

The Gap between the Course of Study and the Present Situation at Senior High School English Education in Japan

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Abstract

Through the study in the area of English education in Japan, we find that there is a gap between the present situation of English education at senior high schools and the purposes shown in the Course of Study for Senior High Schools. The purpose of the guideline is to cultivate students' communication ability. However, many high school students take English classes where grammar translation method is used. The situation and the purpose seem quite different. Since the aim of our study is to find the class styles which fulfill the purpose of the guideline, the survey on the present situation of English classes at high schools should be done as a first step.

In order to know the actual situations of English classes at high school level, questionnaires were sent to about one thousand freshmen all over Japan asking them the content of English classes which they took in their high school days. The result shows that a large number of high school students take English classes where the main focus is on reading and writing, which seems difficult for students to improve their communication ability. In order to improve the present English education in Japan, the results of our study and some implication will be presented at PAAL conference.

Keywords

English education, senior high school, the Course of Study, present situation

Introduction

The course of study shows that the purpose of English education at senior high schools is to develop students' basic abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language. Those who read the purpose might think that English education of Japan is very good to improve students' communication ability. However, many high school students take English classes where the main focus is on only reading and writing. The situation and the purpose of the Course

of Study seem quite different.

Research

Our survey is to find out the actual conditions about English classes at senior high schools all over Japan. In order to get information, the questionnaires were sent to Japanese college freshmen around Japan. The number of them is about one thousand. This questionnaire consists of fifteen items.

Analysis

Figure 1 shows that the real situation of English classes and English classes students want to take. The gap between them is wide as shown in the figure. The purpose of the Course of Study is quite the same as the content of classes students want to take.

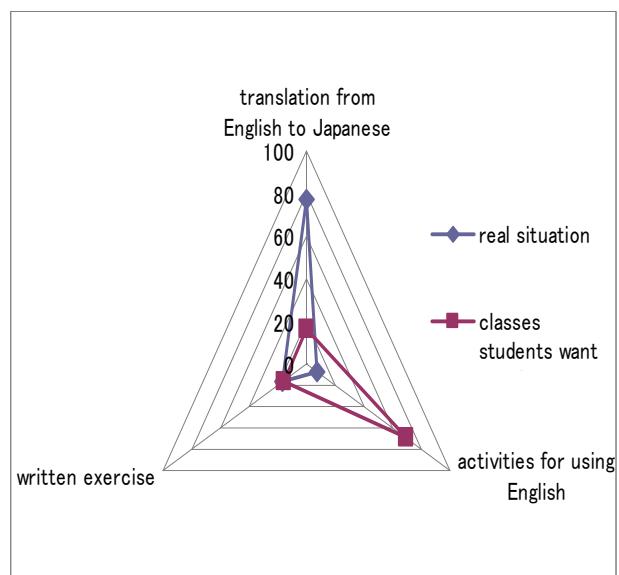


Figure 1: The gap between the real situation and classes students want to take

According to the results of the questionnaire, the teachers use English in classes more than expected. About 25% of teachers use English in more than half of their class time as a means of instruction. In the new Course of Study, all the English classes, in

principle, should be instructed in English. That might be one of the reasons why teachers try to use English in classes. It is also clear that many students don't have enough opportunities to communicate in English during classes and they don't think their communication ability has improved. (Figure2)

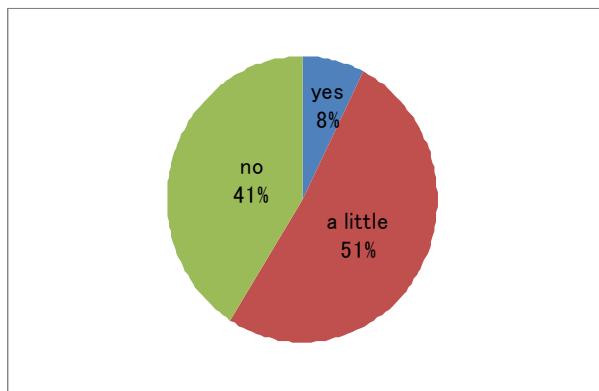


Figure 2: Do you think your communication ability has improved?

At the same time, according to the results, students don't talk and communicate with assistant English teachers (ALTs) enough and they don't have enough chances like pair work and group work as are shown in Figure3 and 4.

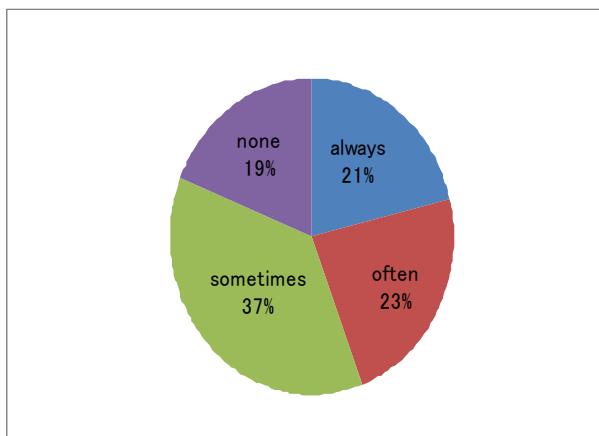


Figure 3: Frequency of pair work

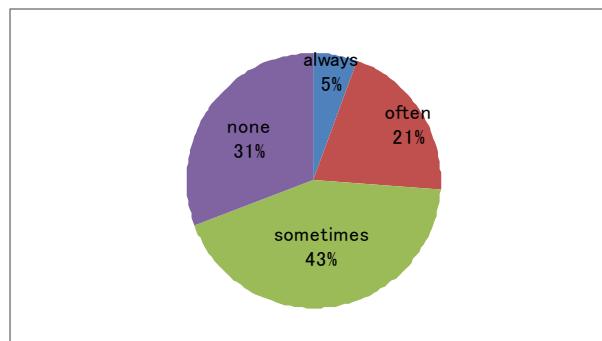


Figure 4: Frequency of group work

Implications

The effective use of ALT is said to be important to increase English activities during classes since having an ALT in class gives students not only a lot of exposure of English but also more opportunities of English than classes taught by Japanese teachers of English alone. It leads to develop students' communication ability. In our research, however, ALTs are not used effectively. Actually there are ALTs in all senior high schools, so we would like to suggest that each school make full use of ALTs in English class. Through communicating with an ALT, students can learn pronunciation and natural expressions. The classes in which students can use English more should be necessary, and that is the thing students want to take and mentioned in the Course of Study. The detailed suggestion will be presented at PAAL conference.

References

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and technology. (2010) The Course of Study for Senior High Schools.