

# Motivation Gains during English Language Camps: A Case Study from Hokkaido, Japan

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## [Abstract]

The Hokkaido Government Board of Education started English language camps in 2012, and they have provided students (age 11 through 18) with an opportunity for intensive contact with practical English outside the classroom. While language camps have a long tradition around the world, they have attracted very little research. The data for this research on Hokkaido camps, collected through questionnaires, showed the value of the camps, in particular, an increase in students' scores on STEP (the Society for Testing English Proficiency) and TOEFL Junior tests, an increased motivation for students to spend more time doing homework, and a more positive student attitude toward English communication.

## 1. Introduction

The role of English in Japan is quite important as it is in many other Asian countries. In addition, with Tokyo winning the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, extra urgency has been given to the desire to improve English language levels in Japan. At the same time, however, there has been increasing anxiety about Japanese people's presumed 'poor' English.

In 2013, MEXT (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) decided to reform its foreign language education system by 2020. With the new policy, called "English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization," the ministry's blueprint for strengthening English-language education from elementary to high school, they planed that elementary students will start learning English from the 3rd grade, or age 8 and 9. Also teachers will be required to speak English in the English classes at the junior high school level. There is no doubt that TOEFL, TOEIC and other external certification tests will be implemented for university entrance exams in the near future. Thus, English will be stressed

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in Japan throughout all levels, and what we might call 'English fever' will further intensify in the years to come.

In Japan, however, students are not exposed to the English language enough because there are few opportunities, other than classes, for students to communicate in English. In addition, according to a survey implemented in 2011 by the Hokkaido Government Board of Education, students who do not study English outside the classroom on weekdays or on weekends amounted to more than 50 percent. In addition, only 36.2 percent of students liked learning English in the first year of high school, while 78.3 percent of students think that studying English is important.

Previous study has shown that the most important factor in facilitating communication is the frequency of English use (Clement, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003). Dekeyser (2000) also points out that the implicit acquisition process requires a massive amount of input, which can only be provided by a total immersion program. Tanaka & Ellis (2003) indicates that staying overseas experience helps EFL learners develop the confidence and motivation in learning English throughout the frequency of English use. Study-abroad, however, costs too much.

Therefore, in order to create English-speaking atmosphere, which could be a substitute for study-abroad programs, the Hokkaido Government Board of Education started English language camps "the Hokkaido English Camp" and "the Hokkaido Super English Camp" in 2012, while the blueprint "Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication" (MEXT; 2011) encouraged the Hokkaido Government Board of Education by proposing that education boards and schools shall provide students with opportunities for intensive contact with practical English, such as English camps with ALTs (assistant language teachers) and people from the private sector.

This study primarily aims to provide suggestions for the development of effective English language camp programs for young English learners. The aim of such programs is to assist students in adapting to the changing social needs. Results obtained from a questionnaire and English proficiency test provided to participants in the 2013-2014 program conducted in Hokkaido were utilized in this study.

## **2. Actual Camp program**

### **2.1 Main goals of the Hokkaido English Camp and the Hokkaido Super English Camp**

The hallmark of these camps is the integration of language instruction with content instruction. In these camps, the participants are exposed to language in different situation. In addition, the goal of learning here is not grammatical perfection, but meaningful communication among participants and staff members. The participants are also expected to acquire their communicative competences through the English language while developing understanding of languages and cultures through unique experiences, and thus fostering a leadership and a positive attitude toward communication.

These camps are committed to the following three objectives.

1. to experience successful communication in English
2. to experience communication with people of different cultures and to deepen the understanding of other cultures
3. to learn to be a team player, gain self-confidence and become independent

## **2. 2 Distinctive features of the camp**

Below are the seven features that distinguish the Hokkaido English Camp from other English camps held in Japan.

