

Intention Versus Actuality: Using Pre-Enrollment Survey Responses to Predict Actual Class Enrollment

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意図に対する実際—履修登録前の調査での回答を用いて実際のクラスへの登録を予測—

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This study was conducted at a small private university with the aim of predicting class enrolment of upper-year General Academic English courses among Year 1 students. Compulsory English at the Year 1 (English I) level is common across universities in Japan. While English I are compulsory courses, the school in question offers upper year courses in English, available to all students in all departments. This option allows students to continue studying English as a foreign language (EFL) in a formal academic setting beyond Year 1.

Results of a survey taken among Year 1 undergraduate students will be presented and shared, highlighting the issues that prevent or dissuade students from continuing their formal studies in EFL beyond Year 1. Factors that impact students' decisions and demand for upper-year English courses will be proposed, contributing to a lack of research that exists regarding students' attitudes when it comes to choosing to study English as a supplementary or elective course. This investigation will be applicable to teachers and educational practitioners who are interested in motivation in EFL and those who play a role in curriculum design at the post-secondary level.

Keywords : EFL, survey, predictive ability

Introduction

English is a compulsory subject across universities in Japan, a requirement for graduation. Beyond Year 1, General English courses are available to all students as an option to continue their formal English studies, which is the case at the small private University where this study was conducted. The main goal of this study was to better understand the reasons for the drop in student registration in upper year courses, specifically English II, with the hopes to have more students continue their formal English studies in the future.

Previous studies have observed high school

students' attitudes towards English generally, where the curriculum stipulates learning English as a mandatory subject (Kikuchi, 2009, 2011). Furthermore, other studies have tried to understand students' attitudes towards English at the university level in Japan (Ikeno, 2002; Tsuchiya 2004, 2006). However, currently, little research exists regarding Japanese university students' attitudes when it comes to studying English as an elective course, as well as understanding the reasons why students do not continue with their formal English studies beyond Year 1.

To better understand students' attitudes towards English generally, motivation should be discussed. Motivation is suggested to be the strongest factor for students' enjoyment and high performance in English class (Dornyei, 1998). Conversely, demotivation (or amotivation) is suggested to affect students the greatest regarding their attitudes towards English (Singleton and Pfenninger, 2015). This may begin as early as childhood and continue throughout the child's formal English education. As of 2020, students now begin studying English informally from the third grade of elementary school and formally from the fifth grade. By the time of high school graduation, students will have studied English for at least eight years.

A student may become demotivated by experiencing demotivators, such as a low score on a test or course or being placed in the inappropriate class (low or high level, depending on the student). An amotivated student does not see the value in studying English, which may lead to classroom attendance attrition. And when they do attend classes, they do not participate, hinder the studies of other students in the classroom or significantly change the learning environment of the classroom. They may also question the usefulness of taking English as a second language with classmates. Ultimately, students who either underperform or do not attend class, will receive a failing grade in the course and will have to repeat the class. Unless they experience motivators and become motivated, they will likely continue to fail.

Therefore, the following research questions were chosen to gain further understanding of the present situation.

1. At the individual level, what motivators do students have to continue their formal English studies beyond Year 1?
2. What reasons or barriers (either external or internal) exist, preventing students from continuing their formal English studies beyond Year 1?
3. On an institutional level, what future adjustments

can be implemented to encourage students to continue their formal English studies beyond Year 1?

