999. Teachers of English, nine male (one Japanese male teacher) and three female teachers (two Japanese female teachers), also gave interviews at these universities after class observation at times convenient to them in their offices. One of them was interviewed while he was walking to his classroom. All interviews were audio-taped, and the class observation was video-taped.

#### **3.3.1 Results from the students interviews**

During the collective interviews, students shared their opinions. They willingly answered and gave their thoughts. They responded independently and if they were not sure about the answer, they discussed and gave answer with which they all agreed. One group, two girls were paired by a teacher to do their assignment together, so they wanted to be interviewed at the same time. Thus, after the interview, they could do their assignment together. Both of them gave their answers during the interview. They were relaxed during the interviews. When answers were not clear, e-mail was used to find out what the interviewer had meant. The findings are as followed: 1) Students evaluate their four skills, and their writing, speaking and listening skills are lower than their reading skill.

Figure 14 Students' evaluation about their four skills



Their preferred method of studying is: 1) by oneself - 11 students preferred studying alone; 2) with another person - 2 students preferred studying in a pair; 3) in a group - 6 students preferred studying in a group; 4) one student liked to study in any of above ways. Probably students like to study by themselves.

Other findings through interviews are: 1) context of the textbooks is not difficult for the students to understand it well. It is probably too easy for them because they do not ask questions in class. That might show that they do not have much input during class; 2) students seem not to have a purpose to learn English, but they have to learn English as it is one of the requirements for the credits. One of the teachers actually said that he does not like to use textbooks, saying,

I am not happy with the materials and most texts, because most materials I find are childish. I don't want to insult the intelligence of students I have. (May, 1999).

3) Students want to speak English with their teachers who are native speakers in order to discover whether the teacher can understand their spoken English. For this reason, students are reluctant to speak English with their Japanese classmates. If the environment in the classroom allows students to speak English, they do so, but students follow the teacher's direction in class. One of the interviewees says,

If everybody speaks English, I will, or after class, I will go to my teacher to speak English or ask questions ... There is a certain atmosphere in class, "We are speaking Japanese in class, why don't you speak Japanese just like us?" (May, 1999).

4) Students look for a dictionary to find out the meaning of a word; if they do not find the meaning there, they will ask their teacher about it.

### 3.3.2. Results from English teachers' interviews

Table 4 shows that the teachers' qualifications, methods, classrooms which they use, and backgrounds.

Six native speakers of English and 3 Japanese teachers of English were interviewed in 1999.

Table 4 Interviewees

| Teachers   | Degrees                                   | Teaching Years                       | Methods   | Audiovisual aids                                      | Classrooms   |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>A</b><br><b>Canadian</b><br><b>Male</b><br><b>Full time</b>   | MA in<br>Education                        | 13 years                             | Communicative<br>teacher-centred for<br>lecturer<br>student-centred for<br>group work | Photocopies<br>blackboard                             | regular classroom  |
| <b>B</b><br><b>Canadian</b><br><b>Male</b><br><b>Part time</b>   | BA in<br>Education                        | 5 years<br>as an ALT                 | Communicative   | blackboard,<br>tape recorder<br>photocopies           | regular classroom  |
| <b>C</b><br><b>British</b><br><b>Male</b><br><b>Part time</b>    | MA in<br>Theology                         | 2 years at college<br>5 years as ALT | Communicative<br>approach<br>monitoring   | tape recorder<br>blackboard, video<br>photocopies     | language<br>laboratory                                       |
| <b>D</b><br><b>American</b><br><b>Male</b><br><b>Full time</b>   | MA in<br>Linguistics                      | 7 years                              | Communicative<br>TPR method<br>Task-oriented  | blackboard<br>photocopies                             | dividing student<br>in two groups<br>using two<br>classrooms |
| <b>E</b><br><b>American</b><br><b>Male</b><br><b>Full time</b>   | MA in<br>Applied<br>Linguistics           | 4.5 years                            | Communicative<br>Notional / Functional<br>Lecture                                     | blackboard,<br>photocopies<br>tape recorder<br>guitar | regular classroom  |
| <b>F</b><br><b>American</b><br><b>Female</b><br><b>Full time</b> | MA in<br>American<br>studies &<br>writing | 10 years                             | Learner-centred   | blackboard  | language<br>laboratory<br>video tape<br>blackboard           |

