

Effect and Impact of Foreign Language Activities  
Appeared in Two Junior High School Teachers' Classes

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2人の中学校英語科教員の授業に現れる外国語活動の成果とその変化

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effect and impact of Foreign Language Activities in two junior high school teachers' classes through observations. Suggestions are made concerning the cooperation between elementary schools and junior high schools. The observations were conducted at a junior high school in Shizuoka City in April and June, 2014. "A positive attitude toward communication" which is one of the aims of Foreign Language Activities appeared in students' 'conversation' and 'reaction'. "Sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages" which is another aim of Foreign Language Activities also appeared in students' 'phrases' and 'words'. However, these effects appeared in lower frequency in June than in April, which was caused by the teachers' belief for the connection with Foreign Language Activities. The result suggested some planning would be needed to improve the effects of Foreign Language Activities in junior high schools.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

It has been four years since Foreign Language Activities were made compulsory at elementary schools in 2011, which attempts to solve the gap between elementary schools. On the other hand, it has been three years since the new Course of study started in junior high schools, which aims to expand the achievements of Foreign Language Activities in classes.

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However, what is the current situation of students in the junior high school classes?

## 1.2 Literature review and current situation

Ogyu and Kaneshige (2013) administered tests for the first-year students in the beginning of the school year for two years. The results showed that students in the second test year tried to listen accurately and had learned fewer numbers of vocabulary and phrases than the first-test-year students. This suggests that students have learned Foreign Language Activities in elementary school. However, Ogyu and Kaneshige pointed out that this study was just a case study, and did not show the general situation. Furthermore, his study was conducted in a junior high school affiliated with a university.

Additionally, MEXT (2013) announced the plan for English language education looking towards the Tokyo Olympics, 2020, which stated that 'Foreign Language' will be a subject in elementary school in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 'Foreign Language Activities' would start in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

According to this situation, research questions were set as follows;

What are the effects of Foreign Language Activities shown in junior high school classes?

How do the effects change in junior high school classes?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

A junior high school in Shizuoka is the participant school, which is located in downtown Shizuoka City. Its students enter from three nearby elementary schools. All students from one elementary school enter this junior high school, whereas the other two, only a portion of the students enter here.

This junior high school is an ordinary public junior high school, which does not involve in any consultation or cooperation with elementary schools.

Two English teachers were participants of this study. Teacher A had seventeen-years of experience of teaching English at the junior high school level and Teacher B had nineteen-years of teaching experience. Both teachers were female. More biographical information will be described in the next section.

### 2.2 Observation

Two English teachers' first grade classes were observed in April and June, 2014. The observations were conducted twice in the last two weeks in of April, and once in the beginning of June. Two video cameras were set at the back of the classroom.

The classes were carried out as usual and no special instructions were given to the teachers.

*Total* (Gakkotosho) is the approved textbook in Shizuoka City.

## 2.3 Analysis

The videos were transcribed and analyzed using the qualitative method. The focus of the analysis was different in April and June, and will be described in the next section.

Structure-Constructive Qualitative Research Method (SCQRM) (Saijo, 2007, 2008) was used as a framework. It defines that researchers can decide everything related to their research according to their interests, such as research tools, participants, etc.

Based upon SCQRM, Grounded theory approach (Saiki, 2008) was used as a way of concrete analysis. The following are the procedures used:

- 1) According the focus, data is labeled.
- 2) The labeled data is categorized by meaning.
- 3) The correlations between the categorized labels are considered and shown in the figure.

## 3. Result & Discussion

### 3.1 April Observations

#### 3.1. 1 Class information and focus

Preliminary observations were conducted in April to see students who had just entered junior high school. Table 1 displays the information of the two teachers and observed classes.

Table 1  
*April Class Information*

	April 23	April 30
Teacher A -Female -17 <sup>th</sup> year of teaching experience -belong to 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	(Third class) -First greetings -Alphabet penmanship phonics	(sixth class) -Textbook How are you? listening -Alphabet penmanship phonics
Teacher B -Female -19 <sup>th</sup> year of teaching experience -belong to 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	(Third class) -First greetings -Alphabet penmanship phonics	(ninth class) -Color -Alphabet penmanship phonics

On April 23, the third class of the term, the content of both classes was almost the same. At the beginning of the year, greetings and the alphabet were the main focus of the class. On April 30, Teacher A's class was the sixth and Teacher B's class was the ninth. This difference came from the faculty development meetings

. The contents of the class varied slightly. However, the main focus was the alphabet.

Two focuses were set to analyze the classes:

- 1) A positive attitude toward communication
- 2) Sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages

These were taken from the aim of Foreign Language Activities in the Course of Study.

