

Influence of Assessment Styles in English Classes on Japanese English Learners' Beliefs and Attitudes

豊嶋朗子

TOYOSHIMA Saeko

Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which English language assessments at the secondary school level influence Japanese English-language learners' beliefs about and attitudes toward learning English. This paper presents a qualitative analysis of experiences in learning process focusing on assessments of cognitive skills (academic achievement assessed mainly by conventional paper-pencil or language skill tests) and non-cognitive skills (including self-regulation, self-esteem, motivation, and diligence) through "learning" history interviews on English learning. The participants were seventeen Japanese university students who had primarily learned English in Japan. All of the participants stated that although their cognitive skills were assessed through standardized or language skill tests, their non-cognitive abilities were never assessed in their English classes. This suggests that their beliefs regarding English were formed according to when and how they started to learn English; their attitudes toward learning English may be a result of these beliefs. This may explain the gap between students' self from belief about English learning and the reality of English education in formal schools.

Keywords

assessments in English classes, cognitive and non-cognitive skills, beliefs and attitudes toward learning English, learner's self in learning English, learning history interview

1 Introduction

This paper examines the influence that secondary school experiences have on Japanese English language learners in terms of their beliefs about and attitudes toward English language learning. Previous studies have indicated that beliefs and attitude are important motivational factors for learners of second or foreign languages (e.g., Heinzmann, 2013), and must research has focused on continuity in English learning after secondary school and university (Ryan, 2009; Toyoshima, 2016). This study investigates

how assessments conducted in English classes in Japanese secondary schools influence students' English learning, focusing particularly on cognitive skills assessed by language skills tests and non-cognitive skills (self-regulation, self-esteem, motivation, and diligence) that are not assessed by standardized tests. Under Japanese national guidelines, high school teachers are required to assess both cognitive and non-cognitive skills to ensure that students develop academically as well as personally. English is a compulsory subject for Japanese students at the junior high school level, and 96 percent of students attend senior high schools that require participation in English language courses for graduation. However, the general university entrance examination (hereafter referred to as *Ippan Nyushi*) is a conventional assessment that only examines cognitive skills, whereas the examination for selected candidates that have been recommended by junior or senior high schools (hereafter referred to as *Suisen Nyushi*) assesses both cognitive (academic knowledge) and non-cognitive (mainly extra-curricular activities) skills. Differences between entrance examinations could affect assessments in secondary schools. This suggests that assessments in English classes could influence Japanese English learners' beliefs about and attitudes toward English learning, and conversely, could motivate them to learn English. Thus, this study examines whether both the cognitive and non-cognitive skills of Japanese English language learners are assessed in Japanese secondary schools and how these assessments influence students. The main research method used is life history interviews of university students regarding their English studies throughout their education history. Content analysis is employed to identify particular topics in the conversations.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Cognitive skills and non-cognitive skills

Japanese national guideline of secondary education had been established based on how students develop their academic achievement. The definition of academic achievement had been fixed for about fifty years as cognitive skills; that is, “the core skills your brain uses to think, read, learn, remember, reason, and pay attention.”¹ As for English language, learners need to expose themselves to the language by using four skills intendedly or to memorize vocabulary and grammatical rules consciously, which are cognitively processed in the brain. These cognitive skills are able to be examined only by standardized tests, such as paper-pencil tests or interview tests (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001).

On the contrary, non-cognitive skills, such as self-regulation, self-esteem, diligence, and motivation, will not be able to be examined by standardized tests (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001). Economists have pointed to the significant relationship between these

skills and lifetime earnings (e.g., Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006; Lee & Otake, 2014; Toda, Tsuru, & Kume, 2014). In their study of high-school graduates, Heckman and Rubinstein (2001) found that people who enhanced their non-cognitive skills through an educational program for high-school dropouts managed to earn higher incomes compared to those that did not. They claimed that non-cognitive skills enabled the former to attain the diploma. In addition, Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua (2006) suggested that self-regulation and self-esteem are particularly important in increasing incomes. Furthermore, self-regulation is considered a more influential factor than IQ scores in educational outcomes (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Moreover, previous studies that examined the relationship between non-cognitive and cognitive skills claim that these skills are complementary (Cunha & Heckman, 2008; Heckman & Kautz, 2013). A study in the Japanese social context suggests that conscientiousness, a characteristic factor supporting non-cognitive skills, is particularly enhanced during secondary education through punctuality and participation in extra-curricular activities, which can lead to regular employment and higher incomes after graduation (Toda, Tsuru, & Kume, 2014). However, no research thus far has investigated how the non-cognitive skills of Japanese students can be enhanced in school, even though the national guideline directs administrators and teachers to introduce practices in class to assess students' "ability to think, express, and decide" and their "motivation, interests, and attitudes." Thus, the development of non-cognitive skills should be essential in secondary education so that students can attain higher and more sustainable lifetime earnings.

