

【研究ノート】

## **Influence of early English education on later English ability**

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### **要旨**

本稿は幼児期・児童期における英語塾での学習がその後の大学入学時のミシガンテストのスコアにどのような効果をもたらすか検証したものである。アンケートは英語専門学部と心理専門学部の生徒を対象に行い、その結果から英語塾は英語を専門として選ぶ折に、大きな役割を果たしていることが分かった。次に英語専門学部のアンケートとスコアの比較により、英語塾に通った経験はその後の英語学習の動機付けとともにリスニング能力を促進させていた。しかしながら、より強い効果を期待するには長期間通う必要性を示した。一方、語彙力は長期間の通塾でも効果を上げることはなかった。開始時期の早い遅いはリスニング、文法、語彙、リーディングのどの能力においても効果をもたらす結果を導くことはなかった。

**Key words:** English cram school, early English education, effectiveness, Michigan Test, correlation

**キーワード:** 英語塾、早期英語教育、効果、ミシガンテスト、相関関係

### **1. Introduction**

Recently there are many English cram schools for young children. The Asahi Newspaper (Activities, 2011) reported that most parents of young children, aged 3-12, wanted them to study English conversation over other activities. Advertisements for private English schools are abundant in everyday life. There are many types of schools, ranging from big companies to private tutors. They are touted for the future dream, for the future English study, or for the future entrance exams. Parents expect the effect, and send their children to English cram school. Benesse's research noted about 15.8% of elementary school students and 11.0% of children before elementary school attended English cram school in 2009. The average cost was 8,400 yen a month (Benesse

education, 2009). Most English cram schools for youth are so called “eikaiwa” schools and many schools appeal native teachers’ teaching. There are various paths to the learning of English depending on one’s purpose. Parents come to the English cram schools to enroll their children for learning English as easily as possible. The atmosphere of English respect accelerates this trend. I would like to investigate the effectiveness of English cram school in youth.

## 2. Literature Review

There are precedent studies of earlier English education such as Lenneberg’s study of brain lateralization concluding that language learning is much more difficult after puberty (1967). Lenneberg’s critical period hypothesis suggests that in very young children, both the right and left hemispheres of the brain are utilized in language but near the age of puberty, lateralization of the brain occurs, and the language functions become firmly rooted in the left hemisphere only. This is the reason why language teaching should be introduced at an earlier age. In addition, there is a research related to students’ incentive to learn. In JASTEC project team, they claimed that studies of early period English learning identify positive emotional influences; in other words, they like English and they are motivated (2008). Another study showed that studying English in elementary school days led to an interchange with second language speakers and better cultural understanding and recognition of mutual understanding (Adachi, 2008). Uematsu (2010) found that the age at which children start learning English and the frequency of classes are only small factors that determine the score of junior high school students on the Junior High School Assessment of Communicative English. There are also studies about the influences on the test scores after English private schools. Experiences of English study in youth lead to higher scores on the phoneme identification test, and students have stronger motivation during their post high school and college days (Yatsuka, 2000).

On the other hand, there are alternative views. Snow in her debate with Unz says older learners, aged 12, are better language learners than younger, aged 5, because of their advanced perception that leads them to learn a second language faster and more perfectly (Unz and Snow, 2002). Wakabayashi (2002) claimed that the survey of an international school suggested that the students with the experience of having

gone to a Japanese elementary school first are superior in both Japanese and English ability than the students who received their first educations abroad or at an international school. Hoffman (1993) also opines that older learners seem to have a greater capacity to learn a second language as follows.

“Observation of young learners can also indicate that children are rather unsophisticated in their learning process, as they lack a number of skills which the older learner usually has, which can facilitate transfer from one language to another: children do not normally perceive the similarities between languages, and they are unable to abstract, classify and generalize to the extent that adults can.”

