

Factors that Influence Population's English Abilities — A Co-study Report on Three Regions of the World —

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【Abstract】

There are many reasons for differing abilities of working English skills within any given region and/or society. Three world demographic areas are looked at in this paper: North America, Northern Europe, and Southeast Asia, for factors why their populations succeed in developing their English abilities and how their English education systems are working for them. Educational, societal, and economical factors are looked at between the countries in this study.

Next, Japan's capabilities in English will be discussed with the aim of establishing some of the common pitfalls within its society that retard the acquisition of English. Statistical information is looked at to show the English educational backgrounds of average nursing students as well as for Miyazaki Prefecture in regards to the increasing number of foreigners moving and living in Miyazaki which implies the need for spoken English in nursing to help them in times of need.

Finally, recommendations will be given as to the best approach for teaching English to our targeted population: Japanese nursing students.

【Key words】 Comparative studies, English education, Nursing students, University

I. INTRODUCTION

It is often discussed in English educational circles why Japanese do so poorly in English skills, whereas other countries do so well. This seems to be of paramount importance in certain fields of study and practice, one of them being nursing.

Many factors within each country can be responsible for one's English acquisition, such as geographic location and population density, cultural and societal characteristics, industrial and economic factors, educational and practical reasons are just a few (Table 1)

In this study, the world was separated into

three demographic regions for reasons of influences as well as monetary considerations. Monetarily, the members within the three groupings are demographically close to each other: North America (U.S.A. and Canada), Northern Europe (The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland); and Southeast Asia (Hong Kong and Singapore). Influentially, North America was chosen for its history of the predominance of spoken English and the fact that so many foreigners reside in North America with English communicational problems. The number of English courses offered to non-native speakers of English for the above stated problem as well as for students wishing

to learn English have increased greatly in the past. Northern Europe was chosen for its history of fluent speakers of English as a secondary language and close proximity to other countries with different national languages. Southeast Asia was chosen because of its past colonial ties with a native English speaking country as well as for reasons of multilingual skills.

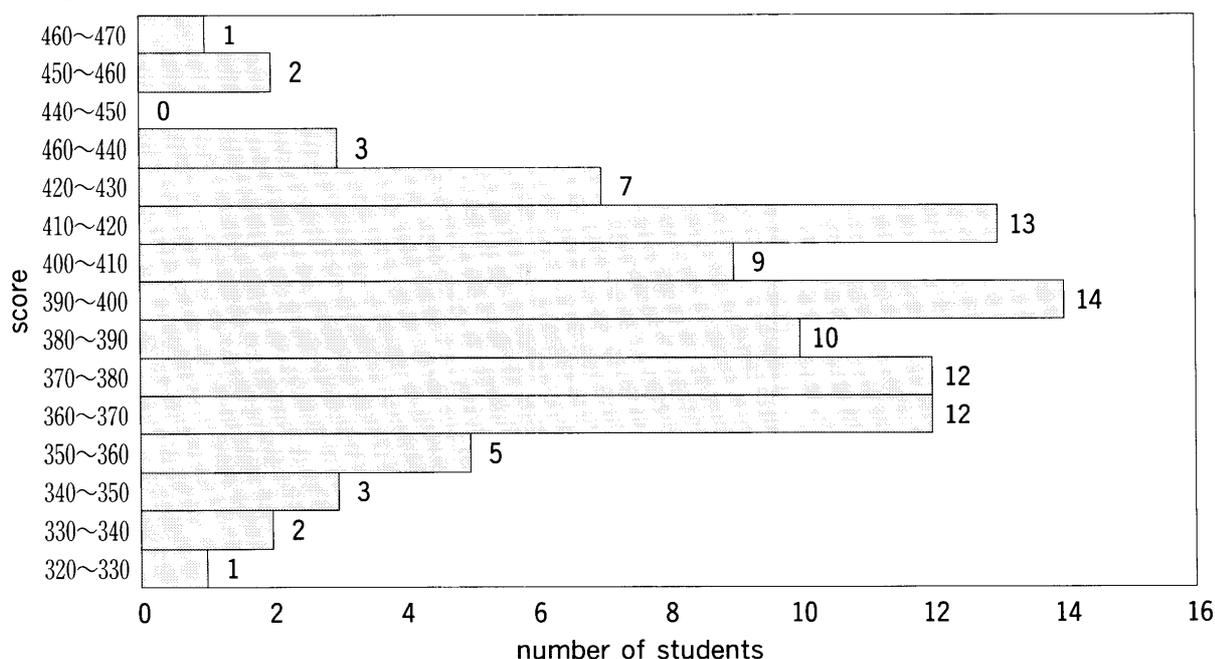
Factors influencing the three demographic areas were then looked at and compared with that of Japan. Conclusions were drawn on the basis of the information with an emphasis on how best to educate the targeted population ; Japanese nurses and nursing students. Reasons for this are twofold. First, English education is required in all Japanese universities. Therefore, it would help English teachers in Japan to know what some of the greatest effects on the ability of speaking English are in countries that excel in English. Secondly, the targeted audience of nurses and nursing students in Japan

