Task-based EFL Curriculum Now:
Implementation at Junior College

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　日本の将来の指導者は自発的で自立していて，よいコミュニケーターであることが必要とされています。文科省は，この目標を達成できるようにと教育者に呼びかけています（高村文科相2016）。CEFR情報に基づいた英語のカリキュラムは，重要な役割を担っています。しかしながら，短大のコミュニケーションコースで主流の現在のPPPモデルは英語が苦手になる原因の一つだと信じられています。そこで，なぜ今カリキュラムの変化が可能なのか，そして限られた時間の中で，最良の成果を出すための方法として，2回シリーズの最初のパートとして議論します。より効果的な英語学習カリキュラムの改革への近道として，タスクベースの語学学習とプロジェクトベースの指示と評価の組み合わせを提示します。以下の3つの要素が重要となります。1．自立した学習と生涯学習の戦略　2．モチベーション　3．評価。この新しいカリキュラムは短期間で変えられて持続可能です。この裏付けとなるデータはリーディングや実地研究，授業の観察から集めました。

Introduction

　The current situation at the junior colleges in Japan can be characterized as follows. Too few graduates measure up to the workforce and university entrance requirements for English proficiency. This has been the case for many years. Students consistently score below average on written standardized English tests, such as EIKEN, TOEFL, TOEIC and ACE. Most importantly, they are unable to communicate confidently and effectively with other speakers of English. A large section of first-year students arriving at junior colleges come from situations that resulted in low entrance exam scores, low English competency, very little confidence in their abilities and even less motivation to try. Due to educational policies requiring assistant language teacher (ALT) presence at both primary and secondary level, a good number of freshmen have had native-taught classes and as such have had to use English to communicate. This does not seem to have added much to student confidence and motivation to use/practice English. A questionnaire was taken among a test group of fifty-three to attempt to measure the progression of use of English in daily life, interest in other countries and student outlook on using English in the future. (See Appendix A for more detailed information on the questionnaire and test group). Results provide an indication of how interest in English and other countries increases between high school and sophomore year at junior college, while the expected use of English in the future drops slightly. Clearly interest and future use in studies and/or the workplace do not lead to the use of or practice of English in daily life. In fact, the junior college seniors use and/or practice English less in daily life, which could be one of the causes for a lack of communicative ability post-graduation. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a need for a structured English as a Foreign language curriculum with a focus on communicative ability (see Figure 1).

　Some freshmen later come to realize that English competency requirements at junior college present a

rather high threshold. In addition, the value attributed to standardized language testing by the job market and universities often still comes as a shock. The added pressure of having only two years to reach the required level and range of competencies in order to graduate naturally affects student attitudes. Compared to university students who have 4 years to achieve a similar level of improvement, junior college students deal with a substantial amount of pressure to pass their courses.
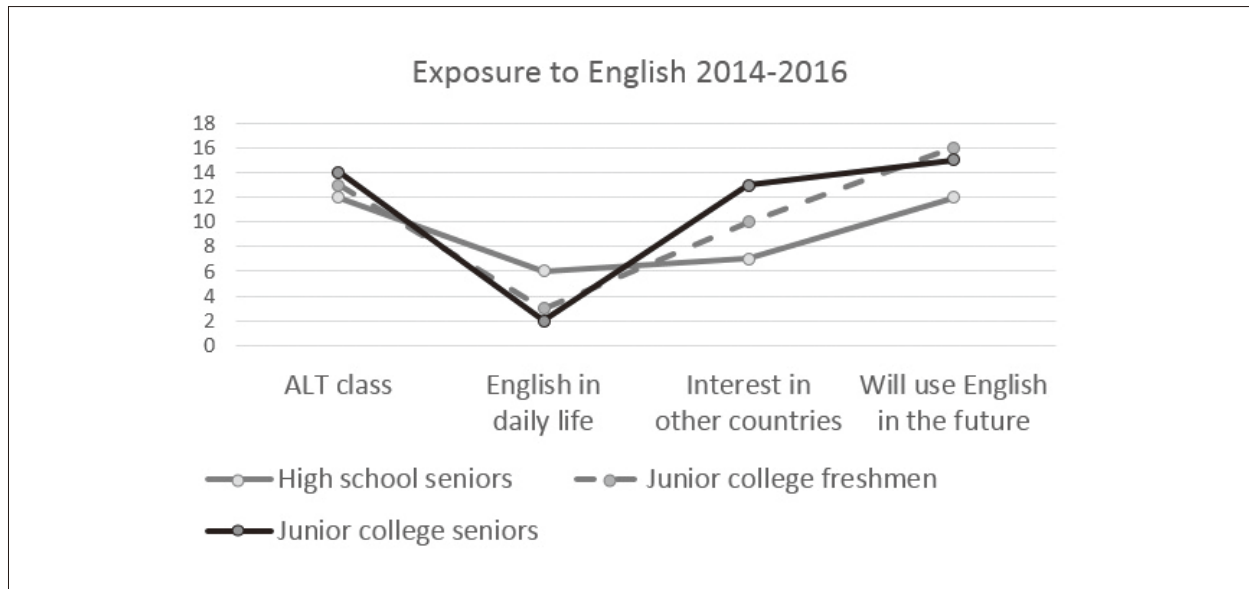
Figure 1. Exposure to English from High school seniors to junior college sophomores (2014-2016). This figure highlights the positive replies gathered from a total of 53 students.

