

## Junior College Students' Perception of English Skill Improvement

Christine Winskowski and Catlin Hanna

### Introduction

Since the inception of the Department of International Cultural Studies, a guiding principle has been the central role of foreign language study, and in particular American English study, in our two-year program. Accordingly, our program was constructed with a heavy emphasis on American English, complemented by content courses dealing with the culture of the United States and the United Kingdom as part of our Euro-American concentration. In addition, history, religion, other foreign languages, and a variety of other content courses are part of our regional and Asian studies concentrations.

Administration of the Institutional TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) at the beginning and end of the students' program has also been the practice since the beginning of the program. However, we are aware that criticism of the TOEFL has focused on the "monolithic" quality of this well-known test, its potential culture-boundedness, and its comparative inflexibility to reflect the specific dynamics of a particular program.

It is the latter point which motivated this study, namely to explore how we might develop a measurement of students' English that relate more directly to our program configuration. As a preliminary step, we wished to explore the students' perceptions of their English language skills, and how those skills had changed over the two-year period.

**English courses in the Department of International Cultural Studies.** The Department of International Cultural Studies at Morioka Junior College offers a two-year program that aims to give students a general introduction to international and intercultural relations with a background in Japanese history and culture, as well as knowledge about Western and Asian culture and thought.

Language study is considered an integral part of this program. The study of English receives heavy emphasis and is required each semester of the program. Currently, all students take three English classes each of their four semesters at the college. Additionally, students must take at least one semester of a second foreign language.

In the first semester, students take a general English class focusing on reading skills, a listening lab class and an English conversation class. In the second semester of the first year, students continue taking both the general English class and the conversation class. A composition class, however, replaces the listening lab. In the second year of the program, students take an English composition class, a business English course and English conversation. In their final semester, students continue the conversation class, take an additional listening lab class, and a newspaper reading class.

Additionally, students take Intercultural Communication (required), Comparison of Japan and America (elective), and American Society (elective), content classes taught in English by native speakers. Another 7 or 8 English-related content courses, including British culture, American re-

gional studies, history, social theory, philosophy, etc., are taught by Japanese faculty in one or both languages. Finally, there is an optional abroad course involving two weeks in the United States.

All classes (except abroad classes) meet once a week for ninety minutes. Among language classes, only the conversation classes and business English class are taught by native speakers. Students are grouped randomly for these classes the first year and in the second year are grouped by ability according to the results of the Institutional TOEFL and the assessment of the instructors.

**The study.** To determine how students' English skills changed as a function of our department's particular courses, during the fall semester of 2002 we constructed a pilot survey. In it, we identified a number of language skills that we felt reflected the content of the department's English courses. The survey was designed to have the students rate the level of their skills when they entered the college (to their best recollection), and the level of their skills as they finished the two-year program and prepared to graduate. Of course, students' recollections of their skill levels from nearly two years prior is of questionable validity; certainly, administering the survey at the time of entrance and at the time graduation would ensure greater validity of the students' ratings. However, since this was a pilot effort, we felt that asking the students to recall, as best they could, their skill levels at the beginning of their program would at least permit an initial "before and after" comparison of perceived skill change.

### **Method**

A pilot survey was constructed to have students indicate perceived changes in their English skills by rating themselves on 21 language skill items. These skills were identified by department faculty as corresponding to department course content. The survey was administered to the second-year students in the final week of the semester before they were to graduate. The students were given the survey in their English Conversation 2 classes, since as a required course, it would give us access to all the students within a two-day time period.

The survey, provided in Appendix 1, sought three types of information. The first was the students' ratings of their ability for 21 specific language skill items. The students provide two ratings for each skill item, one for their remembered abilities for the items on entering the Junior College, and one their current abilities on completing their two-year degree. The rating scale ranged from 1 (no English at all) to 7 (high advanced, easily use English in all situations).

Students were also asked to indicate some information about the circumstances of their study: Amount of class attendance, amount of time spent on homework, perceived level of difficulty of the classes, amount of effort, performance on the TOEFL, etc.

The third type of survey item invited students to provide general text responses to the whole English program. They were asked to explain in writing whether they found their English skills improved, and (if so) why. They were also asked to provide any other feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the English classes. One weakness of our survey, noted only after administration, was that there may have been some ambiguity in some survey items. Students may have been unclear whether the survey addressed skills developed from all the department's English classes or English Conversation only, where the survey was administered.

