

The Relationship between EFL Learners' Success and their Beliefs, Learning Strategies and Confidence in L2

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Methodology
4. Results
5. Discussion of the results
6. Conclusions

[Abstract]

A pre- and post-strategy evaluation was conducted to examine changes in external test scores on a two-year intensive English course at a junior college. Further, pre- and post-response changes in students' beliefs, strategies and confidence in second-language learning (L2) were surveyed during the course. The following findings were noted. First, results indicated that evidence supports the use of CEFR Level B1 as a realistic goal for Japanese junior college graduates: 42% of learners attained Level B1, and approximately 90% of the ones who achieved only Level A2 were in the first half of that level. Second, in terms of learners' beliefs, learning strategies and confidence in L2 and in their English-language proficiency, a significant increase was observed in experiential belief/ learning strategies and confidence besides learning ability. Experiential language strategies might have played a critical role in language learning success. The students' levels of confidence increased with experiential leaning, and they became fluent in English. However, a discrepancy appeared to exist between the learners' English-speaking ability and their confidence level. Despite their relatively high scores in speaking, they lacked confidence in that skill.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the teaching of English in Japanese schools has undergone major changes. In addition to the reform of the English entrance examination, MEXT (2015) proposed CEFR A2 and B1 as realistic targets for Japanese learners of English. One of the aims of these reforms was to help and encourage teachers and students to balance the teaching and learning of the four language skills in line with the global scale.

In the Japanese context, although the aim of the CEFR is similar to that of the MEXT Course of Study goals and content regarding transforming classes into authentic communication contexts, the current influence of the CEFR in secondary education as a whole is superficial and limited (O'Dwyer et al, 2017); that is, Japanese teachers of English are less likely to be acquainted with the CEFR and do not yet have sufficient knowledge regarding understanding and using the CEFR for teaching, assessment and learning. Therefore, the average Japanese learner does not study English

Key words: CEFR-aligned exams, Learners' beliefs, Learning Strategies

in line with CEFR principles pertaining to teaching practices, assessment, textbooks and teaching materials. Furthermore, examples of the use of the CEFR-aligned exams in the four skills such as the Cambridge English Qualification at secondary and tertiary educational levels are hardly found because of issues of practicality, such as, test dates, fees, locations, and the mode of such exams (e.g., computer-based), among other reasons. Notably, although a number of empirical studies have demonstrated how the CEFR has been adapted in Japan (Nagai, 2010), little research has been done involving the use of internationally recognised proficiency tests as regards which CEFR level is appropriate for each school stage in Japan and what explicit evidence those tests in the four skills offer about the characteristics of Japanese learners of English.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how an experiential teaching approach affects the learners' four English language skills and which CEFR level is a realistic and achievable goal when conducting 'CEFR-matched' exams as school-leaving examinations. Additionally, this study explores the kind of changes the participants underwent as they experienced more frequent and varied uses of communicative strategies over time.

2. Background

2. 1 Literature review

2. 1. 1 The use of tests in the four skills in English language teaching

It is common for knowledge of language (e.g., grammar and vocabulary) and abilities in each of the four skills—listening, reading, writing and speaking—to be closely associated. For example, measuring lexical knowledge has generally been assumed to be a reliable predictor of learners' communicative proficiency in a second language (Schmitt, 2008) and it has long been recognised that different types of vocabulary tests are useful in helping teachers to determine the general language proficiency of learners. Another example is that previous studies (e.g., Weigle, 2004) reading-to-write performances suggested that reading and writing interact with each other and integrated language tasks such as reading-to-write activities have been emphasised in communicative language learning; thus, the language skills seem interrelated and affect one another.

Meanwhile, as any language teacher can testify, language learners frequently have strengths and weaknesses in particular skills; in some cases, they are poorer at receptive skills such as listening and reading than the productive skills of speaking and writing. Research on speaking skills has also suggested that this particular skill is distinct from the other language skills of listening, reading and writing (Sawaki, Stricker, & Oranje, 2009). Shiratori's (2019) finding supports this notion that a relatively high proportion (75%) of Japanese learners of English in junior college attained the CEFR B1 for speaking in the Cambridge English examination: B1 Preliminary, while 0% achieved a B1 level for reading. This considerable difference indicates that a fluent speaker may not necessarily be a proficient reader. This makes it challenging for researchers and teachers to draw inferences about ability in one skill (e.g., reading) or performance in another (e.g., speaking) as demonstrated by Powers (2010), or that one skill alone is not a good indication of real communication. In other words, interrelationships between the four

English language skills are not strong enough to allow a single measurement to serve as a sufficient substitute for another (Powers, 2010). Therefore, if we want to make an accurate comprehensive assessment of a test taker's overall proficiency in English, testing all four English language skills would ensure validity and fairness for all test takers (Powers & Powers, 2014). Additionally, a suitable choice of external exams in the four skills would function as effective means of feedback and, thus, provide useful information to teachers and students. Consequently, learners could reflect on their level of learning through a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, while teachers could improve their current teaching practices by reflecting on learners' test performance in each skill.

2. 1. 2 Learners' beliefs, learning strategies and confidence in L2

Learners' beliefs, behaviour, attitude and motivation concerning second language acquisition received considerable attention between the late 1970s and the early 1980s as regards the promotion of learner autonomy (Ellis, 2008; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Subsequently, some studies have attempted to determine how language learners' beliefs, use of learning strategies and motivational aspects correlate with each other (e.g., Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Wenden, 1987).

Learners' beliefs can be classified into the following types—beliefs about self (i.e., confidence, self-efficacy) and beliefs about an experiential or analytic approach to learning (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). The significance of these beliefs is connected to the learners' choice of language learning strategies, their anxiety and spontaneous learning (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003). Richards and Lockhart (1996) also suggested that learners' beliefs might have an impact on expectations about learning, attitude and motivation as regards language study, learning strategies, etc. For example, if a language learner believes that the best way to improve his/her English proficiency is by memorising, his/her language learning might not go beyond memorising vocabulary and gaining knowledge of the rules of grammar (Benson & Lor, 1999). Or a student may think 'this class seems boring and difficult but meaningful to improve English proficiency so I'll do my best'. In other words, learners of a second or foreign language generally have their own opinions, ideas and styles about language learning, which might influence their language learning behaviours, strategies and even outcomes.

Learners' beliefs have been a focus of recent research on SLA. Horwitz (1985) contributed to learners' systematic understanding in this field of study. Her typical research strategy in examining learners' beliefs about language learning involves completing an inventory called the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) regarding five different belief statements: foreign language aptitude; the difficulty of language learning; the nature of language learning; learning and communication strategies; motivations and expectations (Horwitz, 1987, 1988). BALLI has been extensively used to investigate the relationship between students' beliefs and strategies and the impact of their culture on their beliefs and so forth (Horwitz, 1999; Yang, 1999). Yang (1999), for example, carried out a study of 505 EFL university students in Taiwan in order to examine language learners' beliefs, learning strategies and individual backgrounds. All participants were required to

complete sets comprising BALLI, Oxford's (1990) Strategic Inventory for Language Learning and questions designed by the researcher. Her study found that language learners' beliefs regarding how efficiently they learned English were critical in terms of all types of learning strategies, in particular, practical learning strategies.

Learning strategies (LSs) contribute directly to learning and can be considered as thoughts, techniques or procedures that L2 learners consciously select (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Ellis & Shintani, 2014). The term 'learning strategies' has been defined in a number of ways over the past years. For instance, LSs comprise both language-learning strategies for a better understanding of the linguistic properties of English (e.g., reading for gist, inference) and skill-learning strategies for improving the four language skills (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Another example is that learners are said to use three different types of LSs: metacognitive (i.e., planning, monitoring and self-evaluation), cognitive (i.e., rehearsal, inferring and deducting) and social-affective strategies (i.e., cooperation) as outlined in various studies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Taking cognitive strategies as an example, language teachers have reported that some students prefer to translate L1 into L2, whereas others prefer to watch movies in the L2 to acquaint themselves with the target language. Oxford (1990) also divided LSs into two main groups—direct and indirect—and further subdivided them into three major classes each: direct into memory; cognitive and compensation and indirect into metacognitive, affective and social. However, this classification has certain overlaps; for instance, metacognitive, cognitive and affective strategies are classified as comprising an independent group. Critics of this definition have pointed out that metacognitive strategies should be emphasized more as a focal point of discussion for the learning process (Macro, 2006). Hence, recent research studies have focused on the effects of cognitive and metacognitive strategies with regard to instruction of metacognitive strategies in L2 (Macro, 2006). Furthermore, most research on language LSs is generally concerned with the tactics of successful or unsuccessful language learners (Rubin, 1975; Sewell, 2003). Rubin (1975) identified the following main strategies employed by successful language learners: trying to guess and to learn from communicating, implementing strategies to improve their prior learning habits and paying attention to form and meaning, among others.