|  |                  |  |  |   |   |
|--|------------------|--|--|---|---|
| <b>G</b><br><b>Japanese</b><br><b>Male</b><br><b>Full time</b>   | MA in Literature | 32 years   | Teacher-centred<br>Summarizing paragraphs<br>Reading aloud one by one, Choral reading,<br>Group work | For a while, no equipment, then use a tape recorder<br>blackboard | language laboratory-<br>but not use any equipment there |
| <b>H</b><br><b>Japanese</b><br><b>Female</b><br><b>Part-time</b> | MA in TESOL      | 3 years  | Teacher-centred<br>Grammar-Translation<br>pair work  | blackboard<br>tape recorder<br>photocopies                        | regular classroom                                       |
| <b>I</b><br><b>Japanese</b><br><b>Female</b><br><b>Part-time</b> | MA in TESL       | 15 years at her school, ages from 15 years old to adults 3 years at university | Grammar-Translation<br>Using dictionary<br>Teacher-centred<br>Pair work<br>Model reading             | blackboard<br>tape recorder<br>Photocopies                        | regular classroom                                       |

Surprisingly, some teachers of English use the Grammar-Translation method (GT), though they say that their approach is communicative. They claim that translation makes students understand the meanings of the context, so they use Grammar-translation. Here, surely, is a misunderstanding of what communicative teaching is, though they were educated in America. One teacher gave her reason for using both the communicative approach and GT during the interview in June, 1999. She teaches English in Japan.

Question: What kind of teaching methodology do you use?

Answer: Communicative approach and GT.

Question: Why do you use GT?

Answer: I believe the communicative approach is useful when students are learning English as a tool for communication. As for reading, it is easy for them to understand the content of the material when GT is used. For lower level students, GT is the best way to understand the context in the textbook. Through GT, understanding English meanings, and Japanese translation according to each student's ability, means studying English. If students can translate from Japanese to English, students are studying English. Word for word translation is a problem, though.

One native speaker of English teachers uses the Notional-Functional method, which is teacher-centred. In his class, students behave like robots. He sometimes uses translation too. The reason he translates into Japanese after he speaks English is the constraint of time and having 50 students in class, though he knows he should teach English in English. He also uses a teacher-centred approach because when he used the student-centred approach, the ability of the students declined. He explained his predicament during an interview in June, 1999, as follows:

Question: How do you feel about your teaching?

Answer: I feel lately that when I started I was more student-centred, but the ability of the students went down. That causes some frustration, ah, in terms of, what I can do with the numbers of students that I have in class. Therefore, I feel bad ... But as opposed to five years ago, I think my personal technique, my own teaching, is that it's moving away from being student-centred ...

According to Larsen-Freeman (1986, p.4), the Grammar-Translation (Yakudoku) method is not new, because it was used for teaching the classical languages and has been used by language teachers for many years. This method is used for learning the grammar of the target language and for reading foreign literature. However, there are some arguments in favour of using GT. In Japan, the Yakudoku method is the main methodology that Japanese English teachers use in the classroom. According to Hino (1988, p.45-55), two nation-wide surveys conducted by the Japan Association of College English Teachers (Koike et al., 1983, 1985) showed that from 70 to 80 per cent of Japanese teachers of English in high schools and universities use the Yakudoku Method. This traditional method does not seem to achieve sufficient competence in English language. Gorsuch (1997) mentions that the purpose of Yakudoku is to render texts into Japanese so that the content may be understood in Japanese. According to Ueda (1979, cited in Hino, 1988), there are two disadvantages of Yakudoku: 1. The regressive eye movement resulting from the word-by-word translation. 2. The fact that meaning is not understood directly in the target language but only via translation. Hino also states that the Yakudoku habit is clearly a severe handicap for Japanese students. It limits the reading speed, causes fatigue, and reduces the efficiency of comprehension.