1. Hokkaido English Camps are held three times a year (Pre Camp: 1 night in May-July, Main Camp: 3-4 nights in August, Post Camp: 3-4 nights in January; 8 nights in total) in a year. Hokkaido Super English Camp is held two times (Pre Camp: 3 nights in August, Main Camp: 4 nights in January). Participants are required to join all these camps as a general rule.
2. Hokkaido English Camps offer four courses (the Hokkaido English Camp for beginner, intermediate and advanced, the Super Hokkaido English Camp for superlative) so that participants can choose one of them according to their proficiency.
3. A maximum of 5-8 students per group allows for full participation by all participants.
4. ALTs (native English speaking Assistant Language Teachers) take the most important role throughout the camp as language teachers, and as facilitators organizing activities for the participants. 74 ALTs joined the camp in 2013.
5. Overseas students of Hokkaido University, from many countries or regions, including Korea, China, Indonesia, and India, join to make the camp more international.
6. Japanese students of Hokkaido University of Education and Japanese licensed interpreter guides join to support participants during the camp. Participants benefited from their support, and at the same time the camp left a deep impact on all staff members involved, especially on the university students who will become English teachers in the future.
7. The camps are held in seven Hokkaido Youth Outdoor Learning Centers so that more participants can attend a nearby center.

## **2. 3 Pre Camp, Main Camp, Post Camp program**

The Compulsory Education Division and the High School Education Division of the Hokkaido Government Board of Education conceptualize the camp structure, schedule and English language program to achieve the main goals of the camps. The Hokkaido Government Board of Education has 14 District Bureaus of Education and seven Hokkaido Youth Outdoor Learning Centers located in 7 District Bureaus of Education. The Hokkaido Government Board of Education allows each District Bureau of Education and Hokkaido Youth Outdoor Learning Center to plan and implement the camp programs to utilize the characteristic of each center, which provides a unique, fun and meaningful learning environment.

### **2. 3. 1 Pre Camp**

The pre camp is two days long. It is designed to have participants get to know each other and the staff members. It is also a way of making them get used to using English in an informal, fun and exciting environment. The main program of the pre camp includes an opening ceremony, self-introductions, icebreaker games, and a pre-camp test.

### **2. 3. 2 Main camp**

The main camp is four or five days long. It is designed to emphasize using English for real communication. Participants are encouraged to apply their abilities to understand and convey information, ideas, etc. The main program of the main camp includes English lessons, \*a field trip to a nearby town, show and tell, writing and then performing a play, cooking and outdoor activities, etc. Activities can be changed every day to ensure variety as well as a balance between intellectual, physical and recreational activities. Workshops (learning communication skills, rules of debate and a discussion, etc.) by university lecturers are offered for the Hokkaido Super English Camp.

\*a field trip to a nearby town: This outdoor activity is organized to provide a different learning environment and to allow the participants the opportunity of conducting a survey and making a presentation.

### **2. 3. 3 Post camp**

The post camp is four or five days long. It is based on the objectives of the main camp, but is further developed. The main program of the post camp includes crafts/sports/nature programs, discussion, Ad making, a post-camp test, etc. Workshops (learning presentation methods, rules of presentation, etc.) by university lecturers are offered for the Hokkaido Super English Camp.

## **3. The Study**

I hypothesized that the Hokkaido English camp would have an impact on developing the participants' English proficiency and their motivation to learn English. Gardner and Lambert (1972) carried out one of the best-known studies on motivation in language learning. They investigated how motivation and attitudes affect second language learning and found that positive attitudes and motivation are very strongly related to achievement. A few studies, however, have examined the correlation between the motivation for learning English and English proficiency in short-term English language camps. Therefore, I deemed that it was my task to investigate whether English camps increase the participants' motivation and proficiency in English.

### 3. 1 Data Collection and Analysis (2013–2014)

#### 3. 1. 1 English Proficiency Test

Participants were required to take a pre-camp and post-camp test to determine their improvement over the period of the entire camp. The participants' proficiency in English was measured by their reading, listening and writing scores on English Proficiency Test "Level D for intermediate class," and "Level C for advanced class" implemented by the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP), one of the leading organizations for English proficiency testing in Japan. Like TOEFL and TOEIC, the STEP tests are English proficiency tests for non-native speakers of English. Scores on the TOEFL Junior Test were used for the Hokkaido Super English camp.