Table 1 English study information and average TOEFL scores

Country	Starting age of study	Hr. of study/yr (Final year of compulsory education)	% of students studying English	TOEFL
USA	N/A	N/A	N/A	567
Canada	N/A	N/A	N/A	563
Norway	10	135	100	589
Sweden	10	120	100	589
Finland	9	90	99	593
Denmark	10	135	99	606
Holland	10	150	92	616
Hong Kong	6	320*	6*	520
Singapore	N/A	N/A	N/A	597
Japan	12	105	100	496

* In Hong Kong, English is the primary language of instruction,¹⁴(Table 1 from Takeuchi et al)

Figure 1 TOEFL Practice Test



Information based off of research findings of one nursing university. More research would be needed to establish a more conclusive result.¹⁵(Figure 1 example test from Pyle)

* Average : 386

are in need of English skills to better themselves and their profession in an ever increasing workplace dominated by English.

As to the question of how the places were chosen to visit, the national departments of education and health and welfare in all five Northern European countries and the two Southeast Asian countries were contacted via email. Information was given to the respective departments on the subject of the research being conducted. A list of prospective places to visit were generated by the above mentioned governmental departments. The researchers then contacted the given institutions for interviews and viewing sessions. North American visiting and interviewing points were based off of a researcher's findings in this area.

Before looking at the three demographic regions listed above, a look at an average examinee's TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score would help underscore the complications of English education in Japan (Table 1). An average nursing student's TOEFL score is also provided so that nursing students can be specifically placed in terms of English ability (Figure 1).

II. REGIONAL STUDIES

A. North America

North American countries of the U.S.⁽¹⁾ and Canada⁽²⁾ were chosen for this study for two compelling reasons; the large influx of immigrants and foreign students entering these two countries and the large diversity and quantity of language programs for them. As stated before, this study's population is basically concerned with nurses and nursing students who wish to improve their English, to prepare for entering universities in these two countries for licensure procurement as registered nurses

(RN). Most of the visited institutes offered English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs aimed at medical/nursing students and nursing professionals.

Examples include short-term programs in the U.S. to Vietnamese nursing professionals, 4-to-8 week immersion summer camp programs for limited budget high school students with unique cultural experiences such as crafts, cooking, games and so on. Once completed, credits can then be transferred to a regular secondary language course in their appropriate high schools.

Other special programs for Japanese students in the departments of pharmacology, medicine, social welfare, and so on, are also offered in both countries. These short-term courses are mainly held in summer and students either home-stay or stay in university dormitories, taking English classes with other English as a Secondary Language (ESL) students in the morning and optional classes for nursing and site visits in the afternoon. Not only do they learn English and North American culture in general, but they also get first hand experience of the nursing scene through such programs. Another good aspect of learning in these programs is that all regular ESL classes consist of a maximum of 15 students.

