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Japanese Students' Reflections on High School Preparation for University English Classes

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Abstract

High school English classes in Japan typically focus on passive writing skills at the expense of practical communication skills, leading many Japanese students of English to progress to university study lacking vital English conversational competence. The requirements at university differ in that students are required to speak and interact more, thus presenting difficulties in adjustment. The present study aimed to address this disparity by finding how students would like to be taught at high school to prepare them for the different environment they find in university English classes.

A qualitative case study approach was used to gather data, including semi-structured interviews with seven English-major university students. The findings provide insights into students' preferred language of instruction and perceptions on teaching at high school, initial difficulties in adjustment to university, greater enjoyment following adjustment to university, and perceptions on how students can aid their own transition.

The findings from this study indicated that high school lessons were useful for the purpose of achieving in the university entrance test, but not useful for their broader studies at university. The students indicated they would have preferred more dynamic interaction in smaller classes, instead of the current large grammar-centered classes. It was also reported that Japanese high school teachers used little or no English in class and lacked knowledge of Western culture. The students would have preferred more classes with the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) who, while not deemed immediately helpful for their university entrance exams, was considered helpful for students in making a successful transition to university.

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Interviewing my seven participants was a pure joy and I am most grateful to them for giving up their time for me. I was impressed with the honesty and integrity with which each student shared their own personal experiences, especially considering the difficulty of expressing some complex feelings in a second language.

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