One of the most recognizable and troubling results attributed to score-based, graduation requirements for mandatory English courses is a high-level of stress that can lead to truancy and drop outs. A vicious circle often ensues in which junior college graduates continue to score very low and do poorly on university transfer tests. Examples of adverse consequences include students being denied access to study abroad programs, and jobs at international-minded companies.

Since competency in English plays such an instrumental part in student advancement at junior college, first-years can benefit from an English curriculum that is inclusive and supportive of all English skill-levels. In addition, second-years need encouragement on the one hand in order to stay the course and multiple evaluation moments throughout the school year to show what they are capable of. An effective reform can manifest this best-case scenario: junior college graduates with enough confidence and self-knowledge to create avenues for growth at their future workplace or continued studies at university. According to Farrell and Jacobs (2010), fostering the following competencies are considered essential to successful learning environments: independent learning and life-long learning strategies, motivation and assessment. One way to prioritize these competencies in the junior college curriculum is to implementation task-based language instruction principles.

Task-based language teaching or instruction (TBLT or TBI) is an approach that many practitioners abroad and in Japan have shown interest in over the years. Global English teaching conferences regularly feature (action) research, show and tells as well as workshops highlighting TBLT theory and aspects of its application in the classroom. The continued interest can be explained by the position that "the goals of a TBI approach to language teaching theoretically match the communicative demands of learning English as a Foreign Language as a means of communication. Furthermore, multiple aspects of second language acquisition (SLA) theory and

knowledge support the argument that TBI is a valid approach to developing communicative competences" (Ducker, 2012, p. 3-13). Bygate's research (2009) further supports this idea by showing how well TBLT fits a multi-level, non-specialist learning environment, such as junior college communicative English courses.

Independent learning and life-long learning strategies

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture recognizes the importance of life-long learning strategies and includes it in its Basic Act on Education. The goal is to allow all citizens to refine themselves and lead a fulfilling life (MEXT, 2006). In the case of young, Japanese language learners mastering these strategies comes with the pre-requisite acquisition of independence in learning. Key figures in the field of TBLT research and practitioners agree that independent learning strategies are essential to achieving long-term competency in a foreign language (Ingleby, Joyce, & Powell, 2011). In fact, Zimmerman (2002, p.66) goes as far as to say that "self-regulation of learning involves more than detailed knowledge of a skill; it involves the self-awareness, self-motivation, and behavioral skill to implement that knowledge appropriately." Students who can recognize their strengths and weaknesses can more effectively participate and collaborate on projects. Many Japanese, high school graduates come to junior colleges from classrooms that are still teacher-centered. Therefore, students must be provided with the tools to control their own learning process, and the opportunity to adjust to a new way of studying. starting in their first year at tertiary education institutes.

