

The “Fewer Young Japanese Travelling Abroad” Phenomenon: A Questionnaire Analysis of College Freshmen

Masahiro MAEDA[†],

Keywords

study abroad, overseas experience, motivation for studying English

1. Introduction

When we search on the Internet for the phrase “the phenomenon of fewer young Japanese,” we easily find several search results. For example, fewer young Japanese are buying cars, fewer young Japanese are watching TV at home, and so on. It is true that the preferences of the younger generation change over time. However, in addition to the examples of research results mentioned above, it has been claimed that for a long time, fewer young Japanese have been travelling abroad (Nishimura, Takai, & Nakamura, 2010). Does this statement really represent the current state of young people? The present study starts from this question and tries to reveal the current state from the analysis of a questionnaire survey that was conducted among college freshmen.

2. Literature Review

According to Nishimura et al. (2010), the phenomenon of fewer young Japanese travelling abroad has begun to receive attention in the mass media. However, data from the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2019) indicate that the number of Japanese students who studied abroad was 36,302 in 2006, but this number had increased to 105,301 in 2017, an increase

of about 69,000 over ten years. The greatest feature of this data is the increase of the number of short-term study abroad. The number of students studying abroad short-term (less than one month) in 2017 was about four times as large as that in 2006. However, the number of students studying abroad long-term (more than one year) in 2017 was only twice as large as that in 2006. Students tend to prefer short term to long term just for the experience of life overseas. SANNO University (2017) conducted a survey on the Internet to measure the global awareness of new employees hired right after graduating from university (18–26 years old), and found that 60.4% of them did not want to work abroad, while the percentage who did not want to work abroad was 28.7% in 2004. Therefore, the proportion with no interest in working abroad more than doubled. However, we must take the decrease in the number of young people into consideration. The number of young people aged 18 years was approximately 1,500,000 in 2004, but approximately 1,200,000 in 2014. It is true that this is a major decrease, but the tendency of fewer young Japanese travelling abroad still holds true even after taking the decreased population into consideration. In order to improve this tendency of fewer young Japanese travelling abroad, MEXT implemented a special project to

[†] maedam@seiryō-u.ac.jp (Liberal Arts and Sciences, Kanazawa Seiryō University)

afford Japanese young people the opportunity to go abroad in 2013. Under this plan, about 120,000 college students and 60,000 high school students, twice the number of young people who had already gone abroad at that time, will be given the right to go abroad by 2020.

3. The Purpose of This Study

Based on the results of previous studies, this study examines the current situation based on the latest data and uses a questionnaire on traveling abroad to survey college freshmen regarding how they feel about going abroad so as to improve the situation of fewer young Japanese travelling abroad. The following research questions (RQs) are addressed:

RQ1. Does fewer young Japanese travelling abroad represent the current situation?

RQ2. Does what learners hope to gain from traveling abroad match the aims of study abroad programs?

4. Questionnaire on Traveling Abroad

4.1 Participants

A total of 77 college students (60 female and 17 male) who entered college to study intercultural studies took part in this study in April 2019. All of the participants were native speakers of Japanese eager to study English and foreign cultures.

4.2 Results and Analysis

This study investigates the current state on youth traveling abroad with a questionnaire. Figure 1 shows their experience traveling abroad. Of the 77 participants, 29 (38%) have experience of traveling abroad (hereafter, “ETA”). Even though they are interested in studying English and foreign cultures, this number was larger than we expected.

According to JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co. (2014), the phenomenon of fewer

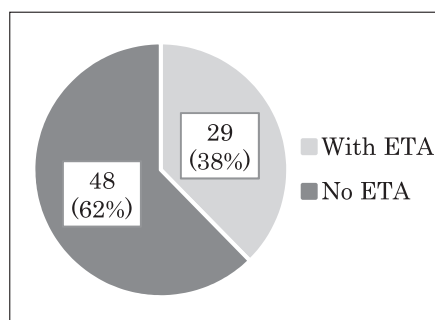


Figure 1. Experience traveling abroad (ETA).

young Japanese travelling abroad has changed. Figure 2 shows the percentage changes of female respondents who traveled abroad between 1985 and 2013. The highest percentage of female respondents aged 15 to 19 since 1985 was recorded in 2013. The possible reasons for this are that, first, self-investment in traveling may be considered valuable, and second, the number of universities that have prepared study abroad programs has increased.