The other aim of researching the North American area was to visit some institutes with secondary language courses targeting nursing professionals. Large populations of legal immigrants admitted into the U.S. include the countries of: Mexico, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, India, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Jamaica, Russia, and others. Immigrants living in North America have demanded nurses to have a certain degree of knowledge of their languages and their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, special programs have

been established to meet their demands.

Examples of this are programs in the U.S. that provide nursing professionals with an intensive Spanish course for beginners where Spanish speaking immigrants reside by using cultural introduction courses taught by an instructor who is a nurse that had been raised in a Puerto Rican family. The program is successful because the students feel the need to know elementary Spanish and important cultural values to help their patients.

A similar example exists in Canada, where people are also linguistically and culturally diverse.

"Over 60 languages are spoken by more than 70 ethnocultural groups across the country. Many schools have students from 20 or more distinct ethnocultural groups. In Toronto and Vancouver, over half the students in public schools can speak languages other than English or French."¹⁾ (JACEF, 1997)

According to the 1996 census, the number of people speaking non-official languages as their mother tongue is 4,598,290. These including Chinese, Italian, German, Polish, Spanish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Ukrainian, Arabic, Dutch, Tagalog, Greek, Vietnamese, Cree, Inuktitut, and others. A good example of this is 40% of Vancouver's population is of Chinese origin.

The result of Vancouver's shifting racial demographics can be seen in school boards that offer intensive English programs for Chinese/Canadian nurses who have found difficulties in communication between their patients and even among nursing staff because of strong regional accents.

Intensive programs for English teachers were also established through a needs assessment of hospital staff. The end result pinpoint-

ed a need for a basic conversation course for the nursing staff so they could make themselves understood clearly rather than a program strictly for medical terms.

It was also found out that nursing students must first know how to communicate with their patients clearly and accurately before working on a commanding technical vocabulary of English. In terms of teaching basic English communicational skills, some approaches to language education in North America can be modeled.

B. Northern Europe

When investigating the five Northern European countries³⁾ (The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland), staggering similarities existed between them. All have similar ethnic backgrounds and languages (except Finland), and have small industrialized populations that engage in international business.

Because of their small populations, they rely on English to communicate with each other as well as the rest of the world. This is noticeable in the lack of published materials in their own languages (Finn Air has no Finnish or Swedish website, only English) and their willingness to learn English from all means of modern technology.

Another important point of the Northern European countries is their willingness to embrace American culture, including the English language. Hollywood movies and MTV are but two important points of interest to look at.

Because of the close proximity of the previously 5 mentioned countries and their increasing wealth, travel has become common place, even among the young. It is not uncommon for a Swede from Goteborg to travel to Oslo, Norway, to see a concert, or vice versa. Many high school students will travel for several

months upon completion of their secondary educational training. Travel as far as Sidney or as close as London, English is the preferred language of communication.

They also all have high standards of education, which starts English education earlier than in Japan, emphasizing spoken English over writing and/or reading skills (Table 1). The theory behind this is that language is primarily for spoken communication with reading and writing to be learned later. Let's look at each country separately to investigate their English education.

Holland is very unique in that many secondary languages are spoken. Besides their own language of Dutch, German, French, and English are learned in schools with English being the most commonly taught and widely used of the three. English education starts in elementary school and continues through junior high (in senior high, it is an elective). Other languages being taught in junior high are German and French. No matter what foreign language is being studied, the stress is on communicative competence² (Tanaka, et al, 1997).

In Denmark, English education starts in the 4th grade, and most junior high schools have English as a required subject. Since 1993, language education has been a major area of stress in the school system with oral skills being the primary focus³ (Danish Ministry of Education, 1996).

Norway also requires English in elementary school through junior high. As a matter of fact, the people of Norway elected to begin English education in even lower elementary school grades. The stress of English education is on oral communication⁴ (Tanaka et al, 1997).

Sweden started English education in elementary school as far back as 1950 with the main goal being the understanding of other cultures. Writing, speaking, hearing, and reading are em-

phasized. Also, because of the above mentioned information about the lack of publishing companies in Sweden, most universities use textbooks in English. The end result is a great improvement in reading skills and an increased vocabulary⁵ (Swedish Ministry of Education and Science, 1995).