Literature Review

Demotivation and Amotivation

It is well documented that motivation and second language acquisition are closely aligned (Baker, 1992; Dornyei, 1994, 1998; Dornyei, MacIntrye and Henry, 2015; Gardner, 2010; Gardner and Lambert, 1972). To better answer the research questions of this study, it is necessary to first identify that which causes a lack of motivation, which Singleton and Pfenninger (2015) define as "demotivation" and "amotivation", based on Dornyei's (2001) definition. He states that amotivation is, "related to general outcome expectations that are unrealistic for some reason, whereas demotivation is related to specific external causes" (p.17), causing a reduction in motivation. Since both demotivation and amotivation identify a change or reduction in motivation, both will be used in this study. Vallerand (1997) theorizes that people can be amotivated through various beliefs (e.g., capacity-ability beliefs, strategy beliefs, capacity-effort beliefs, and helplessness beliefs). Therefore, "language learners who have become amotivated probably cannot see why they should keep attending classes and decide to quit coming to school" (Kikuchi, 2015, p.5). With demotivation, it is important to note that, "[it] does not necessarily mean a lack of motivation; demotivation also occurs, for instance, when the motivation of a highly motivated student decreases to an average level" (Kikuchi, 2011, p.11)

There is a complexity to motivating and demotivating factors. "Each learner interacts with contextual factors differently, and it is simply not possible to identify what motivates or demotivates all learners" (Kikuchi, 2017, p.142). Dornyei (1998) observed nine factors that contribute to students' demotivation. Of the nine, seven were identified as

external factors and ranked from most common to least common:

1. Teacher (Personality commitment, competence, teaching method)
2. School facilities (group size, level, frequency of teacher change)
3. Compulsory nature of L2 study
4. Interference of studying another FL
5. Negative attitude of L2 community
6. Attitude of Group Members
7. Coursebook

The following list identifies the internal factors that contribute to students' demotivation (Falout and Maruyama, 2004):

1. Self-confidence (experience of failure or lack of success)
2. Negative attitude to the L2 (or previous negative learning experience)

Student responses tend to differ whether they are being asked to identify motivating or demotivating factors. Gorham and Christophel (1992) point out that "motivation is a student-owned state [internal factor], while lack of motivation is perceived as a teacher-owned problem [external factor]" (p.239). Ushioda (1998) confirms this finding among Japanese students and found that participants seemed to attribute a loss of motivation only to external causes. Learners have a tendency (particularly in a retrospective sense) to project their decisions [to dropout] onto external factors (Evans and Tragant, 2020).

Looking at teachers as an external factor affecting motivation, the strongest identified factor showed to be "incompetence" by the teacher (Kikuchi, 2013). Adapted by Kearney et al.'s (1991) categorization of teacher misbehaviour, "incompetence" included apathy towards students, bad grammar/spelling, boring lectures, confusing/unclear lectures, lack of knowledge in subject matter, foreign or regional accent, information overload and unfair grading. This was confirmed by Zhang (2007) who conducted a

multinational study in China, America, Japan, and Germany, indicating that even across cultures the greatest source of demotivation among all students was teacher incompetence.

In a study conducted by Hasegawa (2004), students voiced opinions that inappropriate teacher behaviour might exert a "strong impact" on student demotivation. Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) agree that the most salient demotivating factor among Japanese students may be teacher related (an external factor) and that demotivating factors may be different for learners with different proficiency levels. Kikuchi (2013) points out that school administrators place students into proficiency levels using test results (TOEIC scores, university entrance examination, standard proficiency test, etc.). Being placed in the lowest level class has the potential of demotivating students.

Conversely, Tsuchiya (2006) found that half of students taking a low-proficiency English class rated demotivating factors lower than other students which means that their demotivation is not as strong as it seems [being in a low-proficiency class] but appear to show they have a wish to improve their achievement. This means that lower achieving English learners are not always those who have less motivation.

The less impacting of the factors related to demotivation, internal factors, include both learners' interest and the experience of failure. Learners' lack of interest includes negative attitudes towards the English community and English itself (Tsuchiya 2004, 2006; Falout et al. 2009); a lack of admiration of positive English-speaking model (Tsuchiya 2004, 2006); peers' [classmates' or friends'] negative attitude toward English learning (Ikeno, 2002); the lack of usefulness and necessity of English (Kojima, 2004). Students experience of failure also affects one's sense of motivation. Disappointment of failure, including feeling of inferiority about one's English ability, including self-confidence (Arai, 2004, 2005; Ikeno, 2002), which may be more pronounced in courses

where only one section exists; performance (Falout et al., 2009); test scores (Kikuchi, 2009); inability to memorize and understand vocabulary (Kojima, 2004).