## Results

A total of 48 students completed the survey. Circumstances of study results are presented first to provide context for results of perceived increase of skill level and text responses.

**Circumstances of study.** Means for the students' numerical responses to these survey items were tabulated. The students indicated that on average they attended classes 86.1% of the time and completed 81.3% of the classwork and homework assigned. They said they spent an average of 1.5 hours per week on English homework. (Note that in view of this low figure, it may be that students were referring to their English Conversation homework only, not to the combined homework of their three English classes.) Regarding the degree of difficulty of their English classes, 7 felt the classes were too hard, 3 felt they were too easy, and 37 felt they were just right (1 person did not answer). Regarding their level of effort in the English classes, 4 said their effort was poor, 19 said it was fair, 22 said it was good, and 3 said their effort was excellent. A number of students apparently had studied English outside of class for a variety of purposes: 8 had studied in preparation for a university entrance exam; 2 indicated participation in study abroad; 4 had studied for a TOEFL test; 2 had studied for a TOEIC test; 3 had studied by television; and 8 indicated that they had studied outside class for some other purpose.

**Ratings of perceived increase of skill level.** Means for the students' ratings were tabulated for each of the 21 language skills shown in Appendix 1. They include 1) mean ratings at program entrance, 2) mean ratings at graduation, and 3) the amount of increase from the first to the second. These mean ratings for each skill item, and amount of increase, are shown in Table 1, arranged from skill items with the greatest rating increase to the least rating increase. These will be discussed in turn.

**Skill item ratings at program entrance.** For the students' ratings of their skills at the entrance to the program, the majority of the mean ratings for skill items ranged from 2.0 - 2.6 (a rating of 2 = low beginning level). Only two skill items, *Ability to give a classroom speech and Understanding of British culture and values* had mean ratings of 1.9 and 1.8 respectively (1 = no English at all). This suggests that, at the time of program entrance, students felt their English skills generally fell in the low end of the low-beginning (very simple English) range. The mean of all skill item means at entrance was 2.25. The skill items that ranked above the midpoint of 2.2 included:

- Understanding of grammar in reading (2.6)
- Understanding of information like time, schedules, dates, etc. (2.6)
- Ability to write longer sentences (2.6)
- Ability to read memos and letters (2.5)
- Reading speed (2.4)
- General vocabulary (2.4)
- Grammar in writing (2.4)
- Ability to read fiction (e.g. class readers) (2.3)
- Understanding of class lectures (2.3)
- Ability to write memos and letters (2.3)

It can be noted that 7 of these 10 skills involves reading or writing.

Skill item ratings at graduation. For the students' rating of their skills at graduation from the program, mean ratings for skill items ranged from a low of 3.1 (3 = high beginning) to a high of 4.1 (4 = low intermediate), with one exception. A single skill item, *Ability to read newspaper articles*, had a mean rating at graduation of 2.4. This suggests that, at the end of their program, students felt their English skills had improved by an average of over one point in the scale, to the high-beginner range. The mean of all skill item means at graduation was 3.56. The skill items that ranked above the midpoint of 3.6 (excluding the outlying *newspaper* item mean of 2.4) included:

Understanding of information like time, schedules, dates, etc (4.1)

Understanding of class lectures (4.0)

Understanding of American English culture and values (4.0)

Ability to write letters and memos (3.9)

Ability to read memos and letters (3.9)

Understanding of daily conversation (3.8)

General conversation ability (3.7)

Reading speed (3.7)

Grammar in reading (3.7)

Ability to read fiction (e.g. class readers) (3.7)

It can be noted that among the language skills indicated in these highly ranked skill items, reading (4 items) and writing (1 item) remain most numerous, 5 out of 10. There are also items for listening (1), numerical information (1), conversation (2), and culture (1).

Skill item rating increases. The amount of increase for each skill item, from entrance to graduation, was also tabulated (there were no cases of a skill mean decreasing). As noted above, Table 1 shows skill items arranged from greatest to least amount of increase. The increase in skill means ranged from 1.0 to 1.8, with the exception of one skill item (*Ability to read newspapers*), which increased by 0.2. The skill items can be divided into three groups: The 5 large-increase items (increased by 1.6 to 1.8); the 9 medium-increase items (increased by 1.3 to 1.5); and the 7 low-increase items (increased by 1.0 to 1.2 plus the outlier whose mean increased by 0.2). The mean of all increases was 1.31 (1.37 with the *Ability to read newspapers* outlier removed), more than one level.