Two general, overarching instructional styles that might be used by teachers have been regarded thus far: analytic and experiential; this classification has been employed in the present study. Analytic instruction usually refers to formal teaching that requires learners to consciously focus on aspects of language such as grammatical rules and lexical knowledge, which are teacher-centred and focus on training such as pattern-practice, drills and repetition (Kolb, 1984; Ranta, 2002). In contrast, experiential instruction refers to the process of learning from experience (Kolb, 1984; Wolfe & Byrne, 1975) through active participation, involving communication-based activities such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and TASK-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

Another area of research concerning learners' beliefs focuses on the critical reflection of changes in language learning beliefs, together with learners' autonomy and LSs prompted by study abroad programmes (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). A seminal study in this field was conducted by Tanaka and Ellis (2003) wherein they used the BALLI questionnaire and TOEFL scores to investigate changes in the beliefs of 166 Japanese university EFL students as regards L2

learning and their English proficiency in consequence of receiving a 15-week EFL programme in the US. They reported that there were statistically significant changes in the participants' beliefs between the pre-departure and post-international study, which were associated with analytic and experiential language learning, self-efficacy and confidence. Interestingly, the results showed no statistically significant relationship between increases in English proficiency and changes in beliefs, whereas the participants appeared to become more confident and reported that they were satisfied with their learning progress after studying overseas. In Amuzie and Winke's study (2009), 70 EFL learners in the US were asked to complete a questionnaire on how learners' beliefs changed due to study abroad. Based on comparisons between beliefs both pre-departure and during the study abroad programme, the results revealed that, on the one hand, learners experienced positive changes in their beliefs regarding taking more responsibility for learning and on the other hand, their beliefs in the importance of teachers decreased. In other words, they realised that it is important to make an effort outside of class in order to become successful language learners without the involvement of teachers. These results also revealed that learners' beliefs are variable and that context plays an important role in shaping their beliefs. Izumi, Shiwaku and Okuda (2011) administered a questionnaire about the experience of living overseas to 182 university students in Japan. In their study, Japanese learners of English showed a stronger belief in analytic learning. This is likely due to the fact that English education in Japan is generally considered to rely on translating, doing exercises and rote learning. In addition, the participants were less confident in writing and speaking. The findings suggest that the relationship between learners' beliefs regarding their LSs for their L2 and their confidence is a dynamic and interactive one.

2. 2 Research context

2. 2. 1 English pedagogies and international programmes in HGUJC

The Hokusei Gakuen University Junior College (HGUJC) English department has developed unique features and characteristics of EFL pedagogies with a focus on teaching 'living English' and fostering a sense of international awareness among students. In general, most of the students who have finished a two-year course of study seek to enter communication-led careers such as tourism, travel and hospitality jobs in the near future; some students wish to continue their education at colleges and universities in Japan or overseas, and thus our curriculum has a communication focus, stressing a balanced development of the four skills. With this as a starting point, in the first year, students take basic English courses including those focusing on the main four language skills (e.g., Oral English, English Compositions). Additionally, non-native English speakers, that is, the so-called international conversation tutors from other countries like Vietnam, China and the Philippines join to make Oral English classes more international. In the second year, the curriculum involves the extensive use of native English speakers to teach advanced English courses and then students move on to use English as a medium of instruction in academic subjects including lectures in Japan Studies, Intercultural Communication, Geography and Perspectives in Literature. As seen above, the department constantly encourages students to try to use English in terms of global communication and hence most of the English classes, except for general education classes (e.g., Law and Economics),

are conducted in an implicit way, even in grammar classes, where students generally learn grammar explicitly.

Moreover, the department also provides students with extracurricular activities to immerse themselves in English-speaking environments. Some examples include establishing writing and speaking labs where anyone can join in to ask advice about writing or chat with English-speaking tutors and developing a programme of English lunches in which students are not allowed to use Japanese. Notably, to accommodate students' differing skills, aims and resources, the HGUJC offers various study-abroad options such as short-term (approximately 3–6 weeks) and long-term (4–5 months) and international internship programmes in countries such as the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US.

2. 2. 2 Introduction of the Cambridge English B1 Preliminary in HGUJC

As global business environments have expanded to the point where a large number of companies in Japan compete on a global scale, potential new recruits seek a high level of proficiency in English and are eager to become globally aware. Such recent trends in English language skills and communicative competence have a major impact on the design of our curriculum. In our drive to incorporate internationally recognised standards, the English department commenced discussions aimed at providing students with an effective, appropriate format for our curriculum and concluded that students need proficiency in the four skills more than ever when they graduate, and CEFR-aligned exams would increase HGUJC graduates' practical value as future employees.

After conducting a two-year pilot programme to investigate candidate performance when using the Cambridge Exam B1 Preliminary (Shiratori, 2017), the results showed that the exam embodied the department's curriculum and communicative classroom practice in terms of aims, content and construct; for example, both focus on English for communicative interaction, which HGUJC students might encounter inside or outside the classroom. In terms of the difficulty of the test, the results (Shiratori, 2017) provided evidence to support the use of the CEFR B1 level as the realistic target for HGUJC graduates: 45% of Year 2 students attained B1 level in June, indicating a high possibility that the majority of students could achieve B1 level by the end of graduation in March. Based on these findings, we speculated that B1 Preliminary would suit our curriculum and on-going teaching practices best and decided to begin mandatory B1 Preliminary exams in 2017 with students sitting the exam twice during their two-year English course: Year 1 and Year 2 students sit it in the first (April-August) and second (September-January) semesters respectively.

Shiratori (2019) also carried out an investigation of 115 Year 1 HGUJC students and performed a detailed survey on relations between learners' beliefs, confidence, LSs and their English language proficiency. The results showed that beliefs regarding L2 learning, LSs and confidence in L2 seem to play a role in differentiating between learners according to their proficiency level. As regards learning beliefs specifically, learners at A2 level on the CEFR believed in analytic learning, such as the importance of formal structural language learning, whilst the B1 group showed stronger beliefs in experiential learning, reporting more after-school activities such as making English-speaking friends. This result suggested that successful language learners seem to direct their own learning,

accessing a wide range of suitable learning resources and LSs. In terms of language LSs, several significant differences were observed between the two groups in their experiential learning styles such as watching television and movies in English and immersing themselves in English-speaking environments, all of which are employed by B1 learners. The survey results regarding learners' confidence in their L2 abilities showed that average participants had some anxiety and fear with regard to their productive skills, whereas the B1 learners were more confident in speaking than the A2 learners.

In sum, asking learners about their beliefs concerning SLA and LSs can provide useful information to identify the characteristics of successful L2 learners and to find out how they achieve their success. Although learners' beliefs have been investigated in relation to a number of variables, few studies have been conducted on beliefs in relation to two different EFL pedagogies (analytic and experiential) in terms of L2 learning and confidence in L2. Such research can be modified across the same population that was tracked during a two-year English course. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to explore the changes that take place for participants with different learning experiences in terms of language proficiency levels, language LSs, beliefs and confidence regarding L2 learning across a certain period of time.

2. 3 Research questions

While Shiratori's (2017, 2019) results suggested that the majority of HGUJC students could achieve a B1 level by the time they graduated, the studies were limited in that each data was collected from two different groups of participants only during the students' first or second year at HGUJC. As such, it is not clear as to what extent the EFL pedagogies at the college differentiate between candidates with lower and higher proficiencies. More importantly, it is vital to learn how to set realistic, productive goals along with concrete levels (i.e., CEFR B1) for both teachers and students that can help them to maintain focus on the desired goals. Therefore, first, this study attempts to examine the following research question (RQ1) for the same participants in their first and second year: to what extent is B1 an appropriate target for Japanese junior college graduates?

Second, as Shiratori (2019) found that the majority of HGUJC participants were analytic believers and learners at the beginning of college, it would be of great interest to investigate the changes that occurred as they experienced rather experiential types of English instruction during their two-year English course. Thus, the second research question (RQ2) is as follows: how do EFL pedagogies influence learners' English language learning experiences (i.e., LSs and activities) and their confidence and beliefs in L2 in relation to achievement in the four skills of the 'CEFR-matched' exams?

3. Methodology

3. 1 Participants

The participants in this study were 102 second-year students (94 female and 8 male) in the English department at HGUJC, whose average age was approximately 20 years on the date of the

second exam. There were 134 students in the first-year group but 19 and 13 were excluded from the first and second exam respectively as they were absent when the test was administered or because they failed to complete the test and questionnaire.