However, the Yakudoku Method is used widely by Japanese English teachers. Hino explains the reasons why this method is still used, in spite of its disadvantages. Though the Education Ministry does not encourage Yakudoku, this method has a long established tradition in the sociolinguistic structure of Japan. It goes back more than a thousand years, when the Japanese began to read Chinese, the first foreign language. Then, in later years the Japanese applied the Yakudoku technique to other foreign languages. To conclude, surely teachers of English make some effort to teach well and look for better methods for their students' sake, but they face certain problems: 1) there are some misunderstandings about the communicative approach among teachers of English; 2) Teachers do not have enough hours to teach English as they meet students once a week; 3) classes too large; 4) time constraint to cover the teachers' teaching plans; 5) Teachers teach in the way they like best; 6) little use made of the technological devices; 7) little time to speak English in class; 8) lack of a good reason to learn English; 9) English is taught in Japanese; and 10) there is little opportunity to use English outside the classroom.

### 3.3.3 Findings from class observation

There are several findings, as follows: 1) if students do not like their partners or the members of the group, pair-work and group work activities do not work in classrooms. Silence or withdrawal from the activity occurs instead; 2) students learn English with similar activities to those which teachers used in junior high school, such as reading aloud, pair-work, group-work, translation, choral reading, using dictionaries, repetition with a tape-recorder. Moreover, students use similar strategies, for example, not answering in class when the teacher asks, looking for exact equivalents between Japanese and English, asking questions or sharing with the neighbours and so on; 3) Japanese learners of English change in attitude according to whether they have Japanese English teachers or native speaking English teachers. When Japanese English teacher teaches, students are very quiet and there is little interaction between teacher and students in class, but when they have native speakers of English in their groups, they are willingly to listen to English and try to speak in English to express their thoughts, opinions and feelings. They are more motivated to learn in groups with native speakers of English. The same students behave differently according to who is teaching them English, and students are good at finding out what teachers like or how they teach, and adjusting themselves to the teaching methodology; 4) Japanese English teachers teach English in Japanese; 5) Japanese teachers of English tend to give answers before students answer; 6) Some Japanese teachers use textbooks containing Japanese translation; 7) students sit together in a long one bench with other students. The desks and chairs are fixed to the floor; 8) during activities, teachers of English monitor students; 9) teachers stand on a platform in the classrooms; 10) Some teachers are not satisfied with their textbooks; 11) teachers monitor students during activities; 12) students tend to speak Japanese when sharing their thoughts, opinions and asking questions of their neighbours; 13) There are active students and inactive students in groups. Inactive students tend to be silent or to nap in class or look out of the window or copy answers from their classmates.

### Conclusion

This preliminary survey presents something of what goes on in classroom: 1) teachers are looking for a methodology which will work in class for their students; 2) teachers want to teach small classes; 3) teaching English should be done in English, not in Japanese; 4) students adjust to the teacher's ways in class; 5) both teachers and students do not have any sense of purpose in learning English at college; 6) not everybody participates in class activities. This does not, however, mean that students who do not participate in activities are not learning; 7) teachers try to teach everything that they have prepared for each class; 8) students prefer to speak English with teachers who are native speakers; 9) the content in the textbooks is easy; 10) teachers use the same teaching activities at university as those used in junior

high schools.

There are many things to consider if English education in Japan is to improve.

## **II. Problems**

Though MESSC has invested much effort in enhancing English education, the results have remained little improvement. To effect an improvement, five problems must be considered: 1) There is a need to investigate what is happening in the classroom, where both teachers of English and learners bring their cultures; 2) A suitable methodology for the Japanese learners of English needs to be established; 3) On top of that, the cultures of the schools, the institutions and the government need to be investigated; 4) There is also a need to investigate how the cultures of the three organizations can co-operate to enhance Japanese to enhance English teaching, and break down the *blocks* for learners of English; and 5) There is a need for classes to be small.

