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An Introduction to Accents Asia

Martha Clark Cummings
Teachers College, Columbia University

Greetings to the Inaugural Issue of Accents Asia, an online academic journal created by and for MA TESOL students (current or graduates) addressing language teaching issues in Japan and throughout Asia. Initially, this journal will be a place for unpublished but approved Teachers College Columbia University MA papers and MA Projects, but will expand over time to include articles and other types of research reports. This dynamic site can grow and evolve with the needs of teacher/researchers in the field through their suggestions and submissions.

Accents Asia was created to provide a space to access relevant TESOL research that would otherwise be left to gather dust on a shelf, making it accessible, via the World Wide Web, to a large international audience. This is an ideal opportunity for TC graduates to publish and get feedback on their work, as well as to provide opportunities for sharing ideas, lesson planning, and preparing conference presentations. Submissions are invited primarily but not exclusively from TC MA students. We also encourage students from other MA TESOL programs to submit your work.

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Reach high, take the initiative, take risks, submit your work to Accents Asia. This is an opportunity for you as teachers to do what you are always encouraging your students to do. Do it now!

Citation

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Introducing a Global Issues Curriculum at the High School Level

Martin Darling
Kamakura Jogakuin

Introduction

One year ago, the administrators at my high school asked the four native speaker English teachers (NSETs) to implement a global issues curriculum for the second year oral communication class. The administrators wanted the NSETs to link global themes that students studied in their first year social studies class to content in the new English curriculum. I embraced the idea enthusiastically for two reasons. The first was that the NSETs were dissatisfied with the curriculum at that time because it focused on the development of linguistic skills, with little regard for content. As Cates (1990) states, a global issues curriculum aims to enhance students' linguistic skills while also providing them with the knowledge and skills required to deal with world problems. Secondly, the third year oral communication class consisted of a curriculum on environmental issues, so I thought the new global issues curriculum would serve as a natural bridge to the third year class. The obvious link between the two courses fueled our motivation to begin the planning process.

The NSETs devised a global issues curriculum consisting of four components: *Poverty & Wealth*, *Food & Water, Human Rights*, and *Peace Education*. The aim of our curriculum was to present a breadth of global issues to students rather than depth in each component for, as Brinton (1989) has shown, a global issues content-based curriculum is one that teaches students about the world. The curriculum at our school narrows that focus to concentrate on Asia.

The purpose of my project was to assess the students' attitudes to the new curriculum. I wanted to know if students enjoyed studying global issues and at the same time whether students perceived they were able to improve their linguistic skills while studying a content-based curriculum. A content-based curriculum tries to strike a balance between imparting substantial content and encouraging linguistic development. Secondly, I wanted to ascertain if studying global issues causes students to be more enthusiastic to continue learning English.

Global issues can be serious and gloomy. It is a challenge to teach about conflict, famine, poverty and discrimination without the classroom atmosphere becoming heavy and the students depressed. One of the keys to maintaining a positive attitude towards the class is to focus on solutions to the problems.

This project has also provided us with feedback. The NSETs have been able to assess the success of the new curriculum and consider changes based on the feedback. If students embraced a global issues curriculum, it may encourage other teachers and high schools to implement similar courses. As global issues is still a realatively new field of study in Japan, a positive response by students would add momentum to its growth.

There are certain limits to listening to student opinions. Students may reject content that is challenging if they fail to see its applicability to their lives or futures. Students may also not realize how much their language proficiency has actually improved over the course of study, especially when the pedagogic focus is on understanding and discussing ideas, rather than focusing primarily on communicating with grammatical accuracy. Nevertheless, student input is a valuable source of feedback and worthy of consideration when evaluating a curriculum's success.

In this paper I argue that students in this study found global issues interesting and that they perceived they were able to develop their English language skills while studying these issues. Studying global issues made students more enthusiastic to continue learning English. Although students found studying a content-based curriculum challenging, they believed that learning about other countries and cultures enhances their understanding of

the world. Students also thought studying global issues will be of practical benefit to them in the future when they begin to prepare for university entrance examinations.

Literature Review

Content-Based Instruction

Proponents of content-based instruction argue that language is most effectively learned in the context of relevant and meaningful content. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) define content-based instruction (CBI) as "the integration of particular content with language-teaching aims" (p. 2). The activities in a CBI class are centred around the content being taught and students are expected to learn the content by using the target language. According to Eskey (1997), the rationale for employing CBI is that "people do not learn language and then use it, [rather] people learn languages by using them" (p. 133). Eskey argues that content is "not merely something to practice language with: rather, language is something to explore content with" (p. 136). Da Silva (2000) identifies content as a crucial part of language learning and the separation of language from content as both arbitrary and artificial.

Parmenter (2000) sees content-based learning as contributing not only to language but also to students' wider education by broadening their horizons. CBI's broader educational perspective is essential to prepare students for an increasingly interdependent world, and Hosoya (2000) and Kazuya (2000) show that incorporating foreign language classes with global education will enable students to develop global perspectives to deal with a future characterized by change.

Parmenter (2000) also links affective aspects to content-based learning such as enjoyment, confidence and increased motivation. In terms of content, she exposed her students to a wide range of topics, including international business, foreign travel, and the environment. She found that the focus on content rather than language helped her students to stop worrying about making mistakes and start enjoying English. Her students began to form opinions about society and express their opinions confidently. Research has shown that content-based courses increased student motivation for studying English and raised students' confidence when using English (Han & Dickey, 2001; Parmenter,

2000). However, Parmenter (2000) admits that the link between enjoyment and CBI is not automatic and can be combined with frustration as students realize the limitations of their language skills. Students may grasp the content but have difficulty putting their thoughts into English and communicating their ideas.

O'Dowd (2000) reported that students in content courses exhibited greater than usual interest in the courses and engaged in the classes with enthusiasm. Johnson and Higgins (2000) found that students performed at a higher level when they believed the content they were learning was relevant to their present and/or future needs.

Curriculum Design

There are a number of factors to be considered before designing a content-based curriculum. Cates (1990) advocates a global issues curriculum accompanied by the four goals of knowledge, skills, concern and action. He believes these skills will help to ensure our students become socially responsible citizens. Knowledge refers to teaching awareness of global problems. Skills to be taught include communication skills, critical and creative thinking, empathy, multiple perspectives, co-operative problem solving and informed decision-making. Concern entails developing positive feelings about changing the world's condition. Action obviously refers to doing something to alleviate a problem. Content must be chosen judiciously because "it is impossible to teach learners everything they need to know in class" (Nunan, 1988, p. 3). Hosoya (2000) believes the choice of content can be made more effectively through cooperation between social studies and foreign language teachers.

Mackenzie (2000) contends that content is the dimension that fuels course design and the desired learner outcomes will dictate linguistic choices the curriculum developers have to make. O'Dowd (2000) argues for integrating the four traditional language skills into the curriculum. He stresses that assessment and evaluation procedures must be determined from the beginning of the course and made explicit to students. Brinton (1989) points out that a language syllabus must take into account the eventual uses the learner will make of the target language.

Curriculum developers decide on an appropriate balance between substantive content and linguistic aims. Poole and McCasland (2000) for example claim the ideal balance is 20 percent language instruction and 80 percent content instruction. Dusthimer (1996) says curriculum developers need to link content, thinking skills and learning styles. Yamashiro (1996) says training in critical thinking skills is essential in a content-based curriculum as students need to understand different points of view before making decisions or taking action.

Research suggests that in successful CBI, teachers use realia and authentic text materials to increase student interest and motivation (Brinton, 1989; Hosoya, 2000; O'Dowd, 2000). However, authentic materials will likely need to be altered to bring a course to students' ability level because as Sato (2000) warns, most students are likely to be overwhelmed by global issues vocabulary because the words are so unfamiliar. However, according to Kasper (1997), as students grapple with authentic texts, they become aware of how to construct meaning from information stored in memory, and filter out redundant or irrelevant information. Rosengren (1983) suggests the most effective materials are ones teachers design themselves and tailor to meet the interests and needs of their students.

Global Issues

CBI and global issues are tied to teaching style. On the one hand, making connections deepens the relevance of language education. On the other, CBI is difficult to implement. The declaration on International Education by UNESCO (1974) states that human rights, environment, development and peace issues should be taught across the curriculum and Kazuya (2000) urges English teachers in Japan to address these global issues. Cates (1990) talks about teachers' moral responsibility to care about global problems. He says the Japanese Ministry of Education (1983) also has adopted a curriculum model and "encourages teachers to develop courses that train students to have a deep sense of responsibility, contribute to world peace and the welfare of mankind" (p. 121).

UNESCO (1974) advocates a participatory approach of learning and suggests learner-centered ways of teaching. Hosoya (2000) concurs with UNESCO, pointing out

that "not only the content but also the method of global education should be considered carefully" (p. 57). There is much consensus among global educators, such as Brinton, (1989), and Pike and Selby (1988), that the role of teacher should be that of facilitator. To assume the role of facilitator, teachers must shed the traditional role of authoritarian and adopt the role of global learner with the students. Facilitating involves loosening the reigns of the class, encouraging the students to ask questions and viewing learning as a process with no fixed destination. Fisher and Hicks (1985) warn that if teachers assume the role of *knower*, students will fail to develop their enquiry skills.

Before a global education program can be successfully implemented, Kniep (1987) says teachers need clear statements of what global education is and why it is important. The implementation of global issues programs is impeded, according to Mische (1987), because there is a lack of widespread agreement on the definition, purposes and objectives of global education.

Methodology

I designed a study combining both qualitative and quantitative features to determine how students felt about studying global issues and if they perceived they were making progress with their English linguistic skills while studying a content-based curriculum. The means used to accumulate data included two questionnaires, oral interviews, my teacher's journal, written feedback from students and one class observation by a colleague. The study was conducted over a three-month period.

Setting and Participants

The context of the study was a private girls' junior & senior high school in eastern Japan. All 34 of the students enrolled in the second year high school oral communication course. Over the course of the study, students completed two questionnaires soliciting opinions about studying global issues. They were also asked to assess their linguistic progress. Oral communication is mandatory until first year of high school, so this course was an

elective for all students. They had previously studied oral communication at the school with NSETs once a week.