As regards the prior English learning of the average HGUJC students, they had studied English for six years at junior and senior high school levels. Since the MEXT Course of Study (MEXT, 2009) places a focus on a balance in the teaching and learning of the four language skills and aims to increase students' exposure to English, communicative English instructions have been seen more frequently in recent years. The main pedagogical methods, however, are still reading, translation, taking notes and doing exercises (MEXT, 2014), with a focus on the analytic aspects of teaching and learning in which students are seen as largely passive learners with no pressure to become competent in English. The students thus lack a balanced approach to using the four language skills. Considering the fact that the B1 Preliminary exam was taken by participants in June 2017, only 10 weeks after they started their first year at HGUJC and that the majority of participants had either no or very limited experience of international travel, the researcher assumed that their ability in languages was largely a result of prior study at institutions as mentioned above at the time of the first exam date.

Unlike their prior learning experiences, as already mentioned, in the first year of HGUJC, students start to take basic English courses including those focusing on pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, together with the skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Native English speakers are used extensively to enhance speaking skills. In the second year, the academic subjects are as per the CLIL curriculum with lectures by native English speakers (see 2.2.1). On the whole, HGUJC students aspire to pursue their education at overseas institutions. Given that the second B1 Preliminary exam was administered in December 2018, about three months before graduation from college, the Year 2 students experienced rather different types of English instruction (i.e., analytic and experiential teaching) and some international education before and after enrolling in college. Their language ability, therefore, was considered to be largely a result of their English education at HGUJC together with their international experiences.

3. 2 Data collection procedure

Table 1 shows the schedule for the administration of the questionnaire and the B1 Preliminary. The questionnaire was administered approximately eight weeks after joining college and about one and a half months before the end of the second semester of the second year. The first and second B1 Preliminary exams were administered about two weeks after conducting each questionnaire.

Table 1 | Schedule of the Study |

Questionnaire Time 1	May, 2017	8 weeks after enrolling in college
B1 Preliminary Time 1	June, 2017	2 weeks after conducting the questionnaire
Questionnaire Time 2	November, 2018	1.5 months before the second semester ends
B1 Preliminary Time 2	December, 2018	2 weeks after conducting the questionnaire

3. 3 Methods of data analysis

For RQ1, the participants' English proficiency was measured by their scores in the Cambridge

English B1 Preliminary exam, as the name suggests, targeted at CEFR B1 level, which is one of the Cambridge English Qualifications. Like TOEFL and TOEIC, Cambridge English Qualifications are English proficiency exams for non-native speakers of English. There are several distinctive features of the test. First, according to the Cambridge English: Preliminary: Handbook for teachers (UCLES, 2016), all of the examinations measure all four language skills, aligned with the levels described by the CEFR (A1 to C2). In order to encourage learners' autonomy and self-assessment, they can take any level of the tests they wish to. Second, the candidates' scores are reported on the Cambridge English Scale. Candidates receive five scores: one for each of the four skills and an average of these four scores as their overall result. The participants were also provided with their CEFR level according to their points on the scale. The following scores were used to report the results for the B1 Preliminary: 120–139 (A2); 140–152 (B1 Pass); 153–159 (Pass with Merit equivalent to CEFR B1); 160–170 (Pass with Distinction equivalent to CEFR B2). The tests, therefore, enable a comparison of candidates' proficiency levels in alignment with the internationally recognized standard. For example, based on the most recent grade statistics provided by Cambridge English Qualifications, in 2018, Japanese B1 Preliminary candidates attained a level of approximately 42.5% at B1 level and more, which was lower than the candidates in other Asian countries such as China, Vietnam and Thailand: 48.2, 58.4 and 74.7, respectively. Third, unlike TOEFL and TOEIC, the B1 Preliminary focuses on using language in a practical way as a means of communication and shares many factors of the MEXT Course of Study regarding the objectives, content, topics, situations and tasks, etc. (Shiratori, 2019). In terms of task familiarity, the B1 Preliminary exam includes several communicative tasks in which, for example, the candidates discuss familiar topics, such as travel or holidays, in pairs and write an informal letter to a friend. These types of paired spoken interaction and authentic writing activities occur frequently in most Japanese junior and senior high schools. Thus, the main evidence of the validity of the B1 Preliminary is assumed to be high and the test is suitable for the purpose of this research. RQ1 was conducted using two types of statistical methods: descriptive statistical methods to interpret the results; and a paired-samples t-test to evaluate the differences in the test scores of total and each skill at Time 1 and Time 2.

We addressed RQ2 by comparing a questionnaire that had been given to the participants at Time 1 and Time 2 and linking their responses to their B1 Preliminary scores. For this research, the questionnaire implemented by Ogawa and Izumi (2015) was used to examine the changes between Time 1 and Time 2 and the influence of participants' L2 learning. Izumi, Shiwaku, Ogawa and Okuda (2011) previously used this questionnaire in their study of belief and strategy use in L2 learning and confidence in L2 abilities of Japanese learners of English at different levels of L2 proficiency. In their study, analytic beliefs and language strategies refer to approaches that are training-focused, knowledge-based and suitable for groups; e.g., doing exercises, memorizing rules, reading English aloud. Meanwhile, the experiential beliefs refer to student-centred strategies where they develop knowledge and skills via experience inside and outside the classroom such as talking with English-speaking friends, writing emails in English and so forth.

The questionnaire comprised three parts with 52 statements. The first part (items 1–20) explored participants' beliefs regarding analytic and experiential learning (e.g., 'In learning English, it is

important to understand English grammar’). Participants were asked to use a Likert-type 6-point scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) agree or (6) strongly agree. The second part (items 21–38) concerned participants’ previous learning experiences prior to studying at HGUJC (e.g., ‘I learned English by studying school textbooks carefully’) with regard to analytic and experiential learning with a Likert-type 6-point scale: (1) never, (2) almost never, (3) not very often, (4) sometimes, (5) often or (6) very often. In the third part (items 39–52), participants were asked about their confidence in L2 learning (e.g., ‘I am confident with my ability to have a conversation in English’). Response choices ranged from 1 (not at all true of me), (2) not true of me, (3) not so true of me, (4) somewhat true of me, (5) true of me or 6 (definitely true of me). For each statement, a statistical test (paired-samples t-test) was conducted to discern if any significant differences existed in the surveys over time between Time 1 and Time 2.

4. Results

4. 1 RQ1: CEFR Levels awarded for the B1 Preliminary

4. 1. 1 Overall proficiency

For the first research question, a paired-samples t-test was carried out to determine the changes in participants’ English proficiency at Time 1 and Time 2. The B1 Preliminary exam targets the CEFR Level B1, although candidates can also be awarded a B2 or A2 level, according to their score on the Cambridge English Scale. As mentioned earlier, the following scores were used to report the results for the B1 Preliminary: 120–139 (A2); 140–152 (B1 Pass); 153–159 (Pass with Merit); 160–170 (Pass with Distinction).

An overview of each test is shown in Table 2. The overall mean score on the Cambridge English Scale at Time 1 was 132.0, and the median and mode were both 132.0. The scores ranged from 117 to 155, with a standard deviation of 6.862 and a slight positive skewness of 0.375. According to the result of Time 2, the mean score was 139.0, and the median and mode were 138.0 and 136, respectively. Regarding the dispersion and distribution, the minimum score was 123 and the maximum was 167, with an overall range of 44 points. The standard deviation was 7.288. The distribution indicated a positive kurtosis at 2.403.

Table 2 | Descriptive statistics for B1 Preliminary overall scores on the Cambridge English Scale | N = 102.

	Central tendency			Dispersion			Distribution		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
T1 ^a	132.0	132.0	132	117	155	38	6.862	0.375	0.426
T2 ^b	139.0	138.0	136	123	167	44	7.288	1.033	2.403

Note. T1^a: Time 1, T2^b: Time 2

Table 3 shows the proportion of participants and the overall mean score on the Cambridge English Scale by CEFR level. According to the B1 overall mean score, approximately 42% of HGUJC participants attained a B1 level at Time 2, whereas nearly 14% achieved a B1 level at Time 1. One

aim of this study was to investigate to what extent the B1 CEFR level is a suitable goal for school leaving; thus, to learn additional details regarding the participants' levels, A2 was subdivided into A2.1 and A2.2 (total score range: 120–129 and 130–139 points, respectively). The result of this subdivision reveals that, among the A2 group, approximately 90% of the population attained the A2.2 level, indicating a possibility that they could achieve a B1 level in the near future (see Table 4).

Table 3 | Distribution of learners by CEFR level | N = 102.

