

Practical English Skill Acquisition and Cultural Exchange:

Expectations vs. Reality

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要 約

2016年後期から、ニュージーランド研修Iの履修者を対象に「Step-Up 英語」が新設された。海外研修の経験を活かし、さらなる英語力の向上を目指した科目である。2年目を迎える今年、本科目の受講者にアンケート調査を行い、Step-Up 英語とニュージーランド研修をつうじて、英語力、および異文化理解とコミュニケーションの能力向上に、学生がどの程度期待し、それがどの程度達成されたのかを調査・分析した。

The aim of this paper is to examine students' expectations for and actual level of knowledge acquisition from the summer English Training Program in New Zealand and the “Step-Up English” course after the program.

1. Background and Purpose

Edogawa University has held the English Training Program in New Zealand (“New Zealand *Kenshū* I,” hereafter “NZ program”) every year since the university's establishment in 1990. Two of the main purposes of this program (aimed primarily at first-year students) are (1) “to cultivate English ability as a foundation for actual international communication” and (2) “to improve international understanding through experiencing different cultures ... and learning about [New Zealand's] society and culture.”¹ Students study English at various universities in New Zealand (i.e. Auckland, Canterbury, Massey, and Palmerstone North in 2017) for three weeks in September, staying with host families for the duration. After attending university classes in the morning, in the afternoon students participate in many extra-curricular activities including campus tours, harbor cruises, cave visits, horseback riding, basketball matches, soccer matches, and local farm visits. In 2017, 120 students (approximately 20% of all enrolled first-year students) participated in the NZ program. All participating students were required to take the pre-session English course for three months before going to New Zealand.

After studying in New Zealand, students who want to improve their English skills further

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can enroll in the follow-up course titled “Step-Up English,” which is taught in English by native or near-native English speaking professors. To register for this course, students have to demonstrate their English skills and motivations for learning English in a selection/placement interview. There are currently approximately ten students in each class, with four classes in total. In class, students primarily speak and listen to each other and their professors in English.

Unlike the NZ program, the “Step-Up English” course began just last year (2016). Therefore, there is a need to investigate both what students expect from, and then actually acquire in terms of knowledge from the course. For this reason, the authors conducted a survey to ascertain students’ expectations for and actual (self-reported) knowledge acquisition from the course. In addition, as this course is closely attached to the NZ program, questions about the students’ attitudes towards the NZ program were also included in the survey. As the NZ program was established more than twenty years ago, contemporary students’ needs may differ from those of past students; thus, this current survey is warranted.

2. Methodology

On November 8th and 15th, 2017, 17 students registered in the ‘Step-Up English’ course were asked to answer 8 questions via questionnaire sheet. The questionnaire, specifically prepared for this report (attached below), was handed out and collected during class. The questions addressed the topics of expectations for and actual knowledge acquisition from both the NZ program and the “Step-Up English” course as follows:

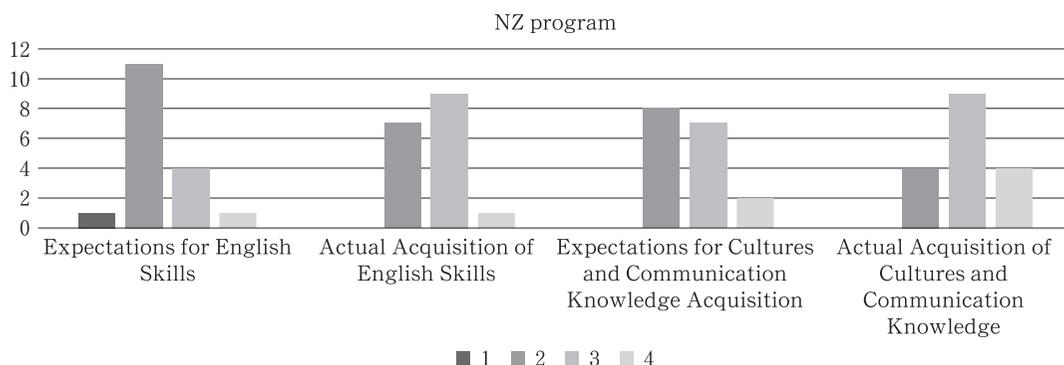
- a. “Before participating in the overseas study, how much did you expect your English level to improve through participating?”
- b. “In reality, did your English level improve through the training according to your expectations?”
- c. “Before participating in the overseas study, how much did you expect your understanding of other cultures and your communication skills to improve through the training?”
- d. “In reality, did your understanding of other cultures and communication skills improve through the overseas study according to your expectations?”
- e. “Before participating in the course, how much did you expect your English level to improve through participating?”
- f. “At present, is your English skill improving according to your expectations?”
- g. “Before participating in the course, how much did you expect your understanding of other cultures and your communication skills to improve through the course?”
- h. “At present, are your understanding of other cultures and communication skills improving according to your expectations?”