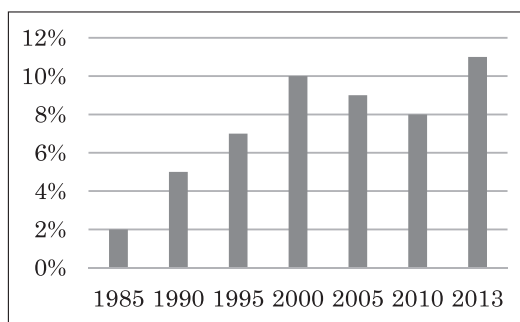


Figure 2. Changes in the number of female travelers in foreign countries (by the author, based on JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co., 2014).

We then asked the participants with ETA about their time abroad. Figure 3 shows that 12 participants (41%) went abroad before junior high school and 13 participants (45%) went abroad when they were in high school. Their average age when abroad was 13.6.

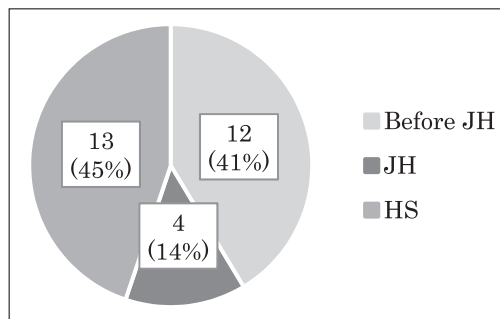


Figure 3. Classification of age during ETA.

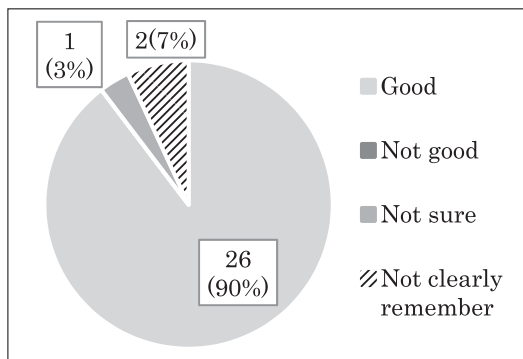


Figure 5. Impressions of traveling abroad.

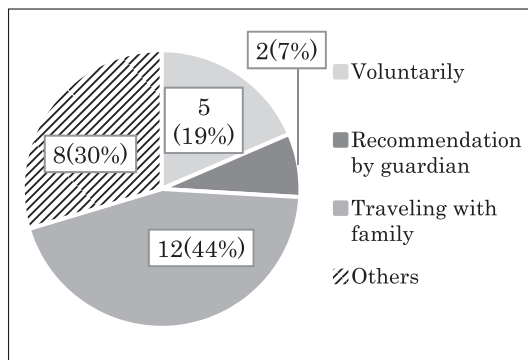


Figure 4. Motivations for traveling abroad.

Next, we asked how they obtained the opportunity to go abroad and how long they stayed there. Figure 4 shows that 12 participants (44%) traveled with their family during their elementary school days. Another 8 participants (30%) traveled abroad on school trips in high school. Their average stay abroad was 7.13 days.

The next question was related to the previous one: “How do you feel about your experiences in foreign countries?” Figure 5 shows that 90 percent of them had a good impression of traveling abroad, and no participants answered that they had a bad impression. Two participants who travelled at ages 12 and 14 did not remember their travel clearly.

Next, we asked the participants the ideal age for traveling abroad. Table 1 shows that the participants with ETA answered that the average ideal age for traveling abroad is 12.8 years, while participants who had not had ETA answered 14.3 years, showing a difference of 1.5 years between the two in the ideal age of traveling abroad.

Table 1. *The Ideal Age Traveling Abroad*

With ETA	12.8 years old
No ETA	14.3 years old

Figure 6 shows the results for the question: “Did you want to go abroad before you entered college?” 30 participants (62%) without ETA answered *Yes*. Contrary to expectations, 18 participants (38%) answered *No*.