Method

Students that were enrolled in the second semester of a year-long compulsory first-year English course (English I) were asked to voluntarily take an online survey using Microsoft Forms during their final lesson to indicate their likelihood to take an elective second-year English course (English II). It was distributed through a QR code by the instructors of all English I sections, including full-time and part-time teachers. The survey was included as one of the other end-of-year questionnaires given by the university. A total of 238 students responded.

Question 1 asked respondents to indicate their department (Psychology, Communication, Health and Nutrition, or Child Education). English II used to be a required subject for Psychology and Communication students, so the class numbers remained mainly the same between the English I and English II. However, since becoming an elective, it has been difficult to best determine the number of English II classes to allot to each department. English II was never a required course for students in the Health and Nutrition and Child Education departments, so determining the number of classes for English II is not an issue. Across all departments, it was hoped that department-specific answers would yield useful information pertaining to English II.

Question 2 asked the students if they planned to take English II next year. Students were asked to choose either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. Respondents that were

unsure were instructed to choose the answer with the highest probability.

Respondents were then directed to their next question based on their response to question 2. Students who answered ‘Yes’ were then asked in question 3 to indicate what they would like to do in English II. Respondents were provided with several preferred options, e.g., English conversation, business English, and speech and presentation skills. Respondents were also able to offer their own answers in question 4.

Students that answered ‘No’ were directed to question 5 and asked to indicate why they felt they would not enroll in English II. These respondents were also provided several reasons, e.g., having a timetable conflict, English I was too difficult, and wanting to take another foreign language. As with ‘Yes’ respondents, ‘No’ respondents were also able to provide alternative answers in question 6.

Results

Overall

The first question was asked for the purpose of separating the data by department, see figure 1. In the 2022 academic year, 305 students were registered in English I b. This total includes remedial students that had failed English I b in previous years. This total does not necessarily reflect the number of students who were actively attending class at the time of the survey. In January 2023, an achievement test that is a compulsory part of the English I b course was administered. The total number of students registered in English I b who sat for the exam was 252, with 29 students recorded as absent (281). The total number of

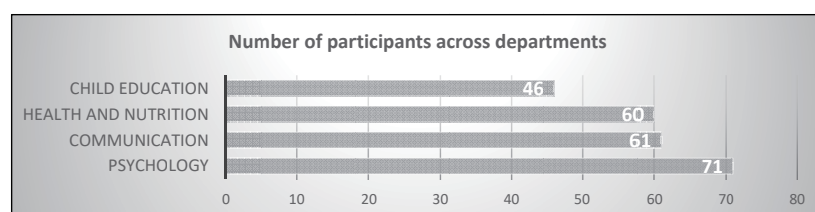


Figure 1 The number of participants of the study separated by department

respondents for the survey was 238.

The results for question 2, see figure 2, showed that slightly over half of all respondents answered ‘Yes’, N=126. Conversely, slightly less than half answered ‘No’, N=112.

Those who answered ‘Yes’ were directed to question 3 and those who answered ‘No’ were directed to question 5. For questions 2 to 6, results will be shown specific to each department.

Department Specific Results

The results for question 2, see figure 3, showed that the students in the health and nutrition department were the only respondents to have more ‘No’ (R=45) responses than ‘Yes’ (R=15). Additionally, child education and communication students indicated the

greatest proportional likelihood of taking English II (67.39% / R=41 and 67.21% / R=31 respectively). Roughly 55% of psychology students planned to take English II. Lastly, the response rates, 71 respondents of a total of 93 first-year registered psychology students responded to the survey for a response rate of 76.3%. Communication students had a response rate of 85.9% (61/71), health and nutrition students were 100% (60/60), and child education had a response rate of 80.7% (46/57). These high response rates provide a high degree of certainty that the results are valid for the university at large as well within each department.