2.2 Comparing English education in secondary schools with English learning in private institutions"

In Japan, English pedagogy differs in public secondary schools and private institutions (Mochizuki, Kubota, Iwasaki, & Ushiro, 2010). Private institutions solely aim to improve students' English communication proficiency, whereas public secondary schools follow the national guidelines outlined in the Fundamental Law of Education and School Education Law, which include the formation of students' personalities in addition to their linguistic skills and English knowledge. Mochizuki et al. (2010) specified the main aims of secondary school English education as follows (pp. 8 – 9):

1. Acquiring English knowledge and skills
2. Cultivating attitudes that encourage active English communication
3. Developing a deep understanding of English-speaking culture
4. Continuously training students' intelligence
5. Promoting the formation of personality

These aims indicate that English education in Japanese secondary schools should

enhance their attitudes and motivations related to non-cognitive skills in order to develop students' English proficiency including cognitive skills. However, Japanese pedagogical and political realities have made many secondary level practitioners aim at letting students obtain high scores of standardized tests or entrance examinations to prove their cognitive skills rather than enhance their non-cognitive skills assessed by appropriate assessment methods (Toyoshima, 2015; 2018).

2.3 Japanese learners' motivations for learning English

Motivations for learning a second or foreign language have been a long-term focus of much research and discussion. The majority of research has focused on integrative and instrumental motivations that may be affected by socio-cultural factors (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Learners with integrative motivations desire to learn a language in order to become familiar with its speakers and culture. Learners with instrumental motivation, on the other hand, are motivated to learn a language for practical reasons, such as getting higher standardized test scores or a better job after graduation. Additionally, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have been discussed as personal factors (e.g., Deci, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Learners with intrinsic motivation enjoy learning a language, whereas learners with extrinsic motivation learn for rewards or to avoid punishment. Japanese formal secondary education is shaped by the national guidelines as well as the content of each subject. Each school must follow the guidelines, use an authorized textbook, and have teaching plans that adhere to the national curriculum. This means that English must be taught according to these guidelines, and students cannot overlook the extrinsic motivations of obtaining good results to pursue higher education (Toyoshima, 2016). Toyoshima (2016) pointed out that this may result in teachers specifically focusing on enhancing their students' academic achievements. However, Ryan and Deci (2000a) indicated that although formal education should include such features, many teachers struggle to intrinsically motivate their students to learn and are unable to introduce inherently interesting or enjoyable classroom tasks; many Japanese teachers are no exception to this problem. Thus, educators should attempt to make the Japanese educational situation more active and volitional (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Success in such attempts depends on whether learners accept the importance of the class' goals and classroom rules extrinsically imposed by the teacher or educational context, which would in turn foster the internalization and integration of the goals and rules (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) theory of second or foreign language learners (L2, hereafter) posits two types of L2 learner selves: "the ideal" L2 self and "the ought-to" L2 self. Toyoshima (2007) extends this concept to Japanese English-language learners, proposing that there are two types of selves in this group: the "I" who can communicate with others

in English, and the “I” who succeeds academically and passes entrance examinations. Toyoshima (2007) suggested that learners’ motivations depend on whether the ideal or ought-to self is learning English: the ought-to L 2 self is somewhat related to extrinsic motivation, whereas the ideal L 2 self is related to intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000a; 2000b) suggested three social conditions for integrating the extrinsic motivation of the ought-to L 2 self with the intrinsically motivated ideal L 2 self: 1) relatedness, the need to belong and feel connected with significant others; 2) competence, the feeling of efficacy in activities with relevant social groups; and 3) autonomy, a sense of choice, volition, and freedom from excessive external pressure to behave or think a certain way (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, pp. 73– 4). Since “significant others” refers to “parents, teachers, and peers” in the Japanese educational system (Toyoshima, 2016), establishing these three conditions in formal English learning in Japan could be instrumental in merging the extrinsically motivated ought-to L 2 self with the intrinsically motivated ideal L 2 self.

2.4 Authentic assessment for the development of non-cognitive skills

Assessment methods must be reviewed to ensure that they meet the three conditions mentioned above to enhance students’ intrinsic motivations. This section introduces two types of assessment; authentic and conventional, and how these assessments should match with cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Conventional assessment is limited to standardized paper-pencil tests that employ closed-ended item formats such as true-false, matching, or multiple-choice questions. It also emphasizes objective measurement, making it efficient for administrative use and suitable for verifying the objectivity and reliability of test scoring, which suggests that it should be suitable the assessment of cognitive skills. However, conventional assessment testing is unlikely to improve students’ higher-order thinking skills or evaluate their non-cognitive skills including motivation, interests, and attitudes (learning engagement), which are encouraged by the Japanese national guidelines (Tanaka, Mizuhara, Mitsuishi, & Nishioka, 2005). Thus, the pedagogical situation requires other assessment types to enhance essential twenty-first century competences.