### **3. Questionnaire**

#### **3-1 Informants**

Informants are students of an English department and a Psychology department at a Japanese university in Tokai area. They are first, second, and third year students of the English department and first year Psychology department students. The number of surveys taken from the English department was 165, and that of Psychology was 166. The responses' breakdown of the English department is 84 first year students, 50 second year students, and 46 third year students. Additionally, 28 students, who had experience living over one year in an English speaking country, were eliminated. Because this paper's purpose is to analyze the effect of English cram schools in youth, exclusion of the 28 students was necessary. The survey was given from June to July in 2011 (see Appendix 1).

#### **3-2 Methodology**

First, this paper compares the survey results about English cram schools in pre and elementary school days from the English majors with those from the Psychology majors. Next, it analyzes the correlation with Michigan Test scores at the time of entrance only in English major. Michigan Test is a commercially available multiple-choice test made up of 100 discrete items divided into, four sections—20 in listening, 30 in grammar, 30 in vocabulary, and 20 in reading.

The main aim of this paper is to analyze the reflected ability of the English

cram schools many years later. As a by-product, the correlation between each score can be analyzed in this research, which is described later.

### 3-3 Results -two departments

In this research, there were no students in the Psychology department who had experience living abroad for over one year. On the other hand, 28 participants (17%) in the English department experienced living abroad. It is presumed that they selected their major based on what they were good at or their strong point.

Of the 138 English major students without experience abroad, 62 students (44.9%) went to English cram schools during pre and elementary school days. The attendance rate is rather high than the 28.3% in Psychology (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Cram schools' experience**

**(Question 2. Do you have experience attending English cram schools, including kindergartens program, during pre and elementary school days?)**

	English major		Psychology major	
	N	%	N	%
experience	62	44.9	47	28.3
no experience	76	55.1	119	71.7

As for starting age, 41 students (66.1%) in English department chose “after 6 years old”. Meanwhile, in the Psychology department, it is the most common answer at 35 (74%), as well. Most students started after 6 years old in both departments (see Table 2). However, looking at the results in detail, English students started a little earlier. The responses were converted to numbers for SPSS analysis in Table 2 to 5.

**Table 2. Starting age**  
(Question 3. When did you start?)

		English major		Psychology major	
		N	%	N	%
starting age	1- 1-3 years old	5	8.1	2	4.3
	2- 3-6 years old	16	25.8	10	21.3
	3- after 6 years old	41	66.1	35	74.5
	Sum	62	100.0	47	100.0

Next Table3 is about the term of attendance. The number is very similar for both groups. “Over 4 years” is 34 (54.8%) in the English department, and 26 (55.3%) in the Psychology department. Over half students continued to attend English cram schools for a long time.

**Table 3. Cram school attendance**  
(Question 4. How long did you attend?)

		English major		Psychology major	
		N	%	N	%
term	1- less 1year	4	6.5	2	4.3
	2- 1-2 years	11	17.7	9	19.1
	3-2-3 years	13	21.0	10	21.3
	4-over 4 years	34	54.8	26	55.3
	Sum	62	100.0	47	100.0

Table 4 shows the feeling toward English cram schools is favorable. Most students answered “fun” or “somewhat fun”. This clearly shows that students had a good time at English cram schools.

**Table 4. Opinion of cram schools**  
**(Question 6. Did you have fun?)**

		English major		Psychology major	
		N	%	N	%
feeling	1- boring	1	1.6	1	2.1
	2- somewhat boring	3	4.8	3	6.4
	3- neither fun nor boring	5	8.1	7	14.9
	4- somewhat fun	18	29.0	16	34.0
	5- fun	35	56.5	20	42.6
	Sum	62	100.0	47	100.0

English major students' awareness of connection to present English ability is significantly better than Psychology major students. Most English major students reported positive answers. On the other hand, in the Psychology department, the most common answer was "agree", 16 (34.0%). Nonetheless, the second most common answer was "disagree", 13 (27.7%). There is a large gap between the Psychology department students and the English department students (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Awareness of connection to present abilities**  
**(Question 8. I am aware of the connection of English cram school**  
**to my present abilities.)**