In Finland, 90% of the students take English as an elective class. Swedish, which is also an official language of Finland along with Finnish, is the second most frequently taken elective for language classes. English is required for university entrance exams, but oral skills are stressed, not grammar. Reforms in language education now stress oral skills, communication for different cultures, and self study⁶ (Finnish Ministry of Education, 1995).

In a nutshell, because of their size, population, reliance on international trade, and willingness to accept American culture and English into their daily lives, the five above mentioned countries are all model citizens of spoken English as a second language. The starting of English education early in their primary years is one reason for this area's effect on the populations' ability to speak English. But perhaps of greater interest are the causes outside of their educational system that seem to be the leading factors to this area's success with English.

As a by-note, none of the above five countries listed here have special English classes for nursing students. The tertiary systems in all five countries do not require English education unless students are majoring in English or linguistics. This also applies to schools/colleges of nursing. Nursing students in the above five mentioned countries are expected to have a command of English upon entrance to any given nursing school/college. Some nursing classes, however, are taught in English and all research in the above five mentioned countries is written

in both their native language and English.

C. Southeast Asia

The Southeast Asian countries chosen for our study, Hong Kong and Singapore⁴⁾, have a long history of British occupation and influence. They also have a unique culture in that indigenous people coexist with other races and cultures. This appears to be a driving force behind their abilities in the English language, but not the only reason for it.

Looking past this obvious point of British colonialization, other influential reasons for the importance of English in these two countries are similar to Northern Europe's. Similar ethnic backgrounds, similar languages, small industrialized populations engaged in international business which relies on a willingness to learn English from all means of modern technology are major points. Others are high standards of education which starts English education much earlier than in Japan with an emphasis on spoken English over writing and/or reading skills (Table 1).

Another common factor between the two countries is that English is primarily used as the working language. This means people will speak English at work due to the different languages or dialects being spoken by the population outside of the workplace.

In Hong Kong, though English is an elective subject in universities, it is used as the language of preference for the main means of communication in official documents, educational institutes, in their higher court system, and in the field of business. English teachers are sent to England and Australia for improving their proficiency of English by the continuing education programs offered through their government for a period of up to 6 months⁷⁾(Tanaka et al, 1997).

Having said this, most people in Hong Kong feel the youth are rapidly losing their abilities to communicate in English. The reason for this is simple ; Hong Kong is now part of China and the Chinese government is stressing the importance of Mandarin Chinese in schools with English coming in at a distant third. A similar phenomenon can be noted in Hawaii, that being a blend of languages the youth picks up for their own particular means of communication.

In Singapore, there are only two universities : Singapore National University and Nanyang University. The educational features here are :

1. Education by ability and aptitude of students
2. Bilingual teaching
3. Priority on science and English⁸⁾(Tanaka et al, 1997)
4. Smaller class sizes for language education

One other important factor to look at is the fading influence of American and British cultures in Asia. For some time now, Asian countries have been establishing closer ties with Japan and it's culture, the reasons being that the Japanese culture is in many ways more similar to their own culture than the American/European cultures. Therefore, the numbers of students studying Japanese is on the rise, making both countries an even more multilingual culture.

As was true with Northern Europe, all people the researchers talked with agreed on the point that English is an important part of their culture, not so much for their excellent English educational system, but for the importance that English plays in their daily lives.

Finally, as was also true with the Northern European countries, English as a subject is not formally studied in nursing colleges, rather the

working language in nursing classes is English itself.

D. Japan

In regards to English usage, Japan differs greatly from North America in that English isn't its first language. Also, the foreign population, although on the rise in Japan, has not voiced its needs for Japanese to acquire a stronger background in their spoken languages. Needs assessments for language acquisition, besides English, are just beginning in Japan at present because of the current numbers of for-

eigners living in Japan (Table 2). It also differs greatly from that of Northern Europe in that Japan's population is four times the size of all five of the Northern European countries previously talked about with many publishing companies along with an abundance of published materials in Japanese. Japan also differs greatly from the two Southeast Asian countries in this study in terms that it was never occupied for a long period of time from an outside power, with quite the opposite being true. Japan also uses Japanese as its' working language because of its homogenous culture.