Authentic assessment was first suggested in the United States in the late 1980s when discussions arose around the importance of authenticity in academic achievement. According to Wiggins (1998), the aim of authentic assessment is to assess items that are necessary in the workplace or daily adult life. Students should aim to complete such authentic performance tasks both individually and in groups because balancing individual intentions and group orientation might arise as future professional challenges. Introducing such authentic performance tasks should help students improve their non-cognitive skills of self-regulation, self-esteem, motivation, and diligence in overcoming challenges. Teachers should introduce performance or portfolio assessments with rubrics to assess students by requiring them to express and apply their knowledge and skills to authentic

tasks (Hart, 1994; Wiggins, 1998). Thus, introducing authentic assessment, including the assessment of non-cognitive skills, could better reflect students' academic achievement (Tanaka et al., 2005). Therefore, researchers, administrators, and teachers should suggest and incorporate authentic assessment in English learning.

3 Method

The discussion above raises the following research questions:

1. How have the cognitive and non-cognitive skills of Japanese English learners been assessed in English classes at the secondary school level?
2. How have these assessments influenced their beliefs about and attitudes toward learning English, and how have these in turn motivated them to learn English?

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology. The main research method was interviews or structured conversations in which the author asked each participant particular questions from a list of interview topics; the conversations were more open-ended than in semi-structured interviews (Conteh & Toyoshima, 2005; Toyoshima, 2007). Informed consent was obtained from the seventeen participants prior to the interviews. The participants were natives of various areas of Japan and were all studying at a liberal arts university in the northern part of Japan in which all courses are conducted in English and in which all students must study abroad to graduate. About half of the faculty members of the university are foreign, and there are more registered international students than local students. The curriculum is not similar to that of other Japanese universities, and the environment is so globalized that the university has become popular among Japanese students, including students returning from study abroad, which has caused the university's entrance examinations to become intensely competitive. Each participant talked with the author about their experiences learning English throughout their education in a life history interview approach (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995); that is, through "learning" history interviews (Toyoshima, 2007). The main topics in the interviews were as follows:

1. Family, social, and cultural situations of their hometown
2. Early English learning experiences (such as experiences with teachers, peers, teaching methods, class sizes, and the language used)
3. English learning experiences in junior and senior high school (such as experiences with teachers, peers, class sizes, teaching methods, assessment methods, and the language used)
4. How they chose their university and major
5. Experiences of learning English at the university (experiences with teachers, peers, class sizes, teaching methods, and assessment methods)

6. The country in which they intend to study abroad (which is required for graduation) and their plans after graduation
7. The experiences that possibly influenced their beliefs about and attitudes toward learning English that in turn affected their motivation to learn the language

The interviews were conducted in Japanese (their first language; L1, hereafter) to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity (Toyoshima, 2007). After each interview, the author analysed the data by identifying and categorizing comments on each topic in the interview data table in Japanese, based on content and discourse analysis (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Wooffitt, 2001). The appendix below displays the participants' family backgrounds (topic No.1 above), and the starting points of English learning of participants who had started learning in private English institutions (topic No.2 above).

The present study was not focused on gathering information about each participant's experiences, but intended to draw out the truth in the subjective and interpersonal interactions of the interview (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995); that is, every participant's story was regarded as true in a naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The author, who served as the interviewer, was a Japanese English learner who previously worked as a senior high school English teacher and is therefore familiar with the secondary-school learning context. It is possible that interview results should be led by "leading questions" emerged from subjective point of views under such experiences. Kvale (1996) claimed that qualitative research interviews are suited for employing leading questions by repeatedly asking questions to see the reliability of the interviewee's answers as well as verify the interviewer's interpretation. Thus, leading questions in this sense would not always reduce the reliability of interviews (Kvale, 1996). While it can be claimed that an interviewee's subjective utterances and a researcher's subjective interpretations are never "true" (Wooffitt, 2001), our subjectivities are our own truth in the reality of our personal worlds. The conversations in each interview should be considered intersubjective and authentic rather than valid (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Thus, authenticity should be discussed here rather than validity. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that the production of authentic conversations in a certain structured context should "represent (the author would argue, they are) the meaning that human beings attach to events, situations, and persons in their effort to impose order on social interaction" (1985, p. 230, parentheses original). Thus, the validation of the representation reduces the usefulness and applicability of reliability (Mishler, 1990). Therefore, the contents of the "structured conversation" of learning history interviews as an intersubjective activity should be discussed regarding representativeness rather than reliability (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

4 Result

The responses to the research questions are shown below:

1. All participants stated that they received only conventional assessments to evaluate their cognitive skills, mainly through paper-pencil tests, and that their non-cognitive skills had never been assessed using a clear evaluation scheme.
2. Assessment in English classes at the secondary level did not influence the formation of learners' beliefs about or their attitudes toward learning English; rather, learning experiences at the beginning stages of their English learning were stated as influences.