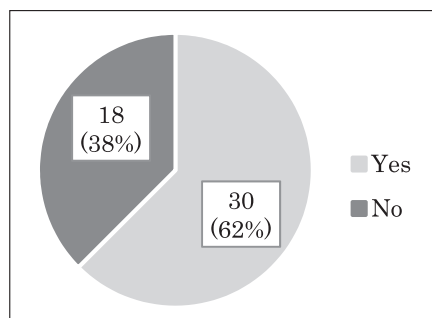


Figure 6. Their hope to go abroad before college.

We asked them why they did not hope to do so before college. Their thoughts were as follows.

- *I have an image that foreign countries are scary.*
- *It was too early for me to learn something from going abroad before entering college.*
- *I am not able to live in foreign countries.*
- *I thought that I would have a chance to go abroad in the future.*
- *I don't have enough ability to go abroad.*
- *I wanted to go abroad with money that I earned by myself.*

MEXT (2015) investigated why Japanese high school students do not want to go abroad. More than half of them answered that the language barrier prevents them from studying abroad, followed by economic problems, anxiety in foreign countries, and no interest in study abroad. Some participants in the current study adduced safety in foreign countries and the timing of going abroad in their comments.

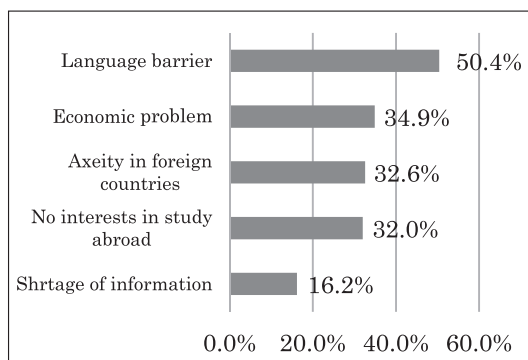


Figure 7. The reasons respondents did not want to go abroad (N = 560,333). By the author based on MEXT (2015). (Multiple possible answers were allowed).

Kanazawa Seiryō University prepares a study-abroad program. Almost all of the participants enter this university in order to participate in this program. We asked respondents, “What would you have done if our university did not have a study-

abroad program?” The participants were not allowed to answer, “Go to another university.”

Figure 8 shows that 33 participants (43%) would have given up their wish to study abroad. Only 6 participants (8%) said that they would try to find another program giving them the chance to experience life overseas or to travel with their friends. From this data, we found that the study-abroad program prepared by the university played an important part in learners’ decision to go abroad.

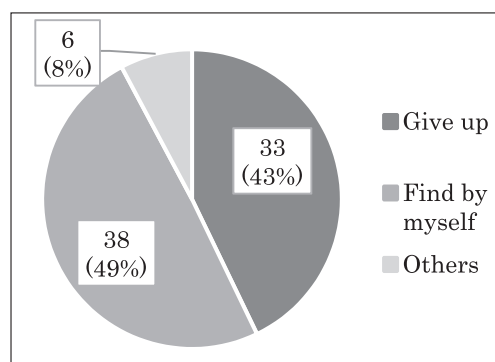


Figure 8. If the university had had no study-abroad program.

Up to this point, we found that the participants had a deep interest in studying abroad and saw the importance of the study-abroad program prepared by the university. The next question concerns their English abilities: “What kinds of English abilities do you want to acquire through the study-abroad program?” The participants were given five options: Daily conversation (DC), Academic purposes (AP), For employment, As a hobby, and others.

Nearly 90% were concerned with daily conversation and skills for work. Contrary to expectations, the number of participants who chose language abilities for academic purposes was very small. Though this detail will be discussed further later, we note here that a number of learners of

English have the feeling that their skills in English are inadequate to deal with daily conversation. In addition, their interest in academic English is not so high even though they are studying at university. This difference between the hopes of learners and the expectations of the university staff must be taken into account.

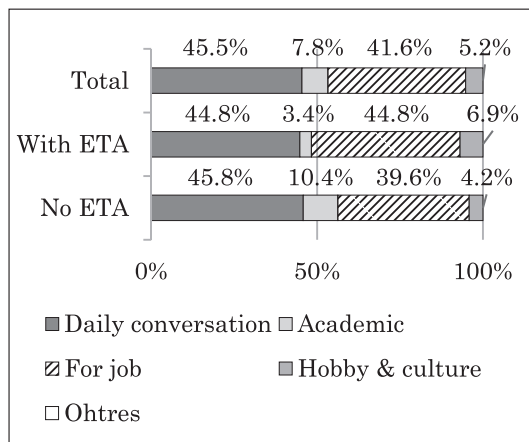


Figure 9. The English abilities expected through the study-abroad program.