		<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>
A1	T1	3	122.0	2.9
	T2	0	-	0.0
A2	T1	85	130.5	83.3
	T2	59	134.3	57.8
B1	T1	14	143.4	13.7
	T2	43	145.4	42.2

Table 4 | Distribution of learners by A2.1 and A2.2 sub-levels |

		<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>%</i>
A2.1	T1	34	125.9	40.0
	T2	7	127.4	11.9
A2.2	T1	51	133.5	60.0
	T2	52	135.3	88.1

4. 1. 2 Proficiency by skill

Although more than half of the participants (57.8%) did not attain a B1 level overall at Time 2, the B1 Preliminary test results provided useful information regarding the participants' levels by skill. The breakdown of level by skill is presented in Table 5, which also shows the performance at each skill of the 102 participants who sat all components. The CEFR level with the highest percentage of participants at Time 2 was A2 for listening and reading and B1 for writing and speaking. Specifically, 60.8% and 90.2 % of participants attained B1 for writing and speaking, respectively, whereas 20.6% and 7.8% attained B1 for listening and reading, respectively. Although a high proportion of HGUJC students were at A2 on listening and reading papers, which was the same as the Time 1 results, participants developed their listening and reading proficiency over 18 months, from 2.9% at Time 1 to 20.6% at Time 2 and from 0% to 7.8% at B1, respectively. Furthermore, the proportion of the participants at A1 for listening and reading decreased from 27.5% at Time 1 to 2.0% and 32.4% to 15.7%, respectively.

Table 5 | Distribution of learners by CEFR level and skill | N = 102.

		Listening		Reading		Writing		Speaking	
		<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
A1	Time 1	28	27.5	33	32.4	11	10.8	4	3.9
	Time 2	2	2.0	16	15.7	1	1.0	0	0.0
A2	Time 1	71	69.6	69	67.6	52	51.0	18	17.6
	Time 2	79	77.5	78	76.5	39	38.2	10	9.8
B1	Time 1	3	2.9	0	0.0	39	38.2	80	78.4
	Time 2	21	20.6	8	7.8	62	60.8	92	90.2

Table 6 shows that the majority of participants' scores were below the mean; the writing and

speaking had -0.343 and -0.508 at Time 1 and -0.125 and -0.190 at Time 2 respectively, which indicate left-skewed; and listening and reading were right-skewed with 0.902 and 0.381 at Time 1 and 1.336 and 1.053 at Time 2, respectively.

Table 6 | Descriptive statistics by skill | N = 102.

		Central tendency			Dispersion			Distribution		
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Listening	T1	125.2	124.0	122	108	164	56	8.410	0.902	3.328
	T2	133.4	131.0	131	114	170	56	10.242	1.336	2.687
Reading	T1	122.8	122.0	127	109	138	29	6.735	0.381	-0.171
	T2	127.7	127.0	127	110	165	55	8.842	1.053	2.679
Writing	T1	135.1	136.0	132	106	159	53	11.626	-0.343	-0.355
	T2	141.9	141.5	133a	112	165	53	8.575	-0.125	0.880
Speaking	T1	144.2	144.5	142	111	170	59	10.746	-0.508	1.142
	T2	152.5	153.0	148a	130	170	40	9.304	-0.190	-0.486

Note. R: Reading, L: Listening, W: Writing, S: Speaking. a. Multiple modes exist. The lowest values are shown.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the differences in the test scores of total and each skill at Time 1 and Time 2. Table 7 shows the mean score, t-value and the significance of total and each skill of the 2017 and 2018 exams against the B1 Preliminary exam. As shown in Table 7, there was a statistically significant increase in the mean difference of the total in the two scores from Time 1 ($M = 132.0$) to Time 2 ($M = 139.0$), $t(101) = 15.19$, $p < .000$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in the total score was 7.0 with a 95% confidence interval of difference. The eta squared statistic (.99) indicated a fairly large effect size. As for the four language skills, a significant difference was found in the Time 1 and Time 2 test scores of each skill: listening ($M = 125.2, 133.4$), $t = 9.24$, $p < .000$; reading ($M = 122.8, 127.7$), $t = 7.63$, $p < .000$; writing ($M = 135.1, 141.9$), $t = 6.76$, $p < .000$ and speaking ($M = 144.2, 152.5$), $t = 8.88$, $p < .000$, respectively. The mean increase in the score of listening, reading, writing and speaking was 8.2, 4.9, 6.8 and 8.2, respectively and the eta squared statistic (.88, .62, .67, .83) indicated a large effect size.

Table 7 | Paired-samples test | N = 102.

	Mean		<i>Gain</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Time 1	Time 2				
Total	132.0	139.0	7.0	15.19	.000*	.99
Listening	125.2	133.4	8.2	9.24	.000*	.88
Reading	122.8	127.7	4.9	7.63	.000*	.62
Writing	135.1	141.9	6.8	6.76	.000*	.67
Speaking	144.2	152.5	8.2	8.88	.000*	.83

One-way repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean score differences of

each of the four skills between Time 1 and Time 2, as measured by the B1 Preliminary. There was a significant effect for the mean score differences, $F(3, 303) = 3.38, p < .05$. As shown in Table 8, there is a significance figure of .018 and .029, respectively between listening and reading and reading and speaking, indicating that the scores of listening and speaking improved significantly over those of reading between Time 1 and Time 2.

Table 8 | Difference of average score by skill between Time 1 and Time 2 |

		Mean difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig.*	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference**	
					Lower	Upper
Listening	Reading	3.36*	1.11	.018*	0.379	6.346
	Writing	1.43	1.28	1.000	-2.013	4.876
	Speaking	0.01	1.29	1.000	-3.464	3.484
Reading	Writing	-1.93	1.11	.505	-4.912	1.049
	Speaking	-3.35*	1.16	.029*	-6.482	-0.224
Writing	Speaking	-1.42	1.37	1.000	-5.102	2.259

*significant at the 0.05 level. **Bonferroni

4. 2 RQ2: Participants' beliefs in analytic and experiential learning

4. 2. 1 Language learning beliefs

The second research question concerns changes in language learning beliefs, strategies and confidence between Time 1 and Time 2. Table 9 compares the mean responses to the questionnaire items relating to the five main categories measured by the questionnaire. Negative t-values indicate a shift towards greater agreement; positive t-values indicate a shift towards lesser agreement. Here it can be seen that the period between Time 1 and Time 2 appeared to have had a stronger effect on the experiential beliefs and strategy use as well as confidence. In particular, the most striking shift was found in the experiential learning factor. More specifically, with regard to changes between Time 1 and Time 2, the overall average score for analytic beliefs fell significantly between Time 1 ($M = 4.82, SD = 0.56$) and Time 2 ($M = 4.59, SD = 0.50$), $t(101) = 4.25, p < .000$ (two-tailed), whereas there was a significant increase in experiential beliefs between Time 1 ($M = 4.52, SD = 0.54$) and Time 2 ($M = 4.77, SD = 0.52$), $t = -4.58, p < .000$. The mean decrease and increase in the scores of analytic and experiential beliefs were 0.23 and 0.25, respectively with a 95% confidence interval. The eta squared statistic indicated a large effect size: $d = .44$ and $.47$, respectively. On the whole, the results showed that the participants generally acknowledged the importance of both analytic and experiential language learning beliefs. While there seems to be a tendency for participants at Time 1 to support analytic beliefs, it is apparent that participants at Time 2 became experiential believers (analytic and experiential at Time 1: $M = 4.82, 4.52$, at Time 2: $M = 4.59, 4.77$, respectively). Prior to students' enrolling in college, the experiential beliefs ranked second among the five categories, whereas they reached the first rank by the time students graduated.

As for the LSs, overall, the participants appeared to rely more on analytic strategies (Time 1: M

= 4.22, Time 2: $M = 4.28$) than experiential strategies (Time 1: $M = 3.22$, Time 2: $M = 4.11$). Regarding significant differences, however, analytic strategies were fairly stable in the populations that had been tracked over time and there was only one significant difference observed in analytic LSs in the comparison between Time 1 and Time 2: item 26 (translating Japanese into English) (2017: $M = 3.74$, 2018: 4.34) ($t = -4.52$, $p < .000$, $d = .48$). Meanwhile, concerning experiential LSs, not only overall (2017: $M = 3.22$, 2018: 4.11) ($t = -7.72$, $p < .000$, $d = .81$) but also seven out of eight items (items 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38) showed statistical significance, all of which were employed more frequently by the Time 2 group. The mean difference score for the 102 students regarding this factor was 0.89, the greatest of the five categories.

With regard to the confidence level of the respondents, while this factor stayed the lowest in rank out of the five categories between Time 1 and Time 2, the respondents at Time 2 had much more confidence than the Time 1 respondents (Time 1: $M = 2.84$, Time 2: $M = 3.28$, 4.77, $t = -5.47$, $p < .000$, $d = .53$).