## **III. Review of previous research**

### **1.1 Importance of the classroom research**

Ellis (1994) says that the classroom gives the second language researcher three different perspectives: 1. Comparative method studies, based on product because they depend on measurements of language learning and examination the instructional and learning processes which happen in the classroom. 2. The black box of the classroom. This views that the classroom is a place where various interactions happen that give learners opportunities to learn the L2. This view leads researchers to observe and describe the person-to-person interaction in the classroom. Allwright calls this 'the fundamental fact of classroom pedagogy.' 3. Formal instruction. Instruction is viewed as an attempt at intervening in the language learning process.

Leo van Lier (1988) states that classroom research tells about learners, learning and teachers, because language development goes on both inside the classroom (a formal setting) and outside the classroom (an informal setting.) Long (1983a) mentions that the classroom is the most difficult place to do second language learning research in, as witnessed by its long history of neglect and its status as a 'black box' between input and output measures. Faerch and Kasper (1980) point out that it is difficult to observe interactions in classrooms, because the processes of interlanguage formation occur in the learners' heads. Therefore, researchers have to infer the processes of interlanguages. However, Lier contends that by using an ethnographic approach in classroom research, the 'black box' of the classroom can be opened up and this approach therefore promotes second-language classroom research. He claims that classroom research must study how classrooms are structured to promote learning and why things happen the way they do, that is, the relationships between individual participants, the classroom, and the societal forces.

A vital aspect of classroom research is observation, and the most common form of classroom observation is non-participant observation. Allwright (1980) mentions that both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis are possible.

Allwright and Bailey (1991) state that classroom research investigates of what happens inside the classroom, using recording devices, because it is the crucible as Gaies (1980) notes. So, a researcher should focus on what actually happens there. Through classroom research, a researcher can collect real data.

The main tool of classroom research is observations with recordings, surveys, and other forms of self-report. Lier (1988:122) also mentions that 'an analysis of the processes of interaction may be achieved by means of a close examination of audiovisual records of interaction.' (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 61).

## 1.2 Definitions of the term "Culture"

Brown (1994) tells that culture is crucial for learning languages, as a language and a culture cannot be separated like a coin.

It is apparent that culture, as ingrained set of behaviours and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of a second language. A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a language. (Brown, D. H. 1994, p. 165).

Condon, E.C. (1973) described what culture is and tells that culture controls our behaviour and human beings are its puppets.

Culture might be defined as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time. But culture is more than the sum of its part. "It is a system of integrated patterns, most of which remain below the threshold of consciousness, yet all of which govern human behavior just as surely as the manipulated strings of a puppet control its motions"

(Brown, 1994, quoting from Condon, 1973).

Murdock (1961) gives seven "universals" of cultural patterns of behaviour: 1) they originate in the human mind; 2) they facilitate human and environmental interactions; 3) they satisfy basic human needs; 4) they are cumulative and adjust to changes in external and internal conditions; 5) they tend to form a consistent structure; 6) they are learned and shared by all the members of a society; and (7) they are transmitted to new generations (pp.45-54).

As each culture has its own characteristics, each culture differs widely. With their own cultural views, people tend to think reality with their own culture, and misunderstanding occurs between members of different cultures. People also have the bias of their own cultural world, therefore, they tend to evaluate

other cultures in oversimplified manner. Ethnocentrism causes cultural inequalities. Brown (1994) warns having negative cultural stereotypes, because every person is a unique individual and it is a danger to categorize all people in a culture in a group categories, and to oversimplify concepts of members of another culture.

A stereotype is a category that singles out an individual as sharing assumed characteristics on the basis of his or her group membership. The stereotype may be accurate in depicting the “typical” member of culture, but it is inaccurate for describing a particular person (p. 166).