Next, we investigated the differences in participants' expectations regarding the English ability that they wished to gain through the study-abroad program. We compare the results of the questionnaire between the participants with and without experience overseas. Figure 9 shows that there was no difference between the two. Most of the participants said that they wanted to acquire English ability for daily conversation and for employment rather than for academic purposes, suggesting that even learners with overseas experience felt that their English ability was unsatisfactory.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. RQ1: Does the phenomenon of fewer young Japanese travelling abroad represent the current situation?

Regarding RQ1, the results of the questionnaire analysis in Figures 1 and 2 show that there is a possibility that the phenomenon of fewer young Japanese travelling abroad no longer represents the current situation. Instead, there is a possibility that the age of young Japanese travelling abroad is decreasing. In this study, we found that a lot of participants had been abroad in elementary school. However, they appear to show no further motivation to go abroad after that. If their high school has school trips to foreign countries or their university has a study-abroad program, they will have their "first" or "second" chance to go abroad, but even in such a case, because they feel that their English skills are inadequate, they will have no motivation to study academic English.

5.2. RQ2. Does what learners hope to gain from traveling abroad match the aim of the study-abroad program?

We found a gap between the learners' intentions in traveling abroad and the university's intentions in terms of acquiring English ability. As shown in Figures 10 and 11, learners want to obtain English abilities suitable for daily conversation in spite of their overseas experience. Taking this data into account, we believe that there should be a balance between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) from the stage of elementary school in which English education starts.

5.3 BICS and CALP

5.3.1 What are BICS and CALP?

According to Cummins (2005), the change in emphasis from daily conversation ability in English such as listening and speaking skills (BICS) to

academic English ability such as reading and writing (CALP) unfolds over a long period. Teachers should take this fact into account when devising their curriculum.

Cummins (1999) also states that the sequential nature of BICS/CALP acquisition has been suggested as typical in the specific situation of immigrant children learning a second language. Japan is classified as an EFL (English as Foreign Language) environment, but because of the increased necessity of spontaneously conveying messages aurally as the opportunities to communicate with foreign people increase, we should take BICS/CALP acquisition into account in Japanese English education.

5.3.2 How and When Can We Shift the Emphasis from BICS to CALP?

We believe that arithmetic is to mathematics as English for daily conversation (BICS) is to English for academic purposes (CALP). One of the possible reasons why learners’ motivation to study English for academic purposes remains low, as we saw in Figure 9, is their dissatisfaction with their insufficiency in English performance for daily conversation. We conducted a survey of 36 college students (25 female, 11 male) concerning how much daily English they can use. Table 2 shows the results of questions of daily English.

Table 2. *The Results of Questions of Daily English (N = 36)*

	the number of right answers	the percentage of right answers
1	23	63.9
2	3	8.3
3	10	27.8
4	20	55.6
5	4	11.1

Figure 10 shows example questions of daily English based on Koike and Sato (2011). According

to them, these phrases shown are known even to elementary students if they are native speakers of English.

The highest correct answer rate was for *The battery is dead* (63.9%), and the lowest correct answer rate was for *Take your temperature* (8.3%). In addition, the correct answer rate for *The bath is ready* was very low (11.1%). The notion of the word “ready” can be used not only in this context but also in many others such as *dinner is ready*, *the room is ready*, and *I’m ready*. Once this type of easy but widely used word or phrase has been mastered not only for receptive ability of English but also active use, learners’ English abilities will broaden. In addition, it will increase learners’ confidence as good users of English.

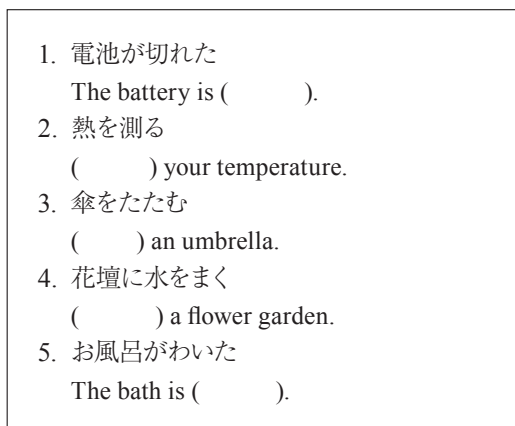


Figure 10. Example questions of daily English.

