

# Implications on pedagogy as a result of adopted CALL practices

James W. Pagel<sup>1</sup> and Stephen G. Lambacher<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** As part of a longitudinal study on learner and instructor attitudes and patterns of computer and mobile device usage, we have attempted to identify how language instructors and students value their use in L2 learning. During the past five years at Aoyama Gakuin University (AGU) in Tokyo, we have surveyed both students and instructors annually in two separate schools. In the present study, results from the surveys administered to both students and instructors within the two schools are examined and compared, with a focus exclusively on the survey questions corresponding to pedagogically-related issues. Overall, the results show a steady movement on the part of instructors away from a more traditional approach to teaching English, emphasizing grammar and vocabulary memorization, to a more communicative-based approach. Similarly, survey responses from students revealed a clear preference for learner-centered classroom instruction over a traditional grammar-translation and teacher-centered approach.

**Keywords:** motivation, second language learning, L2, MALL, learner attitudes, instructor practices, grammar translation.

## 1. Introduction

Many Japanese undergraduates lack motivation and are often discouraged with their English learning experience, which may be due, in part, to any number of factors, including the emphasis placed on traditional exam-centered or grammar-based English classrooms at a large number of Japanese universities. This lack of motivation and confidence often results in a negative impact on student attitudes and classroom behaviors, leading to long-term and widespread negative learning outcomes (Pagel & Lambacher, 2014). Teachers can often miscalculate their

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1. College of Science and Engineering, Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, Japan; jwpagel@yahoo.com

2. School of Social Informatics, Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, Japan; steve.lambacher@gmail.com

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students' needs and the targeting of their curriculum, so that it is either too easy or too difficult, which also results in negative outcomes on student motivation and performance (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

During the past five years at AGU in Tokyo, we have surveyed both our students and instructors annually within two schools – the College of Science and Engineering and the School of Social Informatics. A key motivating factor for this research has been the total revamping of one of our school's English curriculum, which went into effect in April 2012. The surveys were thus developed to serve as part of a faculty development endeavor to evaluate instructor reactions to the new curriculum, which required all classes be held in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) classrooms and for instructors to adapt their teaching methods to take full advantage of the available facilities and technology. The total number of student respondents from both schools has averaged nearly 350 annually. Our 'in-house' teaching faculty has been comprised of nine full-time and 26 part-time instructors across the two schools.

At the past two EUROCALL conferences, we reported on patterns and changes in teacher and student attitudes and motivation towards the adoption of CALL/Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) or L2 learning, which is part of an ongoing study. The overall results revealed both students and faculty preferred the use of MALL and CALL, and found it more motivating and valuable for learning English than traditional practices (Pagel & Lambacher, 2014; Pagel, Lambacher, & Reedy, 2015). In the present study, we focus exclusively on survey questions of the study that corresponded to pedagogically-related issues. The main purpose of the study is on identifying how students and teachers assess resultant changes to language teaching pedagogy. Its primary goal is to better understand the motivation and attitudes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students consistent with a move to more communicative-based classes held in CALL classrooms.

## 2. Methods

The teacher and student surveys consisted of 32 and 47 questions, respectively, which involved Likert scale items measured using a six point semantic scale reporting agreement with the affective items ranging from one (strongly disagree) to six (strongly agree). SurveyMonkey® was used to collect and analyze the survey responses. Instructor questions focused on gauging attitudes on a wide range of pedagogical issues, including learning theory, student learning styles, and general teaching practices. Student questions pertaining to pedagogy were likewise broad,

and ranged from attitudes and perceptions of learning styles and outcomes, teaching methodology and materials, as well as motivation and goals for studying English.

## **2.1. Student survey**

The student survey was administered once annually during a five-year period (2012-2016). On average, each year a total of approximately 350 students from the two schools participated in the study. All participants were native speakers of Japanese mostly from the Kanto region, which includes the nearby prefectures of Saitama, Chiba, and Kanagawa. These were primarily 1st and 2nd year students ranging in age from 19 to 23. The percentages of other demographic variables within this population were as follows: female 33%, male 67%; Science and Engineering majors 50%, Social Informatics majors 50%; freshmen 46%, sophomores 36%, juniors 14%, seniors 4%.