Table 1.  
Students' Perceived English Skill Increase \*

Skill items, arranged by amount of increase	Mean at Entrance	Mean at Graduation	Increase
<i>Large-increase skill items (5 total)</i>			
1. My understanding of American English culture and values (original survey no. 20)	2.2	4.0	1.8
2. My understanding of class lectures (9)	2.3	4.0	1.7
3. My understanding of daily conversation (8)	2.2	3.8	1.6
4. My ability to write letters and memos (14)	2.3	3.9	1.6
5. My general conversation ability (16)	2.1	3.7	1.6
<i>Medium-increase skill items (9 total)</i>			
6. My understanding of information like times, schedules, dates, etc. (10)	2.6	4.1	1.5
7. My ability to write multi-paragraph compositions (13)	2.1	3.6	1.5
8. My ability to read memos and letters (3)	2.5	3.9	1.4
9. My ability to read fiction, (e.g. class readers) (5)	2.3	3.7	1.4
10. My ability to give a classroom speech (17)	1.9	3.3	1.4
11. My ability to write paragraphs to describe, tell a story, compare, explain, etc. (12)	2.2	3.6	1.4
12. My ability to read non-fiction essays (e.g. describing, comparing, persuading, etc.) (4)	2.2	3.5	1.3
13. My reading speed (7)	2.4	3.7	1.3
14. My understanding of British English culture and values (21)	1.8	3.1	1.3
<i>Small-increase skill items (7 total)</i>			
15. My ability to use expressions of politeness, humor, and other common social behaviors (18)	2.0	3.2	1.2
16. My grammar in speaking (19)	2.0	3.2	1.2
17. My understanding of grammar in reading (6)	2.6	3.7	1.1
18. My general vocabulary (1)	2.4	3.4	1.0
19. My ability to write longer sentences (11)	2.6	3.6	1.0
20. My grammar in writing (15)	2.4	3.4	1.0
21. My ability to read newspaper articles (2)	2.2	2.4	0.2
Mean of skill item means	2.25	3.56	1.31

\*Note: 1 = No English at all; 2 = Low beginning level (only very simple English); 3 = High beginning level (elementary, basic English use, e.g. common vocabulary); 4 = Low intermediate

(some general use, understand main ideas); 5 = High intermediate (use English in many situations, understand some details); 6 = Low advanced (use English in most situations with only a little difficulty); 7 = High advanced (easily use English in all situations).

It can be noted that of the 5 large-increase skill items, 1 involves American English culture, 2 involve speaking, 1 involves listening, and 1 involves writing letters and memos. The 9 medium-increase skill items include 2 involving writing, 4 involving reading; 1 each involving speaking, and British culture. The 7 small-increase skill items include 4 involving grammar, 2 numerical information, involving reading, 2 involving writing, and 1 involving a somewhat higher level of social skill (e.g. humor or politeness).

While several types of skills appear in the high and low "ends" of Table 1, the listening/speaking skill set seems more prominent among the perceived large-increase skills, and the reading/writing/grammar skill set seems more prominent among the perceived middle- and small-increase skills. A closer examination of patterns in the individual item ratings of students adds some depth and detail to this picture.

Item and rating analysis. 1008 individual ratings (i.e. 48 students rating 21 items each) were made. A given student could rate a given item to show a decrease in skill, no change, or an increase in skill level. These rating changes will be discussed in turn.

Decreased skill ratings. Out of the 1008 individual ratings, there were only 6 indicating a perceived decrease of skill (slightly more than half a percent - 0.59%).

