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## Short Research Papers

# Communicative Approach: Beliefs, Perceptions, and Attitudes

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This paper examines the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards English learning among students enrolled in Individual Tutorials at a Japanese university's inaugural English Education Center. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was the primary instructional method. Center tutors designed a survey to investigate students' preferences of CLT and classroom experiences. Results of the study revealed a considerable match between students' preferences and classroom practices, which indicates that CLT may be beneficial for the development of communicative competence.

With the opening of an English Education Center in 2018, two tutors implemented non-credit Individual Tutorials for all first-year students in the Management Department of a Japanese university. Individual Tutorials were weekly, 90-minute, small group (4-5 students) semester sessions. Knowing that all students would be traveling to Canada as part of a short-term exchange program, the tutors designed a course based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for development of the students' speaking skills. Despite the researchers' view of CLT as a best-fitting pedagogical approach, however, it was suspected that students might have different beliefs about language learning developed from their high school language experiences, resulting in a very different view of the CLT teaching practices sought to be implemented. Therefore, it was important to get to know the students better, specifically, about their past language experiences, attitudes, and motivations in order to bridge possible cultural and pedagogical gaps—as it is through understanding of students that teachers can find ways to achieve greater language proficiency (Yoshida et al., 2012).

The purpose of this paper is to share the findings of a survey designed to

investigate students' preferences of communicative approaches and classroom experiences in the Individual Tutorials, in the hope that it may be beneficial to other educators interested in using CLT to improve students' communicative ability.

## **Background**

CLT was included into junior and senior high schools in 1989 by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT, 1989). As a demand for good communication skills in English has been steadily increasing for employment and career advancement (MEXT, 2014), the concept of CLT was introduced into Japanese higher education through a program called The Course of Study implemented in 1993 (Yoshida et al., 2012). A number of studies appeared since then that looked into the question of beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards CLT, with rather disparaging results, on behalf of teachers (Gorsuch, 2000; Nishino, 2008; Taguchi, 2005). These studies reported dissatisfaction with CLT, which was found "incompatible with the exam-oriented atmosphere of the Japanese English education system which is not designed to assess communicative ability" (Yoshida et al., 2012, p. 121).

The first study that looked into the question of students' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards CLT was the study by Savignon and Wang (2003), which presented survey findings from junior and senior high school students in Taiwan. The survey was designed to investigate learner attitudes towards communicative teaching and perceived implementation of traditional form-focused learning of English. In their conclusions, the researchers reported incongruence between learners' strong preference for CLT and their form-focused class practices.

Based on these limitations, Yoshida et al. (2012) updated Savignon and Wang's (2003) survey for Japanese students and conducted a large-scale study based on data from five universities in the Kansai region in Japan. The questionnaire designed by Savignon and Wang (2003) was re-adapted for use at Japanese universities. Yoshida et al. (2012) found a different pattern and concluded that all student participants they surveyed saw a good match between their beliefs and attitudes toward CLT and their perceptions of classroom

experiences.

The results of the study by Yoshida et al. (2012) were in line with our understanding of the issue, and, therefore, our study appropriates the aforementioned theoretical framework and looks to provide insights into the following questions:

1. In terms of instructional focus, what are learners' perceptions (what do students think) of the classroom practices they have experienced?
2. What are learners' attitudes (what do students like) toward these classroom practices in Individual Tutorials?
3. What are learners' beliefs (what do students believe) about English language learning generally?

## **Method**

The survey respondents ( $N = 51$ ,  $M = 9$ ,  $F = 41$ ) were freshmen undergraduates studying in the International Tourism and International Career programs of the Management Department at a Japanese university with various backgrounds of English learning. Twenty-four percent said they had started learning English before they were seven years old, 33% between the ages of 7 and 11, 42% between 12 and 15, and 2% at 16 or later.

The questionnaire, which was adapted from Yoshida et al. (2012), was translated into Japanese by the researchers. The questionnaire was then administered in a bilingual paper format in the students' tutorials mid-way through the autumn semester with each question written in English then followed by its translation (Appendix A, B, C). As in Yoshida et al. (2012), all responses were placed onto a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and grouped into the three response categories of Disagree (1-3), Neutral (4), and Agree (5-7) to more easily compare results.

