

Wet and Dry Learning Approaches in English Communication Classes : What Balances Do Freshmen Students at Nagasaki University Prefer?

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英語コミュニケーション授業におけるウェットとドライ学習アプローチ： 長崎大学の新生が好むウェットとドライ学習方法のバランスとは？

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要旨

背景：ウェットとドライ学習のバランスは、英語コミュニケーションスキルの上達において重要な役割を果たす。本研究では、英語コミュニケーション授業を受講している大学1年次生が好むウェットとドライ学習のバランスについて、調査を行った。方法：本研究は、2009年の7月に長崎大学にて実施された。研究対象は、前期英語コミュニケーション授業を受講した148名の1年次生であった。口頭の同意が得られた学生に、無記名自記式質問票を用い、ウェットとドライ学習アプローチに関しての調査が行われた。結果：90%の学生は、ドライ学習アプローチよりウェット学習アプローチを好んだ。中程度のウェット学習アプローチを好んだ学生の割合は、約70%であった。約85%の学生は、在学中に海外旅行を希望した。約75%の学生は在学中にTOEICやTOEFLといった英語検定テストを受験する意図があった。結論：本研究の結果から、学生の英語コミュニケーションスキルを向上させる為には、ウェット学習アプローチのカリキュラムをさらに提供すべきであることが示唆された。英語コミュニケーションスキルの向上のためには、学生は学習アプローチのバランスが必要であると認識していた。これは、学習方法について学生が自律性のある程度持っていると考えられる。本研究の結果は、英語コミュニケーション授業を担当する教員が学習アプローチを決定するための一助となるであろう。

キーワード：ウェットアプローチ、ドライアプローチ、自律性、英語コミュニケーション、大学生

1. Introduction

English communication skills are important for university students in Japan because of globalization. Almost all universities in Japan have the goal of developing students' English communication skills in order to participate in the international community. According to the Ministry of Culture, Education and Sports, the emphasis of English education in Japan

should be on developing communication skills. Between 1981 and 2006, the university center exam has undergone major change. The 2006 test is not a grammar focused test. The 2006 test has a heavy focus on extended reading texts and integrative and holistic reading skills. The 2006 test is skill-based, not knowledge-based¹⁾. The Japanese Ministry of Culture, Education and Sports has ruled that high school

English education should be taught in English starting from 2012²⁾.

English education in Japan is characterized by teacher centered classes. Students learn about the English language and memorize grammar. High school teachers still focus on Dry learning and classes are typically teacher centered. In reality, high school teachers believe that students who intend to go to university must be equipped with “test English” in order to pass the university entrance examinations. As a result, many high school English teachers still resort to the “old ways” of English education³⁾.

Wet learning is more important than Dry learning. Wet learning is R-Directed (right brain) learning and Dry learning is L-Directed (left brain) learning^{4) - 6)}. Now into the future, the emphasis of university education around the world will be on R-Directed learning^{5) - 10)}. R-Directed learning refers to “high concept and high touch” abilities. In the fields of science, medicine, nursing, engineering, economics and education, the Emotional Quotient (EQ) of individuals is becoming more sought after than high Intelligence Quotient (IQ). Furthermore, R-Directed “people skills”, interpersonal intelligence, ethical awareness and the ability to get along with others is extremely important to develop in our students. Recent research clearly points to Wet learning approaches as being more beneficial for gaining future employment in the present conceptual age^{4) - 8)}.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study examined: 1) students’ preference of Wet and Dry learning; 2) what they think the balance of Wet and Dry learning should be in 1st year university English Communication classes; 3) the comparison of students who want to travel and students who intend to take a English test.

2. Methods

2.1 Study site and Participants

This study was conducted at Nagasaki University in July 2009. In 2009, 818 1st year English Communication class students were registered at

Nagasaki University. All first year students are required to pass English Communication I,II,III. The focus of this study was on 1st year, 1st semester students because unpublished data collected by the author suggests that motivation to pursue English is highest during first year, first semester of university.