The findings show that Japanese English learners' beliefs about and attitudes toward learning English were not influenced by assessments in later English classes; rather, when and how they started learning English were determining factors. The participants who started learning English before taking compulsory classes in junior high schools (Early Starters, hereafter referred to as "ES," also see Appendix) believed that English should be a communicative tool, and acquiring English communication competence was their prior aim in learning the language. One of the ES participants, Kaori, expressed these points clearly in her interview as shown in Extra 1 below:

Extract 1

Toyoshima: Did you want to avoid taking entrance examinations like the National Center Test?

Kaori: Well, I did, actually. I thought I studied because I wanted to, but I was being forced to, and I hated it. So I didn't want to study for tests or exams. Of course, I knew I had to enhance my English knowledge for the exam to enter this university, and I wanted to. Definitely! But I always "froze" when I was being examined only through exams or when I had to study only for exams. I didn't feel like doing anything...

T: Did you hate all types of tests or only multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blanks tests? This university examines the candidates through essay writing exams in *Ippan Nyushi*. I suppose you particularly hated the sort of tests that required you to choose only one item.

K: Woo, I hated those types (laugh).

T: But how about math or science? You'd have to use a formula to solve a math problem, but you'd still reach one answer.

K: You need logic to solve a math problem. There will be different processes to reach one answer. English and Japanese are languages and should be used to communicate with others. There are different ways to communicate, so I didn't understand why I must answer only one item.

- T: I see. Did you feel irritated when you had to translate an English sentence into Japanese in exams? I guess the “answer” should be inflexible...Did you ask your teacher if your translation was acceptable?
- K: Yes, I did. My “answer” was not perfect any of the time...
- T: Did you agree with that?
- K: I tried, but in fact I didn't agree with the translation in the exams. I didn't think it would be possible to translate English into Japanese perfectly because the languages are too different. I'd like to understand English directly, so it was waste of time for me. The experiences I had from the English school I attended at the elementary level could have influenced this attitude. I believed I should understand English in English and shouldn't have to understand by translating it into Japanese. It bothered me.

Kaori particularly disliked paper-pencil tests because they allow only one answer to each question, whether the format is multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, or translations of English sentences into Japanese. While Kaori was required to take the National Center Test, she did not enjoy studying for it; she would have preferred to study what she wanted in order to improve her linguistic knowledge (Extract 1, lines 2–5). Indeed, she revealed in another part of the interview that her English teachers had always told students to “memorize” only the points or topic areas that come up in most entrance examinations. As a result, she did not enjoy studying (5–7). This shows that passing paper-pencil exams did not serve as extrinsic motivation for Kaori to study English, unlike participants who were “regular starters.” She particularly disliked the multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, or translation questions on English tests that required only one answer (12) because she believed that there could be various “answers” when communicating in English (15–18), further claiming that ignoring communicative abilities is a limitation of such tests. Her English teachers might have known that their students would need communicative abilities in the future, but the gap between *yutori kyoiku* or “reduced-intensity reform” and the still-unchanged entrance examination system might encourage teachers to maintain the traditional drills and skills Japanese schools promoted in the past (Bjork & Tsuneyoshi, 2005, p. 621), believing that learning English using L1, including translation, should be effective for both the improvement of students' English proficiency and their success in the entrance examinations of national and public universities (Masuda & Matsuzawa, 2017). However, Kaori's early learning experiences might have influenced her belief that learning English could enable her to communicate and could have shaped her negative attitude toward examinations that require only one answer or “perfectly” translating English and Japanese (25–30).

Kaori hoped to study in a senior high school abroad ever since she was in elementary school. However, her teachers and classmates at her senior high school did not believe

that studying abroad would help students enter a “good university.” This nearly dissuaded her, but her parents, and her mother in particular, encouraged her to go. Therefore, she decided to attend a high school in the United States for one year.