The results for question 3, see figures 3-6, indicated that from a total of 59 responses, psychology students, see figure 8, would like to concentrate on English conversation (R=24). Additionally, (R=21) would

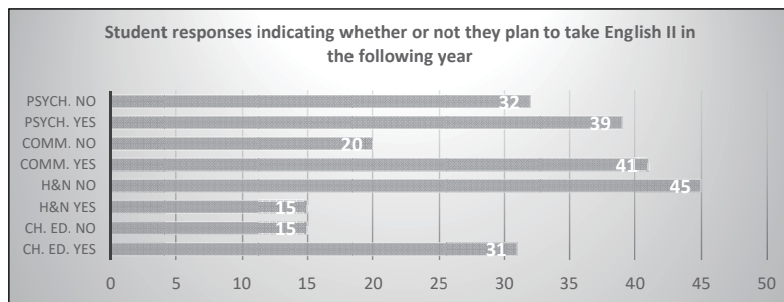


Figure 2 Responses to the question- Are you going to take English II in Year 2 ?
 Legend: Psychology (PSYCH) / Communication (COMM.)
 Health and Nutrition (H&N) / Child Education (CH. ED.)

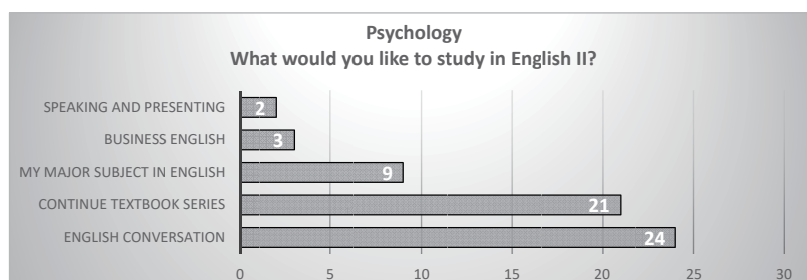


Figure 3. Psychology: What would you like to study in English II?

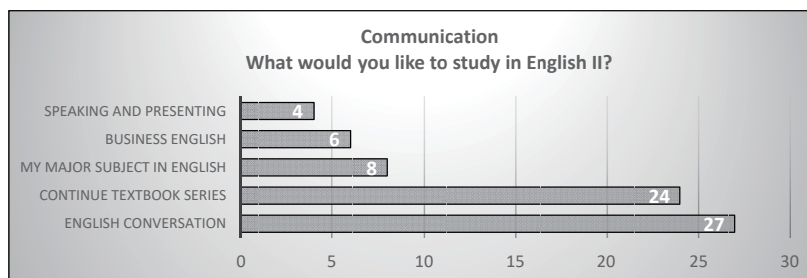


Figure 4. Communication: What would you like to study in English II?

like to continue with their existing textbook series. The remaining departments responded similarly. The third most common choice was studying one's major subject, e.g., psychology, in English.

Communication students, see figure 4, would also like to pursue English conversation and continue with the textbook series. Health and Nutrition students, see figure 5, had similar results to psychology and

communication students. Lastly, child education students, see figure 6, had similar results as the other three departments. Question 4 results, see figures 7-10, revealed that psychology students would also like to develop their four skills (R=14) out of a total 37 responses. Communication students mostly had no additional particular topic to study (R=18). This result was the similar result for health and nutrition (R=7)

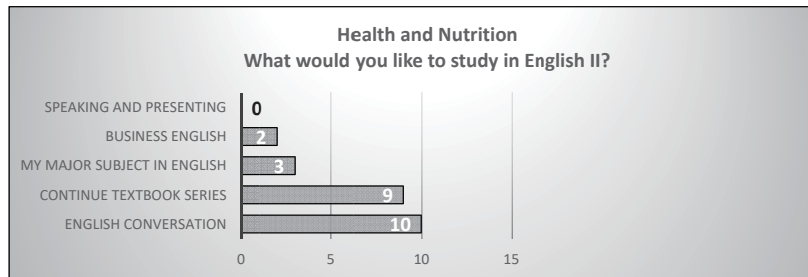


Figure 5. Health and Nutrition: What would you like to study in English II?

