

関西の大学生のアルバイトで英語使用の調査

Survey of English language use in part time jobs of Kansai area university students

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This survey of university students in the Kansai area seeks to shed light on the frequency of English use in students' part time jobs, its value in the part-time workplace, as well as students' overall attitudes towards the English language. The survey found that while most students have studied English for many years, they overall believed that a higher level of English proficiency would help perform their current and future jobs more effectively. Most students also expressed a desire to improve their English language skills, suggesting that a teaching approach catering towards real world workplace language may help with student engagement and overall learning outcomes.

キーワード : workplace language use (職場の言語使用), tourism (ツーリズム), English teaching (英語教育), survey (調査)

1. Introduction

(1) Background

In recent years, Japan has seen a massive growth in the number of foreign tourists visiting the country. 2018 saw visitors from overseas peak at 31 million, up from just 8 million in 2008 (JNTO 2019). The Kansai area has seen a similar rise in popularity as a destination in and of itself, as well as a staging area for visitors on their way to Kyoto, Nara, Kobe or even Himeji and Hiroshima. In light of the recent uptick in foreign visitors, this survey of university students in the Kansai region seeks to answer the question: Do workers in customer service positions face difficulties communicating in English in the course of their work?

This is an interesting question, as perceived cultural distance is a factor which has been identified to influence the popularity of a region for international tourists (Cooper 2019), and within that perceived cultural distance, language plays a large role. Increasing the ability of tourists to navigate and shop autonomously through reducing friction caused by communication issues can help make an area more attractive to foreign tourists.

(2) Survey Methodology

Data was gathered via online survey using Google Forms, which allowed respondents to quickly and conveniently answer a series of questions on a smartphone or other mobile device. Questions were written in English and Japanese, with respondents given 4-5 possible answer choices. For some questions an option was presented which allowed for write in answers.

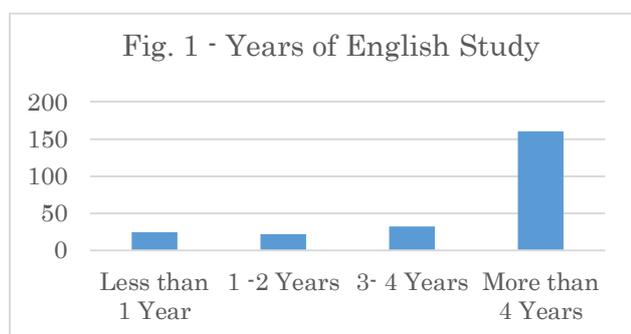
Respondents were solicited directly from university campuses in the Kansai area. A flyer with QR code was generated which was shared with lecturers, who then passed the code on to their students who work part time jobs in the customer service sector. The flyer was written in English, Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese to increase accessibility and interest, which helped collect responses from a wide variety of students with varying language abilities.

Google Forms is a cloud-based service that allows for the creation of surveys and collection of responses in near real-time. It has advantages over traditional survey methods in that it is a paperless survey which negates the need for printing, face to face canvassing, and manual entering in data from survey respondents. It also allows for easy collaboration between survey organizers who may be different areas. With the target demographic of this survey accustomed to spending time on their phones, it was relatively easy to find respondents as the survey interface is very intuitive on both Android and

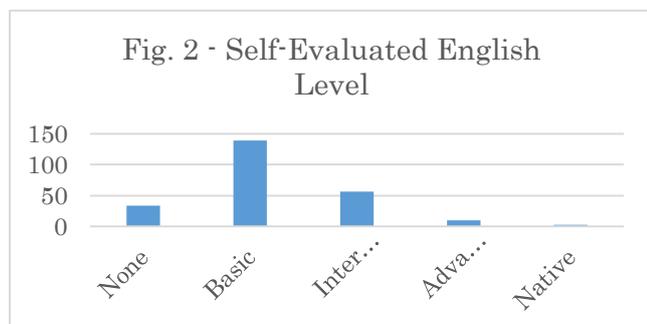
iOS mobile operating systems.