Hofstede (1991) defines mental software is culture and it has two meanings. His definitions of the cultures are; 1) culture one in the narrow sense. It means education, art, and literature 2) culture two in a much broader usage. It means mental software. In his remarkable definition throughout the book, he uses that culture means ‘civilization’ or ‘refinement of the mind’. With this view of culture, ‘civilization’ or ‘refinement of the mind’ shows the only Western view of culture, and he used the IBM data and presents the dimensions of cultures. The dimensions of cultures are: 1) power distance (from small to large); 2) collectivism versus individualism; 3) femininity versus masculinity; and 4) uncertainty avoidance (from weak to strong). There are two problems of his understanding about cultures. One is that his cultural view is the commonly means of culture in most Western languages, and the other is his IBM data. People work for the IBM are not ordinary people, but somehow special people who work for the company sponsored by the foreign finance, and these people’s values, thoughts, lifestyle, language skills are different from ordinary people. He limited certain people as subjects to collect data, so the data have a bias. His aim of this book assists dealing with the differences in thinking, feeling, and acting of people around the globe is proved by this biased data. He neglects other cultures of the world.

In most Western languages ‘culture’ commonly means ‘civilization’ or ‘refinement of the mind’ and in particular the results of such refinement like education, art, and literature. This is the narrow sense; I sometimes call ‘culture one’. Culture as mental software, however, corresponds to a much broader use of the word which is common among social anthropologists : this is ‘culture two’, and it is the concept which will be used throughout this book (p. 5).

Contrary to Hofstede’ view about Japan in collectivism and its people, Mouer and Sigimoto explain that how Japanese are individual from the Japanese proverbs, the Japanese heroes, biographies, autobiographies, or daily life. For examples, *junin toiro* (different strokes for different folks), this means each person has a unique personality, thoughts, values and opinions. The Japanese have emphasized individual responsibility for long. For example, *jigo jitoku* (one must pay the consequences of one’s misdeeds). In the business

world, there are also some proverbs to show individualism. *Jiko-hatten* (self-development), *jiko handan* (self-evaluation), and so on. From childhood, Japanese are raised for being *shikarishita* (courageously strong-willed and stout-hearted) or *jitsuryoku* (the individual ability to carry out projects on their own). However, Japanese look down *happoo-bijin* (those who conform or fit in to please everyone). In daily life, the Japanese prefer doing their hobbies at home or playing by oneself like calligraphy, cooking, fishing, watching television, hitting golf balls or tennis balls to practice, Japanese chess by oneself. In education, the Japanese prefer having education at private schools as they have their own motto and individual character.

There is a feeling among parents that at a private school their child will receive more individual attention, will have more opportunity to develop his or her own personality (*kojinsei*), and will be more refined (e.g., not exposed to mass culture, a theme related to the idea of private cleanliness). (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986, pp. 207-208).

Mouer and Sugimoto also tells about the richness of the Japanese vocabulary for the expression of individualism. For example, the use of the self (I) in English. In the Japanese language, there are wide range of the self; *watashi*, *watakushi*, *boku*, *ore*, *washi*, *jibun*, *uchi*, *shoosei* and *atai*.

Adrian Holliday (1994) argues that insufficient to look only within the classroom interaction as Allwright mentions, but within and around the classroom to look interactions how they are influenced by factors within the wider educational institution, the wider educational environment and the wider society through ethnographical approach.

His social context has two components such as the micro social context and the macro social context, and he focuses on the macro social context as key for us to understand what happens between people. He emphasizes the importance of sociology, and anthropology to determine how influences differently within specific societies.

An anthropology is particularly important because it transcends the macro-micro continuum, connecting an understanding of the wider social picture with a deep exploration of what happens between people (p. 14).