On the other hand, participants who began learning English as a compulsory subject in junior high school (Regular Starters, hereafter referred to as “RS,” also see Appendix) believed that they should study English as a school subject for examinations rather than as a communicative tool, given that English is required for entrance examinations. Their English teachers at the junior and senior high school levels conducted only conventional assessments with paper-pencil tests to assess their cognitive skills. They never introduced authentic assessments to evaluate students’ non-cognitive skills, as the English teachers of the ES participants had. However, RS students had never doubted these methods because they knew that these cognitive skills were required for entrance examinations. Most RS students studied more at cram schools (*juku* in Japanese) and followed their teachers’ advice to pass exams. Thus, they believed that following their teachers’ instructions in high schools and cram schools would lead to success in entrance examinations. Natsuko, an RS participant, had admired her junior high school English teacher’s experiences studying abroad, and she would have liked to speak English fluently like her teacher. However, she encountered English as a school subject, so obtaining high English test scores motivated her to study English in junior high school although she longed for communicative abilities like those of her teacher. Her senior high school was a kind of private prep school in which students competed academically; that is, the school encouraged its students to enter national universities or famous private universities. Natsuko had never experienced learning English communicatively; she focused on preparing to compete in *Ippan Nyushi* against her classmates for three years. She said in her interview that she was tired of the heated competition, still admired people who speak good English, and longed to communicate in English. In the interview, she did not seem to accept the situation but understood that it was best for her at that time to have followed the educational policy of her senior high school as shown in Extract 2 below:

Extract 2

Toyoshima: What on earth did your school, your teachers expect of you? How would they dare object to you…?

Natsuko: The national universities … They admired the national universities and the students who were able to take *Ippan Nyushi* and qualified to go there…

T: Yes, yes.

N: They always said that we were timid for wishing to go to a private university or to take *Suisen Nyushi*. That was the school policy.

T: They would manipulate the students. Did you follow them as well?

N: I did.

- T: Awful ... You were too young, really. Didn't anybody wish to go to a private university?
- N: Yes, and actually their stance on the policy became radically "soft" before the time for the entrance exam.
- T: What?
- N: They eagerly encouraged us to take *Suisen Nyushi*.
- T: What's that? Were you distrustful of the teachers? They changed so suddenly...
- N: I wasn't. Actually...my classmates and I said to each other, "It's weird. They changed too suddenly. Wonder if any university's fine and whether they'll let us go anywhere..."
- T: Wow, you were so mature! So were your classmates! You knew the teachers' attitudes may not have been the reality...So did you accept them?
- N: Yeah, and I knew their calculation. They were counting how many students could go to the national universities or famous private universities. That would show the high academic achievement the students of the high school reached.

At the time of the interview in Extract 2, Natsuko spoke of her submissive tendency toward her teachers, although the topic moved on to her struggle with the teachers' attitudes rather than her experiences learning English. Natsuko had disliked her teachers' undemocratic attitudes and complained about her experiences in the interview. Her experiences reminded me of my own experiences as a high school English teacher, and her teachers' attitudes were beyond my comprehension. The expression revealing my own feelings about the issue in lines 1 – 2 of Extract 2 could be a feature of the "structured conversation" viewed as an intersubjective activity discussed under the Methods section above. Natsuko appeared to understand my sentiments and reflected on her past struggles to try to understand the situation that people in similar situations had faced (3 – 4; 6 – 7). There are many private and national universities in Japan, especially in cities, and I knew that many high school students attended private universities in order to meet cultural expectations. I did not agree with her teachers' use of the word "timid" (6), and I pointed out that the teachers' words might negatively influence students' behaviours or even lead to discrimination against students who wanted to take *Suisen Nyushi*. I asked her if her classmates would have liked to go to private universities (10-11), and Natsuko's responses amazed me (12-13; 14) because her teachers' attitudes had radically changed to encouraging students to take *Suisen Nyushi* (15). I would not have trusted the teachers in that situation, so I asked her about this (16). However, Natsuko had understood her teachers' intention (17-19; 20-22-24), which also surprised me (20-21). Natsuko's attitude at that time suggested that she considered it best to follow her teachers' advice to enter a good university by succeeding in either *Ippan Nyushi* or *Suisen Nyushi*. Other RS participants also showed submissive attitudes toward their teachers. Thus, RS participants who started learning English as a school subject tended to follow their teachers'

advice (Toyoshima, 2007), which suggests that this tendency is formed extrinsically from Japanese educational and social demands.

5 Discussion

The findings suggest that, in Japanese secondary education, it would be difficult to introduce authentic assessment in evaluating non-cognitive skills in English classes where English is a compulsory subject, though the national guidelines have aimed at improving students' attitudes toward English and improving their English communication abilities for decades. All of the participants of this study learned English under the national guidelines, which require them to acquire linguistic knowledge to supplement communication. If this defines academic achievement in English education at the secondary school level, Japanese learners must acquire non-cognitive skills to achieve this goal and must be evaluated with authentic assessments. However, no participants in this study received authentic assessments with any clear criteria, although Sachiko of the ES participants (See Appendix) receiving assessments of her motivation, interests, and attitudes (learning engagement), which should be incorporated into the guidelines, with the teachers' subjective points of view. Nevertheless, many parents must believe that their children should start learning English earlier to improve their communication skills, considering the social and economic demand for English education. Teaching methods for young children should introduce a communicative approach and employ mainly oral practices (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2002). As a result, learners who experience such teaching methods at the early stages of their exposure to English (e.g., the ES participants in this study) may develop the ideal L 2 self (Dörnyei, 2005; 2009) and the "I" that can communicate with others in English (See 2.3 above). The development of motivation to create such a learning environment, and the assessment of communication abilities as part of the non-cognitive skill set, is essential.