		English major		Psychology major	
		N	%	N	%
awareness of connection to present abilities	1- disagree	3	4.8	13	27.7
	2- somewhat disagree	5	8.1	2	4.3
	3- neither agree nor disagree	14	22.6	6	12.8
	4- somewhat agree	15	24.2	10	21.3
	5- agree	25	40.3	16	34.0
	Sum	62	100.0	47	100.0

#### 4. Correlation with abilities' scores in the English Department

##### 4-1 Sample & Methodology

This next section focuses on the English department students only. Students who lived in an English speaking country for over a year were eliminated from the analysis. The effect of the English cram schools could not be analyzed because their Michigan Test scores were higher than other students. Of the 165 English department participants, 138 students were analyzed using SPSS (software for a statistical analysis in social sciences) by making correlations between their scores and answers. Having a significant correlation is a score of  $p < 0.05$  and having a strong correlation is a score of  $p < 0.01$ .

First, experience of attendance was analyzed. It is cross referenced with listening, grammar, vocabulary, and reading at the time of entrance. Next, term of attendance about the same group of 138 students was examined. Finally, the responses of the 62 students who had experience attending English cram schools were cross-referenced with their scores.

##### 4-2 Results—with scores

The results reveal that the experience of attending cram school is significantly correlated with listening ( $p = 0.049$ ). However, in other items, there were no correlations (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Correlation between experience and scores**

	experience		
	N	correlation coefficients-r	p (two-sided)
listening	138	0.168(*)	0.049
grammar	138	0.126	0.141
vocabulary	138	0.08	0.351
reading	138	0.132	0.122

\*\* $p < 0.01$  (two-sided) \* $p < 0.05$  (two-sided)

However, when examining the term of attendance, there were three correlations in the same group. In their answers, “no-experience” was assigned a score

of 0, “less than 1 year” was 1, “1-2 years” was 2, “2-3 years” was 3, and “over 4 years” was 4. Then, correlations between “term of attendance” and four categories were analyzed. Correlations were evident except in vocabulary ability (see Table 7). Listening scores have a strong correlation with attendance terms ( $p=0.003$ ).

**Table 7. Correlation between term and scores**

	Term		
	N	correlation coefficients-r	p (two-sided)
listening	138	0.250(**)	0.003
grammar	138	0.171(*)	0.044
vocabulary	138	0.108	0.207
reading	138	0.171(*)	0.046

\*\* $p<0.01$  (two-sided) \* $p<0.05$ (two-sided)

Finally, 62 students who attended cram school were analyzed, for looking at the correlation between scores and items. The students' responses were converted to numbers that are shown in Tables 2 to 5. The numbers show that the starting age does not correlate with every ability (see Table 8). “Feeling” is not correlated with any scores either. Nevertheless, term is strongly correlated with listening ( $p=0.02$ ). “Awareness of connection to present abilities” is correlated with all scores- listening ( $p=0.002$ ), grammar ( $p=0.030$ ), vocabulary ( $p=0.011$ ), reading ( $p=0.011$ ). Additionally, the later the starting age and longer attendance time, the more awareness of benefit to present abilities, as shown by the correlation ( $p=0.048$ ,  $p=0.013$ ).