The second year oral communication program consisted of three classes of students designated by homerooms. The students rotated from one component of global issues to another each term so students studied three of the four components. Only my *Peace Education* class was offered in all three rotations. The students did not get to choose the content of their study. The head foreign teacher randomly assigned each class to a course schedule.

The Four Components

The global issues curriculum consisted of four components. The *Poverty & Wealth* component began by having the students define the terms poverty and wealth. The students learned how the cycle of poverty is perpetuated by choices of consumption. They also studied fair trade and labor issues, and they discussed squatter settlements. The core activity of the class required students to design their own Non Governmental Organization (NGO) whose mission was to alleviate poverty. After, students wrote, rehearsed and recorded a public service announcement for their NGO. In their public service announcements they cited reasons for poverty and offered solutions to eliminate it.

In the *Food & Water* component, a connection was drawn between fast food and obesity. Students learned how raising cattle to supply fast food restaurants in First World nations affects people in developing countries. Students also examined chronic hunger and famine, and their own consumption patterns.

Given the all-female population of the student body (but especially to heighten interest in its content), the *Human Rights* component focused on women's issues with a more specific focus on Japan and Asia. The component began with the introduction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then shifted to issues prevalent in Asia, including the sex industry and trafficking of women and children. The students did a case study on Maiti Nepal, an organization whose workers attempt to rescue women from forced prostitution. They also explored issues relevant to Japanese society, such as sexual

harassment and domestic violence. Finally, students conducted Internet-based research on the topic, "The Woman I Admire Most."

The fourth and final component of the curriculum was *Peace Education* which I designed and taught. The aim of the *Peace Education* unit was for students to develop a greater understanding of the causes and effects of conflict in their own lives, with a particular focus on Asia. The students learned to analyze root causes of conflicts, and propose strategies for peaceful solutions. Activities in this component included group brainstorming on the meaning of peace, discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an information gap activity using maps of Asian nations, and an exercise adapted from Peaty (1997) in which students tried to view Japanese culture through the eyes of resident foreigners. The unit culminated in a project in which the students worked together in groups to conduct Internet research on areas of conflict throughout Asia. In the last class, each group presented its research to the class, and proposed solutions to the conflict which the group had researched.

Data Collection

I designed and administered two questionnaires completed by all 34 students in the course (see Appendix A). The first questionnaire I and the other NSETs conducted in the first class of the third term. The students completed the questionnaire during class time. The other NSETs and I explained the questionnaire to our students and waited outside our respective classes while the students completed them. I did not want the NSET in the classrooms while students were completing the questionnaires lest we influence their answers. The questionnaire was written in both English and Japanese to ensure comprehension. A Japanese teacher was available in case students wished to ask any questions in Japanese. Following Dörnyei's (2003) model, I piloted the questionnaire to three third year students, including one returnee. I asked them to check for ambiguity. The students approved the content and assured me that second year students would understand it.

The questionnaire was multi-faceted, consisting of Likert-scale questions and open-response questions. Students had a choice of answering questions in either English or Japanese.

The Likert scale questions asked students to consider whether the global issues classes had made them enthusiastic to continue studying English and to what degree they understood the two components they had studied. I also asked the students to gauge how much their four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing had improved since studying global issues. The students had six choices: *not sure, very little, a little, some, much* and *very much.*

One open-response question asked students to name as many Asian countries as they could. Another question asked students what they liked and disliked about studying global issues. I had students write a short response explaining what they remembered about what they had studied. Finally, students could write other comments they wished to make about the global issues program. The closed-response questions asked if students would take the elective oral communication class the following year and whether the global issues classes they had studied this year had influenced their decision.

The second questionnaire was administered three months later during the final class (see Appendix B). I could not spare class time to allow students to complete the survey at school, so I asked them to complete it at home and gave them two weeks to do so. The students had time in class to peruse the questionnaire and ask questions about it. I followed the same piloting procedure as the first questionnaire.

The second questionnaire was similar to the first one. Employing the same scale, students were asked to what extent global issues had made them more enthusiastic to study English and how interesting global issues was for them. I asked how useful the information learned during the year would be in the future. I also asked students to evaluate the level of difficulty of each of the three curricula they had studied. I used a similar scale, ranging from *very easy* to *very difficult*.

I asked students to circle the language skill they had hoped would improve the most during the year and I had them rank the four skills in order of how they perceived

them to have actually improved. Using an open-response question, I asked the students to explain their answers. The remaining questions on the second questionnaire were identical to the first.

Other sources of data I collected included my teacher's journal. I took notes in every class of salient features, such as laughter, body language, engagement, and use of English and Japanese. Immediately following the class I referred to my notes and indexed them following Hubbard and Power's model (1993).

Shortly before administering the second questionnaire, I conducted 12 oral interviews with students. I randomly chose four students from each class. I explained to the students the purpose of the interview and all students complied willingly. A week in advance, I gave each student a list of the four questions which I planned to ask. The students' Japanese English teacher checked my questions before I gave them to the students and suggested that I make modifications with the language and use simpler or more familiar words.

In an attempt to establish an atmosphere of cooperation, I sat side by side with my students while I interviewed them, a technique used by Nunan (1993). As Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993) suggest, I interviewed two students simultaneously hoping students would feel more at ease. I asked students to tell me one thing they enjoyed studying in the global issues classes and something they did not. I asked students if they would take oral communication the following year and if the current year's course had influenced their decision. I also asked students three questions they had not prepared for:

1. Which of the four language skills have you improved the most and why?
2. Which language skill have you improved the least?
3. What skill would you most like to improve this year and why?

I wanted to obtain written feedback from a sample of my students so I asked them to answer questions I wrote on the board at the end of the second class. I asked students to tell me what they remembered and liked about the lesson. I also asked students what they wanted to know more about. I gave students five minutes to write as much as they could and asked them not to stop writing until time was up. In subsequent classes, I asked

students to answer the questions and gave no time restriction. Students never wrote for more than five minutes.

At the end of the following class, I asked students to give me written feedback assessing how much English they perceived themselves to have spoken in class that day. I also asked students to tell me what I could do to increase their speaking opportunities. Lastly, they had to tell me what they did and did not understand in the class.

The third time I collected written feedback, I asked students to state which activity they had enjoyed the most in that lesson. I also asked which language skill students felt they had used the most, and the least, in that lesson. The fourth time I sought feedback, I asked students to write what they liked and/or disliked about the lesson.

I asked another NSET at my school to conduct a classroom observation of one of my classes. I asked him to note how engaged the students appeared to be on the task, the ratio of the use of English and Japanese, and the situations when students resorted to Japanese. The NSET attended the class for 30 minutes and took written notes.

Analytic Procedures

After collecting the questionnaires, I tabulated, coded and analyzed the responses. I used the Likert-like scale responses to provide a representation of each class and the whole program. For the open-response questions, I transcribed responses and created categories, identifying patterns and similarities. Since some of the students chose to write some or all of their answers in Japanese, I asked a Japanese English teacher to translate their responses. To check accuracy, I asked another Japanese colleague to review the translations. She suggested minor changes in word choice which I then negotiated with both Japanese teachers.

The process of coding began by identifying recurring words and phrases. After reviewing the data repeatedly, I identified a group of six categories: *broadening horizons, Food & Water, interesting, useful, serious*, and *difficult*.

After completing the oral interviews, I listened to the recordings to get an overview after which I listened a second time and made notes. I then selected sections

relevant to the research questions and I transcribed those fully, following Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993).

Findings

Results of the first questionnaire show that the majority of students felt the new global issues curriculum had made them more enthusiastic to continue studying English. Of the 33 students I surveyed, 28 (85%) said studying global issues had raised their enthusiasm to continue studying English and 15 indicated they were a lot or very much more enthusiastic. Only 15% of students (5 of 33) said their enthusiasm had increased little or very little. The second questionnaire, administered three months after the first, produced slightly more favorable results. The number of students who said they were a lot or very much more enthusiastic to continue studying English rose from 15 to 19 while only 12% of students (4 of 34) said their enthusiasm had increased just marginally (see Table A).

Table A

To what extent have the global issues classes you have studied made you more enthusiastic to continue studying English?							
	not sure	**very little**	**a little**	**some**	**a lot**	**very much**	**Total # Students**
Nov	0	2	3	13	12	3	33
	0	6.06%	9.09%	39.39%	36.36%	9.09%	100%
Feb	0	1	3	11	17	2	34
	0	2.94%	8.82%	32.35%	50%	5.88%	100%

The enthusiasm for the global issues curriculum was also evident in the number of students who indicated they will continue to study oral communication in the third year class. In the previous year, only 31% of second year students (16 of 52) joined the third year oral communication class. Following the study, 65% of students (22 of 34) indicated they would carry on with oral communication. The large increase of student enrolment may indicate that students are enthusiastic about global issues, as Student A affirmed, "I want to know more about global issues." Further support for global issues is shown by the fact that of the 22 students continuing with oral communication, 68% said the global issues

curriculum had a positive influence on their decision. Of the 12 students not continuing with oral communication, only one said studying global issues had negatively influenced her decision.

Student enthusiasm for global issues was also evident to another NEST when he observed my class. He wrote after the class that the students "appeared to be interested in the subject matter and doing the pair-work quite actively." I noted in my teacher's journal after the same class that "students appeared to be having fun." I based my impression on students' body language. I recorded that one student clapped when I acknowledged her answer to be correct. Another student pumped her arm in delight when her partner said, "I agree," confirming their answers to be identical.

Of the eight entries I recorded in my teacher's journal, I identified demonstrations of student enthusiasm in five classes. After my class on February 10, I wrote that "the students seemed to be engaged enthusiastically during all activities." Observing student interaction in an information gap using maps, I recorded that "they were laughing a lot." During another activity I wrote, "Students seemed to enjoy the challenge of deciding which flag belonged to each country." I noted that one group cheered when I said their answer was correct and I heard another student say "*kore tanoshii*" ("This is fun") during the same activity.

The first questionnaire showed that 70% of students said that studying global issues was interesting or very interesting, and on the second questionnaire this percentage jumped to 85%. The 15% increase shows that students became even more interested in global issues after a further 12 weeks of study. Only 2 students indicated studying global issues was not interesting on the first questionnaire and this number dropped to zero on the second survey (see Table B). On the first questionnaire more than a third of the students (39%) answered that there was nothing they disliked about studying global issues. This percentage rose to 44% on the second questionnaire.