#### 3. 1. 2 Post Camp Questionnaire and Participants' comments

The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire comprising 24 questions related to motivation, learning time, expectations for English classes and so on. The questionnaire also included open ended-questions.

### 3. 2 Procedures

STEP Test was given to the participants on the pre camp (in June-July, 2013) and on the post camp (in January, 2014). The TOEFL Junior Test was given on the pre camp (in August, 2013) and on the main camp (in January, 2014). The questionnaire was administered on the final day of the post camp.

## 4. Results

### 4. 1 English Proficiency Test

For this measurement, I used the paired t-test formula. The data are shown in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3. Table 1 and 2 show mean, t-value and the significance of pre-test and post-test on English Proficiency Test Level D for intermediate class and Level C for advanced class. Table 3 shows mean, t-value and the significance of pre-test and post-test on the TOEFL Junior Test for the Hokkaido Super English camp.

Table1. Pre-Post test Mean, t-Value and Significance on the Level C test (n=43)

Source	M		Gain	d.f	t-value	significance
	Pre	Post				
Participants	275.6	315.8	40.2	42	7.91	p<.001

Table2. Pre-Post test Mean, t-Value and Significance on the Level C test (n=38)

Source	M		Gain	d.f	t-value	significance
	Pre	Post				
Participants	422.6	449.6	27.0	37	3.75	p<.001

**Table 3. Pre-Post test Mean, t-Value and Significance on the TOEFL Junior test (n=20)**

Source	M			d.f	t-value	significance
	Pre	Main	Gain			
Participants	728.0	753.3	25.3	19	-2.48	p<.05

As shown from Table 1, 2, and 3, the difference between the two pre-camp and post-camp test scores is significant. The post-test scores of each test were significantly higher.

#### 4. 2 Post Camp Questionnaire

Table 4, 5 and 6 show the percent response to each item for each questionnaire item.

**Table 4.**

1. How much time do you study English outside classes on weekdays?
2. How much time do you study English on weekends?

Item	1			2		
	pre	post	increase	pre	post	increase
3 to 4 hours	1.8	2.6	0.8	0.9	3.5	2.6
2 to 3 hours	4.4	12.2	7.8	9.6	16.5	6.9
1 to 2 hours	22.8	31.3	8.5	20.2	30.4	10.2
0.5 to 1 hour	27.2	34.8	7.6	28.9	31.3	2.4
less than 0.5	26.3	13.9	-12.4	24.6	13.0	-11.6
none	15.8	4.3	-11.5	15.8	5.2	-10.6
other	1.8	0.9	-0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0

More than 40 percent of the students studied less than 0.5 hour or none outside the classroom on weekdays or on weekends before the pre camp. However, the number decreased throughout the year with the proportion being less than half compared to the pre camp, while the number of students who study more than two hours increased. It can be considered that the participants became motivated to learn English and found that the frequency of English use is a critical factor in becoming a successful English language learner.

**Table 5.**

1. I like English more after the camp.
2. I like learning English more after the camp.

Item	1	2
1. strongly agree	80.9	58.4
2. agree	19.1	35.4
3. disagree	0	6.2
4. strongly disagree	0	0

Participants had the opportunities to play games, make friends, and work individually

or in small groups with native or non-native speakers of English during the camps. The responses to the statements above showed the sense of fun and play and spirit of comradeship helped to motivate them to learn English. It is considered that the camp had a positive impact on the participants in terms of their intrinsic motivation.

**Table 6.**

What do you want to do more in English classes to improve your English?

Percentage of Participant Response	
Item	
1. debate/discussion	70.0
2. essay writing	50.0
3. vocabulary	50.0
4. presentation	45.0
5. speech	45.0
6. grammar	45.0
7. watching English movies/dramas	40.0
8. pronunciation practice	40.0
9. dictation	35.0
10. English-Japanese translation	35.0
11. reading aloud	30.0
12. Japanese-English translation	30.0
13. conversation with teachers and friends	20.0
14. reading English newspaper/magazines/books	20.0
15. recitation	15.0
16. listening to CDs	10.0
17. skit	10.0
18. others	0.0

While many schools conduct classes in compliance with the Course of Study, some schools are reported to focus on lecture style such as English-Japanese translation, or reading aloud. Table 6 shows, however, that the participants were satisfied with the way they could communicate in the camp and found it necessary to convey information and ideas in English by employing such language activities as speeches, presentations, debates and discussions. They also seem to understand the importance of vocabularies and grammatical items as a means to support communication.