Table 9 | Mean scores for the five main factors relating to beliefs, learning strategies and confidence between Time 1 and Time 2 |

Factors	Time 1			Time 2			t	p	d
	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD			
Analytic Beliefs	1	4.82	0.56	2	4.59	0.50	4.25	.000*	.44
Experiential Beliefs	2	4.52	0.54	1	4.77	0.52	-4.58	.000*	.47
Analytic Learning	3	4.22	0.79	3	4.28	0.65	-0.89	.378	.08
Experiential Learning	4	3.22	1.23	4	4.11	0.97	-7.72	.000*	.81
Confidence	5	2.84	0.83	5	3.28	0.83	-5.47	.000*	.53

4. 2. 1. 1 Language learning beliefs that produced the greatest change

Table 10 shows the results for the analytic and experiential beliefs that produced the greatest from the first to third or statistically significant change in descending order of the t-value. Statistical significance was obtained for three items in the belief in analytic language learning: item 3 (the ability to understand a teacher's explanation) ($t = 5.14$, $p < .000$, $d = .57$), item 4 (checking unknown words) ($t = 4.12$, $p < .000$, $d = .45$), item 9 (the importance of correct grammar) ($t = 4.02$, $p < .000$, $d = .48$), all of which were favoured more by participants at Time 1. Regarding the average score for each area in terms of experiential beliefs, four items exhibited statistical significance: item 19 (the importance of communication without the correct grammar rules) ($t = -5.78$, $p < .000$, $d = .69$), item 20 (the acceptance of Japanese accent in English) ($t = -4.56$, $p < .000$, $d = .54$), item 17 (the benefit of studying overseas) ($t = -4.55$, $p < .000$, $d = .58$), item 13 (the tolerance of not comprehending a teacher's explanation) ($t = -4.02$, $p < .000$, $d = .52$), all of which scored higher in the Time 2 survey.

Table 10 | Belief statements showing the greatest or statistically significant change |

Questionnaire Items	Time 1		Time 2		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
(Analytic Beliefs)							
3. The ability to understand everything the teacher says in the English class is important.	4.79	0.98	4.19	1.12	5.14	.000*	.57
4. Checking words I don't understand when I'm reading or listening to English is important.	5.47	0.78	5.06	1.02	4.12	.000*	.45
9. We should learn correct grammar before we speak English.	4.02	1.30	3.46	1.02	4.02	.000*	.48
(Experiential Beliefs)							
19. I can communicate in English without knowing the grammar rules.	3.89	1.49	4.84	1.24	-5.78	.000*	.69
20. It is okay to speak English with some Japanese accent.	3.07	1.39	3.80	1.34	-4.56	.000*	.54
17. You can learn English naturally in an English-speaking country.	4.21	1.25	4.89	1.08	-4.55	.000*	.58
13. I don't get bothered if I don't understand everything the teacher says in the English class.	3.45	1.48	4.16	1.23	-4.02	.000*	.52

4. 2. 1. 2 Language learning beliefs that produced the least change

Table 11 shows the results for the analytic and experiential beliefs that produced the least change, which means these learner beliefs remained stable and static during the period of the two-year English course. Notably, five of six items, except item 16, were related to the beliefs of being perfect or completion of the grammar rules. While participants deemed error correction in the pursuit of perfection important, but they believed that as language learners they were bound to make mistakes or face instances when the content surpassed their comprehension when learning English. It can be said that actual classroom practices bear less influence on students' individual awareness of their mistakes.

Although the following figures are excluded from Table 11 owing to space limitations, they particularly reveal beliefs in the ideas of experiential beliefs, and the participants rated the following items more than a 5 (5: agree, 6: strongly agree) at Time 1 and Time 2: the importance of speaking English (item 11, 2017: *M* = 5.74; 2018: *M* = 5.58), listening to English (item 12, 2017: *M* = 5.81; 2018: *M* = 5.70) and guessing unknown words (item 18, 2017: *M* = 5.14; 2018: *M* = 5.04). More interestingly, the three items mentioned above, which had the highest response score at Time 1, came lower down the scale in the Time 2 survey.

Table 11 | Belief statements showing the least change |

Questionnaire Items	Time 1		Time 2		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Factors							
(Analytic Beliefs)							
6. I want my English teacher to correct all my mistakes.	4.11	1.20	4.16	1.10	-0.32	.751	.04
5. I want my English teacher to explain grammar rules in Japanese.	3.72	1.32	3.64	1.29	0.61	.542	.06
1. In learning English, grammar is important.	5.33	0.80	5.18	0.79	1.60	.114	.19
(Experiential Beliefs)							
16. I would like my English teacher to use as much English as possible in the English class.	4.93	1.03	4.93	0.97	0.00	1.000	.00
15. It doesn't matter if I make mistakes when speaking in English.	4.94	1.16	5.00	1.06	-0.45	.655	.05
14. It is unreasonable to expect to understand everything the teacher says in the English class.	3.98	1.07	3.74	0.98	1.84	.069	.23

4. 2. 2 Language learning strategies

4. 2. 2. 1 Language learning strategies that produced the greatest change

Table 12 presents the results for the analytic and experiential LSs that represent a substantial degree of change or statistically significant change in descending order of the *t*-value. As per item 26, while students had few opportunities for translation work in the HGUJC curriculum, such electives as 'Interpretation I, II and III' for those interested in interpreting and tourism-related industries, 'Translation Seminar I and II' and 'English Composition I and II' might have affected the results of Time 2. It seemed that the mandatory subject 'English Grammar I and II' had an impact on the participants' response to item 23 (reading grammar explanation) (2017: $M = 3.98$, 2018: 4.25) ($t = -2.12$, $p = .036$, $d = .23$). These increased responses to translation work and grammar explanation correspond to their confidence in the use of English translation and grammar (see items 50 and 52).

With regard to experiential strategies, such as speaking with others in English (item 31), reading a lot of English books and watching movies (items 33 and 32) and making English-speaking friends (item 35), they generally occur outside the classroom, suggesting that students spent more time studying English by themselves than they did at Time 1. It seemed that the HGUJC students gradually valued their learning experiences outside of the classroom, meaning that they connected their learning to real-life situations. In terms of item 38 (immersing myself in English-speaking environments), it is fair to say that the impact of international experience resulted in their increased response.

Table 12 | Strategy statements showing the greatest or statistically significant change |

Questionnaire Items	Time 1		Time 2		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Factors							
(Analytic Learning)							
26. I learned by translating Japanese into English.	3.74	1.31	4.34	1.20	-4.52	.000*	.48
23. I learned English from reading grammar explanations.	3.98	1.33	4.25	1.06	-2.12	.036	.23

27. Japanese translation for comprehension check.	4.20	1.29	3.92	1.28	1.85	.067	.22
(Experiential Learning)							
31. I learned English by speaking with others in English.	3.64	1.60	4.94	1.11	-7.65	.000*	.94
38. I learned English by immersing myself in English-speaking environments.	2.81	1.68	4.04	1.31	-6.67	.000*	.82
33. I learned English by reading a lot of English magazines, books, and/or new papers.	2.77	1.36	3.84	1.38	-6.30	.000*	.78
32. I learned English by listening to the radio or watching TV/movies in English.	3.78	1.64	4.74	1.19	-5.51	.000*	.67
35. I learned English by making friends who spoke English.	2.75	1.68	3.58	1.69	-4.83	.000*	.49
34. I learned English by writing emails, letters or diaries in English.	2.89	1.66	3.53	1.45	-3.91	.000*	.41
36. I learned English by trying to think in English.	3.25	1.69	3.95	1.42	-3.81	.000*	.45

4. 2. 2. 2 Language learning strategies that produced the least change

Table 13 shows the results for the analytic and experiential beliefs that showed no significant changes. For analytic learning, the three items out of six that the participants gave more than a 4 (4: sometimes, 5: often, 6: more often) at both Time 1 and Time 2 were stable and static: memorising, reviewing and practising (items 24, 28, 29, respectively), whereas there was only one item (item 31) out of ten that did not show a statistically significant change in experiential learning.

Table 13 | Strategy statements showing the least change |

Questionnaire Items	Time 1		Time 2		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Factors							
(Analytic Learning)							
24. I learned English by memorizing rules and words/ idioms.	4.41	1.33	4.42	1.18	-0.06	.950	.01
28. I learned English by reviewing what I was taught in the English class.	4.01	1.29	4.02	1.05	-0.07	.941	.01
29. I learned English by repeating and practicing a lot.	4.71	1.18	4.70	1.03	0.08	.939	.01
(Experiential Learning)							
37. I learned English by imitating what English speakers said.	3.86	1.39	4.27	1.20	-2.59	.011	.32

4. 2. 3 Confidence in L2 abilities

Overall, the confidence level of the Time 2 learners was much higher: their mean score was 3.28, more than the Time 1 respondents ($t = -5.47, p < .000, d = .53$, see Table 9). Specifically, participants' confidence improved in almost all areas except for item 42, and there were several significant differences, as shown in Table 14: seven out of fourteen items (items 39, 43, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52), all of which were observed more frequently by the respondents of Time 2; for example, item 39 (nervousness of speaking English) (2017: $M = 2.76$, 2018: 3.33, respectively) ($t = -3.21, p < .002, d = .37$, respectively) and items 43 and 44 (confidence related to speaking English) (2017: $M = 2.32, 2.28$, 2018: $M = 2.93, 2.97$, respectively) ($t = -4.33, -4.88, p < .000, .000, d = .49, .53$, respectively). These findings seem to match the answers to the beliefs in experiential learning: items