Anecdotal evidence was gathered that supports the above premise that most junior college freshmen do not yet use tools to control their own learning. They seem to still be used to the passive PPP model of learning. Appendix B shows the results of a recent "How do I like to learn English?" questionnaire taken by junior college students. The questionnaire, adapted from the original created by Finch and Hyun (2000, p.19), makes 17 positive statements about how students like to study. Students answer with "Yes" or "No" to indicate their preference. It was taken by 13 first year and 4 second year junior college students at the start of the 2016-2017 school year. Only the "yes" responses were considered in order to discover towards which approach students have a "Can Do" attitude. The goal was to both encourage students to think about their own learning style (self-knowledge) and see how independent they could be in class. The overall results indicate an overexposure to teacher-centered classrooms, as can be concluded from the high numbers in the sections: reading in class, teacher explains everything, asking other students for help (questions 1, 5 and, 16). On the other hand, questions 8, 14 and 17 could indicate interest in teaching styles featuring group work and peer-assisted study. These elements feature prominently in task-based learning. A need to introduce students to a more autonomous, task-based model of learning is implied.

Unfortunately, task-based language teaching has been dismissed in the Japanese context of secondary and tertiary education for the following reasons. Sato (2010, p.193) posits that "Japanese students are still being given traditional high-stakes tests such as end-term tests or tests for entrance examinations, which include reading and sometimes writing and even listening, but not speaking. There is therefore a mismatch between examinations and task-based language teaching." On the other hand, practitioners in tertiary education advocating for TBI, propose that there is no longer a need to focus on grammar instruction as it is only *part* of communicative competence (Canale and Swain,1980). According to Long (2014) any use of TBI principles with beginners is essentially focused on language input that excludes grammar teaching. Ellis (2009) counters with a more flexible stance that allows for grammar in the input stage. He even states: "All advocates of TBLT see a role for grammar methodologically. Potentially, attention to form (including grammatical form) can figure in all three phases of a task-based lesson, p. 221-246."

From the perspective of teachers and their students, TBI's flexibility, adaptability and focus on the learner are what produce some of the best practices in fluency instruction (Rasinski, Blachowicz, & Lems, 2012). For example, Saito (2015) introduced CEFR-based language portfolios as a way to simultaneously increase self-regulated learning and intrinsic motivation among TOEIC 250-270 students with positive results. Brown implemented language passports as a department-wide assessment tool leading to positive student feedback (Brown, 2015). Both Storch (2013) and Liyanage (2012) agree that focus-on-the-learner in the wider, Asian TBI context involves scaffolding of input and collaboration as the means to an end for language production. Therefore, TBI and assessment has a good chance of fostering the desired independent learner as opposed to teacher-centered PPP, of which results are said to be limited preparation for tests.

The benefits of introducing learners to self-directed study early on becomes clear after exploring the difficulties older learners are currently faced with. The following real life scenario may clarify the connection between older learners and junior college graduates. A large group of learners in the age bracket of 30-75, consisting of teachers, workers, retirees and volunteers choose to "improve" their English through an NPO. What sets them apart from other *eikaiwa* students, is the fact that they intend to use English in the near future for work or are already using it at their current workplace. In addition, this NPO uses TBI. A questionnaire taken by members of this English study group showed that these learners have had to consider their goals as well as their own strengths and weaknesses before choosing a group. Older learners expected to learn from their peers and contrary to the thinking of many junior college students were not at all embarrassed by activities such as peer review. Though reasons for continued studies varied, all members were highly motivated to succeed. Here, success was defined as achieving personal competency goals. Finally, many life-long language learners wish they had learned how to study independently at an earlier age.

There are some who claim that TBI is not a viable approach in the Japanese context because teachers have minimum resources to create tasks and task-based textbooks are not available in Japan. Newton (2015) offers that following the trend, most EFL textbooks pretend to be task-based, but often turn out to only have been *taskified*. Taskification can best be explained as 'missing the point.' Textbook activities often don't qualify as 'tasks', because they lack communicative outcomes & structured opportunities to engage higher order thinking skills. In TBI getting students to convey meaning should be the ultimate goal of a task. For students to engage fully, such communications must be personalized i.e. made relevant to the here and now. This requires the flexibility that open tasks offer. Unfortunately, these aspects are not often included in so-called task-based texts. The lack of task-based textbook is a real issue, however technology has made independent learning and self-directed assessment much easier. Teaching conferences in Japan have teachers showcasing examples of *tech-aided* lessons in autonomous and collaborative learning environments. Technology-assisted task-based lessons free up teachers from administrative work, allowing the teacher more time to fulfill the role of monitor. This means more one-on-one interaction with and direct feedback for students.