He also emphasized that the importance of sociology to determine principles of influence across societies and an anthropology to determine how these influences differ from specific societies. To administer the new innovation, there are conflicts between BANA (British, Australia and North America) and TESEP (that of state English language education in the rest of the world.) because of the lack of knowledge of what happens between people have different cultures. He mentions about cultural imperialism and ideological colonization because that English language education is a powerful and dangerous commodity. So, English language TESPE teachers are the recipients of English language teaching methodologies

produced by a separate BANA. As a result, conflicts occur in many situations of English language teaching. For successful educational innovation in each country, we have to have action research and ethnography to collect data from teachers, learners, host institutions and societies. Ethnographic action research is the central to learning about the host institution and the classroom.

Holliday (1999) distinguishes cultures in two paradigms: 1) the large culture refers to ethnic, national and international entities 2) a small culture means small social groupings or activities wherever there is a cohesive behaviour, and avoiding culturist ethnic, national or international stereotypes.

The notion of small culture does not therefore relate simply to something smaller in size than large ethnic, national or international cultures, but presents a different paradigm through which to look at social groupings. (Holliday, 1999, p.240).

In his article, he tries to examine four things: 1) how large and small culture relate to each other; 2) the limitations of a large culture approach; 3) how cultural imperialism and culture learning may operate the mezzo level of the institution; and 4) the nature of small culture formation and the role of ethnography.

Holliday also defines small culture as a dynamic, ongoing group process in the classroom.

Small culture is thus a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances ... the classroom group where a small culture will form from scratch when the group first comes together, each member using her or his culture-making ability to form rules and meanings in collaboration with others. (p. 248).

He tells what are blocks for learners of English in the classrooms is what each member brings into the classrooms.

### **1.3 Arguments of the cultural stereotypes about Japan and Nihonjinrom**

Ryoko Kubota (1998) discusses the issues of ideology that English language teaching dominates the world. Japan is one of the countries influenced by the Western views through learning English such as using more English loan words written in katakana (syllabic symbols used for the phonetic transcription of foreign sounds), and they are used in advertising, product names, and titles for magazines and TV shows.

Perhaps the most troubling way English exerts influences in Japan is in affecting the formation of people's views of language, culture, race, ethnicity, and their identity. Critics argue that by learning English, the Japanese have adopted native English speakers' view of the world. (World Englishes, 1998, p. 297-298).

She also argues that *kokusaika* (internationalisation) in relation to only the West, emphasizes teaching and learning Western cultures and languages, especially American English, and to encourage cultural exchange, but she says that English language education failed to inquire inequalities and injustices in the world. *Kokusaika* and *Nihonjinron* are discussed only in relation to the West. *Kokusaika* emphasizes

teaching and learning Western cultures and languages (particularly American English) and promotes cultural exchange with the Inner Circle. Therefore, she claims that acquiring the communication skills in the main language should not lead to the rejection of one's linguistic and cultural identity, because meanings are not fixed but multiple. She quotes about the roles of a critical teacher and Japanese teachers of English.

What is necessary for a critical teacher is to help students develop a critical discourse and formulate their identities, and to saturate the dominant Discourse with new meanings. While Japanese teachers of English need to help their students develop both critical awareness and communicative skills, it is also necessary for them to help students broaden their cultural/linguistics perspectives through recognizing 'multiple identities' of English (Kachru, 1997).

In this article, Kubota suggests the three things; 1) to synthesize the issues of ideology in teaching and learning English raised recently by critics in Japan 2) to discuss recent discourses of *nihonjinron* (uniqueness of Japanese) 3) *kokusaika* (internationalization) as broader ideological contexts that would provide an understanding of ideologies of English in Japan.

McKay (2000) gives suggestions from the view of teaching English as an international language about which culture and how to teach it. She uses the definition of an international language by Smith (1967), "international language is one which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another" (p. 17) She concludes that the implications for the role of culture in language teaching: 1) because individuals who learn an international language do not need to accept the norms of native-English-speaking countries, the teaching of culture needs to focus on giving students knowledge about, rather than suggesting the accept, particular cultural values and beliefs. 2) in both ESL and EFL contexts, there is a need to acknowledge the value of including information about the students' own culture (TESOL JOURNAL, vol. 9, no. 4, winter). According to Crystal (1997), there are approximately 320-380 million native speakers of English. In outer-circle countries, there are 150-300 million second language speakers of English, and there are about 100 to 1,000 million learners of English where English is taught as a foreign language. The international English belongs to no one culture, but provides the basic cross-cultural understanding.