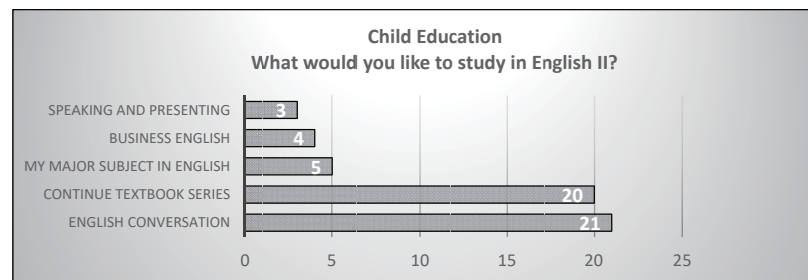


Figure 6. Child Education: What would you like to study in English II?

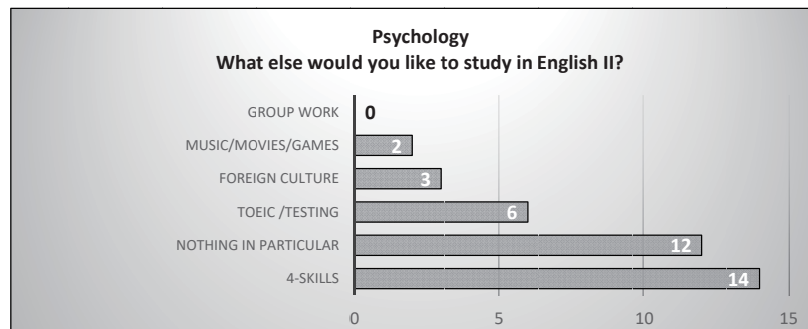


Figure 7. Psychology: What else would you like to study in English II?

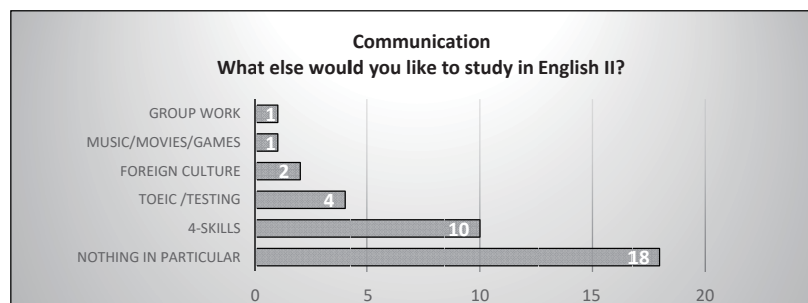


Figure 8. Communication: What else would you like to study in English II?

and child education (R=12).

Results for question 5, see figures 11-14, showed that psychology students want to take another foreign language (R=20) and that English I was too difficult (R=12). Communication students also expressed a desire to take another foreign language. However, for health and nutrition students, it was a potential timetable conflict that was the number one reason not

to take English II. This was the most common answer for child education students, too. Lastly, it should be noted that the response rate for child education was considerably lower than the other departments. The total responses were (Psychology 44, Communication 23, Health and Nutrition 50, and Child Education 15).

The results for question 6, see figures 15-18, showed that psychology respondents did not have

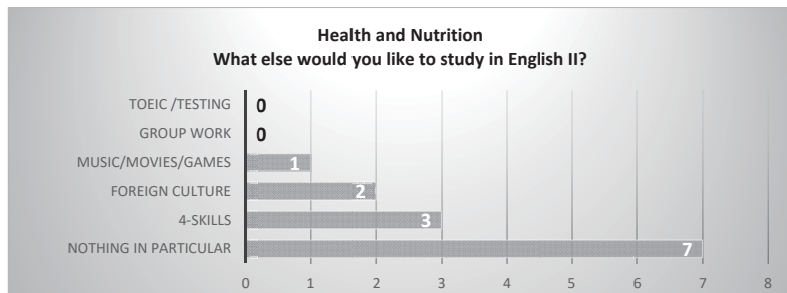


Figure 9. Health and Nutrition: What else would you like to study in English II?