Students were asked to answer these questions by choosing from one of four responses:

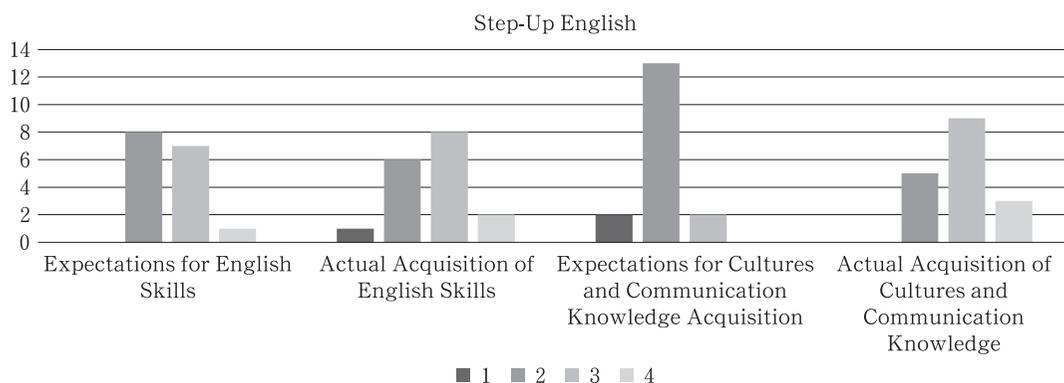
- 1: no expectations (no real acquisition)
- 2: low expectations (small acquisition)
- 3: normal expectations (normal acquisition)
- 4: high expectations (a lot of acquisition)

3. Analysis and Discussion

The results of the survey are as follows. If students had great expectations or experienced significant improvement, they responded with the number 4; if they had little to no expectations or improvement, they responded with the number 1.



Students' Expectations and Actual Knowledge Acquisition from the NZ program (N=17)



Students' Expectations and Actual Knowledge Acquisition from the 'Step-Up English' course (N=17)

The average response to each question is given below.

| Question No. | a. | b. | c. | d. | e. | f. | g. | h. |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Average (min. 1.00-max. 4.00) | 2.29 | 2.65 | 2.65 | 3.00 | 2.65 | 2.75 | 2.00 | 2.88 |

Average response for each question

One important point here is that the value of the students' answers to question (a) is lower than that of either (c) or (e). Students appeared to expect more improvement of their understanding of other cultures and communication than their English skills through participating in

the NZ program. It also appears that students expected more English-language training from the ‘Step-Up English’ course than from the NZ program. Moreover, comparing the responses to questions (c) and (d), it seems that students had fairly high expectations for their acquisition of a deeper understanding of other cultures and communication through the NZ program, and that their expectations were generally met. Interestingly, while students did not seem to expect to improve their understanding of other cultures and communication through the ‘Step-Up English’ course, these expectations were surpassed based on their self-reported knowledge acquisition from the course.

4. Conclusion

Based on these results, it seems possible to conclude that students expect to gain a great deal of understanding about other cultures and communication from the NZ program, but do not expect their English ability to improve much. On the other hand, the reverse is true for the ‘Step-Up English’ course: their expectations are primarily focused on English skill acquisition. Overall, most students’ expectations seem to be being met in both the NZ program and the ‘Step-Up’ English’ course, with actual acquisition level generally reported as higher than expectation level.

How then can we work to improve students’ experiences of both the NZ program and the ‘Step-Up English’ course? We suggest that the first step is to inform students in advance about the abundant English training opportunities available through the NZ program, including numerous opportunities to practice speaking English with native speakers, in order to increase their expectations (that is, their motivations). As for the ‘Step-Up English’ course, it seems prudent to emphasize that the course also teaches the understanding of other cultures and communication skills. A more detailed study would be required in order to suggest methods of improvement for students’ actual knowledge acquisition from both the NZ program and the ‘Step-Up English’ course.

Note

- 1 <http://www.edogawa-u.ac.jp/img/media/9171.pdf> (consulted 11/17/2017)

References

- <http://www.edogawa-u.ac.jp/img/media/9171.pdf> (consulted 11/17/2017)
 Edogawa University (ed.), *Communication and International Understanding 2016*
 (江戸川大学編『ニュージーランド 海外専門・海外経営・海外体験 研修記録』(2016年))

ANNEX: Questionnaire for this survey

2017 Fall Semester “Step-Up English” Student Survey (Blank)

I. Please answer the following questions about the Summer 2017 “New Zealand Study” course.

a. Before participating in the overseas study, how much did you expect your English level to improve

through participating?

- 1 I didn't expect it to improve at all
- 2 I expected it to improve a little
- 3 I expected it to improve
- 4 I expected it to improve a lot

b. In reality, did your English level improve through the training according to your expectations?

- 1 My expectations were not met
- 2 My expectations were not really met
- 3 My expectations were fairly well met
- 4 My expectations were met perfectly, or surpassed

c. Before participating in the overseas study, how much did you expect your understanding of other cultures and your communication skills to improve through the training?

- 1 I didn't expect them to improve at all
- 2 I expected them to improve a little
- 3 I expected them to improve
- 4 I expected them to improve a lot

d. In reality, did your understanding of other cultures and communication skills improve through the overseas study according to your expectations?

- 1 My expectations were not met
- 2 My expectations were not really met
- 3 My expectations were fairly well met
- 4 My expectations were met perfectly, or surpassed

II. Please answer the following questions about the Fall 2017 "Step-Up English" course.

e. Before participating in the course, how much did you expect your English level to improve through participating?

- 1 I didn't expect it to improve at all
- 2 I expected it to improve a little
- 3 I expected it to improve
- 4 I expected it to improve a lot

f. At present, is your English skill improving according to your expectations?

- 1 My expectations are not being met
- 2 My expectations are not really being met
- 3 My expectations are being fairly well met
- 4 My expectations are being met perfectly, or surpassed

g. Before participating in the course, how much did you expect your understanding of other cultures and your communication skills to improve through the course?

- 1 I didn't expect them to improve at all
- 2 I expected them to improve a little
- 3 I expected them to improve
- 4 I expected them to improve a lot

h. At present, are your understanding of other cultures and communication skills improving according to your expectations?

- 1 My expectations are not being met
- 2 My expectations are not really being met
- 3 My expectations are being fairly well met
- 4 My expectations are being met perfectly, or surpassed