## **Results for Research Question 1**

Students agreed with questions that asked about the use of communication-based learning (Questions 6-10) and use of correction (Question 11) in their English tutorials. According to Figure 1, students perceived that communication-based learning and correction methods were implemented widely in their

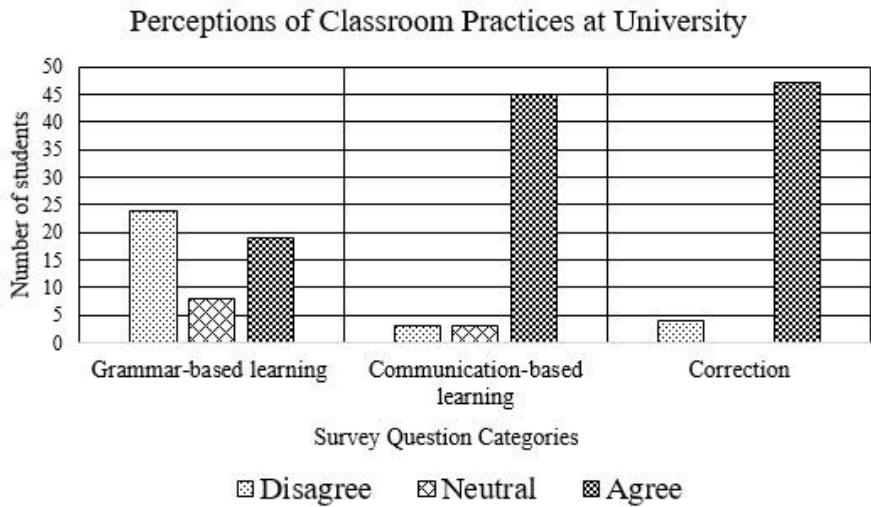
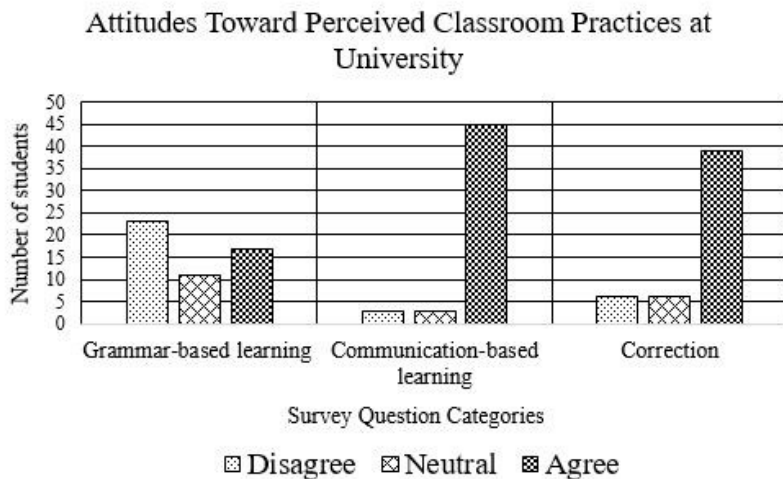


Figure 1. An overview and summary of the results from Part I of the survey about learner perceptions of classroom practice. The original data and results for each item are included in Appendix A.

English tutorials. The results from students regarding grammar-based learning (Questions 1-5) showed that students did not perceive it to be frequent in their English tutorials. In terms of instructional focus, student perceptions of their classroom practices showed that they perceived their English tutorials to be a communication-based learning environment with copious correction and feedback but where grammar-based learning was not a primary feature.

### Results for Research Question 2

Student attitudes displayed a high level of enthusiasm towards communication-based learning (Questions 6-10) as a perceived classroom practice (Figure 2). This is followed by positive student attitudes towards correction (Question 11). Many students displayed attitudes that were disinclined towards grammar-based learning as a perceived classroom practice. Only a third of students agreed with questions that asked about their attitudes towards grammar-based learning as a perceived classroom practice (Questions 1-5).



*Figure 2.* An overview and summary of the results from Part II of the survey about learner attitudes towards perceived classroom practices. The original data and results for each item is included in Appendix B.

### Results for Research Question 3

The strongest responses about beliefs about language learning among students (Figure 3) were to questions that asked about the importance of English to society (Questions 24-25 and Question 28) and the desire to speak English like native speakers (Question 29). However, student beliefs varied with grammar-based learning (Questions 1-5 and Questions 12-16), and pronunciation (Questions 22-23). Although a slight majority of students believed in the importance of grammar, nearly half of students either disagreed or were neutral. It was found that student beliefs about English learning were supportive of its importance with a desire to speak like natives but with mixed feelings about the importance of grammar-based learning and pronunciation.