However, there is a gap between the goals of the national guidelines and the reality of the educational situation in Japan. Japanese students must take entrance examinations – either *Ippan Nyushi* or *Suisen Nyushi* – after their compulsory English education to join a senior high school or a university. None of the participants of this study received an authentic assessment of their non-cognitive skills using clear criteria; instead, they were evaluated with conventional assessments of their cognitive skills because their English teachers responded to the current educational reality. The ES participants must have another self: the ought-to L 2 self (Dörnyei, 2005; 2009), the "I" who succeeds academically and passes entrance examinations (See 2.2 above). Thus, the ES participants revealed that they felt there was a gap between the ideal and the ought-to L 2 self at the high school level. However, the RS participants never experienced this gap because they

started learning English at the junior high school level. They believed that the “I” succeeds academically and passes entrance examinations as both the ideal and the ought-to L2 self, so their attitude was to follow their teachers’ instructions and to be “good” in the classroom to satisfy their “self.”

The discussion above indicates that the ES participants’ beliefs and attitudes formed at the onset of their English learning are more internalized, which makes them more intrinsically motivated despite their experience with formal English education and assessments at the secondary school level. The ES participants did not start learning English at public schools but at private institutions or in small classes. Such environments encourage teachers to introduce inherently interesting or enjoyable tasks to enable students to learn effectively (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; see 2.3). The ES participants may believe that these learning conditions are ideal and internalize them into their self. Thus, their beliefs intrinsically motivate them to learn English to acquire communication skills, even though their English teachers never evaluated their non-cognitive skills with clear criteria, nor did general entrance examinations (*Ippan Nyushi*) require these skills. It is possible that once their beliefs were internalized and the students were intrinsically motivated, the belief was never lost but remained and shaped their attitudes toward learning English in later stages (Ryan, 2009; Toyoshima, 2016). As a result, some of them struggled with intense competition in English tests among their classmates and in general entrance examinations. Kaori, an ES participant, studied abroad as a senior high school student to avoid such competitiveness in Japanese high schools and the *Ippan Nyushi*, and instead took the examinations for selected candidates recommended by senior high schools (*Suisen Nyushi*). The other ES participants also maintained the beliefs they had acquired from the onset and had chosen learning environments according to their attitudes that were influenced by these beliefs at the later stages. The experiences of the ES participants suggest that the beliefs acquired during the onset of English learning intrinsically motivated students to overcome the gap between their beliefs and the reality of English education in formal schools.

The RS students, on the other hand, had never experienced this gap because they were mainly motivated to learn English to obtain high scores on English tests or pass the *Ippan Nyushi*. According to the RS participants’ experiences in this study, their English teachers tended to prioritize students’ success in examinations rather than evaluating their communicative competences with authentic assessments. As RS participants found that their English teachers satisfied their expectations, they were able to behave like “good students” in the classroom. The ES participants, on the other hand, recognized a gap between their teachers’ practices in the classroom and their own learning expectations. In fact, the present study could not identify RS participants’ clear beliefs regarding English education; instead, they relied on following their teachers’ instructions or asking

for help. These attitudes might have arisen from the belief that students must simply follow their teachers and be “good” in the classroom. This might have contributed to such students struggling or feeling lost upon joining a university in which all courses were conducted in English and where independence was expected from students. These circumstances might provide RS participants with the extrinsic motivation to meet graduation requirements and find a good job. However, it seemed that such students found it difficult to adjust to the university or to adequately answer questions during the interview because they only had experience in following their teachers. In other words, they had never held strong beliefs about the English language or learning English, unlike the ES participants. Natsuko, the RS participant introduced in Section 4, had faced so many difficulties at the time of the interview that she had lost her interest in English and considered moving to Korea to study Korean. The learning conditions at the university, such as teaching methods, materials, and her peers’ proficiency, differed from those of her prior education to such an extent that she could not identify connections between her teachers and classmates or feel competent in English classes; as a result, she had no autonomy over her learning and simply followed her teacher’s instructions in order to pass the class. This participant could not internalize such extrinsic motivations, and as a result, she never learned intrinsically after joining the university (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; 2000b, see 2.3) and the excessive pressure undermined her interest in learning English (Bjork & Tsuneyoshi, 2005). The other RS participant seemed to be undergoing a similar situation at the time of the interview and was struggling to overcome feeling lost while finding her learner self.