Table B

How interesting do you think global issues is?							
	not sure	**not interesting**	**a little interesting**	**somewhat interesting**	**interesting**	**very interesting**	**Total # Ss**
Nov	0	2	3	5	15	8	33
	0	6.06%	9.09%	15.15%	45.45%	24.24%	100%
Feb	0	0	3	2	16	13	34
	0	0	8.82%	5.88%	47.05%	38.23%	100%

As well as saying that global issues was interesting, students also overwhelmingly endorsed the global issues curriculum as being useful to their futures. A large majority of students (85%) said they thought the information learned would be quite or very useful to them. Student B wrote that the curriculum was useful because it expanded her knowledge, "I could know many things which I didn't know." Student C viewed the global issues content she was studying as useful because "the class deals with the problems of today." When interviewed, Student D alluded to practical benefits of the global issues curriculum saying, "It can be help for the university entrance exam." None of the students said the new curriculum was not useful.

Entrance Examinations

Of the nine students whom I surveyed about whether they thought the course would help them prepare for university entrance examinations, six answered affirmatively and the other three students were unsure. Two of the students who answered affirmatively said global issue themes are included on entrance examinations and two other students stressed they believed the content of the curriculum was important. One student said her vocabulary had increased and another said her knowledge had expanded, "My thinking and opinion about global issues made deeper. My knowledge of the world problems are more than before." However, other students, including Student E, were uncertain if studying global issues was beneficial in a practical sense saying, "This lesson is good for us but it may be useless in college examinations." My Japanese English teaching colleague advised me that some students had not begun to prepare for entrance examinations so their ability to assess the usefulness of the curriculum would be difficult at that time. Student F offered

this comment on her questionnaire: "I wish your lessons would have been more useful for the entrance exams; for example, some articles with important content or words of high frequency" [original in Japanese]. Student F was the only student who explicitly perceived the global issues curriculum as not being useful for her entrance exam preparations.

Broadening Horizons

Within the endorsement for studying global issues, a third of the students made comments that suggested their vision and understanding of the world had deepened. Student G said, "My thinking and opinion about global issues made deeper and my knowledge of the world problem is more than before." I found that students initially had not known a lot about other Asian countries or global problems. Student H confirmed my impression. She said she enjoyed studying global issues because her "vision of the world has been widened to learn the present global issues" [original in Japanese]. Student I said she liked studying global issues because she could "know about many countries problems or culture in English." She also added that "What was rewarding is to have learned about conflicts and religions of the world, which made me interested in other countries." Comments like these indicated that some individuals broadened their horizons by learning about other countries through English.

Global Issues Content

Students most enjoyed studying global issues when they could relate to the content of the curriculum. Seven students specifically said they could easily identify with the content in the *Food & Water* class. Student J explained that she "liked the topic of fast food, because it was familiar." Student K reinforced the remark saying she liked the theme because food is the "nearest" issue to her. Student L concurred when she said the theme was most enjoyable because it was familiar and easy to think about. Food and water are commodities students consume every day so they could easily visualize those items and understand their necessity.

Students least enjoyed studying global issues when they deemed the content as abstract or irrelevant to their lives. Student M complained the *Peace Education* class was "too abstract" while Student N said the class "felt a little far for me." Student O said she wanted to "study a concrete thing." To maintain student interest in global issues, it's important to be able to convey the connection between far away conflicts and students' immediate lives. Therefore, it seems I was not always successful in engaging all students in the global issues content.

Many students indicated they had learned and remembered content from the curriculum. Students also made comments indicating their attitudes towards life had changed. Student P said her appreciation of food and water had been heightened: "I thought we [should] treasure resources because there is many people who don't have water for even wash their body and face." Student Q learned that "more understanding each other" was necessary to create a more peaceful world. Other students said studying global issues had stimulated their thinking. Student R said studying about NGOs had started her "thinking of global problems." Student S claimed that learning about conflicts and religion in the *Peace Education* class had made her "interested in other countries."

Negative Views

On both questionnaires a few students had complaints about specific classes but most negative comments were about the study of global issues in general. Some students said the content was too serious. Student T said, "As the topic was very serious, the class atmosphere tended to be gloomy" [original in Japanese]. Student U thought the class length was too long and not conducive to serious content. She said, "Since the topic was serious, it was hard to concentrate for two periods" [original in Japanese].

Some students did not like the feeling of hopelessness that some classes gave them. Students felt they could do nothing to alleviate the world's problems. Student V said she disliked not being able to know or "think about this problem's solution." Student W said, "I want to learn more about how can we solve those problems." Student X said the thing she disliked about studying global issues was that "the global problem is very heavy so I

can't imagine what can I do for them." One student stated she would like to do some fund raising to alleviate a global problem and another said she would like to volunteer at a charity agency but a feeling of pessimism dominated over her altruistic aims, saying, "These problems are very serious issue in our world. I think 'What can I do?' many times. It is so difficult issue that I thought many things. I'll try to volunteer."

Global issues teachers must stress that problems are solvable to ensure students will be motivated to take action. Therefore, with these students, I was unsuccessful in showing that the problems were solvable and the feeling of helplessness seemed to subdue their motivation to act. Another common complaint about the curriculum was that the content was too difficult. The questionnaire revealed that the four components of the curriculum were not understood to the same degree. Students said overwhelmingly (91%) they understood the issue of *Food & Water.* A slightly smaller percentage, but still a large majority (74%) said they understood the *Peace Education* class well. More than half (60%) of the students believed they had a greater understanding of the *Poverty/Wealth* issue and half the students said they understood the *Gender Issues* class well.

One student said she disliked global issues because "there are some difficult words." Students were presented with a lot of new vocabulary in each component of the curriculum. Six students found the vocabulary overwhelming.

The *Peace Education* class was considered the most difficult of the four components. When asked to assess the level of the difficulty for each component of the curriculum, 18 students said *Peace Education* was "a little difficult" but only 7 of the 34 students said the same about *Food & Water, Poverty & Wealth* and *Gender Issues.* On the second questionnaire *Peace Education* was the class most listed as a reason for disliking global issues. One student wrote, "This issue is so difficult." Another student said she disliked the *Peace Education* class because of the vocabulary, saying, "The words and content was a little difficult." When I interviewed Student W and asked what she disliked about global issues, she told me that the *Peace Education* class was difficult saying, "Global issues were very complicated so it was a little difficult for me to think many

countries' conflicts or religion." Sometimes students had to read authentic materials on the internet and nine of them found the research process difficult.

Although some students complained that the curriculum was too difficult, other students said the curriculum was tolerable. Students were still able to enjoy studying global issues despite the challenging content. One student said, "It was very difficult for me. But I could learn many global issues so it was interesting." Another student commented:

> I thought I could have understood the global issues more easily since I had already learned them in social studies class, but it was more difficult than I thought. I tried very hard because not only the contents but English itself was difficult, but I felt I was able to learn all the more for that hurdle.

My data suggests that students liked the material in class to be challenging and are usually willing to persevere if they find the content interesting. Learning occurs when students are able to overcome initial difficulties. My teacher's journal provided an example of students persevering and enjoying difficult content. In one class I presented the song "Feed the World" as a cloze exercise. After the class I wrote this summary in my journal:

> The song was difficult for them but they got some of the answers. I asked students if they wanted to hear the song a second time and they said 'yes.' One student then asked to see the answers and requested I play the song a third time so they could listen while they read the lyrics. A few students left the room singing 'Feed the World.'

This student reaction indicates that challenging tasks can be enjoyable and students are able to learn by overcoming initial difficulties.

Student Suggestions

Other students made suggestions about how the content could be made easier, particularly by using videos. One student wrote, "I want to watch more pictures and video." Other students suggested how vocabulary could be made less difficult. One student proposed that "this program has many difficult words, so I want to look up in the dictionary before class." Another student suggested that she would sometimes "like the difficult words to be paraphrased to follow the explanation" [original in Japanese].

Some students suggested that a system of separation according to English ability be adopted for the global issues class. One student complained that if she had been "able to speak English more" the class would have been more fun." The student felt that the curriculum "seemed to be geared to the excellent students" and felt left out [original in Japanese]. At the school, students are separated into three levels according to their English ability for instruction with the Japanese English teachers. Oral communication classes, of which the *Peace Education* class was a part, are multi-leveled.

English Language Skills

The first questionnaire results showed that reading was the linguistic skill that students thought had improved the most since the course began. About half the students said their reading (48%) and listening skills (45%) had significantly improved since studying global issues. Twelve students (36%) perceived their speaking ability had improved while only 8 of 33 students (24%) believed their writing had improved much.

On the second questionnaire 23 students (67%) wrote that speaking was the language skill they had hoped would improve the most while studying global issues. However, 13 students perceived listening as the language skill most improved, followed by speaking (8 students) writing (3 students) and reading (2 students). The skill most students considered the least improved was writing (13 students) followed by reading (6 students), speaking (5 students) and listening (1 student). The reason most cited for the improvement in listening was that the class was conducted exclusively in English and the students had more time to speak and listen to their friends in English. Student X's reply summed up the feelings of many students when she stated, "In oral communication class, teacher always speaks in English and I have a chance to listen my friend's English so it became practice listening. There was little chance to write." Student V said her listening skills had improved the most during the course and that she was happy because there will likely be a listening component on some future entrance test examinations or *Eiken,* the standardized English test given in Japan.

Discussion

In my project, I have addressed the issue of implementing a global issues curriculum at the high school level. I found that most students enjoyed learning about global issues and most perceived they were simultaneously developing their English language skills while learning about world problems. While I had hoped the students would embrace the new global issues curriculum, I was surprised that so many students felt their lives had been enriched**.** The findings suggest that my students thought global issues were interesting, especially if they could connect the content to their own lives. Students were also enthusiastic about studying global issues and they believed the information they learned would be useful in the future, possibly even helping them on university entrance exams.

Sometimes, however, students found studying global issues to be difficult because they had to concentrate on English and grapple with a content-based curriculum. Despite efforts to adapt the material to the level of the classes, students said the content was difficult. The global issues curriculum contained many new words and some students felt overwhelmed, while other students said they liked that their vocabulary had expanded. Such a discrepancy will certainly make designing a similar curriculum in the future a challenge, as I want to present new and challenging content, yet avoid discouraging students with an abundance of vocabulary. A few students complained that some content was abstract and not always significant to their lives. However, student suggestions to present issues more clearly by using videos and pictures could be used make global issues more real and concrete in future classes.