## Discussion

A discussion of the results first warrants mention of the decision of the researchers to combine the Likert scale data into categories of 1-3, 4, and 5-7 for easy comparison of the results with Yoshida et al. (2012). An overview of the

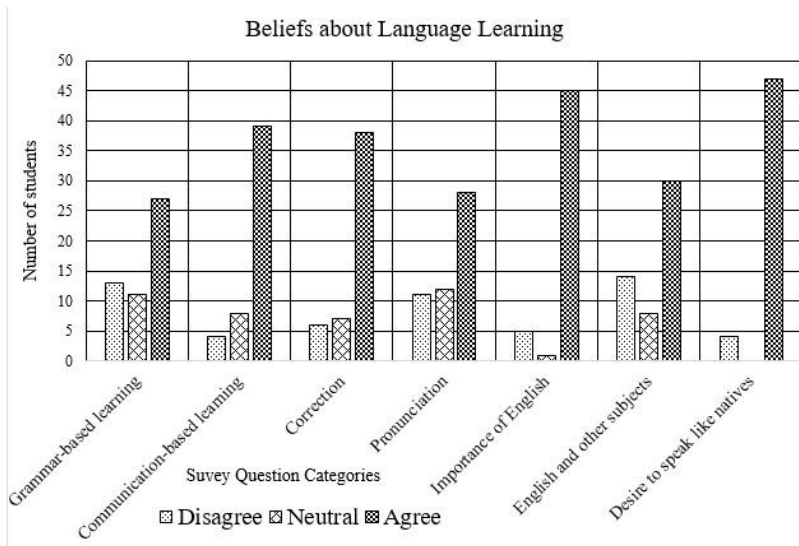


Figure 3. An overview and summary of the results from Part III of the survey about learner beliefs about language learning. The original data and results for each item is included in Appendix C.

results suggests that a majority of students held beliefs valuing the importance of English and communication-based learning strategies over the use of grammar-based learning. Although student beliefs showed less agreement towards the importance of pronunciation, while agreeing with the desire to sound like native English speakers, this can be partly explained as a result of students likely believing in the importance of communication over the need for accuracy in grammar and pronunciation. In terms of instructional focus, learner perceptions of classroom practices and their attitudes towards said practices showed that students perceived their Individual Tutorials to feature frequent communicative-learning and correction rather than grammar-based activities, with their attitudes towards said practices showing agreement. CLT may thus be beneficial for the development of communicative competence.

In the editorial process, for survey items A2 (3, 9, 10) and A3 (13, 18, 22, 26) English and corresponding Japanese translations were pointed out not to be parallel. Also, A3 (10, 27 and 29) have grammatical errors. This might have resulted in learner miscomprehension, and thus, general statements cannot be made with these items. The authors recognize this to be a data limitation.

## Conclusion

A majority of students revealed that their beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards practices in the Individual Tutorials matched their needs for CLT. This was also shown to be true in Yoshida et al. (2012). Although the researchers had a smaller and limited pool of study respondents ( $N = 51$ ) compared to Yoshida et al.'s (2012) study ( $N = 299$ ), the use of CLT was shown to be supportive of student needs for CLT at the English Education Center, and the optimal form of instruction matched students' beliefs about language learning, their perceptions of classroom practices, and their attitudes towards these classroom practices.

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## Appendix A

### Student Survey, Part I, English Practice

What is your opinion about each item below? (下記の質問に対してあなたの意見は?)

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

English item (Japanese item)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
1. English teaching in the English Education Center is grammar-focused. (英語教育センターの教え方が文法中心である。)	14 (27%)	17 (33%)	20 (39%)
2. My English teachers often ask us to do sentence drilling and repeat sentences after them. (英語の先生たちは私たちによく反復練習をしたり、あとについて復唱したりするよう指導する。)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	44 (86%)
3. The language used by my teachers is mostly Japanese. (先生たちの指導は主に日本語で行なっている。)	34 (67%)	10 (20%)	7 (14%)
4. English teaching in the English Education Center is mainly explaining and practicing grammar rules. (英語教育センターでは主に文法の説明と練習である。)	20 (39%)	10 (20%)	21 (41%)
5. I seldom need to open my mouth in the classroom. (私は個別指導のクラスの中で話す必要がない。)	49 (96%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
6. English teaching in the English Education Center is communication-based. (英語教育センターの教え方はコミュニケーションを基本とする手法である。)	2 (4%)	5 (10%)	44 (86%)
7. My teachers often design activities to have us interact in English with peers. (先生はよくクラスメイトと一緒に英語が使うアクティビティを紹介する。)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	47 (92%)
8. Our focus in class is communication, but the teacher would explain grammar when necessary. (生徒の主眼はコミュニケーションだが、先生は必要に応じて文法を説明する。)	2 (4%)	6 (12%)	43 (84%)
9. English teachers in the English Education Center allow us trial-and-error attempts to communicate in English. (英語教育センターの先生たちは、失敗してもやってみる方法で英会話をさせる。)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	43 (86%)
10. My English teachers often create an atmosphere for us to use English. (先生たちはよく英語を使える雰囲気を作る。)	4 (8%)	0 (0%)	47 (92%)
11. My English teachers often correct my errors in speaking in class. (先生たちは個別指導のクラスで間ちがいを直してくれる。)	4 (8%)	0 (0%)	47 (92%)