### **1.5 Arguments about Asian students' reticent attitude**

Xiaotnag (1999) argues about the common allegation that Asian students' the reticent and passive behaviour in classroom result from cultural attributes of Asian societies. He argues about two points; 1) It is an over generation of what some professors' and teachers' complaints came from their impression about Asian students. It is largely a groundless myth rather than a universal truth. Asian students have

strong desire to participate in classroom activities. In China, Confucius encourages students to challenge to ask questions. Respect for teachers does not seem to be a major cause for some Asian students' reticence in class. 2) Asian students' reticence and passivity are observed in situation specific factors such as cultural attributes, language proficiency level and teaching methodologies. Xiaotang discusses that it may result from unsuitable methodology, lack of required language proficiency, irrelevant or offensive topics, lack of rapport between the teacher and the students, lack of motivation, and student' mood on a particular day. Among them he chooses two causes: 1) unsuitable methodologies; 2) lack of language proficiency. He adds that in a teacher-centred teaching and learning environment, learners are doomed to reticence and passivity.

Liu and Littlewood. (1997) also argue that East Asian students' seem to be reluctant to speak and passive learning behaviour in classroom through their surveys. They mention that this idea of passive learners is a myth, but students prefer active speech roles. Liu and Littlewood show that East Asian students' positive attitudes to English when the students acquire stronger cultural identities, English becomes less a threat as it has become an international language. Liu and Littlewood show the reasons for plausible causes of students' apparent reticence: 1) Lack of experience in speaking English It is a major factor for students' poor English performance input-poor environments; 2) Lack of confidence in speaking English Frequency of practice opportunities seems a vital cause to students' confidence and proficiency; 3) Anxiety from high performance expectations It seems to appear that there is a strong correlation between students' sense of ease when speaking English and their self-perception of their own competence. If students' high anxiety in class, they won't take risks of being wrong or of revealing their self-perceived weakness in English; 4) Perception of leaning role There seems to be the mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions of learner role. Through these causes, Liu and Littlewood conclude that lack of experience in using English as a tool for spoken communication and active, exploratory learning in class are the main reasons for students' reluctant to speak and passive learning behaviour in classroom. They also state that students' previous education has provided them with inadequate opportunities to practice speaking English and to adopt passive roles in the classroom. Therefore, many students' who lack confidence in speaking English, cannot perform without feelings of anxiety. Liu and Littlewood propose two years of development for English language learning and for wider aspects of students' learning. They are: 1) Before students enter university, they need to experience more opportunities to develop active skills in oral English and to use those skills in active leaning roles in the classroom. 2) At tertiary level, everybody concerned needs to explore strategies for encouraging students to move towards more active roles.

Liu discusses that curriculum innovations involves many and interrelated factors, so EFL countries should develop their methods in their own contexts. To find appropriate teaching methods to their learners, colleagues and societies, EFL countries should strive to establish their own research contingents and encourage methods specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching methods that take into account the political, economic, social, and cultural factors and, most important of all, the EFL situations in their countries (Daoud, 1996; Phillipson, 1992). Li mentions that teacher have crucial roles for an innovation curriculum to implement to learners, schools, teachers and societies (Hall & Hewings. 2001. pp. 163).

### **Conclusions**

Through this preliminary survey and literature review, many problems in English teaching in Japan and misunderstandings about Japanese people, a mismatch between what Japanese students want and English teachers want are mentioned. Through the history of English education, investing much money and time, MESSC has not achieved good results borrowing methodologies from Western countries. MESSC and English teachers have not considered how culture impact on learning languages. The impact of culture on language learning should be discussed to improve Japanese English education before borrowing methodologies from the Western countries.

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