### 3.1.2 April Results

In "A positive attitude toward communication", <applying> was categorized. The following is an excerpt from 'in conversation':

S: Please give me a sticker.

T: Sure, which one do you want? Here you are.

S: Thank you.

T: You are welcome, great!

\*S=students, T=teacher

Students who could achieve the goal in the communication activity asked the teacher to give them a sticker for reward. The teacher did not tell them to speak in English, but they spoke in English.

The next is an excerpt from a label 'in a reaction':

T: Hello.

S: Hello.

T: Oh, I'm happy. My name is (teacher's name), please call me (teacher's name).

S: (Laughing) Yes, Yes

T: Thank you! Nice to meet you.

S: (Laughing)

\*Original text in both English and Japanese.

T: Hello.

S: Hello.

T: おー, うれしいね。 My name is (教員名), please call me (教員名) .

S: (笑い) Yes, Yes

T: Thank you! Nice to meet you.

S: (笑い)

When the teacher tried to show the model for the communicative activity, students showed an unexpected reaction to the teacher.

These two excerpts show that students tried to react to the teacher by using what they had learned in Foreign Language Activities. Thus, students try to apply what they learned in Foreign Language Activities.

In “Sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages”, labels were ‘phrases’ and ‘words’, which were categorized into <conformation from teachers>, <Question from students>, <students’ murmuring>. Following is an excerpt from ‘phrases’ of <conformation from teachers>.

T: Well, first say hello.

How do you say, ‘jibun no namae ha’, ‘watashi no namae ha’?

S: My name is...

\*Original text in both English and Japanese.

T: そうですね。こんにちは、とまず言ってからね。「自分の名前は」、「私の名前は」  
って英語でなんて言う？

S: My name is...

In this excerpt, students answered the teacher’s question in English. Another one is excerpted from ‘words’.

T: Look at this? What color?

S: Green

T: It’s Green. Oh, it’s light green.

What color is green in Japanese?

S: Midori.

T: It’s green. So, it’s lighter color than green.

Right, it’s light green.

‘Light’ means ‘karui’ .

Say, light green.

\*Original text in both English and Japanese.

T: これ What color?

S: Green

T: Green ですね。Oh, light green ですね。これ, green って何色なの。

S: 緑

T: 緑だね。で、緑よりちょっと軽い色ですね。そう, light green. light 「軽い」  
って意味ね。はい light green

This excerpt shows the introduction of colors. The teacher walked around classroom and pick up pen cases, asking students the colors.

The next excerpt shows ‘words’ of <Question from students>.

S1: Teacher, ‘raito’ means... that is .... right or left?

T: Right

S1: Raito?

T: Right. This is 'light.'

S1: light...

\*Original text in both Japanese and English.

S1: 先生, ライトって, あの・・・ 右とか左のライト?

T: Right

S1: ライト?

T: Right. これは light

S1: light...

\*S1= one of the students

A student who knew 'right', but did not know 'light' wondered and asked the teacher. This excerpt shows that a student who had learned Foreign Language Activities realized a new similar word.

The next excerpt shows 'words' of <students' murmuring>.

T: Open your textbook to page 3. Three...

S2: San ban.

\*Original text in both Japanese and English.

T: Open your textbook to page 3. Three...

S2: 三番。

\*S2= one of the students

When the teacher told the textbook page, one of the students murmured the page number in Japanese.

### 3.1.3 April Discussion

Class observations in April suggested that "A positive attitude toward communication" was revealed in students' 'reaction' and 'conversation', which showed that students tried to apply what they had learned in Foreign Language Activities. This demonstrates students' motivation

On the other hand, "Sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages" could be seen in 'phrases' and 'words', which were categorized into <confirmation from teachers>, <Question from students>, <students' murmuring>. This demonstrates not only students' motivation but also teachers' belief in the connection with Foreign Language Activities.

### 3.2 Interviews for two teachers

Interviews of the two teachers were conducted to further understand their teaching philosophy and methodology and how they tried to connect with the Foreign Language Activities. The interviews were semi-structured and questions were added according to the interview. The contents of the question included two points: 1) about teaching

English, 2) about bridging between elementary schools and junior high.

Table 2 shows the result of the interviews focusing on ‘belief of teaching’ and ‘way of connection.’

Table 2  
*Interview Results*

	About teaching English	About connection
Teacher A -17 <sup>th</sup> year of teaching experience	-to make students communicate with their friends	-relationship between sounds and spelling -eye contact
Teacher B -19 <sup>th</sup> year of teaching experience	-rhythm	-using games of Foreign Language Activities -to connect sounds and letters

Teacher A tried to encourage her students to communicate with their friends in the class. The classes in April suggested that she took a large amount of time for communicative activities. On the other hand, Teacher B pointed out ‘rhythm.’ It proved that chants were used in her class in April.