Technology-assisted anything is thought to come with a price tag. Budgetary concerns cause many to dismiss this learning aids out of hand. It is important to remember however that most students are tech-savvy in their everyday lives. They already use smart phones, tablets and PCs to streamline communication and scheduling. Due to the advancements in mobile device efficiency and connectivity, it is not surprising some opt to not purchase PCs at all. Using technology to independently increase language competency is a natural next step. It is important that students be introduced to both the idea and the various technological options available as part of their life-long language learning skills arsenal (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). Efficient use of time for study and work outside of the classroom should remain the learner's responsibility and familiar

technology facilitates this. Figure 2 shows actual percentages of a representative group of 53 junior college students at the start of the school year, relating to the four most commonly owned electronic devices that can be used in task-based activities. For exact numbers, see Appendix C.
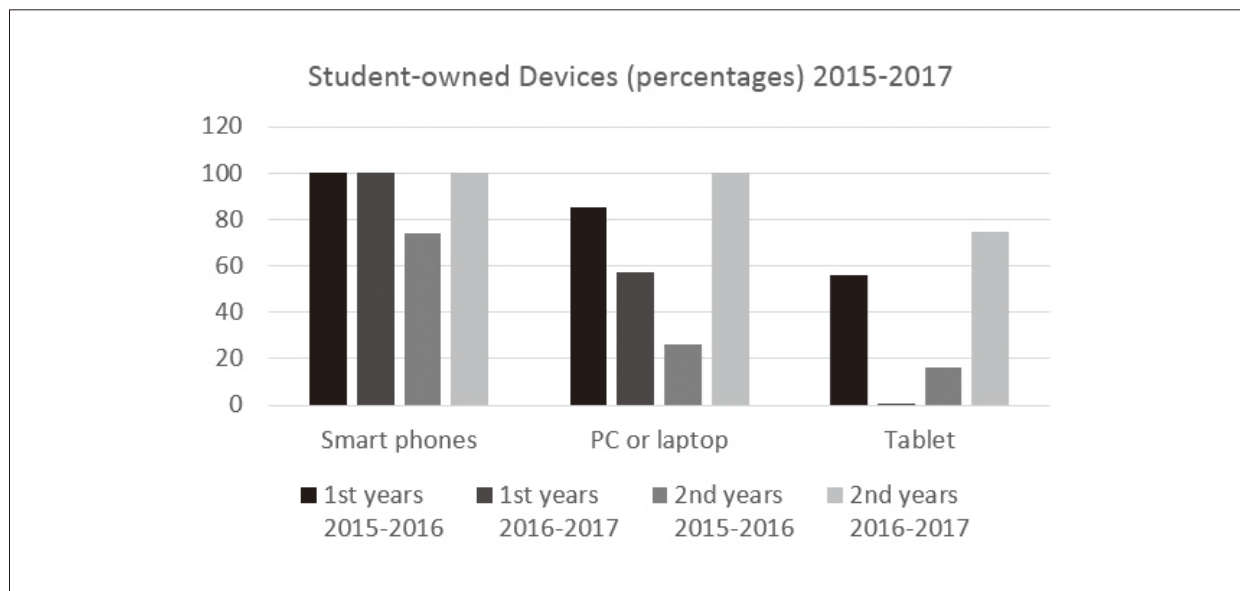

Figure 2. Student-owned devices 2015-2017. This figure shows which devices students own that can be used in class for tasks.

Motivation. Learning to do something is time and energy consuming for both the young and the experienced. Young children often feel they have mastered something if they can do it by themselves. They will attempt the task over and over, preferably under the *hands-off* supervision of an adult. They keep trying until they succeed. Right after they will search for a new challenge and attempt to tackle it using what they have learned. One can conclude that self-reliance, self-confidence and motivation are inextricably linked. Therefore, learner-centered teaching must inevitably give priority to nurturing self-motivation.