## **2.2. Instructor survey**

Following [Pagel et al.'s \(2015\)](#) approach, the instructor survey was administered four times during a four-year period (2012-2015). To ensure anonymity, all questions regarding personal information, such as age and nationality, were eliminated. The number of English instructors of the two faculties currently totals 34. While the total number of respondents participating in the study during the first three years averaged only 17, this number increased in 2015 due to an increase in the number of instructors employed within both faculties as a result of an expanded English curriculum.

# **3. Results**

Due to space limitations, we present here just a brief sampling of the results from both surveys. A higher response rating indicated an increase in agreement and a lower rating indicated an increase in disagreement with the survey items.

## **3.1. Students**

Student survey responses, in general, revealed relatively low mean ratings for questions dealing with traditional classroom practices, such as the grammar-translation method and vocabulary memorization (3.45 and 3.19, respectively). These results helped to confirm that students felt it was not being emphasized by their instructors in their classrooms. On the other hand, for items that related to

perception of the level (3.67), pace (3.69), and understanding (3.77) of classroom activities, students exhibited an overall increasing pattern of agreement during the five-year period.

In response to questions related to learning style preferences (i.e. working alone vs. working in a group), a majority of students preferred the latter (3.46 vs. 3.63, respectively). Also, in response to questions related to extrinsic motivation (e.g. relevancy of English for success in job-hunting) a majority of students agreed that English was vital for their future (3.84). Conversely, an overall decreasing pattern of agreement was observed for the question “studying English *only* to earn course credit for graduation” (3.53), which was encouraging to the authors.

### **3.2. Instructors**

The instructor ratings were relatively low for survey questions dealing with traditional classroom practices, such as a focus on vocabulary memorization, and grammar mastery, and the use of grammar-translation method as a key component of classroom instruction. For example, the survey question “the use of grammar-translation method as a key component of classroom instruction” received a mean rating of 3.25, while the question “I like to try new things to keep the students motivated” received a mean rating of 5.41, which was considerably high. In general, the results during the four-year period revealed a pattern of steady movement on the part of instructors away from a direction of classroom practice emphasizing a more traditional approach to a greater focus on communicative-based teaching, with a few exceptions.

## **4. Discussion and conclusion**

A majority of Japanese students feel a reluctance to converse in a foreign language, which may be due to a number of factors. For English educators working as teachers at Japanese universities, it is somewhat rare to find students who go out of their way to hone their English skills. Even Japanese students who have returned to Japan after living and studying overseas for a number of years often feel reluctant to speak out as well, unless they are isolated with other fluent speakers of English. We question the reason for this hesitation to learn a language and unwillingness to use what students have mastered through their language learning experiences. That being said, our students have proved to be interested, motivated learners when having encountered a new pedagogy with the incorporation of information and communications technology both in and out of

the classroom. Likewise, our instructors have shown a willingness to be flexible and embrace the new technologies and resultant changes into their teaching pedagogies.

The internal reform incorporating the extensive use of CALL into our school's English curriculum has been the motivating factor behind this research, which has attempted to determine whether technology is being embraced in the classroom, and beyond (i.e. MALL). However, the curriculum reform has not only affected students' study habits, but also placed a burden on the part of instructors, many of whom were unfamiliar with using technology in their instruction and more comfortable with traditional lecture style classes focusing on the grammar-translation method. We found the instructors' general movement away from a direction of classroom practice emphasizing a more traditional approach to a focus on communicative-based teaching, as well as student preferences for it, to be extremely positive – and promising. As language educators are exposed to new technologies and teaching approaches (e.g. the implementation of CALL practices), it is evident that their adaptation is possible, even among traditionally-trained native speakers of Japanese serving as EFL teachers.

We will next turn our attention to a critical yet relatively new area of research in language learning and teaching that relates to the adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) in Japan (CEFR-J), with the goal of ascertaining to what extent CEFR-J is being understood, adapted, and embraced by CALL educators at universities throughout Japan and Asia, and to compare it with European practices.

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