2.2 Procedure

This study used convenience sampling in four English Communication classes. The researcher informed 1st year English Communication class students about the study and all of them volunteered to participate. Oral consent from students was obtained. Data was collected using anonymous self-reported questionnaires with closed-ended questions. Questions were translated from English into Japanese, and were back-translated. The back-translated questionnaires had almost the same content and meaning as the original questionnaires. Then, a pilot test was conducted to ensure the readability and comprehension among five 3rd year medical students. The questionnaires were revised based on the student feedback and results of the pilot test.

2.3 Content of Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained questions about demographic characteristics such as age, gender, faculty and hometown. Descriptive data was collected about Wet and Dry learning activities and needs. Three questions on Wet and Dry focused learning activities were asked: 1) Are you interested in Wet focused English such as singling, watching movies and discussion in English? 2) Are you interested in Dry focused English focused on accurate English grammar such as translation from English to Japanese? 3) What do you think the rate of Dry focused English and Wet focused English in your English communication class should be? Scaling of the three questions involved the use of a five-point Likert-type scale. Responses of ‘strongly agree’ were weighted 5, and those of ‘strongly disagree’ were rated 1.

Data about the needs for Wet and Dry learning was

collected. Two questions were asked: 1) I want to travel overseas while I'm at university and 2) I will take an English test such as TOEIC, TOEFL or English proficiency test while I'm at university.

2.4 Analysis

Demographic data except for age was shown by percentage and numbers. Age was shown by the mean and standard deviation (SD). Descriptive data was shown by percentage. The preferred rate of Wet and Dry learning was divided into three categories: High Rate, Medium Rate and Low Rate. The High Rate includes the preference for Wet learning activities of 70% and over. The Medium Rate includes the preference for Wet learning between 40% and 60%. The Low Rate includes the preference for Wet learning 30% and under. The data on student preference for Wet and Dry learning was analyzed by Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The data was shown by Median and Interquartile range (IQR).

3. Results

The mean age of the 148 students was 18.55±SD 0.87 years. Seventy nine males and sixty eight females completed the questionnaires for the survey (Table 1). Male students were 53%. Ninety-five percent of the participants come from Kyushu area. Of them, 42% were from Nagasaki and 26% from Fukuoka. Only 4% were from outside of Kyushu. Thirty-four students (22.8%) were in the Faculty of Nursing, forty-one students (27.5%) were in the Faculty of Economics, thirty-five students (23.5%) were in the Faculty of Environmental Science, and thirty-nine students (26.2%) were in the Faculty of Technology.

Table 2 shows a comparison of the students' interest in Wet and Dry learning activities. The Median of Wet focused learning was 4.00 and the Median for Dry focused learning was 3.00. Interest in Wet learning activities was significantly higher than interest in Dry learning ($p<0.001$).

Figure 1 shows how students rated their preferred balance between a Wet approach and a Dry approach

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N=149)

Characteristics	n	%
Age ^a		
17	1	0.7
18	85	57.4
19	50	33.8
20	7	4.7
21	3	2
23	2	1.4
Gender ^b		
Male	79	53.7
Female	68	46.3
Faculty		
Medicine	34	22.8
Economics	41	27.5
Environmental Science	35	23.5
Technology	39	26.2
Hometown ^c		
Nagasaki	63	42.6
Fukuoka	39	26.4
Kumamoto	10	6.8
Saga	9	6.1
Oita	8	5.4
Kagoshima	7	4.7
Miyazaki	6	4.1
Others	6	4.1

^a One participant did not respond to this question.

^b Two participants did not respond to this question.

^c One participant did not respond to this question.

Table 2. Students' Interest in Wet and Dry Learning Activities in English Communication Classes (N=149)

	Median	Interquartile Range	P Value
Wet Focus Learning	4.00	(3.00–4.00)	<0.001
Dry Focus Learning	3.00	(3.00–4.00)	

to learning activities in English communication classes. The data reflect that about 70% of participants preferred a medium rate of Wet learning. A preference for a high rate of Wet learning was 23%. A preference for Low Rate of Wet approach was about 10%.

Figure 2 shows a comparison of students who wanted to travel overseas while at university and who intended to take English tests such as TOEFL or TOEIC while at university. About 85% of participants agreed that they wanted to travel overseas while at university. Less than 15% disagreed that they wanted to travel overseas while at university. About 75% of

participants agreed that they intended to take an English test such as TOEIC, TOEFL or English proficiency test while at university.