No-change skill ratings. The number of individual ratings indicating no change in skill level totaled 106 out of 1008, or 10.5%. These no-change ratings are not distributed evenly through the data. All 21 of the survey's skill items received between 1 and 11 no-change ratings from students. Of course it may be expected that a given skill item would receive at least a few no-change ratings from the 48 students. What is of interest here are the items which received between 7 and 11 no-change ratings (i.e. more than the mid-point of 6). These items, and the number of no-change ratings observed for each, are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Survey items with the highest number of no-change ratings

Skill Items	Number of No-Change Ratings
#6. Understanding of grammar in reading	11
#15. Grammar in writing	9
#18. Ability to use politeness, humor, common social behaviors	9
#13. Ability to write multi-paragraph compositions	8
#21. Understanding of British culture & values	8
#19. Grammar in speaking	7

It can be noted that 5 of the 6 skill items for which 7 to 11 students gave no-change ratings include items on *grammar, reading, writing, speaking*, and rather advanced-level *social interaction*. In fact, these are the same skills evident at bottom of Table 1, indicating the least amount of perceived skill increase. Item 21, *Understanding of British culture & values*, is not part of the small-increase set of items at the bottom of Table 1; however, it is the next highest rank, with an increase of perceived skill level of 1.3. Item 13, *Ability to write multi-paragraph compositions*, fits in the medium-increase group with a skill increase of 1.5 in Table 1, something of an anomaly.

It may additionally be noted that 25 out of 48 students (52%) made these no-change ratings. Five students made 7-11 no-change ratings. The remaining 20 students made between 1 and 5 no-change ratings. 23 students (48%) did not make any no-change ratings.

The confluence of these item details suggests that the 25 students indicating no change in Table 2's skill items materially influenced the overall results showing the least perceived improvement in reading, writing and grammar skills.

Increased skill ratings. The vast majority of individual skill item ratings increased from entry to graduation—896 out of 1008, or 89%. The majority of these - 814 of the 896 (81% of the total) - consisted of increases of 1 or 2 levels. The remaining 82 of the 896 (8% of the total) consisted of rating increases of 3 or more (3+) levels. It is this latter group which will be examined next.

Nineteen of the 21 skill items received between 7 and 10 rating increases of 3+ levels. Again, it may be expected that most skill items would receive at least a few such large rating increases. There were 5 skill items which received between 7 and 10 rating increases of 3+ levels. (There were no skill items receiving 6 3+ increases, and those received 4 and 5 3+ increases constitute the mid-point.) These 5 skill items, and the number of 3+ increases observed for each, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.  
Survey items with the highest number of 3+ increase ratings

Items	Number of 3+ Increase Ratings
#20. Understanding of American English culture and values	10
#14. Ability to write memos and letters	9
#8. Understanding daily conversation	8
#10. Understanding information — times, dates, etc.	8
#19. Ability to write paragraphs to describe, tell a story, compare, etc.	7

Survey items for which 7 to 10 students indicated a 3+ level increase included *American English culture and values, writing (2), conversation, and numerical information*. Three of the 5 skill items in Table 3 are part of the large-increase items in Table 1, and the other two rank at the top of the medium-increase items.

It may be additionally noted that 17 of the 48 students (35%) gave ratings of 3 or more points increase. One person rated 15 items with a 3 or greater increase in skill level, one so-rated 9 items, 3 students so-rated 8 items, 2 students so-rated 7 items, and the remaining 10 students rated 1-5 items with 3+ increase in skill level.

The confluence of these details certainly suggests that this minority of 17 students, giving a large number of 3+ rating increases, strongly influenced several of the skill items' appearance among the large-increase group in Table 1.

**Text Responses.** Students were asked to provide text responses to two items on the questionnaire. These responses are listed in Appendix 2, and are summarized below.

The first question was, "In general, did your English improve in the last two years? Please explain why." There were 47 responses to this question. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. Most mentioned specific skill improvement and many noted their increased use of English and level of comfort with the language. Only 4 students wrote that that they felt that either a specific skill or their overall English ability had not improved. Those responses are included in the "mixed and general responses" category. The other responses have been grouped according to the English skill mentioned in the response; vocabulary, speaking, listening, writing, reading, and overall confidence.

The skill most frequently listed is "speaking", with 22 students (46%) noting improvement in oral skills. Improvement in listening ability was the second most often noted change with 10 student responses (21%). Increased ability was noticed by 3 students in each of the following: reading, writing and overall confidence. Two students commented on increased vocabulary. A number of responses addressed more than one skill area and so have been included under all relevant headings.