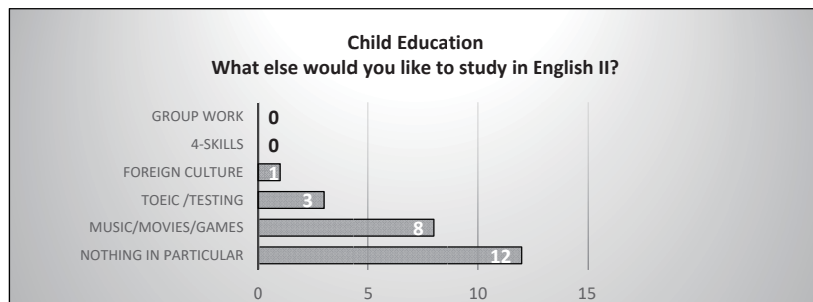


Figure 10. Child Education: What else would you like to study in English II?

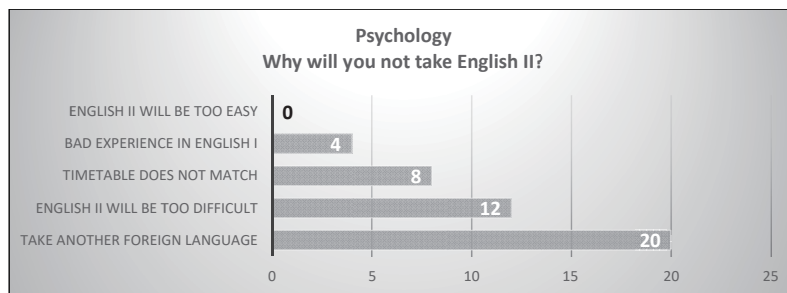


Figure 11. Psychology: Why will you not take English II?

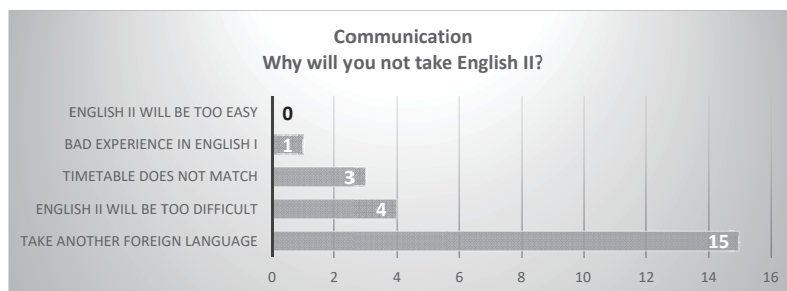


Figure 12. Communication: Why will you not take English II?

any other particular reasons for not wanting to take English II.

Overall, the “Yes” responses proved to be a reliable indicator of the respondents’ true intentions with the “Yes” responses yielding an overall, 96% accuracy. The breakdown by department shows that psychology and communication students were less likely to follow through with their intended “Yes” responses (72%)

and (88%) respectively. However, health and nutrition and child education students seemingly underreported their likelihood of taking English II (126%) and (122%).