Concerning the connection with elementary school, Teacher A suggested that she focused on the ‘relationship between sounds and spelling’, and eye contact. Teacher B suggested that using games of Foreign Language Activities and to connect sounds and letters were focuses.

According to the interview, both of the teachers focus the connection of sounds and letters. Yorozuya, etc.(2013) suggest that junior high school teachers worried about the poor understanding of letters and they focus on the connection of sounds and letters.

### 3.3 June Observations

Follow up observations were conducted again in June to further investigate any changes.

#### 3.3.1 Class information and focus

The observation was conducted on June 4. Table 3 shows the information of the classes.

Table 3  
*June Class Information*

	June 4
Teacher A	-Explanation of mid-term exam -Phonics Bingo game -Plurals
Teacher B	-Vowel and consonant - Phonics -Alphabet penmanship -I like~.

Both teachers handled phonics using penmanship. Teacher A explained plurals, which is in Lesson 2 of the textbook. Teacher B explained vowels and consonants, and explained 'I like ~' from the textbook.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, the focus for the observation in June was as follows:

- 1) the relationship between sounds and spelling for Teacher A,
- 2) to connect sounds and letters for Teacher B.

### 3.3.2 June Results

In the class of Teacher A, 'relationship between sounds and spelling' was the focus. The following is an excerpt from the class:

Ta: You all have been trying hard to learn sound of consonant and vowel. When you listen carefully, I'll read twice, you'll understand 'Uh, that word' in twice. Ok, now, shall we start? Are you ready?

S: Yes.

Ta: Are you ready?

S: Yes.

Ta: Yes, OK. Ready, start! NUT, NUT. How do you spell?

S: N U T

Ta: N U T, good. OK, next word. BED, BED. How do you spell?

\*Original text in both Japanese and English.

Ta: みんなが、ここんどこ一生懸命やってる、子音の音、母音の音。よーく聞いていると、あたし、2回読むけど、2回で、「あ、この単語だ」とわかると思います。はい、それでは、早速ですが始めますよ。いいですか。

S: はい。

Ta: Are you ready?

S: Yes.

Ta: Yes, OK. Ready, start! NUT, NUT. How do you spell?

S: N U T

Ta: N U T, good. OK, next word. BED, BED. How do you spell?

\*Ta= Teacher A

Teacher A included the checking of relationship of sound and spelling in the Bingo game. This excerpt suggests Teacher A's belief of the connection. However, Teacher A took time to make students just repeat like this excerpt.

'To connect sounds and letters' was the focus of Teacher B. The following is an excerpt from the class:

Tb: I wonder if you are hard to see in blue. Let me know if someone cannot see. I'll write in different color.

If you say 'no', this always comes with. This appears. You can already read this.

OK. Say.

S: Do not.

\*Original text in both in Japanese and English.

Tb: 青見えにくいかな。見えないっていう人いたら、言ってね。

別のチョークで書くから。No と言ったら、こっちな、必ずセット。

この子が出てくるの。もうみんな読めるよ。はい、どうぞ。

S: Do not.

\*Tb= Teacher B

Teacher B asked students to remember the connection of sounds and letters in the conformation of grammar.

### 3.3.3 June Discussion

As the observation shows, both teachers considered their belief of the connection of Foreign Language Activities. Teacher A focused on the 'relationship between sounds and spelling', as was seen in the Bingo game. However, students had to repeat the same words, which made the class monotonous.

On the other hand, Teacher B focused on 'To connect sounds and letters,' as seen in the explanation of grammar. She asked students to identify the sounds and letters. However, there were few chances for students to speak and talk.

## 4. Conclusion

Figure 1 represents the analysis of the observation results. The effects of Foreign Language Activities appeared in students' attitude and their words in April classes. "A positive attitude toward communication" was seen in students' 'reaction' and

'conversation', in which they tried to apply what they had learned in elementary school. "Sounds and expressions of foreign languages" appeared in students' using 'phrases' and 'words' when the teacher confirmed students' understanding, students asked questions, and a student murmured. These effects came from students' motivation and the teachers' belief in the connection with Foreign Language Activities, which was confirmed in the interviews with the teachers. Their focus of connection with Foreign Language Activities is a desire to connect sounds and letters.

In the June classes, both teachers considered their belief of the connection of Foreign Language Activities. However, chances for students' 'reaction' or 'conversation', which was seen in April, decreased. Instead, teachers made students repeat 'words' or 'phrases' in June, which made classes monotonous. Although the focus of the observation was different between April and June, students showed less 'positive attitude toward communication'.