Some students found the global issues curriculum to be an abrupt shift from their previous experiences of studying oral communication. The students had studied oral communication for four years and had received little exposure to global issues content in those classes. Suddenly, students were presented with a completely different kind of learning approach and with a classroom atmosphere that was markedly more serious. However, most students made a smooth transition to content-based instruction, learning content and simultaneously developing their English language skills. It was especially gratifying to learn that many students felt studying global issues had widened their

perspective of the world. Students became interested in global issues and enthusiastic to learn more about other countries and cultures.

When teaching global issues, it does not suffice to merely present content and inform students of problems. It is essential to stress that problems are solvable, if students are to act to find solutions. Unfortunately, some students could envision no solutions to world problems and felt helpless to improve the situation. In the future I would like to encourage student action either collectively or individually. Collective action will consist of class projects to raise money for a global problem or students volunteering their time for a worthy cause. Even simple actions such as giving to charity or writing a letter to an embassy could lead to positive changes by allowing students to develop greater social responsibility. Students felt they alone could not act to initiate positive changes but as Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (Cates, 1990, p. 5).

Before starting the project, I had hoped that students would perceive that their speaking skills had improved the most while studying global issues. Speaking was the skill the teachers had wanted to provide most opportunities for practice, and was the language skill the majority of students most desired to improve. However, students complained there were few opportunities for speaking practice or that the serious content made it difficult to discuss global issues in English. Student feedback requires me to reflect on my teaching practice and consider if in fact I am doing what I think am in the classroom. In the future, the NSETs will reassess their lessons to ensure ample opportunities are provided for speaking practice.

Next year, for logistical reasons, the NSETs will combine the *Food & Water* component of the global issues curriculum with the unit on *Poverty & Wealth* in hopes that learner awareness of the interconnectedness of the components will rise. Implementing the global issues curriculum has given me a more acute understanding of the value of content-based instruction where students are given the opportunity to engage with world problems. While I need to recognize the constraints that students face and perhaps check

the effectiveness of the curriculum, the project has given me encouragement to make connections between language learning and global issues.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire #1

H2 Global Issues Survey

1. To what extent has the global issues classes you have studied made you more enthusiastic to continue studying English? (please circle one number)
   global issues の授業の結果、もっと意欲的に英語の勉強を続けようと思いましたか？

not sure	very little	a little	some	a lot	very much
0	1	2	3	4	5

2. How much do you think your four language skills have improved since studying global issues?
   global issues の授業の結果、以下の英語の 4 技能はどれくらい伸びたと思いますか？

		not sure	very little	a little	some	much	very much
		0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Language Skills	**speaking**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	listening	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	reading	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	writing	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

3. Please write as many **Asian** countries as you can on the lines below. Then write the total number of countries you have written in the box. Spelling is not important.
   下線部にアジアの国名をできるだけ多く書き、その数を BOX に書いて下さい。スペルは間違っても構いません。

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

   TOTAL # OF COUNTRIES ☐

4. How much more do you think you understand the global issues you have studied this year? Please circle one number for each topic.

授業を受けてから、どれくらい global issues について理解が深まりましたか？
それぞれのトピックについて、1 つ選んで数字に丸をして下さい。

Gender Issues

not sure	very little	a little	some	a lot	very much
0	1	2	3	4	5

Poverty Wealth Gap

not sure	very little	a little	some	a lot	very much
0	1	2	3	4	5

5. Do you think studying global issues is: (please circle one number)
global issues の勉強はおもしろいと思いますか？

not sure	not interesting	a little interesting	somewhat interesting	interesting	very interesting
0	1	2	3	4	5

6. Please complete the following 2 sentences.
次の２つの文を英語で完成させて下さい。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、
６．と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

One thing I like about studying global issues is… _____

_____

_____

One thing I don't like about studying global issues is … _____

_____

_____

7. Are you going to take oral communication next year in H-3? (please circle one)
来年も H３で oral communication をとりますか？

No **Undecided** **Yes**

(まだ決めかねている)

8. Please explain the reason for your decision in question # 7
７の答えの理由を英語で説明してください。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、
８．と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

_____
_____
_____

9. Has your experience with global issues had an influence on your decision in #7?
global issues を学んだことが７番の決定に影響しましたか？

Not sure **No** **Yes**

10. Thinking about the global issues you have studied this year, please finish the sentence below by writing as much as you can. I remember and understand . . .
global issues の授業を振り返って、I remember and understand に続く文章を英語で
できるだけ多く書いて下さい。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、10. と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

_____
_____

Please use the lines below to write any other comments you have about the H2 global issues program.
H2 の global issues のプログラムについて、他に何かコメントを英語で書いて下さい。
ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、「コメント」として文章を書いて下さい。

_____
_____
_____

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Appendix B – Questionnaire #2

H2 Global Issues Survey

1. To what extent have the global issues classes you have studied made you more enthusiastic to continue studying English? (please circle one number)
   global issues の授業を受けて、もっと意欲的に英語の勉強を続けようと思うようになりましたか？

not sure	very little	a little	some	a lot	very much
0	1	2	3	4	5

2. Which of the four language skills did you hope would improve the most this year in the oral communication classes? (please circle one)
   今年度の oral communication の授業で、４技能のうちのどれを最も上達させたいと思っていましたか？（１つ選んで丸をして下さい）

writing **reading** **listening** **speaking**

3. Which of the four language skills do you think has improved the most since studying global issues? Please write one number (1, 2, 3, 4) beside each skill.
   global issues を勉強して、4 技能のうちのどれが最も上達したと思いますか？
   それぞれの技能について、(1, 2, 3, 4) から１つずつ選んで数字を横に書いて下さい。(1, 2, 3, 4) を 1 回ずつ使い、同じ数字を書かないようにして下さい。

Most improved			**Least improved**
1	**2**	**3**	**4**
writing __	**reading __**	**listening __**	**speaking __**

4. Please explain the reason for your decision in question # 3
   ３の答えの理由を英語で説明してください。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、
   ４．と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

_____

_____

5. How difficult were the global issues you studied this year? Please circle one number for each topic.

global issues の勉強は難しかったですか、やさしかったですか？
それぞれのトピックについて、1 つ選んで数字に丸をして下さい。

Gender Issues

not sure	very easy	a little easy	okay	a little difficult	very difficult
0	1	2	3	4	5

Poverty Wealth Gap

not sure	very easy	a little easy	okay	a little difficult	very difficult
0	1	2	3	4	5

Peace Education

not sure	very easy	a little easy	okay	a little difficult	very difficult
0	1	2	3	4	5

6. How interesting do you think global issues is? (please circle one number)
global issues の勉強はおもしろいと思いますか？

not sure	not interesting	a little interesting	somewhat interesting	interesting	very interesting
0	1	2	3	4	5

7. How useful to you in the future do you think the information you studied in global issues will be?
global issues の授業で学んだことは、将来あなたの役に立つと思いますか？

not sure	not useful	a little useful	somewhat useful	quite useful	very useful
0	1	2	3	4	5

8. Please complete the following 2 sentences.
次の２つの文を英語で完成させて下さい。ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、
８．と数字を振ってから文章を書いて下さい。

One thing I really enjoying studying in the global issues class and I would like to learn more about is . . . _____

_____

_____

One thing I didn't like studying in the global issues classes was . . ._____

_____

_____

9. Are you going to take oral communication next year in H-3? (please circle one)
来年も H３で oral communication をとりますか？

No **Yes**

10. Did your experience with global issues have an influence on your decision in #9?
global issues を学んだことが９番の決定に影響しましたか？

No **Yes**

Please use the lines below to write any other comments you have about the H2 global issues program.
H2 の global issues のプログラムについて、他に何かコメントを英語で書いて下さい。
ただし、日本語のほうがうまく表現できると思う場合には、用紙の裏面を使って日本語で書いても構いません。裏面には、「コメント」として文章を書いて下さい。

_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you very much for your cooperation!
ご協力ありがとうございました！

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Classroom Anxiety: How Does Student Attitude Change in English Oral Communication Class in a Japanese Senior High School?

Noriko Kurihara
Himeji Minami Senior High School

Introduction

The Course of Study established by the Ministry of Education and Science put into practice in 2003 directs teachers to focus on practical English communication skills as a general objective of English secondary education. More emphasis is now to be placed on oral communication skills than ever before. However, the students in my classes do not seem interested in acquiring the oral communication skills the Ministry recommends. Although my school is ranked highest in the southwest area of Hyogo Prefecture, and the students' academic achievement is exemplary, their attitude toward oral English activities is passive. They have learned a sufficient amount of vocabulary to communicate in English, but they are reluctant to use the language and do not seem to believe they can actually speak English. Students are generally quiet in class. Their attention is always on the teacher; in my class, students characteristically listen to me intently and carefully take notes when I write something on the blackboard. Students seldom answer when I ask them to speak in English, however. Instead, they look down at their notebooks or textbooks, avoiding eye-contact with me. This general attitude applies to the oral communication class, in addition to other classes. Previously, however hard I tried to get students to speak out in English, they remained silent. If our assistant English teacher or I said something funny, they laughed or smiled, but they rarely, if ever, spoke English voluntarily. Students spoke only when they

were called on to answer a question. I often wondered what was on their mind and how their attitudes could change.

As a teacher, my assumption had always been that the students were not accustomed to speaking in English, but if provided with constant opportunity, they would start. After several months of attempting to use only English in class, however, I found little change taking place. I used only simple English, explained new words by paraphrasing, and adopted as many gestures and visual aids as I could. Although the class style was still teacher-centered and a CD player was used as an audio aid, all instructions were given only in English and all explanations were made in English -- except on rare occasions when students showed total confusion or incomprehension. I continued to speak in English in the classroom, dealing with the materials for listening practice in the authorized textbook. However, the reaction of the students was not very different from that of the students in classes where I used Japanese for instructions and explanations. If I asked students even a simple question, no one volunteered to answer. The class remained silent and students spoke only when I chose someone to answer my question. Even though students responded, the utterances were typically limited to the set phrases, such as “I’m sorry, I have no idea.” The environment of the English classroom itself seemed to give students pressure, preventing them from using their knowledge of the English language. I decided to do an experiment to determine whether the student attitudes would change in the oral communication classroom, and if so, what could be the key factors.