6 Implications as Conclusion

The present study suggests that both practitioners and researchers should consider introducing the authentic assessment of non-cognitive skills to formal English education to evaluate communicative competences required in the national guidelines. The Ministry of Education is planning to reform the entrance examination system, including the National Center Test, for national and public universities. However, it will be difficult to assess non-cognitive skills in the test as long as the test retains its conventional format. Practitioners should design course plans and assessment methods considering not only success in entrance examinations but also the improvement of students’ non-cognitive skills, which would lead to greater life-long learning as well as communicative competences. However, further research on assessment methods for Japanese secondary education is required.

It is necessary to investigate how authentic assessments at the onset of English education influence the formation of students’ beliefs and attitudes toward learning

English, and how such beliefs and attitudes motivate them to continue learning English. The present study does not clarify this point, so case studies or action research are essential in future work. Enhancing non-cognitive skills and evaluating such skills using authentic assessments is crucial for students' survival in the Japanese economy (e.g., Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006; Lee & Otake, 2014; Toda, Tsuru, & Kume, 2014; also see 2.1). It is also essential that students are able to learn autonomously after finishing their formal education, as life-long learning will enable longer lives compared to previous generations. Thus, future research will investigate whether the introduction of communicative tasks and authentic assessments in Japanese formal education, in which students learn extrinsically by following the national guidelines (Toyoshima, 2016), can form Japanese learners' beliefs and attitudes in a similar manner as the ES participants in the present study with intrinsic motivations and enhanced non-cognitive skills, and if these experiences can lead students to be motivated to learn continuously and intrinsically in the long term.

Note

1 <https://www.learningrx.com/what-is-brain-training-/what-are-cognitive-skills/>

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Appendix

*The following participants are introduced in the main sections.

Name	Hometown, Family, Social environment in their childhood	Early Starters (ES) / Regular Starters (RS)
Yuka	Hometown: Kansai area (Western part) Parents: researchers in a private section, both completed their MA at Kyoto University Younger brother: junior high school student Her parents rarely told her to study. Yuka learned how to play the piano when she was a young child, and she wanted a job related to music.	RS
Miho	Hometown: Tohoku area (Northern part) Family: Father, Mother, an older brother She always followed what her brother did. She was praised by her teacher in primary school as the best in her class. This experience made her feel that she should be the best everywhere after joining junior high school.	RS

Mayumi	<p>Hometown: Kansai area (Western part) Family: Father (owns a company inherited from his father), Mother (housewife), two older sisters</p> <p>It seemed to her that her parents felt inferior in their educational background because neither of them acquired higher education. Her mother encouraged her and her sisters to complete their higher education studies in order to be financially independent in the future. Her hometown's environment was sort of a working-class area, which might have influenced her mother's attitude toward her daughters. Her parents decided to enroll them in private junior and senior high school so that they would not study with the local children.</p>	RS
Yuko	<p>Hometown: Chubu area (Middle part) Family: Father (public servant), Mother (primary school teacher), an older sister</p> <p>Yuka always stayed with her grandmother after school. Her hometown was rural, so her mother told her and her sister to study some correspondence courses in preparation for entrance examinations of senior high school and university. Her father liked reading and told her to read aloud with him.</p>	RS
Narumi	<p>Hometown: Tohoku area (Northern part) Family: Father (engineer), Mother (works as an accountant in a hospital), an older sister (studying nursing)</p> <p>Her mother often took her and her sister to the city-library and read many books. She believed that she should be a good student in school and wanted to be an English teacher in the future.</p>	RS
Julia	<p>Hometown: Kanto area (near Tokyo) Family: Father (from Canada, working in the IT industry), Mother (housewife), a younger sister</p> <p>Her father spoke to her in English while her mother spoke to her in Japanese, which was natural and understandable. However, she gradually spoke only Japanese at home and in school, so she was not able to communicate in English with her grandmother and relatives on her father's side. Just before joining university, she decided to speak English with her father and travelled to Canada to see her grandmother and relatives.</p>	RS

