Teaching Introductory Psychology in English to Japanese Undergraduate Students

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Introduction
As the Japanese higher education continues its movement toward globalization and international exchange, it seemed vital that universities begin providing trainings at the undergraduate level to prepare students for the future. In 2000, the School Psychology and Counseling Department at Faculty of Education, Shinshu University, began an experimental course in which introductory psychology topics were taught in English. The goal of the course was to introduce many fields of psychology and to offer the knowledge in English. Because teaching psychology in English to undergraduate students had not been done before, it was necessary to examine how students adjust to a course of this nature. The purpose of this study was to identify factors affecting students’ performance when they use English to learn psychology.

Method
Participants A total of 98 freshmen students (45 males, 53 females) majoring in the School Psychology and Counseling program at Shinshu University over the 5 year span participated in the course. For most students, this course was their first course in psychology.

Data Collection Several questionnaires were administered throughout the school year. Attitudinal questionnaires were given at the beginning (pre-test) and at the end (post-test) of the course. They focused on obtaining information regarding attitude toward and feelings of efficacy about English as well as psychology. A course evaluation was administered after the first mid-term examination to gauge students’ progress in the course.

A study strategies checklist was also distributed with each examination for which students reported the average number of hours they spend studying per week and the strategies they used. All, except the evaluation and study strategy checklist, were written in Japanese, and students were encouraged to respond in Japanese.

Results
Attitude On the average, students came with a slightly negative attitude toward English (on a 5-point scale, $M=2.56$, $SD=0.74$). The attitude did not change at the end of the course ($t(97)=0.14, p=.885$). On the other hand, students came with a very positive attitude toward psychology ($M=4.52$, $SD=0.48$). The attitude decreased significantly ($t(97)=2.80, p=.006$) at the end of the course. However, the attitude was still high ($M=4.38$, $SD=0.53$).

Study Strategy Students reported spending an average of more than 3 hours ($M=3.44$, $SD=2.05$) per week and using about 7 different strategies ($M=7.12$, $SD=2.46$) studying for the course. Both the time spent studying ($r=.28$) and the number of strategies used ($r=.24$) correlated weakly with test performance. The most frequently used strategies were: (1) look up words in a dictionary, (2) read silently, and (3) take notes in class. Higher performing students did more “underlining and highlight the text while reading” and “rephrasing the text in their own words” than did the lower performing students.

Test Performance The affective variables (attitude and efficacy) and study behaviors did not correlate or correlated only weakly with students’ test performance, ranging from $r=-.01$ to .28. The entrance examination score of English correlated moderately with test performance ($r=.40$), indicating English ability may be a more revealing factor in predicting how well students would do in the course.

Conclusion
Among the affective and cognitive factors, English ability appeared to be an important factor in predicting student performance in the course. Therefore, providing learning support, such as English text reading training, to students with lower English ability would be necessary in helping them succeed in the course.

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