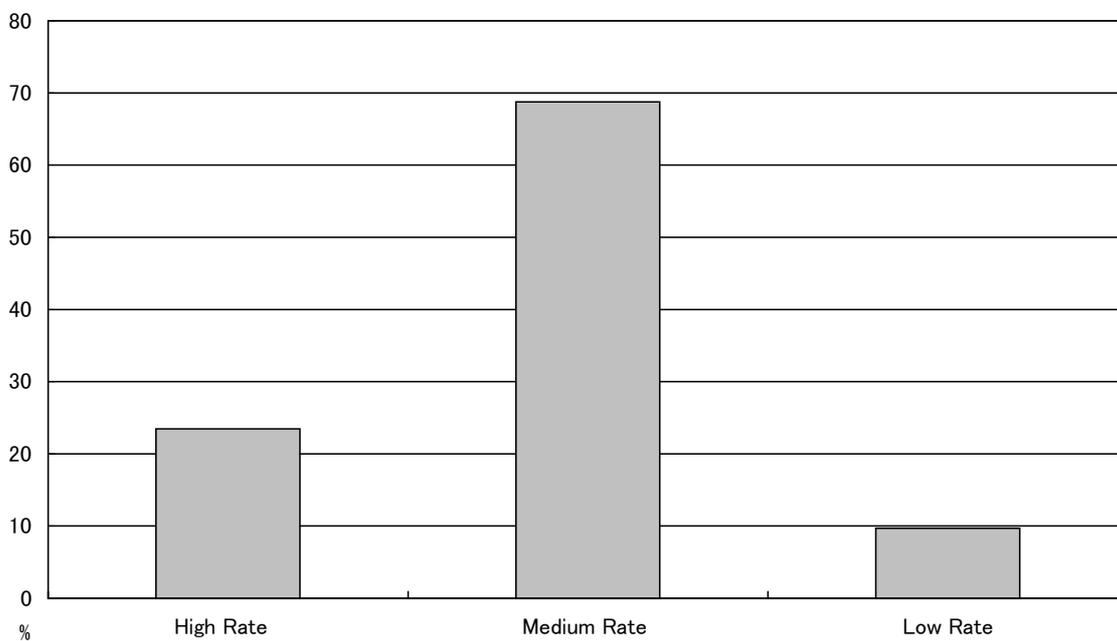


Figure1. Preferred Rate of Wet and Dry Learning Approaches

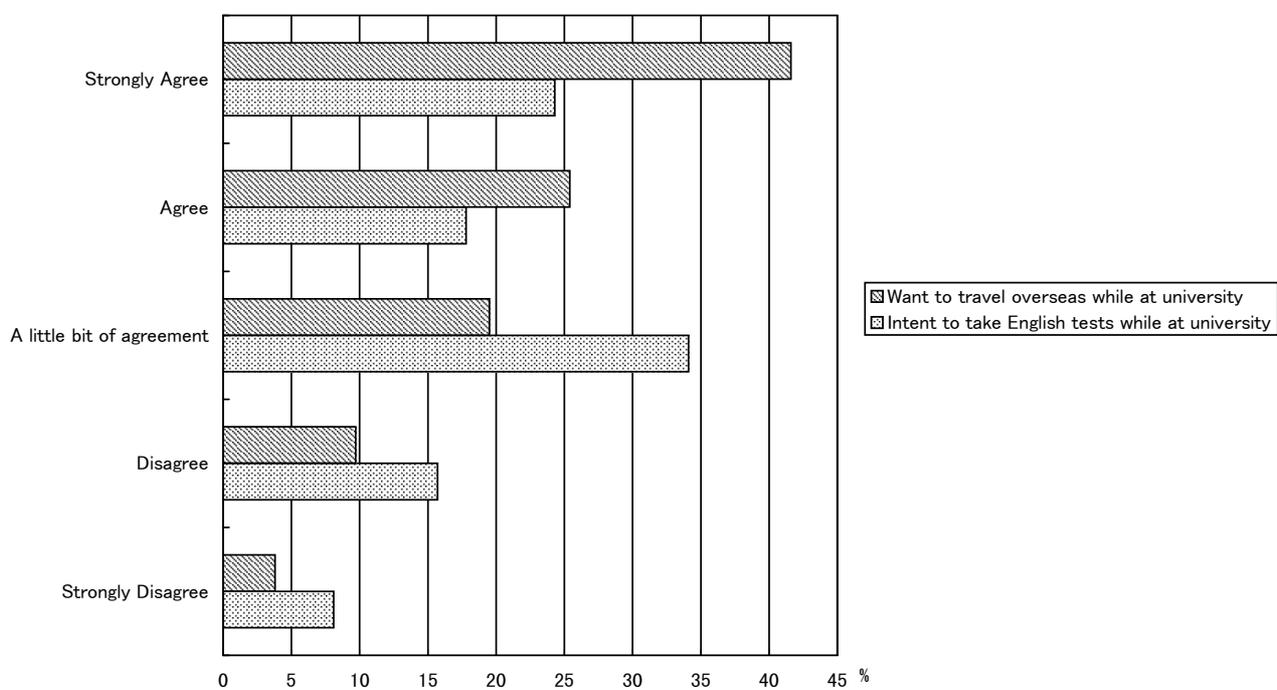


Figure 2. Comparison of students who want to travel and intend to take English tests while at university

4. Discussion

Students preferred more Wet learning, however, they thought about the balance between Wet and Dry learning. While at university, two thirds of the students want to go abroad and will take an English test.

Students preferred more Wet learning than Dry learning in English Communication classes. The reason is mostly because high school English education is Dry focused and teacher focused. Unpublished research by the author revealed that over 90% of the students were dissatisfied with their high school English learning experiences. A Wet approach, in which students gain passion for their profession, exercise high emotional intelligence (EQ), develop interpersonal intelligence, practice seeing the big picture, are encouraged to work with new technologies and become more ethically aware, should be part of the mosaic of the university learning experience ⁴⁾⁻⁶⁾. Wet learning, R-Directed learning, is considered more important than Dry learning now in Western countries ⁵⁾⁻⁸⁾. Japanese university education also needs to adopt a more Wet learning approach.

This research suggests that 1st year, 1st semester students at Nagasaki University are able to decide the balance of Wet and Dry learning activities that suit them and that they feel they can learn by. These are indications that students do have autonomy. However, fewer than 30% chose a high rate of Wet learning and over 70% medium rate of Wet learning. University students may be underestimating the benefits of Wet learning. This might be due to misinformation about Wet learning from respected others such as parents and high school teachers, a lack of information about new research regarding employable skills and over emphasis of intelligence quotient (IQ) development in society ^{4), 11)}.