15 and 20 (acceptance of making mistakes and speaking English with a Japanese accent, respectively). The extensive use of native English speakers in Oral English I, II, III and IV (compulsory classes) and overseas experience might have had a positive effect on their lack of fear and confidence in speaking. In relation to this, the responses concerning the students' Japanese accents showed their increased opportunities to communicate with non-native English speakers inside the classroom and also beyond; it may have encouraged and enabled students to be adequately exposed to specific different English accents, and they found that speaking English with a Japanese accent was not considered bad. Meanwhile, it is interesting to see that although the 2018 learners felt that a Japanese accent was not considered bad, they were still less confident in their English pronunciation. They might have unconsciously given more value to standard varieties and accents of English, or the instructors' classroom practices may not have reflected their personal confidence about pronunciation. Furthermore, their eagerness to speak English became weaker—from 5.11 at Time 1 to 4.78 at Time 2 (item 42: $t = 1.86, p = .07, d = .25$). A similar trend can be observed in terms of the experiential language learning belief with a decline in the importance of speaking with others in English (see item 11: $t = 2.06, p = .42, d = .27$). For this reason, it is examined later. With regard to grammar, the Time 2 learners were more confident in their ability to use grammar in communication (item 50, 2017: $M = 2.38$, 2018: $M = 3.34$), and this item improved more than any other items in terms of confidence ($t = -6.55, p < .000, d = .79$). A similar change was observed for item 19 (communication without correct grammar rules) ($t = -5.78, p < .000, d = .69$). This result suggests that the Time 2 participants became less likely to believe that they needed proper grammar to communicate in English over 18 months even though they agreed on the importance of grammar (item 1, 2017: $M = 5.33$, 2018: 5.18, $t = 1.60, p = .114, d = .19$).

Regarding students' satisfaction and progress with their English skills, they rated less than a 3 (3: not so true of me; 2: not true of me) to the question (item 41, 2017: $M = 2.28$; 2018: $M = 2.77$, $t = -2.93, p = .004, d = .38$). This suggests that as English major students, the participants wanted to experience further improvements in their English skills. Additionally, personal voices of the students who participated in international programmes indicated that they were overwhelmed to observe the EFL students from other countries who were much more fluent in English, and thus recognised the lack of their oral proficiency.

Lastly, and importantly, there was a discrepancy between the participants' English skills and reported confidence in L2. Since approximately 90% of the HGUJC participants achieved Level B1 on speaking at Time 2, they might have been expected to be confident in speaking. However, they regarded their oral proficiency as the least competent and, contrastingly, their reading comprehension as the most competent skill, although their reading scores on B1 Preliminary ranked last. Specifically, they were significantly the least and the most confident in speaking and reading (items 44 and 47, 2018: $M = 2.97, 3.44$, respectively) among the four skills. It is difficult to estimate why the HGUJC respondents expressed negative views about their ability to use English. One of the possible explanations is that their analytic learning experience in their previous institutions, i.e., their limited opportunities to communicate in English and spending a lot of time on reading still might have had an impact on shaping their confidence in language skills.

Table 14 | Confidence statements showing statistically significant change and the least change |

Questionnaire Items	Time 1		Time 2		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
(Most changed)							
50. I am confident with my ability to use grammar for communication.	2.38	1.13	3.34	1.31	-6.55	.000*	.79
52. I am confident with my ability to translate Japanese to English.	2.54	1.08	3.15	1.16	-4.93	.000*	.54
44. I am confident with my ability to speak in English.	2.28	1.21	2.97	1.38	-4.88	.000*	.53
46. I am confident with my ability to understand spoken English.	2.73	1.32	3.42	1.40	-4.27	.000*	.51
43. I am confident with my ability to have converse in English.	2.32	1.14	2.93	1.36	-4.43	.000*	.49
48. I am confident with my ability to write in English.	2.91	1.33	3.40	1.26	-3.87	.000*	.38
39. I don't get nervous when speaking in English.	2.76	1.59	3.33	1.50	-3.21	.002*	.37
(Least changed)							
45. I am confident with my ability to pronounce English.	2.63	1.36	2.75	1.38	-0.94	.351	.09
51. I am confidence with my ability to translate Japanese into English.	3.02	1.19	3.34	1.22	-2.52	.013	.27
42. I will ultimately learn to speak English.	5.11	1.24	4.78	1.36	1.86	.066	.25

5. Discussion of the results

5. 1 RQ1: CEFR levels awarded for the B1 Preliminary test

5. 1. 1 Overall proficiency

To summarise, for RQ1, the proportion of participants who achieved the CEFR B1 level accounts for approximately 42% of those in their second year, whereas nearly 14% of the HGUJC participants did not attain the overall level for the CEFR in their first year. In addition, although more than half of the population in the second year did not attain the level of the test, almost 90% of the A2 group had scores in the upper half of the A2 level, and this result indicates a quite high possibility that they could belong to the B1 group after further study. Considering the figures, we concluded that Year 1 students found B1 Preliminary difficult, but the ones who studied at HGUJC obtained a noticeable gain in their score in the B1 Preliminary test and improved their overall English language proficiency levels with the two-year study in HGUJC, as indicated by changes in their CEFR levels. This improvement is consistent with an interpretation of the Cambridge English Scale scores as indicators of English language proficiency. The results based on both the pre-test and post-test scores suggest that 18 months of intensive English study at college can lead to a substantial improvement in English skills and B1 Preliminary test scores, especially in the listening and speaking sections.

It is important to investigate the reasons why or how these changes have occurred over time. Since many interrelated factors such as preparation and motivation for the test might have influenced what occurred over a period of about two years, it is unclear exactly what specific factors could have contributed to the improvements in students' scores. Needless to say, the amount of time the HGUJC

participants spent studying English was not comparable with that of average university students, and this might be a direct reflection of the test results. Other possible causes are as follows: first, other Asian EFL learners demonstrate positive attitudes towards English with the major objective of obtaining a good job in their own countries (Berowa, Devanadera & David, 2018). In the same way as other Asian EFL learners, the HGUJC participants majoring in English must realise that authentic communicative skills are indispensable for their future careers. Such motivation, which is one of the primary determining factors of success in developing L2 (Gardner, 1985; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992), might have had an impact on their proficiency in English. Second, unlike the prior English language instruction they received at junior and senior high schools, EFL pedagogies at HGUJC have a communicative focus with a lot of attention on competence in English for practical purposes. It appears that the department provides successful and effective course programmes, student-centred teaching instruction as well as various international programmes to motivate students to practice and improve their English language skills to a more advanced level. Furthermore, rather than teaching taking place in one big class, interaction and participation increase as a result of the smaller class sizes at college and this allows individual students to develop their English skills for the purposes of communication. In addition, extracurricular academic activities such as those conducted in writing and speaking labs might have affected the students' clear improvements in writing and speaking. Moreover, since American English is the dominant variety favoured by teachers and learners in Japan, the Year 1 participants may have been inexperienced in the wide range of English which they may have encountered in B1 Preliminary. The Year 2 students, however, had plenty of opportunities to speak to non-native speakers of English from other countries in HGUJC. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the Year 2 students felt accustomed to other varieties and accents of English in the listening paper.

5. 1. 2 Proficiency by skill

The proficiency test in the four skills revealed surprising findings in their four language skills. The HGUJC participants' development across these four skills was uneven; they were strong in writing and speaking but weak in listening and reading. Specifically, a relatively high proportion of the HGUJC students were at Level B1 for writing and speaking, whereas their receptive skills were relatively low, with an average score at A2 for listening and reading, which demonstrated a similar pattern to that observed in the 2019 study (Shiratori, 2019). These results question the generally accepted belief that Japanese learners of English are poorer at productive skills than receptive skills. This may be off topic in terms of this study but it would be worthwhile to examine why the HGUJC students scored much lower in receptive skills. Investigation of this discrepancy needs to start with the difference between the B1 Preliminary exam tasks and current teaching practices in Japan in terms of topic and task familiarity, which has a vital influence on test takers' performance (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). The researcher then reviewed the reading and speaking sections, because the respective average scores in the B1 Preliminary, as well as the rates of improvement, were lowest and highest accordingly in both the 2017 and 2018 surveys as shown in Table 8.

For speaking, in terms of topic/task familiarity, the speaking tasks provided in the B1 Preliminary

involve test takers getting their message across to one another with a focus on communication, interaction and fluency, for example, discussing daily life, hobbies and future plans or talking about likes, dislikes and habits (Cambridge English: Preliminary: Handbook for teachers, 2016). These topic areas might not have required the participants to draw on a higher level of content knowledge and cognitive abilities. Additionally, such paired spoken interaction provided in the B1 Preliminary frequently occurs in most Japanese junior and senior high schools. Therefore, the average HGUJC participants might have produced opinions and ideas appropriately in a relaxed atmosphere. If they had been assessed by an examiner in a one-to-one interview and if the topic had been rather abstract, they could not have worked well on the speaking aspect with discussion beyond their lexical and cognitive knowledge.