My experiment consisted of two parts. The first was to let students become involved in group talk, where each group member worked to understand a message from another member who presented a topic. The rule of this activity was that only English should be used. At first, the material for this activity was chosen by the students from magazine articles I provided. Later students were allowed to select magazines and books to talk about. Forming groups for the activity and having the choice of material were to see how group work influenced student attitudes, as well as student interest in their talk. The style of group formation was changed in the middle of the project to determine whether and how peer relationship affected student attitudes. The second part of the experiment was to let students

work in groups to create a performance of their choice, such as drama or speech. Watching the student reaction to being given freedom in the classroom learning condition, I tried to see how students' interest influenced their attitudes in oral communication activities.

Since my school is strongly entrance exam-oriented, there is a tendency for both teachers and students to look at the classroom as a place to hone test-taking skills but little else. English oral communication class is no exception. In each school term, there is a listening test similar to the entrance exams and the procedure is strictly set. This means less time for unique projects in the classroom. I tried hard to spend as much time as possible looking for differences in students' attitudes through this project. Even though student tendency to focus on entrance exams continues, if student anxiety in the oral communication classroom is lessened, they will talk more in the activities and thus improve their practical English communication skills.

In this project I was particularly interested in anxiety that might hinder student spontaneous speech. I tried to find what factors encourage students to talk more in the classroom. I examined mainly group work, peer choice, and materials of interest. I employed questionnaires both at the beginning and end of the project. I tried to examine student attitude change by observing students in class and letting students keep a group journal as well as by interviewing with volunteer students. Student attitudes changed dramatically at the end of the project. In this paper I argue that relationships among peers affect student attitudes in the classroom in a subtle way, as well as the style the students work in. The careful choice of the materials, considering the level and interest of the students, are also important factors in reducing classroom anxiety.

Literature Review

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (1998) announced a National Curriculum Standards Reform making a foreign language a required subject. The document states "Great emphasis will be placed on the practice in the situations where the target language is actually used" (p.14). The Ministry (2002) also proposed a "strategic plan to cultivate 'Japanese with English abilities'," with its target in senior high school

English education for students to be able to "hold normal conversations (and a similar level of reading and writing) on every day topics" (p.2). Speaking and listening skill development is of greater concern than ever.

Japanese Student Reticence to Speak in the Classroom

The Ministry's strategic plan intends to increase learners' opportunities to speak English in cooperation with English teaching facilities such as private supplementary schools, and to encourage learners to study abroad. However, many practitioners and researchers report Japanese student's reluctance to speak in school classrooms, where language learning is generally teacher-centered. Both teachers and students found student reticence problematic in class (Matsuura, Chiba, & Hilderbrandt, 2001). Anderson (1993) points out Japanese students have a tendency to remain silent in the classroom unless called upon or provided with clear-cut answers. It is often argued that Japanese students' formal reserved attitudes are cultural traits fostered in the high school context (Barnland, 1975; Condon, 1984; Anderson, 1993; Rohlen, 1983).

Researchers have also examined Japanese students' attitudes in EFL contexts (Shimizu, 1995; Koizumi & Matsumoto, 1993; Servetter, 1999). Long and Russell (1999), Christensen (1989), and Miller (1995) specifically noted Japanese students' attitudinal change. Both Long and Russell (1999) and Christensen (1989) investigated student attitudinal change between two English learning environments, high school and college. Long and Russell (1999) found that the current student attitudes do not reflect their past experience. Long and Russell (1999) also pointed out that students expect teacher enthusiasm as well as ability to create an environment effectively for students to speak in the classroom. Miller (1995), in a survey of college EFL classes, compared student attitudes toward communicative instruction given by a native English speaker, and traditional teacher-centered instruction given by Japanese teachers. Results revealed that students' silent reaction in classroom interaction activities was predominantly due to inner tension caused by the fear of failure to convey a message. In this study, student attitudinal and behavioral change proved to be largely influenced by the teacher attitudes. One clear indication of Miller's study (1995) is the significance of Western instructors'

accommodating attitudes toward culturally different learners. Although the participants were already highly motivated college students with comparatively high English proficiency, in a small class size, Miller's findings (1995) are useful not only for Western instructors but for Japanese teachers in that they argue for the significance of teacher attitudes. In terms of accommodating attitudes of the teachers, as Miller suggests (1995), more studies from the Japanese teacher's perspective as well are expected in communication classes.

Language Learner Attitude and Attitudinal Change

Although studies on attitudes and motivation are well documented by researchers (Dörnyei, 2001), the definition of 'attitudes' seems to remain varied. Campbell (1963) perceived attitudes to be evaluative tendencies as acquired behavioral dispositions, and Fishbein and Aizen (1975) defined attitude as a learned predisposition. Gardner, Tremblay and Masgoret (1997) found a link between affective measures and achievement, by examining correlations of attitudes, motivations, and other variables with achievement. Widdows and Voller (1991) invented a survey (PANSI) in order to understand student attitudes and needs. Eagly and Chaikien (1989) regard attitudes as outcomes of categorizing processes of learner's predispositions. Long and Russell (1999) define attitudes as "a means of adjusting to and changing one's social environment"(p.19). Thus, attitudes are defined in various ways, but an important aspect is stressed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), who point out that attitudes are subject to change. We can, therefore, expect attitudinal change in the learning environment.

Language Learner Attitude and Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the factors that determine attitude in the foreign language classroom. Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) found that anxiety is a major contributing factor in determining attitude and motivation towards learning a second language. In attitudinal changes in language learning, then, anxiety and the variables that influence the level of anxiety need to be examined. Trylong (1987) concluded that aptitude, attitude and anxiety

"interact in unique and powerful ways as they relate to achievement" (p.65). Campbell and Orwitz (1991) estimate up to one half of all language students experience debilitating levels of language anxiety. In the language learning environment, controlling student anxiety level seems to be the key to changing student achievement. Horwitz, et al. (1986) state that there are three components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation, and test anxiety. As test anxiety is treated differently when dealing with oral communication, the other two components can be focused on in examining the attitudes in English oral communication classroom. Endler (1980) explains multidimensional view of anxiety as individual and contextual, stating that anxiety is produced in the interaction between the person and the situation. This also supports focusing on the social element in treating the anxiety. Tsui (1996) conducted a qualitative study of reluctance in Hong Kong EFL classes, searching for how language learning anxiety impeded Chinese students in classroom interaction. Anxiety was produced by fear of negative peer reaction. Tsui (1996) recommends several teacher classroom strategies to lessen anxiety. Although the cause of Chinese student fear in Tsui's study (1996) seems mostly culture-based, the suggestions are also useful for Japanese classrooms.

Peer Relationship and Group Work

Kondo and Ling (2004) grouped the strategies used by Japanese college students to cope with anxiety in English language classrooms into five categories: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, resignation, and peer seeking. In this study, peer seeking means finding someone whose achievement is as unsatisfactory as one's own, so that the learner can share the miserable feelings caused by failure. The peer role here seems to be passive. However, peers more often seem to have a greater influence in the language learning classroom.

Peers in foreign language learning play a complicated role. Potter and Wetherell (1987) conclude that individual's attitudes can change drastically through social pressure from peers in a classroom discussion. Dörnyei (1998b) illustrates the case where attitudes of group members are regarded as one of the demotive factors in a classroom, and Leki (2001) points out that group work sometimes has negative consequences. On the other hand,

benefits of positive group atmosphere (Hadfield, 1992) and of group cohesiveness (Galley et al.,1995; Mullen & Copper, 1994) have also been pointed out. Based on the argument of Japanese learner's cultural traits (Lebra,1976), Mutch (1995) recommends intimate tasks in a classroom for learners to feel more relaxed and behave more spontaneously because a closer relationship between learners will help them to attempt English. After researching Japanese learner beliefs, Matsuura, Chiba, and Hilderbrandt (2001), conclude that "group work and paired activities are appropriate for Japanese students"(p.79) Servetter (1999) points out the positive effect of group work on Japanese learners, with increased motivation, achievement, and desire to support peers. Thus group work in the learning environment, as well as learners' relationships between peers, affect learner attitude in the classroom.

Choice of Materials

Dörnyei (2001) writes that the "course book" is one of the most demotivating factors in a classroom. In his study, learners chose the course book as one of the factors that discouraged them from learning. Mutch (1995) also points out the importance of careful choice of materials and tasks in learner motivation and attitudinal change in the EFL classroom. Matsuura, Chiba, and Hilderbradt (2001) suggest that student's level of English ability should be prioritized in selecting materials. The effect of instruction based on learner aptitudes, interests, abilities, and preferred learning styles is reported by researchers (Rost, 2002). Choice of materials also plays an important role in student attitudinal change.

Ely (1986) points out that a psychologically comfortable and safe learning environment is important. Teacher attitudes in EFL classroom affect student attitudes in the classroom, and teachers play an important role to change student attitudes and behavior to be more motivated (Dörnyei, 2001; Mutch,1995; Miller, 1995).

Researchers attribute Japanese students' reticent attitudes in the language learning classroom to cultural traits or teacher influence. It is also observed that language learner attitudes change. Researchers regard anxiety as one of the major determiners of these attitudes. Studies on anxiety also have ascertained its social aspect. It is argued that social

elements such as peer relationships and teachers' attitude, as well as choice of learning materials are the key elements in attitudinal change in the language learning classroom.

Methodology

In this project I investigated student attitudes toward the English oral communication classroom. First, I used questionnaires to get an idea of student goals and expectations. I then adopted two main activities, where students had the freedom to choose their learning materials. Both activities were conducted in groups, a style which students had never experienced. I asked students to keep a journal in both in English and Japanese in each group for reflection of their activities. At the end of the project, I distributed another set of questionnaires to discover what change students had undergone through the activities. Interviews with volunteers followed the questionnaires, with the goal of ascertaining student perceptions of the attitude changes. I also kept a journal of my observations of the activities. Both sets of questionnaires and the interviews were conducted in Japanese. I wrote my journal in English.