Note. All items had 51 respondents except for Item 9 ( $N = 50$ ).

## Appendix B

### Student Survey, Part II, Attitude Toward Instructional Practice

What is your opinion about each item below? (下記の質問に対してあなたの意見は?)

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

English item (Japanese item)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
1. I like grammar-focused English teaching in the English Education Center. (英語教育センターの文法中心の英語教育が好き。)	9 (18%)	9 (18%)	33 (65%)
2. I like sentence drilling and repeating sentences after my teachers. (反復練習や、あとについて復唱するのが好き。)	7 (14%)	12 (24%)	32 (63%)
3. I like the language used in the classroom by my English teachers to be mostly Japanese (先生たちの指導は日本語で行なってほしい。)	38 (75%)	10 (20%)	3 (6%)
4. I like much of the time in the classroom to be spent in explaining and practicing grammar rules. (英語教育センターの教え方が文法ルールの説明や、そのルールの練習に時間を使ってほしい。)	17 (33%)	17 (33%)	17 (33%)
5. I like an English class in which I do not need to open my mouth. (個別指導のときに口を開ける必要がないのが好き。)	43 (84%)	6 (12%)	2 (4%)
6. I like communication-based English teaching. (英語教育センターのコミュニケーションを基本とする手法が好き。)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	46 (91%)
7. I like communicative activities so that we could interact in English with peers. (クラスメイトと一緒に英語が使うアクティビティが好き。)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	46 (91%)
8. I like my English class to be focused on communication, with grammar explained when necessary. (指導の主な焦点はコミュニケーションで、必要に応じて文法を説明してもらうのが好き。)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	45 (88%)
9. I like English teachers to allow us to make trial-and-error attempts to communicate in English. (先生たちはよく試行錯誤によって英会話をさせたりするのが好き。)	3 (6%)	7 (14%)	41 (80%)
10. I like my English teachers to create an atmosphere that encourages us to use English in class. (先生たちは英語を使う雰囲気を作るが好き。)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	45 (88%)
11. I like my errors in speaking to be corrected by my teachers. (先生たちに会話のときの間違いを言い直してほしい。)	6 (12%)	6 (12%)	39 (76%)

Note. All items had 51 respondents except for Item 9 ( $N = 50$ ).

## Appendix C

### Student Survey, Part III, Beliefs About Learning English

What is your opinion about each item below? (下記の質問に対してあなたの意見は?)

English item (Japanese item)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
1. Learning English is learning its grammar rules. 英語学習とは、英文法を学ぶことである。)	13 (25%)	14 (27%)	24 (47%)
2. English learning through sentence drilling is effective. (反復練習することが効果的である。)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	44 (86%)
3. I believe Japanese should be frequently used in my English class for my better understanding of the lessons. (授業の内容がよりよく理解できるよう、個別指導で日本語が頻繁に使用されるべきと考えている。)	29 (57%)	13 (25%)	9 (18%)
4. I believe the more grammar rules one memorizes, the better he/she is at using English. (文法を覚えると、英語がよりよく使えるようになって考えている。)	7 (14%)	8 (16%)	36 (70%)
5. Opening one's mouth to practice speaking in the classroom is not essential for English learning. (個別指導で英語を口にするのは、英語学習に必要ではないと考えている。)	44 (86%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)
6. A language classroom should be communication-focused. (語学学習のレッスンは、コミュニケーションに重点を置くべきと考えている。)	1 (2%)	9 (18%)	41 (80%)
7. It is important to practice English in real-life or real-life like situations. (英語の練習が実際の活動で、あるいはリアルなシチュエーション場面で実践すべきと考えている。)	5 (10%)	9 (18%)	37 (73%)
8. Languages are learned mainly through communication, with grammar rules explained when necessary. (言語はコミュニケーションを通じて学ばれ、必要に応じて文法規則を説明すべきと考えている。)	4 (8%)	8 (16%)	39 (76%)
9. I believe making trial-and-error attempts to communicate in English helps me to learn English. (試行錯誤によって英会話することは、英語学習に役立つと考えている。)	3 (6%)	5 (10%)	43 (84%)
10. A teacher should create an atmosphere in the classroom to encourage interaction as a class or in groups. (先生がクラスの内、あるいはグループ内での相互活動を進める雰囲気を作り出すべきと考えている。)	6 (12%)	8 (16%)	37 (73%)
11. It is important for the teacher to correct students' speaking errors in class. (先生が生徒の会話に出る間違いを直すべきと考えている。)	1 (2%)	9 (18%)	41 (80%)