The second text item on the questionnaire was, "Please give us any other comments about the English classes, e.g. what was good and not so good." The 48 responses to this question were again overwhelmingly positive and more general than the responses to the first question. Thirty-two students (67%) wrote that they enjoyed the English classes and found them fun or interesting. Among the more specific comments, six students mentioned enjoying the video<sup>1</sup>, with only one student commenting that "the video was not so good". Other positive comments included enjoying speaking with and understanding the native speaker instructors, having perspectives broadened and learning about culture. The most common suggestion (from 5 students) was that there should be more time for English conversation classes. Other suggestions or negative comments (from one student each) include "homework was too hard", "I was bored", "I didn't understand the lecture", "we should sit in chair circle" and "not so good — there is English class at first period".

## Discussion

While we are dealing only with students' perceived skill improvements rather than direct



measurements of their skills, this study has generated a number of illuminating findings. The students' responses indicate that they attend and participate in their English classes seriously, and that they find the classes aimed at an appropriate skill levels. This suggests that they took the rating of their skills seriously.

**Perceived Skill Increases.** Overall it is gratifying to note that overwhelmingly students indicated improvement in their English language skills. Around 90% of the ratings and the text responses were positive, indicating improvement in skills and satisfaction with the English language courses. Of course, we do need to exercise some caution in the interpretation of this good news. The design of the survey invites — predisposes — the respondent to respond positively, and students are more likely than not to express appreciation or approval for a program in which they have invested time and money. (Otherwise, they would be left with a classic case of cognitive dissonance!) Further, students did not experience equal improvement in all skill areas. The details of the results may be explained by some aspects of our department's program and how particular courses have impacted English skill areas. In this discussion, we look at two areas: Absolute rank of skill items means (e.g. reading items or listening items), and the size of skill item mean increases.

Students indicated that at the beginning of their program, their language skills in reading and writing were dominant. At the end of their program, dominant skills in reading or writing comprise 5 of the 10 skill items receiving the highest ratings. However, 3 listening and speaking items also appeared among the top half of the item means. Further, listening and speaking items comprise 3 of the 5 items whose means have the largest increases. While only 35% of the students seem to have strongly influenced this finding (see discussion of Table 3), this suggests that the students see their ability as better-rounded, with the various language skills that make up language ability more evenly matched.

Almost certainly, the fact that all students take an English conversation course each of their four semesters in the program impacts this result, allowing listening and speaking skills to "come from behind" if we may be permitted a racing metaphor. The conversation classes are limited to 16 students and are taught by native speakers, and all communication with these faculty outside class transpires in English as well. Additionally, the students' two courses in listening, and several courses taught in English (on the topics of intercultural communication, American society and culture, comparison of Japan and the U.S., etc.) show the relatively intensive emphasis on and exposure to spoken English use. Thus the high skill item rankings of *listening to class lectures*, *understanding daily conversation*, and *general conversational ability*, and the frequent references to speaking and listening improvement in the text responses, can be explained by these courses.<sup>2</sup>

The moderate gains in perceived reading and writing skill, and their continued dominance (especially in reading) among the skill item means at the end of the program, may also reflect the configuration of our courses (as well as a general emphasis in Japanese education). Courses in reading and writing skills are required for two of the four semesters. Additionally, there is ongoing exposure to English-language reading materials in about 10 other non-language courses. The high increase of skill in ability to *write letters and memos* may be attributed in part to Business English, which places an emphasis on letter- and memo-writing.

It can be noted that the skills related to *grammar* and *vocabulary* received small increases.

(Recall that 10.5% of students may have significantly affected the grammar result; see discussion of Table 2.) Grammar and vocabulary teaching is scattered throughout the language courses. Despite what must be considerable exposure to English vocabulary and grammar through the language and many content courses, students may be less aware of grammar and vocabulary gains because they are enfolded in other, major skill or study areas. Explicit grammar and vocabulary learning may be areas which, as a department, we wish to revisit.

Language teachers know that culture underpins language, and understanding of culture underpins a good understanding of language. Among the large-increase skill ratings, it is not surprising that *understanding of American English culture and values* ranks first, given the intensive emphasis on language and culture courses described above. In addition to ongoing exposure to spoken English (which directly embodies culture and values), and to two U.S. native speaking faculty, we noted the approximately 10 content courses with U.S. content include culture studies, history, U.S. regional studies, philosophy, social theory, etc. One of these courses is an abroad experience in the U.S. lasting two weeks, in which 16-18 students participate. All of these curricular elements support a substantial increase in perceived ability to understand culture and values.