Table 8. Correlation between scores and items

		listening	grammar	vocabulary	reading	starting age	term	feeling	awareness of connection to present abilities
listening	r	1							
	p								
grammar	r	.252(*)	1						
	p	.048							
vocabulary	r	.340(**)	.488(**)	1					
	p	.007	.000						
reading	r	.426(**)	.379(**)	.439(**)	1				
	p	.001	.002	.000					
starting age	r	.021	.104	.041	.028	1			
	p	.872	.423	.749	.828				
term	r	.380(**)	.223	.139	.182	-.177	1		
	p	.002	.082	.280	.157	.169			
feeling	r	-.194	.077	.079	-.109	.049	-.055	1	
	p	.131	.551	.540	.400	.705	.669		
awareness of connection to present abilities	r	.393(**)	.277(*)	.322(*)	.321(*)	.252(*)	.314(*)	.232	1
	p	.002	.030	.011	.011	.048	.013	.069	

\*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-sided) \*  $p < 0.05$  (two-sided)  $r$  = Pearson's correlation coefficient N=62

As for the correlation with each score, it is reasonable that the four abilities show strong correlations with each other.

## 5. Discussion

In the two departments, the largest variation of the results was the awareness of the connection to the students' present abilities. The rate of "disagree" is 27.7% for the Psychology students. However, the English students' rate is only 4.8%. In the English department, negative opinions toward cram schools are few. Contrary to my expectation, many students regarded the English cram schools as effective, especially English major students. Psychology students perceived attending English cram schools in their youth as less effective than English students. In the Psychology department,

no student stayed for over one year in an English speaking country, nonetheless, the 17% students stayed for over one year in the English department. Additionally, compared to the Psychology students, about twice the number of English students attended cram schools. Moreover, the English department students started English cram schools a little earlier. These findings suggest that the English students had more opportunities of contact with English before university entrance, and that is one factor to choose their major. Additionally, it means that the English students' parents were more interested in early English education than the Psychology students' parents.

Most of the students in both departments answered that they began after six (66.1% in English, 74.5% in Psychology). And more than half of the students attended for over four years (54.8% in English, 55.3% in Psychology). Many students indicated English cram school was fun. It may have been less academic compared to other subjects' study. The contents of English cram schools might be too easy and childish for students at that age. Actually, in the question about the contents, they described activities such as playing, singing, and games with few answers for writing or reading. That may be the reason why some Psychology students provided negative opinions of English cram schools' effectiveness. The same thing can be said about "English activity" started from 2011 for fifth and sixth grade students at public elementary schools. The content of "English activity" is too childish for fifth and sixth grade students and the effectiveness is doubtful (Iwata, 2012). However, for some English students, English cram schools are one of the factors for selecting their major and motivation for English study.

Next is the comparison with Michigan Test in the English department. Of 138 students, English cram schools' experience promotes a listening ability as seen in Table 6. Additionally, it can be said that the period of attendance effectively influences abilities of listening, grammar, and reading in Table 7. This suggests that longer attendance provided many opportunities to communicate with English speakers and the content had gradually changed to learning as time of attendance lengthened. Vocabulary is limited in English cram schools for children even attended for a long period, because most of English cram schools focus on daily English communication improvement; like Cummings' Basic Interpersonal Communication skills (BICS).

Focusing on 62 students who attended English cram schools, the data showed starting earlier does not promote any abilities as seen in Table 8. This is the most appealing point. Recently, English education in Japan is becoming earlier and earlier, nonetheless, my research showed a different result. Though many students have good memories of their English cram schools, the effect do not result with merely a sense of enjoyment. Additionally, the later starting age and longer attendance time, the more awareness of benefit to present abilities. As students get older, the difficulty level might gradually increase, so they feel profit.

Focusing on correlation with each score in Table 8, the data analysis shows that listening, grammar, vocabulary, and reading have a strong connection to each other. This is the same as 138 students' analysis (see Appendix 2). This suggests Japanese English learners do not develop any abilities independently. Most Japanese start to acquire English academic ability, like Cummings' Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (1999), from junior high school study, even if they attended English cram school in youth. The aim of English cram school for youth is to cultivate BICS. Michigan Test assesses CALP. This study assumes that English cram school for BICS does not promote CALP in university students. This result may coincide with opinions of Snow (2002), and Hoffman (1993), that starting later is more effective.