As we take the results of their performance in daily English conversation mentioned above into account, we would like to propose the ideal mix of BICS to CALP at different stages shown in Figure 12. At the kindergarten level, English songs and poems are available to interest pupils in this foreign language, especially its sound and rhythm. In addition, they are expected to gain certain levels of daily vocabulary through songs and poems.

At the elementary-school level, just as they acquire abilities in arithmetic at this stage, they will learn daily phrases such as *I wash my face*, *Breakfast is ready*, and *We're running out of time*. What is more, what is important at this stage is for pupils to grasp the phrases needed to communicate with others, such as *I see / Sure / Right / Uh-huh / Should be OK*. If these communication devices are available, even young pupils will have great confidence when speaking a foreign language. For most Japanese students, even if they are high school students, if the first words needed to respond to others cannot come out of their mouths, then the second word surely will not. This is why acquiring the communication devices mentioned above is of great importance.

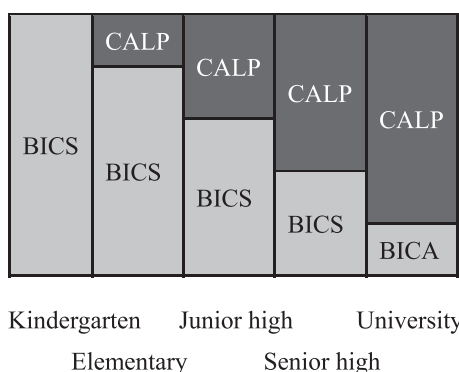


Figure 11. The ideal mix of BICS to CALP.

At the stage of junior high and senior high, the ratio of BICS to CALP should be reversed as in Figure 11. Especially at the high school level, the topics that textbooks treat should include social issues such as global warming, discrimination, and so on. However, even at this stage where debate or discussion increases, 30 to 40% of the content should be allocated to BICS skills such as accepting and respecting others' ideas, rejecting them, and how to enter a discussion.

At the university level, 80 to 90% should be allocated to CALP skills. According to the results of the survey shown in Figure 9, learners' motivation to study English tends to be daily conversation or employment, not academic work. Compared to these uses, learners may not feel it practical to study English for academic work. However, teachers should help them find it interesting.

References

- Cummins, J. (1999). *Taftotites ypo Diapragmatefsi* (Negotiating identities) (Greek Edition). Athens: Gutenberg.
- Cummins, J. (2005). A proposal for action: Strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 89, 585–592.
- Koike, N., & Sato, S. (2011). *Ieso de Ienai Kurashi no Eigo 2500 Hyogen* [English expressions that seem easy but I can't actually say 2500]. Tokyo: Takarajimasha.
- JTB Tourism Research and Consulting Co. (2014). *Ryoko market no genjyo* [The present state of travel]. <https://www.tourism.jp/tourism-database/column/2014/09/travel-market-seminar-report1/>
- Nishimura, S., Takai, N., & Nakamura, T. (2010). Wakamono no kaigai ryokou hanare gensho eno ronriteki approach no kanousei [Attempt at a theoretical approach to the “fewer young Japanese travelling abroad” phenomenon]. *Doshisha Shogaku (The Doshisha Business Review)*, 62, 79 – 96.
- MEXT. (2015). Heisei 27 nendo koutougakkou tou ni

okeru kokusaikouryuutou no jyoukyou ni tsuite
[International exchange at high school].

[http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/
education/detail/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/07/06/
1386749_27-2.pdf](http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/detail/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/07/06/1386749_27-2.pdf)

MEXT. (2019). Gaikokujin ryugakusei zaiseki jyoukyou
chousa oyobi nihonjin no kaigai ryugakushasu tou
ni tsuite [The report of the current situation and
number of foreign students who study abroad and

number of Japanese students who study abroad].

[http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/
1412692.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/1412692.htm)

Nishikawa, T. (2016). *Tobitate ryugaku Japan no
goshoukai* [The introduction of Tobitate Japan].
www.mlit.go.jp/common/001270470.pdf

SANNO University. (2017). *Dai 7 Kai shinnyushain no
global ishiki chousa* [The 7th survey of the awareness
of newly hired employees].