English item (Japanese item)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
12. The formal study of grammar is essential to eventual mastery of English. (英語をマスターするためには、文法を正式に学ぶことが必要と考えている。)	6 (12%)	10 (20%)	35 (69%)
13. I believe my English improves most quickly if I study and practice the grammar. (英語能力は、文法を学び、文法練習したりすると、急速に改善すると考えている。)	8 (16%)	15 (29%)	28 (55%)
14. There should be more formal study of grammar in English class. (個別指導では、正式な英文法学習がもっと増やすべきと考えている。)	16 (31%)	16 (31%)	19 (37%)
15. It is more important to study and practice grammatical patterns than to practice English in an interactive way in the classroom. (個別指導では、対話より文法を学び、文法練習したりする方が重要である。)	25 (49%)	12 (24%)	14 (27%)
16. Grammar rules should be explicitly explained in class. (個別指導では、文法規則を明確的に説明すべきと考えている。)	21 (41%)	15 (29%)	15 (29%)
17. Learning English is learning to use the language. (英語学習とは英語を実践的に訓練で学ぶことだと考えている。)	6 (12%)	12 (24%)	33 (65%)
18. Learning English by practicing the language in communicative activities is essential to eventual mastery of a foreign language. (コミュニケーション活動をしながらか訓練することは、英語学習に大事だと考えている。)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	44 (86%)
19. A communication-focused language program often meets the learner's needs. (コミュニケーションに焦点をあてた英語学習プログラムは、学習者の必要を満たすと考えている。)	3 (6%)	7 (14%)	40 (80%)
20. I believe it is important to avoid making errors in the process of learning English. (英語学習においては、間違いをしないことが重要だと考えている。)	37 (73%)	3 (6%)	11 (22%)
21. Teachers should correct students' pronunciation or grammatical errors in class. (先生たちが個別指導で生徒の発音や文法の間違いを直すべきと考えている。)	6 (12%)	8 (16%)	37 (73%)
22. A good language learner usually pronounces beautifully. (優秀な言語学習者が普段発音も美しいものである。)	10 (20%)	9 (18%)	31 (62%)
23. A person's good pronunciation usually indicates good English. (発音の良い方が英語も上手なことを示す。)	12 (24%)	14 (27%)	25 (49%)
24. Learning English is important for people in Japan. (英語学習は日本人にとって重要である。)	5 (10%)	0 (0%)	46 (91%)

English item (Japanese item)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
25. English is useful in getting a good job. (良い仕事に就くために英語は役に立つ。)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	46 (91%)
26. Good language learners are intelligent. (優秀な言語学習者は賢いと考えている。)	7 (14%)	6 (12%)	38 (75%)
27. Students who have good grades in other subjects are likely to be good language learners (他の科目において良い成績を収める生徒たちが、語学学習者としても優れている。)	21 (41%)	9 (18%)	21 (41%)
28. English education should begin in elementary school. (英語学習は小学校で開始するべきである。)	5 (10%)	3 (6%)	42 (84%)
29. I wish to speak like English native speakers. (ネイティブスピーカーのように英語を話したい。)	4 (8%)	0 (0%)	47 (92%)

Note. All items had 51 respondents except for Items 19 ( $N = 50$ ), 22 ( $N = 50$ ), 28 ( $N = 50$ )

English item (Japanese item)	<i>American</i>	<i>Canadian</i>	<i>British</i>	<i>Australian</i>	<i>Others, please specify</i>
	<i>English</i> アメリカ 英語	<i>English</i> カナダ英 語	<i>English</i> イギリス 英語	<i>English</i> オーストラ リア英語	他の地域の英 語、具体的に教 えてください
30. If you agree with the above statement, what English would you like to learn to use? (上記の質問に同意いただければ、どの英語を学んで使えるようになりますか?)	36 (64%)	10 (18%)	9 (16%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

Note.  $N = 56$  (some respondents selected more than one answer). No region or variety of English was specified in the "Others, please specify" item.