Participants and their background

The participants were a class of 38 girls in the second year of the academically-oriented senior high school. In terms of test scores, the school was ranked as the highest in the southwest Hyogo. More than 95% of its graduates go on to university or college each year. Approximately half of the students go to national or municipal universities, and the rest go to prestigious private universities. As a result of the emphasis on entrance exam success, student interests and efforts are often focused on techniques for test-taking. Teachers, too, place a great deal of emphasis on success on entrance exams.

Research question

I had three research questions. How did student attitudes change in one high school English oral communication class, where students were reticent in the activities? What hindered

their spoken performance? How could I eliminate the restricting factors to encourage students to speak more in the classroom?

Data collection

The data for this project consisted of questionnaires conducted at both the beginning and end of the project as well as student journals written immediately after the group activity, my own field notes taken while observing students in class, and interviews with student volunteers carried out at the end of the project.

The questionnaires that I administered at the beginning of the project dealt with students' goal awareness in English learning as well as their expectations of the oral communication class, as measured on an eight degree Likert scale. I asked about student expectations of the proficiency level they aimed for in the English oral communication class as well as their perception of their present proficiency level. I also asked for both student ideas about the most effective ways and their actual practice to improve oral communication skills in the classroom (See Appendix A for details). While the first questionnaire was partly for the purpose of raising learner awareness and consisted mostly of closed questions, the second set of questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions, such as "When do you find it easiest to speak in English in the classroom?" I asked about the difficult times as well, and about the reasons (Appendix B). The interview questions were also open-ended with the intention of exploring student attitudes and perceptions, with a focus on the reluctance to speak in English. The main questions were concerned with reactions to group talk activities and the presentation project. I wanted to examine how student react to the freedom of choice in materials as well as how their relationships with peers affect their attitudes toward the activities (Appendix C).

Group Talk

I examined the change in student attitudes, by adopting a new style of class activity. Before I introduced this activity, I taught one of the two class periods of English oral communication with an assistant language teacher (ALT) every week. Most activities there

were task-based pair work, following the conversation textbook. In the other class period I taught alone, I used a textbook based on listening practice for university entrance exams. I inserted the new system into both two different styles of class. I call this Group Talk. Group Talk was a system where I encouraged students to communicate in English through a topic of their choice and to share their ideas among group members first, then with the whole class. I examined group formation as well as other influences on students' attitudes in the classroom.

First, I organized groups by name order. Each group was made up of four or five members. There were three different assigned roles: presenter, reporter and listener. Before the class, the presenter was assigned to choose an article from an English magazine. She also prepared three short quizzes on the content with answer keys and definitions of difficult or unfamiliar words. In the class activity, the other members (listeners and reporters) asked as many questions as possible, while the presenter read the article aloud. The presenter stopped reading to answer questions from other members. When she finished, it was her turn to quiz the other members, who tried to answer her questions. Communication had to be done only in English. Time for reflection followed this ten minute activity and the members filled in journal sheets, keeping records of who had asked how many questions, what was the main idea of the article, and how well their communication had proceeded (Appendix D). The reporter from each group then reported what the group had learned, to the whole class. If there were no questions from students in other groups, the ALT or I asked each group several questions. The reporters were thus given an opportunity to respond quickly in English in front of the whole class. Students changed roles each period. When everyone had experienced each role, they formed new groups a second time, according to their choice.

In this group talk activity, during the first five periods, presenters chose articles from several different issues of the English magazine *TIME*, which I prepared. The length of articles was roughly between ten and twenty lines. I provided articles that contained difficult words, so that many questions from listeners would arise. In the next stage (after five periods), I provided a much wider range of choices with regards to the level and the

content of articles, from several different magazines and story books in English. To examine student attitude change, I focused my attention on student journals of the first, the middle and the final class periods of this activity. A comparison of the journal contents of the first period and the middle period showed student attitude change toward the group work, and a comparison between two different group formation in the middle periods showed an attitude change concerning peer relationships. The different attitude in the middle and the final periods showed the influence of interest in the material since students got a wider range of material choice after the middle period.

Presentation Project

After nine periods of group talk activity, I organized students to do a performance in which they would present a speech or a drama. Each group turned in a practice plan as well as a self-assessment system. They spent the following four periods preparing for the presentation, which included drama or speech. The focus here was on student reaction to a wide choice of materials in the process, which showed how student interest in the materials influenced their attitude in the activity.

In this project, I followed "content analysis" (Leki, 2001), of interviews, open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires, journals of students' reflection in class, and my own observations. Although my main focus was on anxiety, I also examined factors that appeared frequently. For example, in response to a question about the reason for their discomfort in speaking English in the classroom, many different answers arose. I categorized them into several groups, each of which contained the same factor. After getting a general idea about student attitude through analyzing the questionnaires, I examined how these factors were mentioned in the interviews. The interviewees' reflections on class activities gave detailed accounts of their thoughts and feelings on each factor. I then looked through the student journals and my own observation journal to examine how they supported the interviewees' accounts. I thus synthesized the factors and tried to find relationships as well as overall meanings, which explained students' reticent attitudes in the classroom.

Findings

Students expected improvement in their practical English speaking skills from the oral communication class. They also developed ideas about how to improve their skills through the oral communication class. However, many students didn't use what they believed was the most effective way to improve their skills. For example, students avoided speaking English as much as possible, despite their belief that it would help them. The pressure in the classroom was affected by a complicated relationship between peers. Students feared making mistakes and that hindered them from speaking in English in the classroom.

Student expectation of English oral communication class

In general, students' goals in the English oral communication class seemed more practical than mere success on the entrance exams. More than half of the students said they aimed at "everyday conversation" skills and more than a third of the students said they wanted to acquire speaking skills for "shopping and traveling." Most students revealed an expectation to improve their skills by two ranks higher than the present skill level, in response to a question about their perception of the present proficiency level and expectation of improved proficiency level. Students' generally passive attitude in classroom, then, was not caused by their lack of expectation of the class and themselves (See Figure 1).

I found an interesting contrast between student beliefs and practices. When I asked about their perception of the most effective ways to improve English oral communication skills in the classroom, about 77% of the students answered that making an effort to speak as much English as possible was the most effective. However, only 10% of the students said they actually tried to speak English in class. In other words, students found it hard to practice their beliefs in the classroom. Also, among students who said engagement in English oral activities was the most effective way to improve their skills, less than half practiced this belief. Something seemed to block students from doing what they believed was helpful for their improvement. On the other hand, 92% of the students said they carefully listened to the teacher in the classroom, yet less than half of the students thought

of this strategy as the most effective to improve their English communication skills. No one chose careful note taking as an effective strategy, but 21% took notes in the classroom (See Figure 2). Students were doing what they didn't believe was the effective way to improve their skills. Students wanted to improve their skills and had ideas of what to do. They wanted to speak in English as much as possible in the classroom, but they couldn't or didn't actually speak. Something seemed to prevent students from carrying out their beliefs in the classroom.

Student Preference of Activities

Student preference of group activities revealed factors that kept them from speaking English as much as possible in the classroom. On the questionnaire at the end of the term, two thirds of the students ranked group work activities as their number one choice (See Table 1). I asked, "Which activity did you find the most interesting and fun?" Students ranked *practice with ALT, group talk, presentation project,* and *listening exercise with CD* according to their enjoyment. Both *group talk* and *presentation project* contained group work. The *practice with ALT* consisted mainly of pair work. *Listening exercise* was a whole class activity. Although students adored their young and handsome ALT, apparently most students found group work activities more interesting than pair work and other activities. In the questionnaire, students who chose *presentation project* or *group talk* referred to group work as the most enjoyable factor. Thirteen students said, "We enjoyed learning and working in cooperation." Others pointed out, "Group work made activities fun and interesting."

Most students said they found it more comfortable and easy to learn when working in small groups because they didn't have to worry about making mistakes or errors. In the open-ended questionnaire, for example, those students who chose group activities as the best opportunity to speak in English in the classroom, wrote the reason, "Even if I make a mistake, my friends (members in the same group) understand me and we can laugh at it." Others also wrote, "I don't suffer any anxiety in group activities." Small group activities made it easy for students to speak in English in the classroom.

Whole Class Activities—Fear of Losing Face

Students revealed that they were afraid of making mistakes in front of the whole class. On the questionnaire, about two thirds of the students said that they found it extremely difficult to speak in English in front of the whole class. Six students mentioned a "fear of making mistakes" while 16 stressed "tension" or "nervousness." Whole class activities made students keenly aware of the significance of giving a correct answer. Even though the class was composed of people whom they already knew very well, when faced with the opportunity to speak alone in front of their peers, students said that they suddenly felt as if they were examinees being tested by the others. [1] Fuyumi, a thoughtful student with general high academic achievement, explained the feeling in terms of self-consciousness and embarrassment. She said, "Being looked at by all the other classmates makes me feel nervous." Michiko, whose academic achievement in English was also high, explained the feeling, "My mind stops functioning when I worry about being chosen by the teacher in whole class activities. I can't answer a question I normally would be able to answer if I were not in this panic."

Students clearly feared classmates' evaluation. They hated to consider the possibility that everyone but them knew something important. They didn't want to lose face. In the interview, Mutsumi, a bright but shy student, said, "The teachers' reaction does not make me feel small because it's natural that they know more. However, if my ignorance of some common knowledge is revealed in front of the whole class, I feel ashamed. I feel like a fool." The fear is strong. Student comments suggested that even one mistake in front of the whole class would discourage students so much that they would become demoralized about learning. As Takae, an outspoken student of average achievement said in the interview, "If I make a mistake in the whole class activity, I would never feel like speaking again."

Interestingly, students were not afraid of being laughed at in front of the whole class. To them laughter wasn't insulting but rather reflected compassion and sympathy. The fear was silence, which they said meant either insult or coldness. Machiko, in the interview, described this silence as *shirakeru* which means a reaction caused by disappointment or

boredom. Chie, a cheerful student of average achievement, said in the interview, “I don’t care about being laughed at when I make a mistake, but I dread the silent reaction of the whole class.” On this point, the other interviewees expressed agreement.

The peer unit as a whole thus worked to put each student in the spotlight in the classroom. Peer reaction, however, changed depending on the situation. Students recognized others’ difficulty of reacting to the speaker in whole class activities. For example, Machiko said in the interview, “The same classmate who reacts to my mistake in a friendly way in small group activities, will keep silent in the whole class activities.” The style or the condition of how students are situated in class has a significant effect on their anxiety.