3) Respondent Profile

The respondents were primarily university students (94.6%) under the age of 30. Most of the respondents were from Japan, followed by Vietnam, China and Thailand. In all 240 respondents from 10 different countries participated in the survey. Only responses from those working part time jobs in the service sector were counted in the survey results. The most popular work location was Shinsaibashi / Namba (19.2%), followed by Kansai International Airport (13.2%), Umeda (10.5%), Rinku Town (5.5%). The remaining respondents (51.6%) worked in other areas within the Kansai region. 2)

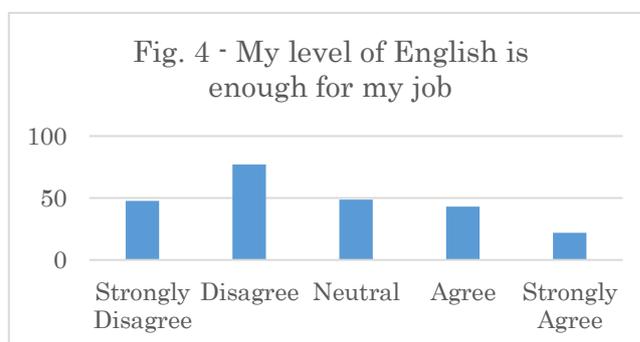
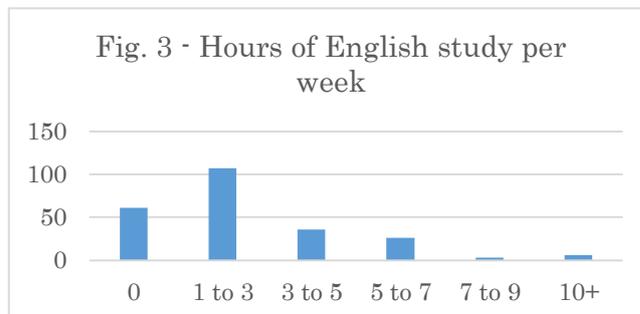


Most respondents have studied English for more than four years (Fig. 1), yet in self-evaluation of their English level they rated themselves as having a basic or below English level (Fig. 2). English has been compulsory in public Japanese elementary and junior high schools since 2002, and according to MEXT, 93.6% of schools had introduced English conversation classes by 2005 (Lyon 2013). Additionally the Japanese government has been devoting funds toward English education and there have been a series of action plans from the Ministry of Education aimed at increasing English proficiency.



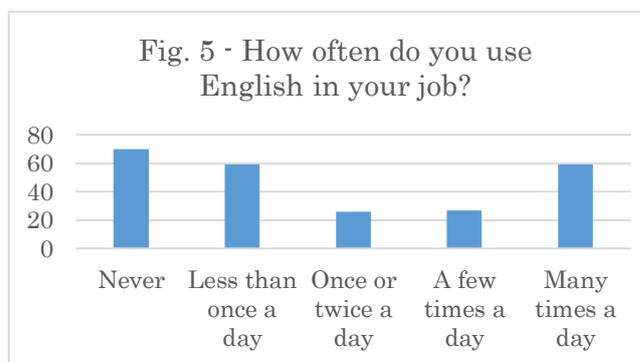
The fact that such a large number of survey respondents felt that their English ability was not adequate to interact with

customers during the course of their work suggests that changes in the approach to English education may be worth considering (Fig. 3, Fig. 4).



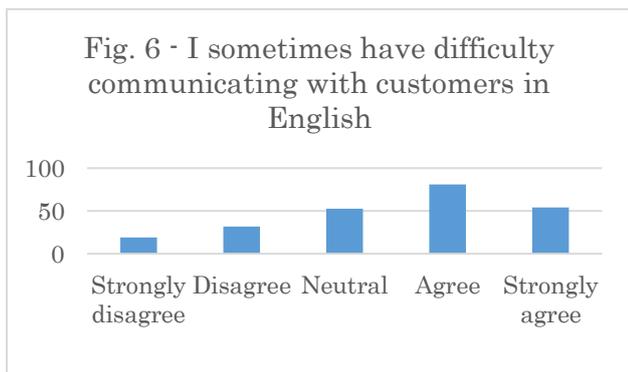
2. Survey Analysis

Based on survey results, 46.3% of respondents reported they use English at least once a day in the course of their work, and 24.2% of those felt they use English many times per day (Fig. 5). That said, the majority (52.3%) of those surveyed do not feel that their level of English is adequate to perform their job (Fig. 4). Regardless of this belief among respondents, the vast majority (70.3%) studied English for less than 3 hours per week. 56.4% of respondents reported having difficulty in communicating with customers during the course of their work (Fig. 6).