Two other areas merit mention. Notable medium-increase skills also include *information like times, schedules, dates, etc.* and *understanding of British English culture and values*. The former category is essentially numerical information, and a practical skill likely to increase with repeated exposure. The latter is at the bottom of the medium increase skills with an increase of 1.3, which initially seems only a moderate increase. However, given the predominance of American English in the program, it is a respectable increase. This finding may reflect exposure to British English culture in three courses involving society, religion, scientific development, and related institutional focuses on culture, as well as exposure to British English in some language courses, such as General English and Listening.

**Future Surveys.** Future administrations of this survey will address some of the limitations that were found in the pilot survey. As mentioned earlier in the Method section, optimally the survey would be administered once when the students enter the program and once again as they graduate. Administering the survey twice would yield more accurate results than relying on students' memory of their skill level upon entering the program the prior year.

Another area requiring slight revision is the instructions given to students filling out the survey. Judging from some of the responses, students may have believed that the survey was mainly an assessment of English conversation skills (since it was administered in that class), rather than in all of the English courses in the International Cultural Studies Department. In the future, we would more clearly specify that students should consider skills gained in *all* of the English classes.

Additionally, students would be asked to note which courses contributed to any perceived improvement in skills. This would provide a more direct indication of how individual courses do or do not contribute to improvement in student language ability.

Finally, through the use of a coding system to preserve anonymity, student responses to the survey would be matched with their scores on the Institutional TOEFL exam. This would yield valuable information about what kind of relationship exists between student language

ability as determined by the TOEFL exam and the student's own perception of his or her ability. These results would be of particular interest because the TOEFL does not test spoken or written English ability, nor does it measure cultural understanding, and therefore may not reflect some improvement in language ability perceived by the student.

### **Conclusion**

This pilot study has provided us an opportunity to see a good deal of detail about the growth of our students' English skills. This very useful data regarding students' perceptions of their English skills and their level of satisfaction with the English program gives us a platform for serious analysis of our curriculum's impact. This will, in turn, provide the tools to implement improvements in the quality of instruction and a program more directly tailored to the particular needs of our students.

### **(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> English conversation classes use Connect with English, which includes a video story, conversation practice and other activities.

<sup>2</sup> Recall that emphasis in the text responses on speaking and listening skills may have been influenced by the survey's administration in conversation classes.

**Appendix 1**  
**Survey of English Language Skill - Class of 2003**

**Thank you for help with this survey! Please tell us:**

How much did your English skills improve during your time at IPU? Show your level in each skill area 1) when you entered the Department of International Cultural studies, and 2) now at graduation time. Please use the following numbers:

- 1 = No English at all
- 2 = Low beginning level (only very simple English)
- 3 = High beginning level (elementary, basic English use, e.g. common vocabulary)
- 4 = Low intermediate (some general use, understand main ideas)
- 5 = High intermediate (use English in many situations, understand some details)
- 6 = Low advanced (use English in most situations with only a little difficulty)
- 7 = High advanced (easily use English in all situations)

<u>When I</u> <u>Skills</u>	<u>Now, at</u> <u>Entered IPU</u>	<u>Graduation</u>
1. My general vocabulary	_____	_____
2. My ability to read newspaper articles	_____	_____
3. My ability to read memos and letters	_____	_____
4. My ability to read non-fiction essays (e.g. describing, comparing, persuading, etc.)	_____	_____
5. My ability to read fiction, (e.g. class readers)	_____	_____
6. My understanding of grammar in reading	_____	_____
7. My reading speed	_____	_____
8. My understanding of daily conversation	_____	_____
9. My understanding of class lectures	_____	_____
10. My understanding of information like times, schedules, dates, etc.	_____	_____
11. My ability to write longer sentences	_____	_____
12. My ability to write paragraphs to describe, tell a story, compare, explain, etc.)	_____	_____
13. My ability to write multi-paragraph compositions	_____	_____
14. My ability to write letters and memos	_____	_____
15. My grammar in writing	_____	_____
16. My general conversation ability	_____	_____
17. My ability to give a classroom speech	_____	_____
18. My ability to use expressions of politeness, humor, and other common social behaviors	_____	_____
19. My grammar in speaking	_____	_____
20. My understanding of American English culture and values	_____	_____

21. My understanding of British English culture and values \_\_\_\_\_

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22. I attended classes \_\_\_\_\_% of the time.