Discussion

Overall, the response rate of this survey was high (84%), 238 responses out of a total possible 282

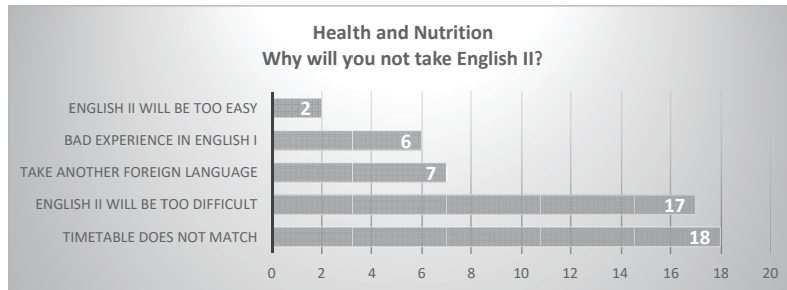


Figure 13. Health & Nutrition: Why will you not take English II?

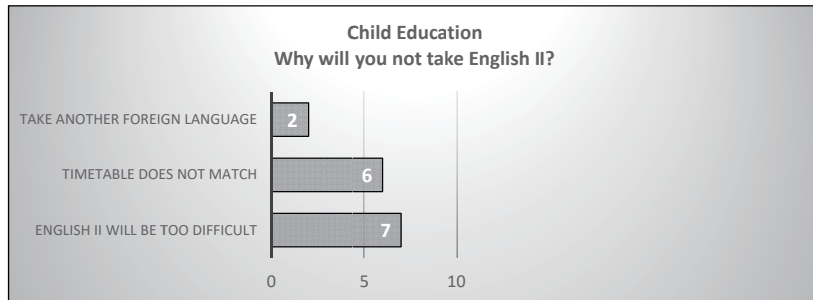


Figure 14. Child Education: Why will you not take English II?

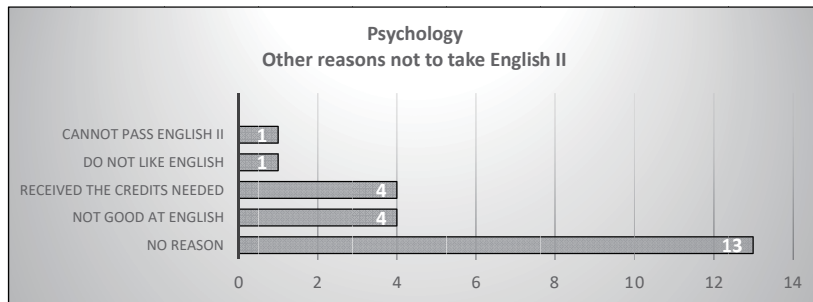


Figure 15. Psychology: Other reasons not to take English II

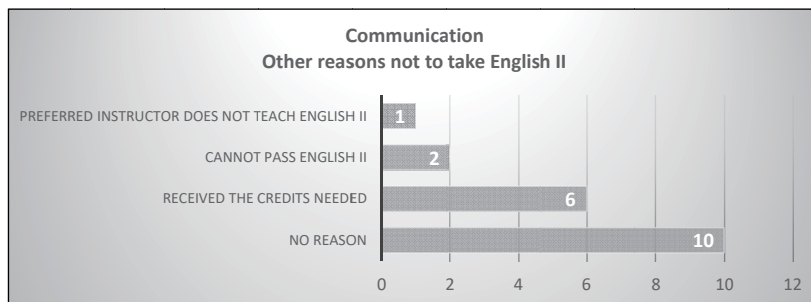


Figure 16. Communication: Other reasons not to take English II

eligible students. Based on the response rate, one can assert that the results are representative of the majority of students eligible to enroll in English II.

The most common reasons for wanting to take English II showed that a significant number of students view English conversation skills and continuing the textbook. The wanting to concentrate on English conversation may stem from the perceived notion that Japanese people as a whole are not proficient at English speaking (Takeichi, 2020). The preference for continuing the textbook series ostensibly indicates a satisfaction with the current textbook and possibly the preference to have continuity from English I to English II.