Summarizing the above results, two points can be suggested as follows:

- 1) Additional planning for improving "a positive attitude toward communication" is needed in junior high school.
- 2) Some planning for handling sounds and letters in both elementary schools and junior high schools is needed.

Considering the Course of Study of Foreign Language Activities in both elementary school (MEXT, 2008a) and English in junior high school (MEXT, 2008b), communication is one of the important aims. However, students exhibited "a positive attitude toward communication" less in June than in April because the teachers focused more on connecting sounds and letters. The key to solving this issue is how to handle letters in elementary school. As mention above, MEXT announced the change of English education in elementary school, which stated that students would have some experience of learning letters in elementary school. If the time permitted for learning letters in junior high school were to be reduced, the time for communication could be increased.

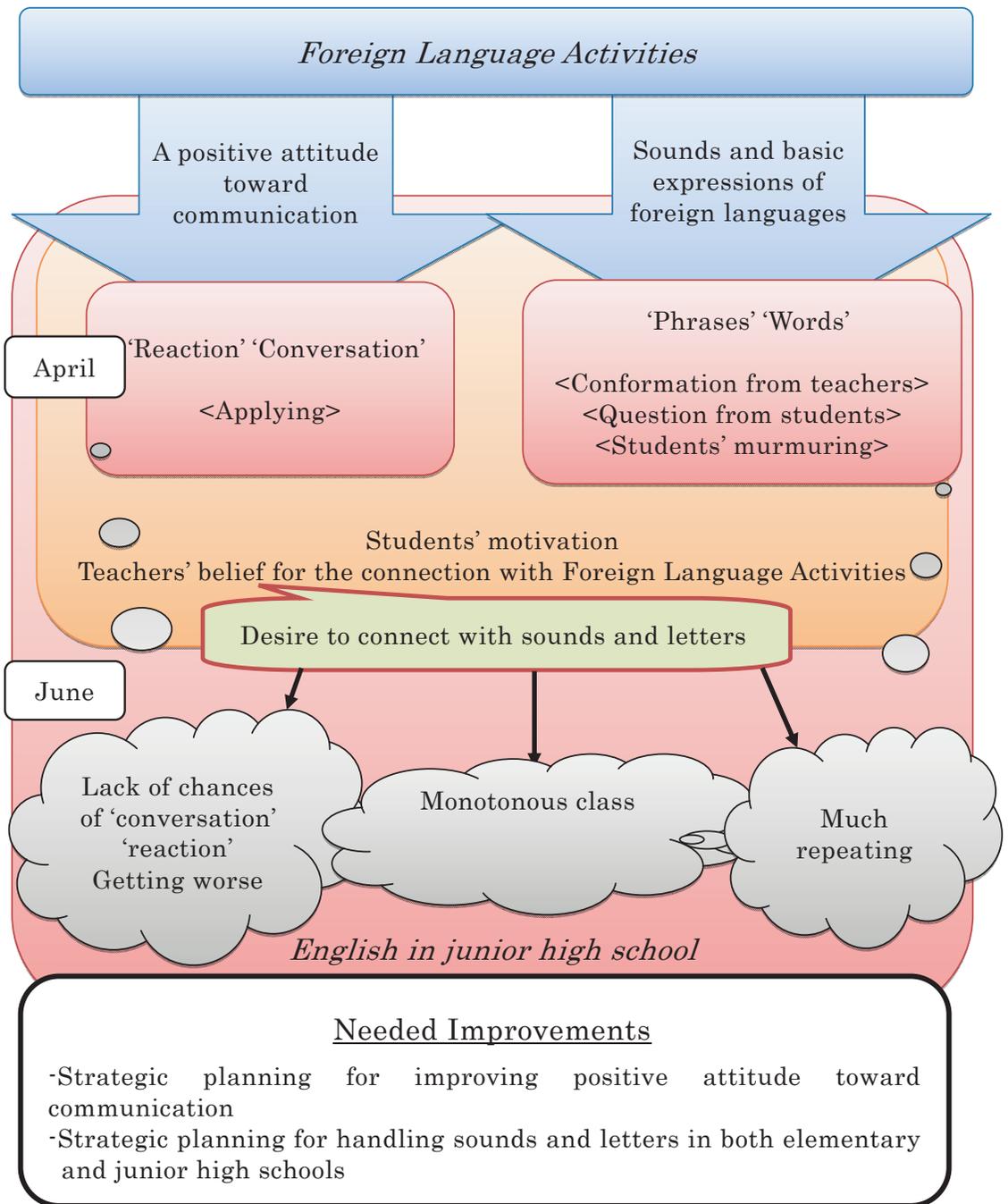


Figure 1. Effect and impact of Foreign Language Activities appeared in junior high school English classes

## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank students and teachers who gave us the opportunity to observe their classes.

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