Table 2 Non-Japanese residents registered in Miyazaki Prefecture (Top 20)

Country /Year		1993	1998
1	North/South Korea	855	768
2	China	472	535
3	Philippine	461	463
4	Indonesia	34	256
5	USA	178	200
6	UK	42	51
7	Brazil	155	50
8	Canada	17	46
9	Australia	34	43
10	Vietnam	33	41
11	Bangladesh	19	40
12	Thailand	29	38
13	New Zealand	13	35
14	Malaysia	18	26
15	Peru	51	20
16	Sri Lanka	9	17
17	India	1	16
18	Egypt	10	15
19	Italy	10	11
20	Bolivia	7	10
Total		2540	2788
Nations		53	60

¹⁶(Information taken from brochure prepared by Miyazaki Prefectural Government)

As for English education, it must be first stated that English education in Japan fits certain elements of Japan and its' society. Dove tailing in with this paper's research findings, Hayashi⁹ (1999) points out Japan doesn't seem ready to embark on improving its English communicational skills.

"The fundamental fact is that socially, politically, and economically, Japan is in no serious need of macro-level changes that would facilitate the improvement of people's English proficiency."

English education starts later and has less hours of English study (Table 1) than the other countries in this study and stresses written and grammatical information for entrance examinations. Only recently have English communicational skills been stressed at tertiary levels. This is showing up with nursing students' strong motivation for learning spoken English other than for their profession (Table 3). Also at the tertiary level, English education is required in the 1st and sometimes 2nd year, with these being the only classes taught in English.

One interesting aspect of nursing univer-

Table 3 What are you interested in doing after you learn English? (Top 10)

#	Activity students wish to do	
1	Traveling overseas without depending on tour guides and making cultural experiences*	71
2	Watching a movie TV without subtitles	32
3	Talking with non-Japanese people	26
4	Making friends (and pen pals) with people overseas	15
5	Studying abroad	14
6	Home staying	13
7	Becoming an interpreter (and translator)	13
8	Working/volunteering overseas	11
9	Having a boy/girlfriend, international marriage	10
10	Living overseas, immigrating	9

(Table from research findings on 1st year nursing students)

*Traveling overseas includes the following specific wishes ; traveling around the world, learn how to make cheese, talking with African children, scuba diving in the southern islands, going to a beauty parlor in NY, seeing celebrities overseas, learning to cook, etc.

sities/colleges in Japan is that some do have nursing staff input in the English classes that are being taught. Some nursing staff also help in parts of the teaching, especially the technical aspects of English for nursing. Other nursing universities/colleges also have special reading courses designed specifically for nursing students.

It is believed that all secondary and tertiary teachers who are involved with teaching English to Japanese do the best job they can under their given circumstances, this being the present aim of English for exams and large class sizes. This seems true also for nursing

students. At present, an average English class including conversation classes, averages 50 students per class. Ishikawa¹⁰ (1993) researched the problem of class sizes in university English courses and found out that only 1.9% of the universities researched had class sizes of 20 (or less) students per class. (20.9% up to 40 students, 59.0% up to 60 students, and 12.3% up to 80 students per class). According to the Ministry of Education research¹¹(1995), when university students were asked about their class size, only 28.2% felt their class size was appropriate which implies most Japanese universities have class size problems.

III. CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

By looking at three different areas and some countries within them, a better understanding of how and why English is learned was discovered. All three areas have particular elements to them that make their usage of English unique, but similarities also existed. By looking at these similarities and differences, ideas have been formulated how best to help nurses and nursing students with their English skills in Japan.

In thinking how to best help nurses and nursing students with their English skills, one needs to look past how English is now taught. This paper can not change cultural, economical or educational systems nor how Japan itself views the importance of English. It was found that nursing students themselves, with a great degree of personal effort, must improve their own English skills for whatever reasons they deem important.