At many junior colleges across Japan students are taking communicative English classes with a native teacher from their first semester. To get an idea of these students' level of confidence in their own language learning ability, a questionnaire was given to a group of 14 students enrolled in first year and a group of 4 students enrolled in second year mandatory English courses. These two groups filled out a 20-question self-assessment profile to gage their self-confidence (see Appendix D). The profile was created by Finch (Accessed, 2014) and used in its original form. Students indicate on a scale of 1-5 to what degree they agree or disagree with the 20 positive statements. *False* is worth 1 or 2 points, *Maybe* amounts to 3 points, and *True* is valued at 4 or 5 points. Figure 3 shows the averaged results per answer; results from 4-5 are considered indicators of a basic level of confidence. It seems that freshman confidence barely changes after the first year of study. The registered change is a decrease in confidence with a majority of 'maybe' answers. This leads us to believe that adjustments to the curriculum are required in order to support and increase self-confidence in junior college graduates. One can conclude from the figure that freshman confidence barely changes after one year of study. As most junior college English programs do not pay special attention to or nurture self-confidence, students are left to use grades from written tests as confidence builders. The registered change is caused by a decrease in confidence due to an increase in 'maybe' answers. This leads us to believe that adjustments to the curriculum may be required in order to support and increase self-confidence in junior college graduates. An increase in

self-confidence (in one's own ability) is commonly believed to lead to an increase in motivation to participate in class.
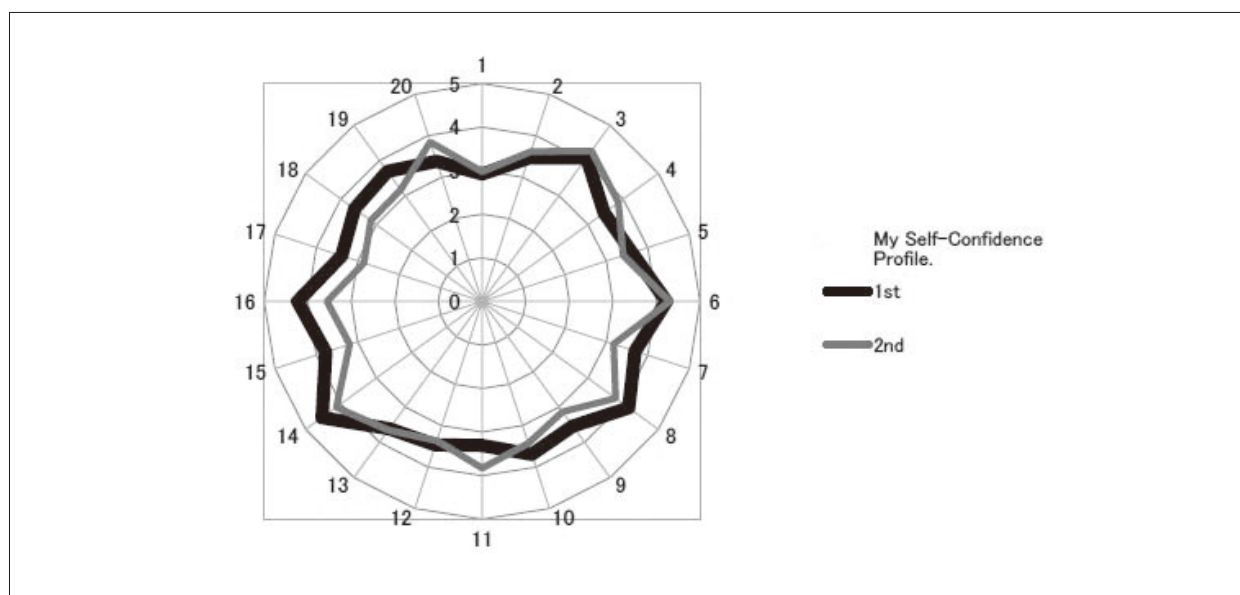
Figure 3. Results from Finch's My Self-confidence profile. No significant change is seen between the first and second year.

At junior college level, TBI offers students tasks to be mastered with hands-off supervision, promoting self-reliance. The tasks will ideally have some relevance to a student's real-life interests or future circumstances. This aspect can be built on, by presenting real-life examples of successful Japanese communicators using English at home and abroad. Students have the opportunity to shake the fallacy of English being useless and only words on a page. English can generate interest with tasks involving research, presenters and emulating real examples of effective communicators to improve (Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011).