The most common reasons for not wanting to

take English II were wanting to take another foreign language and holding the belief that because English I was too difficult, so English II would also be too difficult. There is nothing to be done about students wanting to take another foreign language. It would be disingenuous of English language educators to try and dissuade students from pursuing another foreign language. A possible course of action would be to work with the personnel in charge of class scheduling to try and ensure that foreign language classes, including English, are not scheduled at the same time. This can be difficult as many of the instructors who teach the other foreign languages are part-time, so they generally have less flexibility in their schedules because they often teach at other

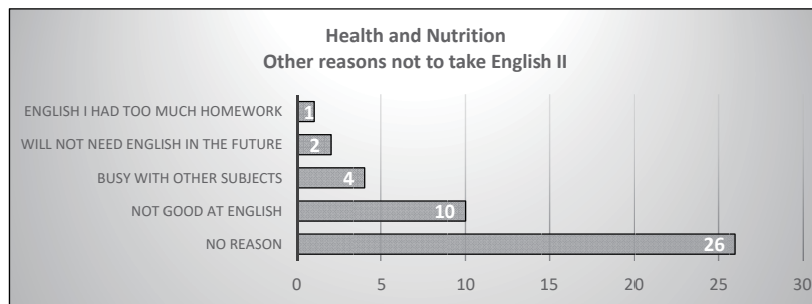


Figure 17. Health and Nutrition: Other reasons not to take English II

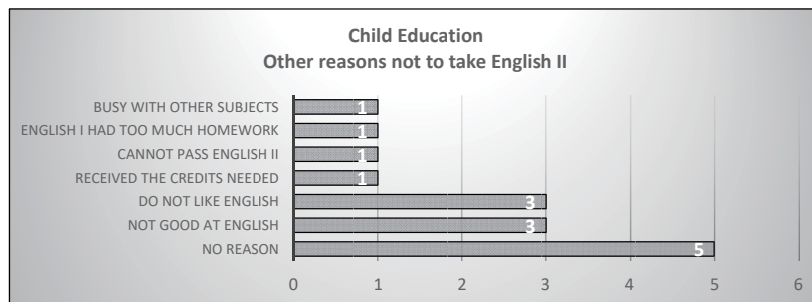


Figure 18. Child Education: Other reasons not to take English II

Table 1. Survey “Yes” Responses vs Actual Enrollment in English II

Department	(Yes) Survey Results	Actual Enrollment *As of 4/17/2023	Percentage
All Departments	126	121	96%
Psychology	39	28	72%
Communication	41	36	88%
Health & Nutrition	15	19	126%
Child Education	31	38	122%

institutions. Regarding the perceived difficulty of English II, currently, English I students are divided into three separate class levels. However, all English I students use the same textbook. Although it is a pre-intermediate level textbook, the contents may still be too difficult for some of the lower-level students. A possible solution could be to introduce a separate textbook for the lower-level classes. It is a move that would need to be made cautiously as it could have an adverse effect if students realize that they are in the low-level class, see Kikuchi (2013), and then based on that realization fall into a self-fulfilling prophecy, i.e., “I am in the low-level class, so I am not good at English, so I will not take English II.”

Lastly, a number of students across each department reported not having a particular opinion of what else they would like to do in English II as well as not having any particular other reasons for not taking English II. It may prove useful to have a more explicit conversation with English I students toward the end of the second semester of the course to gain a deeper understanding of how students view the course.

Conclusion

This study set out to determine whether survey response data is a reliable predictor of actualized behavior. Specifically, would the rate of students indicating their intention to take English II be similar to the number of students who actually enrolled in the course? The results from this study indicate, yes. There were several reasons listed as to why students wished to take English II. However, when pressed for further reasons, a majority of respondents indicated there was ‘no particular reason’ for continuing their English studies. Similarly, ‘no reason’ was the most common answer when asked if there were any additional reasons not to enroll in English II. Further research is warranted into why this was the case. It is possible that all the valid reasons were listed as options and respondents felt there was nothing to add.

Another possibility is that respondents were unsure as to how to answer, so they simply took the path of least resistance and answered, ‘no reason’. It may be possible to address, as yet unreported reasons, and remedy them if further insight is gained into the reasons for not continuing to take English.

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