In this study more than 80% of students want to travel overseas while at university and more than 70% of students will take an English test while at university. Therefore, most students thought about what balance between Wet and Dry learning would

benefit them.

English educators in Nagasaki University should provide English education using more Wet learning experiences that will enhance student autonomy. University educators are often heard saying, “Students’ don’t have autonomy.” and “Students don’t know how to study”. Students also complain that many university educators are not able to use English as a communicative tool effectively, even their Japanese English instructors. Emphasizing a Wet approach and exercising more Wet learning activities would liberate both students and instructors from these expectations and from this finger pointing. Such action would call for more student-centered classrooms and more Wet learning activities.

5. Limitations

This study has two limitations. One is selection bias. Student participants were from the researcher’s classes. Thus, the students had some influence from the researcher.

A second limitation of this study is that there was varying degrees of awareness and understanding among students of Wet and Dry learning. The researchers briefly explained Wet and Dry learning using simple words on the questionnaires when questionnaires were distributed. Future questionnaires should have more explanation, discussion about Wet and Dry learning and visual prompts which are characteristic of Wet learning.

6. Future Research

Further research needs to be conducted in other 1st year English Communication classes at Nagasaki University to confirm this study. Furthermore, a longitudinal study is necessary in order to follow up on student’s Wet and Dry learning needs.

7. Conclusion

More Wet learning in English communication class curriculum should be provided for students to improve their English communication skills. English

teaching staff must consider the balance between Wet and Dry learning approaches in their classes at Nagasaki University to support student autonomy.

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