In terms of reading, although problems associated with reading have various root causes, poor comprehension of text may be due to challenges in the use of reading strategies. Nevertheless, English classes in Japan still seem to value 'careful reading' (Khalifa & Weir, 2009, p.45), such as sentence-for-sentence translations and comprehension questions, to extract complete meanings from the text. In addition, the HGUJC students might have felt unfamiliar with certain tasks provided by the B1 Preliminary because they had not been exposed to the full range of authentic text types, e.g., articles, stories, emails, leaflets, etc. In studies on the B1 Preliminary, Cambridge English exams aim to approximate authentic real life communication (Shaw & Weir, 2007) and require a wider range of both expeditious and careful reading tasks (Khalifa & Weir, 2009), as follows: reading for the main idea; identifying specific and detailed information; understanding attitude, opinion and the writer's purpose; and reading for gist, inference and global meaning (Cambridge English: Preliminary: Handbook for teachers, 2016). On the whole, although most of the B1 Preliminary tasks would have been familiar and relevant to the average HGUJC learners, based on on-going Japanese teaching practices observed by the researcher and in terms of the threats to validity such as construct-irrelevance and under-representation as well as topic/task familiarity, questions remain as to whether the reading paper in the B1 Preliminary exam is based on what the HGUJC students have learned in junior and senior high schools when they sat the B1 Preliminary during their first year. Regarding the study at college, while the HGUJC department offers courses (e.g., Reading Skills for Year 1 students and Extensive Reading for Year 2 students) designed to enhance students' various reading sub-skills that contribute to effective and efficient reading, we assumed that Year 2 students found it difficult to transfer the reading skills and strategies that they had acquired at college to various reading tasks because they still had a limited amount of time and opportunities to fully develop and master all of the sub-skills.

The average HGUJC students have studied English for a minimum of six years, starting at age 12 in junior high school. It would appear that they spent much more time reading compared to the other skills. In general, the expectation might be that their success in reading skills would increase with the amount of time spent reading. If teaching practices and textbooks provided in junior and senior high schools were consistent with the details in the MEXT Course of Study embodying several reading sub-skills provided by the B1 Preliminary, the observation regarding the HGUJC students' reading ability might be completely different. More importantly, the more substantive

problem should be the main focus of attention in the current educational reform in Japan; the HGUJC cohort, most of whom learned English at Japanese junior and senior high schools, have rather poor receptive skills: 0% achieved a B1 level for reading even after receiving 6 years of English instruction.

With regard to the use of the CEFR-aligned tests in the four skills, the introduction of the B1 Preliminary has provided more adequate feedback in a way that has allowed the HGUJC students to become more autonomous learners. After conducting the B1 Preliminary exam, a faculty development meeting is held to discuss the results and this enables a shared awareness of the participants' CEFR levels, strengths and weaknesses. Then, the students receive feedback from teachers on the basis of the B1 Preliminary result. Consequently, learners and teachers become more familiar with the CEFR Level B1, and thus both benefit by having a better understanding of English ability in alignment with the internationally recognized standard.

5. 2 RQ 2: Participants' beliefs, learning strategies and confidence in L2

5. 2. 1 Participants' beliefs

The second research question examined how beliefs regarding L2 learning, strategies and activities for learning and learner confidence in L2 have changed over time. Concerning beliefs in analytic and experiential learning based on the 2017 and 2018 results, the participants generally remained consistent, that is, they agreed on the proper balance of analytic and experiential language learning beliefs: the importance of grammar and vocabulary, checking unknown words and exercises for analytic learning, the importance of speaking, listening and guessing and exposure to English for experiential learning.

With regard to analytic beliefs, the average HGUJC students were overloaded with grammar, vocabulary, translation and exercises in their senior high schools and developed a stronger awareness of these aspects. In addition, features common to the Japanese context include larger classes with nearly 40 students, which restrict the teachers in terms of them being able to incorporate communicative language activities and non-native teacher-centred instruction with minimal English language input. Furthermore, students have limited opportunities to experience contact with English-speaking people. Such conditions are probably related to the beliefs and attitudes held by both students and teachers. As a result, when students and teachers think of language and school, most of them think about reading, vocabulary and grammar, which have the greatest impact on school success. It seems that they are less likely to feel that experiential language learning and strategies could form a realistic pedagogy in Japanese EFL classes. Given these circumstances, as Kern (1995) suggested, once beliefs are established, they are resistant to change simply by being exposed to different types of language instruction, and thus the HGUJC students maintained a fixed attitude about analytic language learning during their two-year English course. Meanwhile, concerning learning vocabulary and grammar, at a glance, the beliefs of the HGUJC participants in 2017 and 2018 appear to be similar but they are different in terms of their detailed thinking. As lexical and grammatical knowledge were taught at college in a way applicable to real-life situations, it seemed that the 2018 respondents were more convinced that vocabulary and grammar provide the basis for

efficient and correct communication in order to understand and convey opinions, ideas, information, etc., rather than being the medium for traditional exam-oriented English learning. Thus, the thinking of the 2018 respondents might differ to that of the 2017 respondents concerning grammatical and lexical knowledge.

There is one interesting cause to ask about students' beliefs. One of the main reasons for students applying to HGUJC is generally to obtain high levels of overall linguistic development, with a desire to enhance communicative proficiency after entering college. From this point of view, it is possible that other factors such as students' expectations and willingness to learn English after joining college would have affected the 2017 responses regarding their experiential beliefs because the HGUJC English instruction is rather different from the English instruction that they received in their senior high schools. However, it is not possible to establish a direct link to accurately examine what the respondents wanted to imply. This is a major drawback of closed-ended questionnaires, which the responses are dependent on the respondents' ability to interpret the meaning of the questions (Alderson, 1992).

Interestingly, as mentioned earlier (see 4.2.1.2), the 2018 survey concerning experiential learning beliefs saw a decline in the importance of speaking with others in English and listening to a lot of English in accordance with a decline in eagerness to speak English—this score was the highest of all items regarding confidence in 2017. The researcher assumed that the reason was because the HGUJC students had become more realistic regarding L2 learning. That is, as they proceeded through the course, they experienced difficulties in mastering English and realised that simply increasing exposure to English might not be enough to develop fluency. They realised through experience that the skill of speaking includes the correct pronunciation of words, together with the appropriate use of vocabulary and grammar in order to make thoughts and feelings clear and understandable to others. As they became more fluent in English, they appeared to become more aware of the gap that existed between accuracy and fluency and increasingly sensitive towards improving the quality of their learning experience and actively looking for LSs that would suit them.

With regard to the other results concerning both analytic and experiential beliefs, the results suggest that the students became less conscious of their ability to understand the teacher's explanation, as well as checking unknown words and avoiding grammatical mistakes. It can be assumed that students are no longer frightened when they make mistakes and do not understand every word the teacher is saying in English. It seemed they also learned that making mistakes was not viewed negatively and they developed skills to better control their uncertainty and anxiety.

5. 2. 2 Participants' learning strategies

The findings of this study provide some encouraging insight in terms of the LSs that students need to adopt to expand and create learning experiences beyond the classroom to improve their English language skills with a two-year intensive English study in HGUJC, although the responses to the 2017 questionnaire suggested that they relied heavily on the influence of past learning experiences and showed in what way students learned English in junior and senior high schools, and these analytic beliefs encouraged the use of analytic strategies (Izumi & Ogawa, 2015; Shiratori,

2019). The remarkable increase in students' agreement on experiential learning experiences at college led to a change in their way of thinking, resulting in new ideas and LSs, meaning that as one's behaviour changes, one's thought patterns may also change and vice versa. The shift toward their experiential beliefs, however, may not be so surprising because the HGUJC participants started to use many of the experiential strategies since they belonged to the English department, where there was more linguistic input and output, that is greater opportunities to be in contact with English, such as listening to and speaking with native English speakers in daily life, writing opinions and essays in class and being surrounded by thousands of graded readers or printed books in the college library, etc. This suggests that this practical environment in college may have reshaped their beliefs about language learning and have contributed to their English proficiency as well as to the shift towards greater agreement on their experiential learning. Thus, we should take into consideration that learning experiences are particularly important in the context of Japanese EFL learning and teaching, wherein few opportunities exist and there is no real practical impetus to use English as long as students reside in Japan.

As for the relationship between leaning strategies and proficiency, although it is difficult to examine whether changes in learning strategies affected their English proficiency, as Shiratori (2019) indicates, experiential LSs might play a critical role in students becoming successful learners. Specifically, the results revealed that experiential strategies were used more frequently by the 2018 participants than by the 2017 participants. In other words, it can be seen that because an increasing number of Year 2 students belonged to the B1 group, it might be reasonable to assert that as they became more advanced learners, they might have acquired various effective strategies and have chosen to apply suitable strategies to improve their English proficiency; however, the majority of Year 1 students, who were among the A2 group, were likely to limit their strategies to the analytic ones and hinder their own progress.