23. I completed \_\_\_\_\_% of the class work and homework.

24. Each week, I spent about \_\_\_\_\_ hours on English homework.

25. The work in English classes was (circle one):  
too hard                      too easy                      just right

26. My effort in studying English was (circle one):  
poor                      fair                      good                      excellent

27. Did you study English outside of college classes? (e.g. to prepare for a university entrance exam, a TOEFL test, or some other purpose) If yes, please explain.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

28. From your first Pre-TOEFL test to your second Pre-TOEFL test, did your score  
\_\_\_\_\_ increase? ( \_\_\_\_\_ a lot?                      \_\_\_\_\_ a little?)  
\_\_\_\_\_ stay about the same?  
\_\_\_\_\_ decrease? ( \_\_\_\_\_ a lot?                      \_\_\_\_\_ a little?)  
\_\_\_\_\_ I'm not sure

29. In general, did your English improve in the last two years? Please explain why.

30. Please give us any other comments about the English classes, e.g. what was good and not so good.

**Appendix 2 - English Skills Survey 2003 Text Responses**

**Question 29. In general, did your English improve in the last two years? Please explain why.**

1. Yes, I think that I have my ability of vocabulary now. So when you explain a lot of vocabulary during class lectures, I understood those, and I could speak conversation than my freshman.
2. Because I met great teachers. And I have many times for meet many kind of English.
3. Yes, because I didn't speak English in public. I freezed up in public. But, gradually I speak English.
4. My English improve is that listening and speaking.
6. Speaking, writing, and reading. I have been sending email Dick, this two years.
7. I had spoken English a little when I entered IPU. But I spoke English more than them. So, I feel good.
8. Yes, I can have a lot of chance that I speak English.
9. Yes, but a little. I can't speak fluently.
10. I couldn't speak English well. But, I can speak English, and when I see a foreigner, do not ashamed, I can speak English.
11. I can listen to English conversation.
12. Yes. Because I want to speak a lot of things with teachers. I had to speak English because they were not use Japanese!!
14. I think my English vocabulary improved. I became to understand English talks.
15. I think the my English conversation ability is improved in class.
16. Yes, I did. I improved English conversation ability. Because I talked with Dick every lunch time.
17. My ability to English is good. I can write English long sentence.
18. Conversation.
19. A little (because I speak English in conversation class).
22. Yes, my English improved in the last two years. First I didn't understand English so much, but now I understand what English teacher says. This is a miracle.
25. I accustomed to speak and write English.
26. Yes, I did.
27. My understanding get increase of reading. The reason was that I listened the English conversation for many times.
28. I think that I improved communicate to English.
29. Yes. I couldn't speak English very well. But I think I can speak more easily.
30. I was not good at speaking English in the last two years, but now, I like to communication with the speaking English.
31. Writing is bad...but listening is very good. I can understand that teachers say.
32. Yes. I could listen to teacher's talk and speak with teacher in English.
33. Yes. I didn't study English conversation when I was high school student. So I could not speak English when I entered this school. But conversation ability maybe improved.
34. [Transl.] I have more confidence in reading the newspaper; I learned some difficult words
35. Yes. [Transl.]

36. I couldn't be in English conversation in high school. But now, my conversation ability increase a little.
37. Yes. I could understand speaking English than before because I had many chances to listen to native English.
38. Yes. Until I entered this junior college, I didn't like to speak English. But now, I like to speak English because I could understand in English conversation and communicate with foreigners.
39. Yes. I didn't have time to speak in English without class when I'm in high school. In the last two years I often speak English.
40. We had many kinds of English classes. Not only grammar but conversation class...
41. I don't think so, unfortunately...
42. Yes, because I could practice English by talking with teachers in English.
43. Yes. I think my English did improve in the last two years. Because I could understand what ALT said a little bit compared with entered IPU.
44. No. I didn't.
45. When studying English, native English teachers is the best.
46. Listening is improve because each week, I listen to Catlin and Dick's English, but vocabulary does not include. My effort was not good.
47. Yes. I didn't want to speak English last two years. But I want to speak English now.
48. Very fine. That was good training for to learn English with native speaker. I was just East Asian native, I noticed. (sigh)