Haruki	<p>Hometown: Chubu area (Middle part) Family: Father (engineer at a car company), Mother (kindergarten teacher), a younger sister</p> <p>His mother's specialty was young children's education, so she "supervised" his learning, such as swimming, playing the piano, and basketball among others.</p>	RS
Natsuko	<p>Hometown: Kanto area (North to Tokyo) Family: Father (public servant), Mother (public servant)</p> <p>She was an only child and her parents were very busy, so she felt lonely even when she stayed with her grandparents who lived next to her house. However, she and her mother have a good and friendly relationship. Her father was strict and difficult. When she told her parents that she wanted to study for her high school education abroad, both of them did not allow her.</p>	RS
Masako	<p>Hometown: Tohoku area (Northern part) Family: Father (engineer), Mother (housewife), a younger sister, grandparents (mother's side).</p> <p>She moved to her hometown when she finished junior high school. Her father often went on business trips or only stayed home for a short while. Her mother was very social and active in offering voluntary support at her primary school. The relationship between her and her sister was rivalrous.</p>	RS
Masaru	<p>Hometown: Tohoku area (Northern part) Family: Father (IT engineer), Mother (housewife), a younger sister</p> <p>He moved to his hometown from Kanto area when he was six years old. His father was strict and because he had played tennis, he forced him to play tennis too when he was a junior high school student. His mother liked reading and read books with him when he was a child.</p>	RS

Natsumi	<p>Hometown: Tokyo Family: Father (public servant), Mother (housewife), a younger brother and two younger sisters</p> <p>Her father moved around Japan because of his job and her family moved with him. Her father was ordered to move to Switzerland just before she finished junior high school, so she and her family moved there five months later. She attended an international high school for three years and then came back with her family when her father's duty was over. However, she was not good at English, especially grammar and vocabulary. Her grandmother was a university lecturer who majored in English education and she taught her granddaughter very strictly when she was a junior high school student. She did not like English at the time.</p>	RS
Kaori	<p>Hometown: Kyushu area (Far western part from Tokyo) Family: Father (IT engineer), Mother (works in IT industry)</p> <p>Mother strongly wanted her daughter to acquire high English proficiency because she did not think she could acquire it herself. She let her daughter listen to English songs and stories when she was pregnant. Kaori started to learn English at the age of four years in a small English class, where an American and a Japanese teacher taught English through games and songs. After moving to another place at the age of six, she and her mother went to the same English school, where people of various ages learned English. Kaori enjoyed learning there and stayed until she finished junior high school.</p>	ES
Sayuri	<p>Hometown: Hokuriku area (facing Japan Sea) Family: Father (businessman), Mother (works in a nursery), a younger sister</p> <p>She moved to her hometown at the age of eight from Kanto area because of her father's job. Her father was strict and stubborn toward her, but her mother was always on her side. Her mother studied English as her major in junior college and wanted to further study abroad at the time. However, her parents did not allow her, so she gave up. This experience made her have her daughters start to learn English earlier to enable them acquire high proficiency in English. Her father often objected to her mother's intention and they argued with each other.</p>	ES

Yuri	<p>Hometown: Kansai area (Western part) Family: Mother, grandparents (mother's side)</p> <p>She does not remember when her parents got divorced. Her mother worked part-time and depended on her parents who owned a restaurant. She had difficulty finding a job due to her educational background, which gave her the idea that her daughter should have better education conditions. Thus, Yuri learned many things including piano, swimming, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and English. She started to learn English at the age of 10 in a small English class with a Japanese teacher and ten peers. The teacher used only English and introduced many communicative activities. She enjoyed the class very much, but she had to give up the class because her mother made her prepare for her private junior high school entrance examination.</p>	ES
Aiko	<p>Hometown: Tohoku area (Northern part) Family: Father (senior high school teacher), Mother (piano instructor), a younger brother</p> <p>Aiko liked playing the piano and was influenced by her mother, though she was not instructed by her mother. She does not remember how she started to learn English, but she remembers going to an English school managed by her kindergarten. She continued until she left junior high school. She enjoyed the class very much, where a Japanese and a native English speaker taught about ten children and introduced communicative activities.</p>	ES
Masaki	<p>Hometown: Chubu area (Middle part) Family: Father (businessman), Mother (housewife), a younger brother and a younger sister</p> <p>Masaki was a returnee from three countries: UAE, Turkey, and UK. He moved from UAE to Turkey at the age of three and went to a Japanese kindergarten. He started to learn English at that time, where communicative activities were introduced. He went to a Japanese primary school and continued to learn English there. He and his family moved to Manchester, UK, at the age of 12. He attended a local secondary school, but it was difficult for him to keep up with his classes. He also went to Japanese supplementary school every weekend, where he learned Japanese and read many books. He went back to Japan at the age of 14 and joined a local junior high school in his hometown.</p>	ES

Nana	<p>Hometown: South-west islands area Family: Mother, an older sister, and a younger sister</p> <p>Her parents got divorced when she was two or three years old. She started to learn English in primary school in a local town in the island she was born. An assistant teacher of English (ALT) came to the school once a week. There were only nine pupils in her class and she enjoyed English classes and adopted many communicative activities. She moved to another town at the age of nine and the primary school there did not introduce English classes. She restarted learning English in junior high school.</p>	ES
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