Scaffolding is one of the corner stones of task-based activities and its value is in broadening the application of new language through small steps. In a multi-level classroom smaller steps with practice tasks allow students with lower competency to participate and achieve success at the same rate as higher competency level students. Being able to keep up with the group is a confidence booster and lowers the embarrassment threshold. Increasing confidence creates a thrust of motivation to keep trying.

Collaboration is another aspect of TBI that can help students build confidence and generate motivation. It is also a critical life-long learning skill. Working in a group and contributing to a joint result implies the presence of peer support. However, group dynamics affect in-class learning, especially in an TBI environment (Dornyei & Murphy, 2003). Group dynamics could give rise to negative peer pressure. Among Japanese tertiary students of English this takes the shape of a dichotomy between the *Fellowship* and the *Competence* face (Takeda, 2015). This interaction countermands effective and fair collaboration on tasks. The effects of *fellowship and competence* face should be pre-emptively addressed through the restructuring of tasks using "Can do" statements. Choosing to stress the *fellowship face* could help students feel more obliged to "do their part," possibly leading to inclusion, appreciation of abilities by others and a sense of responsibility towards a group goal. Conversely, collaboration should always allow for different perspectives and, support self-evaluation through peer evaluation in a safe environment. As long as collaboration leads to higher competence, students do not need to worry about losing *competence* face.

Assessment. Currently, most junior college English curricula show a prevalence of teaching to the standardized test. Testing and assessment are two facets of the learning process which are often confused (Brown 2015). The goal of assessment is to check for competency and give autonomous learners a chance to recognize their weaknesses and strengths. These would then be used to formulate new learning goals. With institutions' recent desire to apply CEFR guidelines, many junior colleges find themselves having to adjust curricula to promote communicative competency at higher levels. This means preparing students to advance from basic level A to independent and subsequently advanced user level B (The Council of Europe, 2012). Junior college students have consistently scored at A-level on entrance exams. These exams usually do not include a speaking section. Yet the same type of standardized testing is erroneously used throughout the school year to assess student progress. This common procedure is based on a fallacy that creates false expectations of improvement in freshmen, decreased motivation and disappointment in sophomores. In other words, English curricula tend to only use MEXT-endorsed CEFR guidelines to categorize textbooks and *describe* student ability. Standard English courses do not tend to consistently work towards *CEFR learning outcomes*, which are learning goals meant to increase student competency. Setting effective learning outcomes then becomes the first task in creating a unilateral English curriculum.

Students must often take an additional, national, standardized test regardless of their "course assessment" scores to satisfy future workplace demands. Future workplaces require test scores from TOEIC, TOEFL or IELTS and as such preparatory courses still have their place. However, preparatory courses, generally speaking, make up only a small part of the English curriculum. Since their learning outcomes are limited to attaining one-time, high scores, the remaining English courses can easily shift focus to improving communicative competencies. Assessment guidelines must be clear and cover only skills and language presented during instruction. In short, in order to come to a sustainable English curriculum, we must replace testing in communicative English classes with accurate, motivating and formative assessment.

Subsequently, the CEFR standards could be more effectively applied if the institutions were to implement in-course assessment in combination with project-based, final assessment. Continuous assessment takes varying learning preferences into account and allows for a rotation of assessment styles among students. In comparison to university students, junior college students only have 2 years to show progress and become independent users of English (CEFR, 2012). As such, they have a more urgent need of a structured and interconnected curriculum with clearly formulated learning outcomes. These outcomes can consolidate two years of inter-related topics and language input, leading to a final project that assesses students on what they have actually studied and the competencies they possess.

The most recent international conference on TBLT: Tasks for Real in Belgium (2015) showcased several, collaborative projects as final assessment. Student and teacher feedback included concerns such as the amount of time and skill required of individual teachers to create and monitor these projects. Institutional reticence to procuring new materials and/or facilities due to recent budget cuts were also mentioned. Furthermore, students who are already used to relatively narrow content and predictable testing may show some resistance to the level of independence asked of them in and outside of class. Having to make their own guidelines to meet project requirements is a challenge many are unaccustomed to. Thankfully, solutions were offered as well. Useful suggestions and learning experiences were shared by a number of schools that have been trying to implement collaborative projects as final assessment. At one institution English teachers banded together, divided tasks equally amongst themselves and planned feedback sessions. Others learned the importance of keeping the lines of communication open and short (Sato, 2010). Since tasks and other materials were created

by teachers, no new textbooks were purchased. Student resistance was compensated for by scheduling weekly consultation dates in advance, with both teachers and project members. Planning and cooperation seemed to be the two main contributors to their success.