#### 4. 3 Participants' comments

Table 7 and 8 are open ended-questions in terms of how to improve their English skills and their attitudes toward English. The responses from participants are presented in the tables below.

**Table 7. What I did to improve my English skills between the camps.**

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Comments

1. To try to think in English
  2. To make the effort to mix with English speakers
  3. To participate in debate or speech contests
  4. To use Internet
  5. To buy English language – learning CDs
  6. To keep a diary in English
  7. To read English books/newspapers
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Table 7 shows that the participants tried to find study methods that suited them and became more active in learning English. In addition, the participants found that more exposure to English is needed to improve their English skills.

**Table 8. Participants' attitudes toward English after the camp**

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Comments

1. I found learning English really interesting.
  2. I am now more confident in using English. I don't be afraid of making mistakes.
  3. I found a lot of friends to study and speak with. Learning English together was very encouraging.
  4. I had more interest in ways of thinking and customs of other cultures.
  5. I want to know more about people from different countries.
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Table 8 shows that intrinsic motivation such as 'I found learning English is really interesting' or integrative motivation such as 'I had more interest in ways of thinking and customs of other cultures' and 'I want to know more about people from different countries' seem to be strong with this group. This result can be explained by the fact that the sense of fun and play and sprit of comradeship gradually produced intrinsically motivated participants after the camp.

## 5. Conclusion

This study discussed the effects of English language camp programs. On the basis of the results, I found three important points to consider; 1) the learning environment created during the camp was unconventional and provided a variety of experiences. The sense of fun and play and sprit of comradeship helped to encourage them to use English without being too conscious about their lack of it, because errors in English use were not seen as bad. 2) The exposure given during the camp and the experiences of the successful communication in English maintained to sustain the participants' confidence, interest and motivation throughout the camp, more importantly to change their learning style. 3) The participants found it necessary to speak and listen to English in the normal classroom and wanted to be more

active in class.

The following points are also suggested to improve and augment the positive impact of English language camp programs.

First, the long-term impact plays an important role in maintaining the participants' level of interest in the language and motivation to use the language, hence improving proficiency. The intervals between the camps, however, were quite long. Given this, pre-, and main- and post-programs throughout a year are strongly linked by carefully designing the entire program to enable gradual progress.

Second, each District Bureau of Education and Hokkaido Youth Outdoor Learning Center planned and implemented the program for their own camp, so the specific schedule of the camp varies from center to center. To achieve the main goals of the camps and increase the effectiveness of the camp, future programs should be designed with a higher level of consistency and a more clearly outlined purpose.

Third, though the majority of participants who attended the camp greatly benefited from the program, some concerns and complaints were raised, such as 'I could not follow some of the activities', 'I did not get along with group members'. These comments may result from some participants having an insufficient English proficiency level and a general lack of vocabulary. The program will include more free time with other participants and staff members to help them meet various people in an informal, fun and authentic setting.

The ultimate goal should be to apply insights from studying this special environment to English education and to further enhancing the current language teaching situation. It will be feasible for students in Japan to have such opportunities in the local community where their school is located. Student-centered language activities such as speeches, presentations, debate and discussions should be employed in the normal classroom routine. Colleges and universities with English teacher preparation programs would do well to consider adopting this informal, authentic and fun approach to foreign or second language learning.

I did not administer the questionnaire or English proficiency test with students who did not join the program. Moreover, the intervals between the camps were quite long, so I can't say for certain, that the improvements in participants' English proficiencies were a result of their participation in the camps. The findings from this study might be limited to proposing a general explanation of the English camp program. Despite these weaknesses, this study has provided statistical evidence that attending the camps are valuable experiences for participants.

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