Difficulty of the material

The tension in whole class activities seemed to be caused in part by the gap between the high expectations of students and the difficulty of the material. Students were also reluctant to make mistakes because they had been treated as “good students” for years, which reinforced their fear of losing face. Yet they were willing to show off their achievements to prove their intelligence. While successful in junior high school, high school classes were more difficult for students to deal with and maintain a positive attitude. Quizzes from the teacher in class were not always easy. Students were no longer certain whether they had the correct answer.

In the interview, all but one student confessed that they didn’t usually feel uneasy in whole class activities in junior high school. At that time they were eager to speak in front of peers. Chie said in the interview, “I used to volunteer to speak out in class in junior high school. The quizzes were so easy that I was certain I knew the correct answer.” There was no fear of losing face and they were able to speak voluntarily in front of the whole class. In high school, the content of the textbook had become more difficult and teachers’ quizzes harder to tackle, with far more risks of losing face if they volunteered to speak. The drive to participate in class activities inevitably shrunk. Chie said, “The school (class) is choking me.” Michiko, referring to the class in general, made a similar comment. She said “This

content is too difficult." The sudden change of the required level made students feel stressed and tense in the classroom.

The difficulty of the material affected student attitude in group activities as well. Students found it difficult to engage themselves in the task when the level of the material was too difficult. At the beginning of the group talk activity, students showed a great deal of confusion, which was apparently caused by the unfamiliarity about the activity itself and the choice of materials. However, as they became more accustomed to what to do and more careful about choosing their materials, students became more relaxed and involved in the activity. Students wrote in the group journal, "There were so many difficult words that we found the activity hard. Though the speaker had prepared a lot, there was still confusion." Even though the assignment was mainly to ask and answer questions about short articles of ten or more lines, students became stuck, depending on the material. When they chose articles more carefully, though, their attitudes became active. Kumi said in the interview, "My group was engaged in the activity with much more ease and interest when we talked about an article of a familiar topic." Also one group wrote in their journal when they dealt with an article about a popular movie, "Today's topic was easy to understand. We were able to ask many questions." Student involvement in the activity depended on the level of their materials.

Materials of Learner Interest

Students also found significance in selecting their own material for the presentation project. In the questionnaire, more than two thirds of the students chose this assignment as the most enjoyable activity. The style of small groups and the freedom to choose material seemed to make students think highly of the activity. Questionnaire comments often included such words as "freedom," "creative," and "own ideas," factors that students thought made the activity interesting. Before I started this project, students had been simply provided with the material to learn in class. They were often obliged to struggle to understand the difficult materials, which led to a great deal of stress as well as loss of confidence in the subject matter. Students often became nervous and reluctant to show their ideas. In the presentation

assignment, however, students had the opportunity to set their own goals as well as chose their own materials. They were able to select what to learn according to their interests and needs.

Some students answered in the questionnaire, “I enjoyed the ‘presentation project’ because we had the freedom to create and adopt our own ideas. I became more positive and willing in the activity.” Others said, “It was easy to speak my opinions and ideas. This project was interesting.”

In this activity, students seemed to work positively, free from anxiety. They realized learning was more effective when they enjoyed it. One interviewee said, “We never forget fun experiences. We learn a lot from what we find fun and interesting.” Another girl said, referring to the outcome of the project work, “Even though I don’t feel a strong sense of achievement, I’m sure knowledge and skills were acquired through this activity without my consciousness.” The data suggest that when the material is right in terms of level and content, as well as student interest, learning becomes more fruitful and more efficient.

It was clear that the choice of materials was one of the keys to a positive attitude toward speaking in English in group work as well. In the fifth class period after students had started the activity, when they became more careful about choosing articles, students in one group wrote in their journal, “It has become easier and easier to understand the content of the article through the activity. We are happy. We want to do better next time.” When they got an even wider variety of books and magazines, such as teen magazines or a volume of *Harry Potter*, students’ attitudes became even more positive. One group wrote in their journal then, “Today’s article was very easy to read. We asked and answered many questions.” Also in the interview one student concluded, “When we had a choice from the various materials, we felt it more comfortable to engage in the activity.” Students knew what they were interested in as well as what they could understand without much difficulty. Their freedom of choice made it possible for them to deal with materials which are right in terms of level and content as well as their interest. Materials affect student attitudes in the activities.

Peer Relationships in Small Group Activities

Group talk activity also revealed how peer relationships in each group affected student attitudes. When this small group activity started, groups were formed by name order. After each member served in the role of speaker and reporter, groups were formed according to student preference. The effect was remarkable. The activity became much more lively. In my journal I described the active English communication conducted by the students as "a dramatic change." I wrote at the time: "The moment the activity started, laughter and excitement filled the classroom. The words spoken were not in a complete sentence style… but actually they were actively speaking in English."

Students seemed to feel more relaxed with friends than an ordinary mix of classmates. They were more secure, and less worried about making mistakes because they knew their friends understood them and tried to be helpful in learning together. Students pointed out in the interview, the difference in their anxiety level in the small group activities. Machiko said, "If my peers in the same group are all quiet, I feel nervous. If the peers are those I know well, I can speak in English more." Yui, whose speaking proficiency was relatively high, was worried about peer reaction, saying, "If my peers remain silent when I speak in English, I feel embarrassed as well as discouraged." Mutsumi, who was apparently shy in Japanese communication, also said, "I was able to ask questions in English when my familiar classmates were in the same group." Peer relationships clearly influenced student attitude in class activities.

Peer Support in the Whole Class Activity

Although most students showed a preference for group work in the classroom with regard to interest and level of difficulty, one student chose the group talk activity as her favorite activity. The reason seemed to be that the group talk activity is comprised not only of talking in groups but also a whole class activity, as the questionnaire showed the majority of the students considered it most difficult to speak in front of the whole class. Students generally felt more secure and relaxed when talking with peers in small groups, but they had to go through stress and pressure when they took the role of reporter. The reporters, as

representatives of each group, made a summary of their group talks as well as asked or answered questions from other groups in front of the whole class. In the interview Fuyumi explained her experience as a reporter, saying "At first, I found it extremely difficult to put my thoughts into English sentences. I was almost in a panic."

Student attitudes, however, changed gradually through the group activity conducted every class period. Especially after forming new groups, student engagement in the group activity became more active. The feelings of peer support were strengthened through the activities, and became strong enough to affect the whole class activity. Kayo, a quiet but emotionally stable student, said in the interview, referring to the reporting stage of group talk in the whole class: "In the beginning, I felt nervous and at a loss what to say, but by the end of the term, it became easy to speak. I actually found it fun."

Takae explained a similar change, saying, "Speaking in front of the whole class became easy, because I was aware of my group members support from behind. I was not alone." Group work fostered this secure feeling which developed even in the whole class activity. Group journals on the final day of the activity were full of excited comments about their achievement. One student said, "The content of the story was easy to understand. The speaker used gestures and it was fun to listen to her. Our group was able to ask two questions in the whole class activity! This is great!"

My own journal also noted the active involvement of the students in the whole class activity after the group talk, referring to the four groups which volunteered to ask questions. Peers in the same group influence each other in various ways.

Discussion

Students' quiet attitude was mainly caused by the fear of losing face in front of the whole class. Ironically, their background as "good students" worked to press them to maintain that status. They knew it's hard for them to remain the best students in high school, but they couldn't allow themselves either to lose face in front of the whole class, by making mistakes. Although I was not unaware of students' tension caused by this fear before starting this project, I attributed it more to teacher influence than peer reaction. However,

the results of this project show that students were less concerned with teacher evaluation than peer evaluation. In class activities, speaking in front of the whole class meant becoming an examinee tested by other students. If they made a mistake, the silent reaction of their fellow students so threatened to damage their ego that they would not try the same risk again. Teacher encouragement didn't seem to have much of an effect.

In general, group work seemed to lessen this tension, and students were more relaxed and actively engaged in group-based speaking activities. Small groups seemed to allow students to deal with mistakes more easily. The physical closeness in the activities enabled students to respond to each other's mistake in a friendlier way; not with silence but with laughter. In small group activities peers were no longer strangers, though they still were in the whole class activities.

Peer relations were apparently the key to active engagement even in small group activities. Students suffered anxiety even in small group activities depending on the relationship between peers. Although the relationship could be improved in the process of the activities, it seemed better for students to have a choice of peers in the same group. I expected this tendency to some extent, but the results revealed such a profound influence of peer relationships that I have had to recognize its centrality.

The level and interest of the material in class was also significant. Student involvement in activities became more intense as they became more accustomed to choosing materials. When students dealt with materials chosen according to their interest, their attitude became even more lively. Before this project, I had just provided materials, which were often difficult to deal with. I directed them to do what the textbooks suggested. Students spoke as little as possible, no more than the textbook directed. However, students started to speak more, with materials of their own choosing, which they knew were not too difficult and of their interest.

Students' fear of losing face was also caused by the gap between their perception of their ability and textbook requirements. Students didn't find the textbook activities fun, either. Their interests were not reflected in textbook exercises, which seemed to hinder students' active involvement in class activities.

Before starting this project, I thought students' quiet attitudes in the classroom meant nothing but excessive concern with the entrance exams. My assumption was that students' concentration on class materials took the form of silence. I thought students believed the silent concentration was the best way to prepare for the entrance exams. However, I have found that students are eager to improve their English oral communication skills by actively speaking in class. As my results show, students wanted to speak English in the classroom, even though they mainly "listened to the teacher" and "took notes carefully." I am encouraged to know students hold different expectations of English oral communication class. More importantly, I feel keenly aware of my responsibility to help foster this attitude.

The results of my project reveal how much peer-relationships mean in classroom activities. They also show the importance of the adequacy and appropriateness of class materials. Student attitudes changed according to this consideration. I have always sought better teaching methods; How to teach and what to teach. Formerly, however, my thinking was always based on a teacher's view-point, which proved, I now realize, to be one-sided. What is more, students care little about teacher influence in the classroom although students have been subjected to teacher-centered classrooms for a long time. Through this project I actually discovered that students are more concerned about their peers and materials. By choosing their peers and materials themselves, students improved their learning attitude. The elements of choice and decision have enabled students to become more active speakers in the classroom. This capacity to control one's own learning is how Benson (2001) defines autonomy. Benson (2001) states that autonomous learning is "a mode of learning, and educational practices designed to foster autonomy"(p.110). Student attitudes changed in this project through the fostering of autonomy. This being the case, what I can do as a teacher is provide an environment where students have such choices, and to help them choose what they need and who they want to work with.