**Question 30. Please give us any other comments about the English classes, e.g. what was good and not so good.**

1. Thank you for helping our English. Since your explanation was brief, I could understand. And this class was very fun.
2. Thank you for your teaching! I can learn many things!!
3. Very nice. I enjoyed this class. But you don't understand my pronunciation and conversation. I'm happy to meet you.
4. I enjoyed studying English. To watch the video is very good.
5. I want to watch video more. I think most important thing of study is "enjoy."
6. It was very good. I spent super time every week. My skills really improved. I want to go to America or Canada!!
7. This lecture is interesting. I learned this lecture and you. I'm sorry for coming too late. I want to speak to you. Thank you!! I love you!!
8. Thank you for your English classes. It give me good experience and broadens my perspective.
9. I want not to speak only classmates, but to speak native American.
10. Your class was very good. I understood English. Thank you very much!!
11. Good -> only English
12. It was fun!! I wanted more classes in a week. Thank you!
13. I want to watch videos continue. Thank you very much!!!
14. I wanted to watch video more. Words and sentences on whiteboard helped me when I understand and remember words.

15. We should on chair circle.
16. I'm sorry that I absent of English conversation class.
17. I want to see video until last. I was interested in your class.
18. I enjoyed studying English for two years.
19. Good.
21. I had a good time while I was a junior college student.
22. If possible, I wanted more time to speak English. But English teachers are very very good. I had a good time in the last two years
23. This class was very fun. So, I wanted to more study this class.
25. I didn't understand things in the lecture, but teacher didn't tell me the mean[ing] which was I didn't understand things, so I never understand it!!
26. I was boring.
27. I feel good. Because the English classes enjoyed and I can understand English than before times. [Transl.] I'm glad I studied English.
28. English conversation is very interesting class. I didn't know. English is excited. I enjoy this class. And Catlin's English, easily than other.
29. I think I should speak English more.
30. [Transl.] Having classes twice a week would be better.
32. Not so good -> There is English class at first period. Good -> It is very interesting to read English books.
33. English classes were very interesting. Talking with foreign teachers was good experience for me. But, I was not good at hearing English. So I wanted to improve it more and more.
34. [Transl.] Learning with the video is good for listening practice.
36. I enjoyed this classes very much. Sometime, I didn't know what should do...but I can get to enjoy English conversation. (For example...we make pumpkin)
37. It's good because I knew various American English and culture. It's so precious.
38. I enjoyed speaking English with friends. And English conversation class was my first experience, so that class is very interesting for me!!
39. I had to come to class. Homework is good. I think conversation record with my partner is very fun. Thank you very much.
40. I think we need more English conversation class. Twice a week...
41. For English conversation class -> I wanted to listen more English songs and wanted to know the meaning of lyrics. For all other English classes ->I wanted to have more discussions about the class.
42. It was a very nice experience that I could talk with native English teachers. Before I entered this school, almost I didn't have a chance to talk with native English speaker. This experience enabled me to get confidence about my English.
43. I was interested English conversation class using movie. Xmas and Halloween party was great.
44. Video was not so good.
45. It was my first studying with interesting and joy.
46. Good thing was to enjoy English class. Not so good thing was that homework is too hard.
47. I enjoyed studying English. It was difficult that I studied English. But I like English. I want



to speak English more. Thank you. [smiley face]

48. English presentation is a very good training.

## **Junior College Students' Perception of English Skill Improvement**

**Christine Winskowski and Catlin Hanna**

**Department of International Cultural Studies**

**Morioka Junior College**

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In this study, we investigate junior college students' perceptions of their English language skills, and the degree to which they improved over the two-year program of the Department of International Cultural Studies. The students were administered a survey which permitted evaluation of language skills (through specific language skill item ratings and written responses) at the beginning and at the end of their program. The results show that the students' recalled stronger skills in reading and writing at the beginning of their program. At graduation, the students' indicated that they observed improvements that were broadly distributed among all language skills, including reading, writing, listening, conversation, and cultural understanding. A curricular emphasis on English conversation classes, as well as many classes on North American and British culture and communication may account for these findings.