Conclusion. Junior college students taking mandatory English courses are said to exhibit high-levels of stress, which may in turn be the cause for the cases of truancy and low scores. My recommendation for junior colleges is the implementation of a TBI system that supports learner motivation by providing consistency through familiarity. Additionally, nurturing life-long learning strategies may help students learn to effectively participate and collaborate on projects. In comparison to university students, junior college students only have two years to become competent users of English. Conclusions based on results from action research initiated by teachers seem to suggest that a much more structured and interconnected curriculum is needed. Clearly formulated learning outcomes and fair testing are given high priority. As Ducker (2012) said, "On balance, some form of carefully implemented task-based instruction can and should supplement English as a Foreign Language Curriculum, provided that it suits the communicative needs of the students and is tested fairly." Two years of practicing independent learning skills may well be enough to soften the impact of "culture shock" on both students transferring to university and students entering the workforce. A best-case scenario sees them adjusting well and building on learning strategies they acquired in junior college.

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Appendix

Appendix A: "Exposure to English from High school seniors to junior college sophomores (2014-2016)."

The test group can be subdivided into 18 high school seniors, 16 junior college freshmen and 19 seniors. The students included in this group were Japanese nationals studying at typical, Japanese schools. None were children from international marriages, alumni of immersion programs or part of families who have previously functioned as homestay families. The questionnaire consisted of 8 questions, of which only 4 were considered for this chart:

1. Have you had a native teacher/ALT in (junior) high school?
2. Do you use English in your daily life?
3. Are you interested in other countries?
4. Will you use English in the future?

	ALT class	English in daily life	Interest in other countries	Will use English in the future	Total Informants
High school seniors	12	6	7	12	18
Junior college freshmen	13	3	10	16	16
Junior college seniors	14	2	13	15	19

Appendix B: "How do I like to learn English?" questionnaire, featuring 17 positive statements about learning styles

Positive Statements about Learning Styles		YES: Responses
1	I like to learn by reading in class.	10
2	I like to play language games in class.	9
3	I like to learn by speaking in class.	6
4	I like to have a textbook.	8
5	I like the teacher to explain everything.	13
6	I like the teacher to tell me my mistakes.	11
7	I like to study in pairs in class.	7
8	I like to study in groups in class.	13
9	I like to study outside of class.	6
10	I like to study grammar.	6
11	I like to study new words.	9
12	I like to watch TV in English.	8
13	I like to talk to native speakers.	5
14	I like to think about my progress.	4
15	I like to visit the teacher in his/her room.	5
16	I like to ask the teacher for help.	10
17	I like to ask other students for help.	12

Appendix C: Student-owned devices 2015-2017

Student-owned Devices (percentages) 2015-2017			
	Smart phones	PC or laptop	Tablet
1st years 2015-2016	100	85	56
1st years 2016-2017	100	57	1
2nd years 2015-2016	74	26	16
2nd years 2016-2017	100	100	75

Appendix D: My self-confidence profile statements

My self-confidence profile			
1. I have the ability to learn English.			
2. If I do my best, I will achieve my learning goals.			
3. I will improve if I continue to study.			
4. I like to speak in English in class.			
5. Trying to speak English is more important than accuracy.			
6. I like to study with my group members in class.			
7. My contribution is as important as anyone else's.			
8. I participate in all the activities in class.			
9. I participate even if I am embarrassed or nervous.			
10. I ask the teacher for help when needed.			
11. If I don't understand, I say so.			
12. I do my best, whatever the situation.			
13. I keep trying to learn, even if I am nervous.			
14. It is OK to make mistakes when practicing new language.			
15. I'm not bothered what other students think of my efforts.			
16. I'm not bothered what the teacher thinks of my efforts.			
17. I believe in myself. I trust myself.			
18. I trust my feelings and emotions.			
19. I think about my learning ("How am I doing?").			
20. I am a good language-learner.			