Having said this, there are a few simple things that can be done in terms of helping nurses and nursing students acquire English skills that may benefit not only themselves, but

their profession as well.

First, English should be taught as a living, and hopefully, working language. English should be encouraged whenever possible in either spoken or written form at both the university and workplace. The more students are exposed to English, the better.

Secondly, English classes should not only be educational, but fun as well. Because of the limited hours of English per week for study purposes, why not make it enjoyable, i.e., things that relate to daily life where English is used, such as in movies, songs, advertisements, books, games, cooking, the arts, etc. Along with this must come smaller class sizes. A recent poll by the Japan Society for the Study of Education (JSSE) states that more than 90% of school boards across Japan want smaller classes at the junior/senior high levels¹²⁾ (Daily Yomiuri, 2000). This is in line with what university English teachers want: ideal class size is 20 or under. Further evidence of this can be found in research conducted on reducing primary and secondary class sizes in the U.S. by the Department of Education¹³⁾ (1999). The findings clearly point to significant effects of class size reduction on students achievement with classes between 15 to 20 students per class regardless of area, race, or subjects studied.

Furthermore, research in the three overseas areas pinpoints many ways of reaching students and teaching them than besides the old way that is so prevalent in most subject areas in Japan. English classes for nursing students should not only be technical nursing terminology, but should be more centered in usable English skills to better help their patients as well as to improve their pursuit of leisure activities and their expected experiences in life.

Next, because of their lack of understanding of basic nursing terminology, these types of

living English classes should be taught to 1st and 2nd year students. Reading for pleasure should be encouraged throughout their tertiary experience. Nursing terminology would be more appropriate in the 3rd and 4th years when students have developed better fundamental educational backgrounds in nursing.

More input from nurses and nursing staff at nursing universities/colleges and in the workplace would be of great help in understanding what they think nurses or nursing students should know about English. If qualified, they themselves may be able to teach some of the 'Nursing English' classes, defined here as "A class for learning technical terms about nursing in English and using them in their daily work."

Finally, it is believed that it would be in the best interest of nurses and nursing staff to travel overseas to improve their English skills as well as to see what is going on in their profession in other countries.

Notes :

(1) The following English Language Institutes were visited for the research in the U.S. :

Georgetown University, Northern Virginia
Centre of the University of Virginia,
California University of Los Angeles, St.
Joseph University

(2) The following institutes were visited for the research in Canada :

The English Language Institute, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver
School Board

(3) The following places were visited for the research in Northern Europe :

Holland ; the Rijksuniversiteit and the Hanzehogeschool in Groningen

Denmark ; The Ministry of Education and Hovedstadens Sygehusfaelleskab

Norway ; Oslo University

Sweden ; Swedish Ministry of Education

and Science, Karolinska Institute, Swedish Red Cross, Linköping University, Ersta University College, Umeå University
 Finland : The Ministry of Education, Kuntokallio Centre for Gerontological Training & Research, University of Helsinki, Arcada Polytechnic

(4) The following places were visited for the research in Southeast Asia :

Hong Kong : Hong Kong Polytechnical University, Hospital Authority, Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Singapore : Nanyang Polytechnic, National University Hospital, Singapore General Hospital

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事例報告

英語教育に関する諸要素 —— 海外3地域における調査報告 ——

宇久 眞雄 ラーソン エリック 川北 直子

【抄 録】

諸外国における英語学習者に比べて日本人学習者の英語力は劣ると言われている。本調査報告では、看護と英語教育の視点から選んだ海外の3地域（北米、北欧、東南アジア）についてそれぞれ訪問・調査を行い、英語力の差異が生じる要因、成功する英語教育のあり方について研究した。

海外の調査報告にあわせ、日本人の英語習得がなぜスムーズにいかないのか考察し、特に日本の看護学生にどのような英語教育を行うべきかについて提案する。資料の一部として、平均的な看護学生の英語力の現状と、宮崎県における看護職者が英会話の力を身につける必要性を示唆する統計的資料を提示する。

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