This project has taught me the real meaning of student-centeredness in oral communication class. The teachers' role as moderator means a great deal in this respect. Rogers (1983) suggests the importance of the teachers' role as "facilitator," who tries to create a psychological climate where students feel free to learn without fear of making

mistakes. In the future, I am determined to present a better learning environment so that students can practice what they believe is effective to improve their speaking skills -- to speak English more actively in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

1. How much do you expect to improve your English oral communication skills in this class? Please circle one of the following.

- everyday conversation (greeting, talking about weather)
- conversation for shopping or traveling
- conversation at work, with Native English speaking people
- success in entrance exams
- professional interpreter level

2. Please rate your English oral communication skills.

Circle the adequate number with 0 as no skills, 8 as your goal level.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

3. How much do you think you can improve your English oral communication skills through this class? Please circle the adequate number, with 8 as your goal level.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

4. What do you think is the most effective way to improve your English oral communication skills in classroom? Please pick up the best two and circle them.

- To be engaged in English oral activities intently
- To try speaking in English as often as possible
- To try listening to the teacher as carefully as possible
- To learn as many English words and phrases as possible
- To take note neatly
- Others ( )( )( )

5. What do you actually do in this class, in order to improve your English oral communication skills? Please circle every item you practice.

- To be engaged in English oral activities intently
- To try to speak in English as often as possible
- To try to listen to the teacher as carefully as possible
- To learn as many English words and phrases as possible

- To take note neatly
- Others ( )( )( )

6. What do you believe is the most effective practice outside class to improve your English oral communication skills? Please circle the top three.

- To review the class.
- To practice with the friends the expressions you have learned in class.
- To memorize the expressions.
- To try to listen and watch English programs.
- To use materials of English oral communication, such as CDs or videos .
- To go to English conversation school.
- To travel abroad.
- To study abroad.
- Others ( )( )( )

7. What do you actually do outside class to improve your English oral communication skills? Circle every item you practice.

- To review the class.
- To practice with the friends the expressions you have learned in class.
- To memorize the expressions.
- To try to listen and watch English programs.
- To use materials of English oral communication, such as CDs or videos .
- To go to English conversation school.
- To travel abroad.
- To study abroad.
- Others ( )( )( )

8. How much do you think you can improve your English oral communication skills by changing your current practices? Please circle the adequate number, with 1 as no improvement, and 8 as the maximum improvement.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Appendix B

Questionnaire

① What did you enjoy most among the activities in oral communication class?

Please name the best three with the top as first.

(among: listening exercise with the tape, practice with ALT, talk about a topic activity, presentation project)

What do you think are the factors that made the activity enjoyable?

② What was least enjoyable factor about your least favorite activity?

What do you think are the factors that made the activity least enjoyable?

③ When do you think is the most comfortable situation to speak in English in classrooms?

What do you think makes you feel comfortable?

④ When do you think is the most uncomfortable situation to speak in English in classrooms?

What do you think makes you feel uncomfortable?

⑤ Do you think you find it easier to speak out now than before?

Why do you think so? (What do you think helped you, if you think you improved?)

⑥ What do you want to do more to improve your English oral communication skills?

⑦ Do you have any suggestions for improving this class?

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What do you think of the activity “Group Talk” that you started in the third term?

2. What was your reaction when you were allowed to choose your fellow members to form a group? (compared with the other way of forming groups)

3. Have you got accustomed to ‘asking and answering’ task that was required during the ‘talk about a topic” activity? Are you better at listening for information than before you started this activity?

4. As for “Group Talk” activity, at first you only chose an article from among the ones the teacher presented before you. In the next round, you chose a magazine from among those the teacher offered so that you can choose any topic from any magazine of your choice. then the next round allowed you to choose from anything, not only from the materials such as magazines or books the teacher presented, but also form the library or your own home. Which way did you like most? and why?
5. What did you think of the presentation task and its preparation?
   What was the good point for you?
   What was the bad point for you?

6. What do you think of the group project that you were engaged in (for the presentation of a short drama or speech) compared with the traditional (regular) style of class?
7. If you have a chance to do some project work, which would you prefer, to work in a group or individually? And why?
8. What do you think is important if you try to improve your English skills in class?
9. Are you now more motivated to improve your English speaking skills than before?

Appendix D

Group journal sheet:

GROUP JOURNAL
Date: /
activity:(talk, role play, game, presentation, etc)
Names of members/ frequency of questions
* /
* /
* /
* /
Question type: frequency:
What……:…… times
Who……..: ……times
When……: ……times
Where…….:… …times
When…… : ……times
How……..:… ….times
clarification ……..:……. .times
Words/phrases:
*
*
*
*
Comments/ summary :(excitement, improvement, reflection, etc.

Talk about a topic: there is a separable sheet of each member

a) for the speaker: b) for other members: c) for the reporter:

Date: name:	Date: name:	Date: name:
Topic:	Note:	Question type:
Contents: (words & phrases)	Who…….. What…….. Where……. When…… How…….. Words/phrases…	Who … What Where When How…
	Topic/main ideas:	Summary:

Table 1

Student Ranking of Favorite Activities

Activity	First	Second	Third
Presentation Project	24	5	1
Group Talk	1	17	11
Practice with ALT	11	8	14
Listening Exercise with CD	0	0	4

Figure 1.

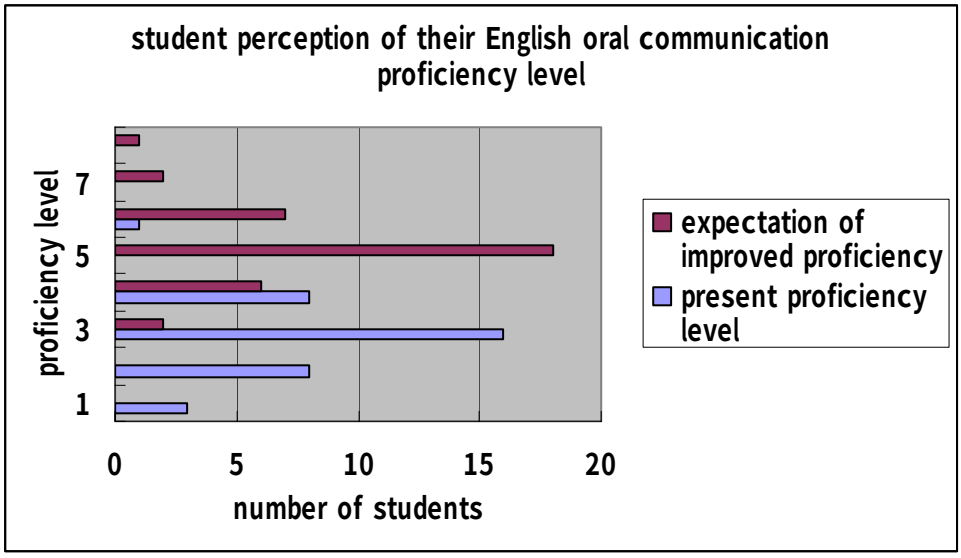
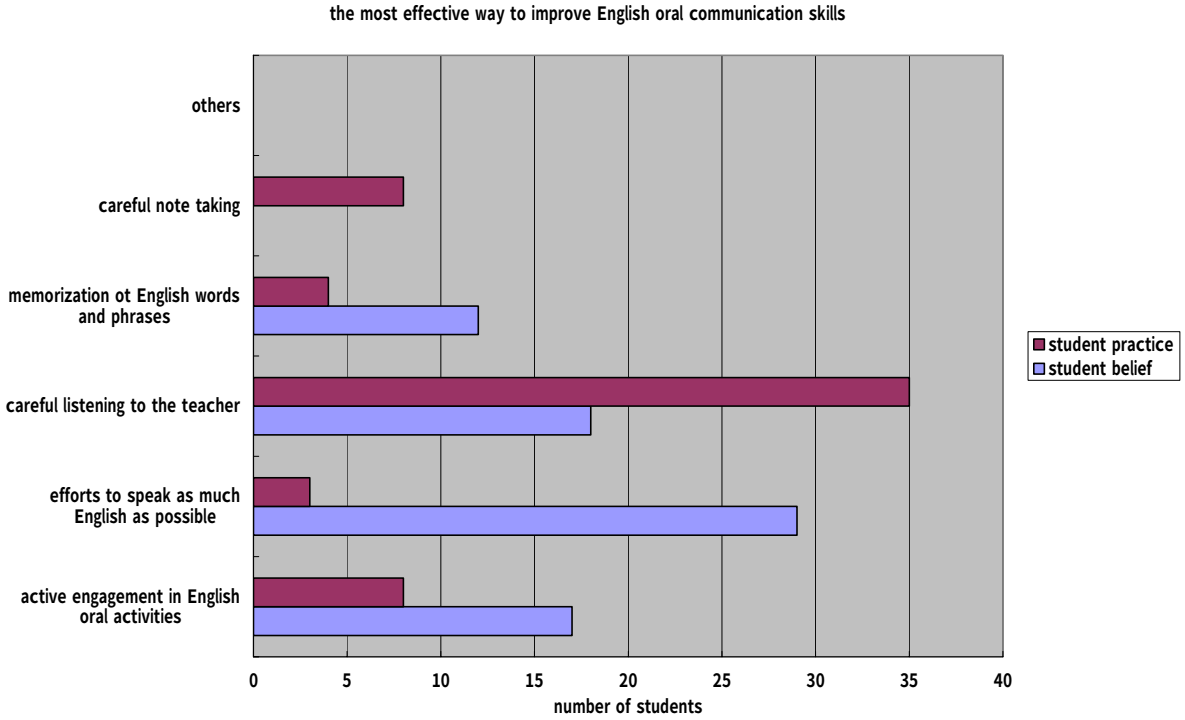


Figure 2.


the most effective way to improve English oral communication skills
others
careful note taking
memorization ot English words and phrases
careful listening to the teacher
efforts to speak as much English as possible
active engagement in English oral activities
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
40
number of students
student practice
student belief

Footnote

[1]All names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.