5. 2. 3 Participants' confidence in L2

The results of the experiential LSs revealed that the average HGUJC students had not experienced communicative language instruction and also might be aware of the fact that mainly studying only grammar and translation in a teacher-centred environment does not produce fluent English speakers, as seen from the responses in the Time 1 questionnaire on confidence. This finding is clearly related to how they learned English in the past. This longitudinal study also revealed a significant impact of experiential learning on students' confidence as well as their proficiency in English. Examples of an experiential learning approach which enhance students' active participation, interaction and communication are pair/group work, presentation and discussion as well as making English-speaking friends and watching movies. Such experience of communication in English and active participation in its trial and errors nature seemed to have a direct influence on their perception of success with respect to learning and allowed them to set realistically high levels and helped to build their confidence as they work through the course.

Moreover, perhaps the HGUJC participants are more comfortable with risk-taking. As Rubin (1975) suggested, a 'good language learner is comfortable with uncertainty ... and willing to try out

his guesses' (p.45), and as such, perceptions acquired during English classes in college could affect beliefs and confidence in using English. Notably, considering that most of the students had enhanced opportunities to learn English in English-speaking countries, as Tanaka and Ellis (2003) indicate, international experiences provide learners with confidence and motivation to learn English owing to the frequent exposure to and the use of the language.

Lastly, as already discussed, although there was a discrepancy between the participants' speaking ability and their confidence level, it seemed that the relationship between confidence and proficiency was affected by a previous lack of practice in using the target language and this had an impact on the role of self-assessment, meaning that confidence and proficiency might affect learners' metacognitive such as monitoring and self-evaluation. As such, anxious students with less proficiency showed a tendency to misestimate or underestimate their proficiency, particularly their productive skills, while more proficient students tended to be less nervous, especially when speaking English, and rated their ability to use the target language more correctly and appropriately.

6. Conclusions

6. 1 Main findings

The main findings can be summarised as follows. First, in terms of learner development and success, it seemed that the majority of HGUJC participants failed to pass the B1 Preliminary at the beginning of college but despite nearly half of the participants still not passing the exam, CEFR Level B1 seems more within reach for the Year 2 HGUJC cohort and can be viewed as a realistic and attainable goal for measuring the English proficiency of HGUJC graduates. Second, analysis of each of the four language skills revealed several key points, in particular as regards the uneven development of productive and receptive skills. Although a statistical significance was reached in comparing the mean scores in proficiency of each of the four skills over the two-year course at college, there was no change in the trend of participants doing better in writing and speaking but being mostly concerned by listening and reading. Third, the findings revealed that the direction of change of analytic LSs seemed consistent with participants' responses, whilst changes had become apparent in their experiential learning which facilitated a clearing of their misconceptions regarding how to learn foreign languages; that is, among the beliefs about L2 learning, LSs, and confidence in L2, LSs are crucial in contributing to shaping their beliefs and building confidence in L2. Specifically, as the HGUJC learners had sufficient exposure to the English language either in the classroom or outside class after joining college, they experienced a positive change from analytic to experiential beliefs with the two-year study at college. Conversely, the participants with such positive beliefs appeared to be more active in class and behave more productively outside the classroom, which resulted in improvements in their English proficiency. Fourth, the results suggest that as language learners improve their proficiency in English, they expand their strategy when revising language learning, meaning the choice of preferred strategy and flexibility might be related to language learning success. Alternatively, compared to inexperienced L2 learners, it can be said that experienced L2 learners attempt to seek a combination of strategies to maximise their learning (Ehrman &

Oxford, 1995) and to ‘make language learning more successful’ (Oxford, 1989, p.235). Above all, the present study suggests that experiential learning and teaching might be considered a key pedagogical strategy from which language learners are likely to benefit most, promoting successful learning if they experience such instruction over lengthy periods of time. Therefore, it seems safe to infer that even if the language learners’ beginning level of English proficiency is low, students with the correct beliefs and L2 learning can improve their skills in using the language even in EFL situations.

6. 2 Limitations

It is important to openly acknowledge the limitations of the study so that the scope of the findings can be fully understood. Before presenting the implications that this study has for teaching and research, its constraints must be outlined. First, the results of this study were heavily based on learners’ characteristics: the participants were English majors, largely female, and generally preferred to learn by interacting with others and use more strategies than male learners (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988). This indicates a more favourable attitude to the HGUJC EFL studies, whereas some Japanese learners of English might prefer to learn through more solitary activities. The results, therefore, cannot claim to be completely representative of the wider population of Japanese learners of English in universities. In future studies, it would be worthwhile to carry out research with both male and female students who may have different levels of English proficiency and different levels of motivation with reference to acquiring the target language. Second, in response to the limitations of the sole use of closed questions, an in-depth analysis of the respondents’ answers was not undertaken; that is, it was difficult to infer how much influence their prior learning experiences at junior and senior high schools had on their responses in the questionnaire. Other approaches, therefore, need to be employed; for instance, a combination of both open and closed questions, interviews with teachers and students and classroom observations. Furthermore, classroom observation is particularly important to identify what teachers actually do in the classroom. The last limitation concerns the frame of the two-year longitudinal research which influenced the dynamics of the cohort that participated in this study: the results were influenced by both formal (classroom) learning contexts and informal learning (study-abroad), for example.

6. 3 Final remarks

These findings are timely in Japan and will enhance the current English teaching practices wherein the English education system has been undergoing a number of changes and facing many challenges; e.g., starting English education in elementary school and continuing through higher educations. Since promoting English language education should be consistent throughout each school stage, this study’s main implications conclude that daily classroom routines place on learners at all levels of English language education, allowing students to develop communication skills in English, which will be more important in Japan. The goal of future research should be to apply implications from this study to English education and to further enhance the current EFL situations in Japan, through which it will be feasible for Japanese learners of English to experience interactive and communicative learning activities.

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Appendix

Table : Questionnaire items used in the study

Belief in analytic learning

- 1 In learning English, it is important to understand English grammar.
- 2 In learning English, it is important to memorize vocabulary.
- 3 It is important to be able to understand everything the teacher says in the English class.
- 4 It is important to check any words I don't understand when I'm reading or listening to English.
- 5 I want my English teacher to explain grammar rules in Japanese.
- 6 I want my English teacher to correct all my mistakes.
- 7 It is important to know grammatical terms to learn English.
- 8 It is important to do many exercises to learn English.
- 9 We should learn correct grammar first before we speak English.
- 10 It is important to speak English with a native-like accent as much as possible.

Belief in experiential learning

- 11 To learn English, it is important to speak with others in English.
- 12 To learn English, it is important to listen to a lot of English.
- 13 I don't get bothered if I don't understand everything the teacher says in the English class.
- 14 It is unreasonable to expect to understand everything I read in English.
- 15 It doesn't matter if I make mistakes when speaking in English.
- 16 I would like my English teacher to use as much English as possible in the English class.
- 17 You can learn English naturally in an English-speaking country.
- 18 It is okay to guess if you encounter unknown words or phrases in English.
- 19 I can communicate in English without knowing the grammar rules.
- 20 It is okay to speak English with some Japanese accent.

Analytic learning strategies

- 21 I learned English by studying school textbooks carefully.
- 22 I learned English by doing many exercises.
- 23 I learned English from reading grammar explanations.
- 24 I learned English by memorizing rules and words/idioms.
- 25 I learned English by translating it into Japanese.
- 26 I learned English by translating Japanese into English.
- 27 I learned English by using Japanese translation to check my comprehension.

28 I learned English by reviewing what I was taught in the English class.

29 I learned English by repeating and practicing a lot.

30 I learned English by reading English aloud.

Experiential learning strategies

31 I learned English by speaking with others in English.

32 I learned English by listening to the radio or watching TV/movies in English.

33 I learned English by reading a lot of English magazines, books, and/or newspapers.

34 I learned English by writing e-mails, letters, or diaries in English.

35 I learned English by making friends who spoke English.

36 I learned English by trying to think in English.

37 I learned English by imitating what English speakers said.

38 I learned English by immersing myself in English-speaking environments.

Confidence

39 I don't get nervous when speaking in English.

40 I am not afraid of making mistakes when using English.

41 I am satisfied with my progress in English so far.

42 I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.

43 I am confident with my ability to have conversation in English.

44 I am confident with my ability to speak English.

45 I am confident with my ability to pronounce English.

46 I am confident with my ability to understand spoken English.

47 I am confident with my ability to understand written English.

48 I am confident with my ability to write in English.

49 I am confident with my ability to explain English grammar.

50 I am confident with my ability to use grammar in communication.

51 I am confident with my ability to translate English to Japanese.

52 I am confident with my ability to translate Japanese to English.