In terms of the frequency of English use in part-time jobs, responses varied widely from "never" to "many

times a day," depending on the area and type of the respondent's part-time job. Despite the frequency of English use at work, most respondents experienced difficulty communicating with customers in English. This is not surprising based on the respondents' self-rated English level as "basic." It also indicates that even while most workplace language interactions are routine, there is still enough variety in the English used by customers to create communication issues.



Survey respondents were asked what types of communication issues specifically caused issues and the most common response was "word usage" (55.6%) followed by "grammar" (47.4%). "Accents" and "culture" were also said to be issues but not to nearly the extent of word usage and grammar.

Overall, most respondents expressed a desire to improve their English skills (Fig. 7). This is unsurprising based on the number of communication issues reported and the self-evaluated English level. Respondents were also asked how an improved level of English would impact their work and were given space to write a short answer. Sample answers include:

"If I speak English good I can get a nice job."

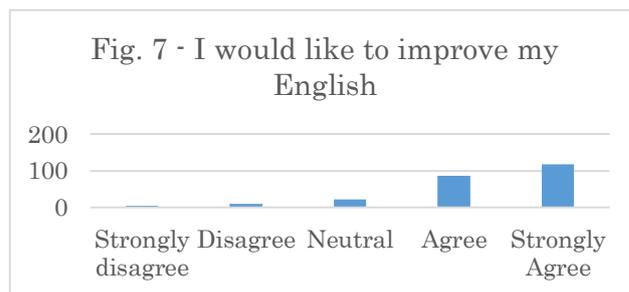
"I could get more money."

"If I can talk more fluently like business level, I think I can be more helpful to my customers."

These sample responses indicate the primary motivation for English improvement relates to workplace performance and / or greater earning potential in future work. Many of the respondents were open to the idea English classes

at their workplace, which might directly address the widely reported communication issues if classes were tailored specifically to the language needed to conduct their jobs. Additionally, studying language specifically for use in one's workplace may improve overall motivation to learn the language, as knowledge could be put to direct use daily. However not all respondents were focused on the work benefits of English, there were also responses about being able to "talk to anybody in the world," or "[being] comfortable when I travel the world."

Based on responses from survey participants, it would appear that not only did many respondents recognize workplace communication issues that could be alleviated by increased English proficiency, they also expressed a desire to take action to improve their English. This suggests that educators could factor this desire to improve into class syllabi. For example, educators with large numbers of students engaged in part time work could periodically solicit workplace communication problems students have and design activities and projects based around those issues. Additionally, most English textbooks cover the topic of tourism generally and broadly where explicit instruction related to specific scenarios might be more beneficial (Terauchi 2017). With respondents reporting issues related to grammar and word usage, incorporating authentic texts, materials, and scenarios can give students more knowledge and confidence when their real-life workplace encounters stray from the more structured language they are familiar with from the classroom or textbook.



3. Conclusion

While the survey was minimal in scope, a few interesting trends can be observed in the role of English in service sector jobs in the Kansai Region. First, many of those working in the service sector have only basic English ability which results in communication issues. With the number of foreign tourists on the rise over recent years, and with the

upcoming Tokyo Olympics in 2020, the communication difficulties that part time staff have in their work with foreign tourists can be expected to rise unless addressed.

The fact that many respondents have years of English study, yet feel they are lacking in the English proficiency needed for their jobs, especially when it comes to grammar and word usage, suggests that the focus of English classes for those in the tourism sector could use some adjustments. Many respondents were open to the idea of studying at their workplace, but if that is not a viable option, educators may wish to bring in more authentic materials and situations into the class to prepare students explicitly for situations they will face in their workplaces.

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