## 6. Conclusion

Currently, English cram schools' business has become too big to ignore for parents who have young children. Starting an English curriculum in public elementary school in 2011 might make parents more anxious about their children's English ability. However, this study reports the cram school curriculum is not academic. This paper's results suggest that there are some benefits especially in listening, but to indicate a higher effect, long time attendance is required. A much earlier starting time was not defined as a plus factor.

Grammar, vocabulary and reading are required from junior high school, high school, and university in the exam systems. However, little effect was detected in after junior high school exams. Parents should not expect an improvement in all the English skills as their children grow up. Furthermore, if the goal of attending cram school is to

gain an advantage in job hunting or provide more personal or professional opportunities, the expectation is too great. English cram school fees are expensive to attend for a long time. Nonetheless, it is difficult to expect to improve learning ability in academic scores. If I consider about listening ability in communication and motivation, English cram schools in youth are effective.

English varieties have been extensively studied as proposed by Kachru (1992). English communication between non-native English speakers is becoming increasingly common. The first exposure of children to foreign teachers may influence the children's intentions. Many parents want the teachers to be native English speakers in the English cram schools. If children regard native-like English as a model, from the view point of world Englishes, that perception would be at least one of the issues (Kirkpatrick, 2007). There are some probabilities that children perceive native English as a typical model; moreover, they desire to speak like a native speaker. If English cram schools help to shape this perception, it is an underside of English cram schools. Parents should understand this well and consider their reasons for sending their children to English cram schools.

### Note

This article is based on the author's presentation at JALT 2011 on November 18 in National Olympics Memorial Youth Center, Yoyogi, Tokyo.

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## Appendix 1

### *Survey about English cram schools*

1. Do you have an experience living in an English speaking country over 1 year?
  1. Yes
  2. No
2. Do you have experience attending English cram schools, including kindergarten's program, during pre and elementary school days?
  1. Yes
  2. No

Please answer the following questions only if respondents answered "Yes" in question number 2.

3. When did you start?
  1. 1-3years old
  2. 3-6 years old
  3. after 6 years
4. How long did you attend?
  1. less 1 year
  2. 1-2 years
  3. 2-3 years
  4. over 4 years
5. What kind of activities did you do in a cram school? Check all that apply.
  1. sing songs
  2. plays games
  3. listening practice: including using CD, DVD, etc.
  4. writing practice: letters, words, and sentences
  5. conversation practice
  6. others
6. Did you have fun?
  1. fun
  2. somewhat fun
  3. neither fun nor boring
  4. somewhat boring
  5. boring
7. Why did you quit?
  1. feel bored
  2. finish the curriculum's term
  3. become to be busy in other studies or activities
  4. others
8. I am aware of the connection of English cram school to my present English abilities.
  1. agree
  2. somewhat agree
  3. neither agree nor disagree
  4. somewhat disagree
  5. disagree
9. If you answered "1" or "2" in question number 8, why do you think so?  
Check all that apply.
  1. good academic results
  2. better listening ability than others
  3. confidence in English speaking
  4. confidence in vocabulary and reading
  5. others
10. If you answered "3", "4", or "5" in question number 8, why do you think so?  
Check all that apply.

1. forget English because of quitting cram school
2. content of activities is play , not academic
3. same level as students with no experience
4. different from the content of junior high school study
5. few letter, word, and sentence practices
6. should study more conversation practice
7. too early to study English during pre and elementary school days
8. others

## Appendix 2

Correlation with each ability in 138 students

		listening	grammar	vocabulary	reading
listening	r	1			
	p				
	N	138			
grammar	r	.296(**)	1		
	p	.000			
	N	138			
vocabulary	r	.289(**)	.459(**)	1	
	p	.001	.000		
	N	138	138		
reading	r	.347(**)	.354(**)	.439(**)	1
	p	.000	.000	.000	
	N	138	138	138	138

\*\* p<0.01 (two-sided) r=Pearson's correlation coefficient