

# **Declining Affect among Japanese University Students Returned from Studying Abroad**

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## **Introduction**

This paper presents the results of a 2011 survey conducted by two Asia University English instructors of ninety-three, Sophomore English students who had returned to Japan from the Asia University America Program (AUAP) four months prior. Results show a decline in student motivation, confidence, and enjoyment of English upon students' return to Japan. The authors suggest possible causes for this decline as well as methods of addressing the problem.

## **About AUAP**

AUAP is a required five-month study abroad program in the United States for students in the International Relations department at Asia University. There are four participating universities: Eastern Washington University, Central Washington University, Western Washington University, and Arizona State University.

## **Rationale**

When comparing students' behavior between AUAP and Sophomore English, we have observed differences among them with regard to classroom behavior, motivation, confidence, and overall English performance.

We hypothesized that their AUAP lives brought them motivation to study English for immersion purposes and enjoyment and that their confidence was highly boosted as English speakers, especially given the "English Only" policy during AUAP, whereas once matriculated into Sophomore English after AUAP, their motivation to study English slipped, their behavior became lazy, and they spoke more Japanese in class.

Last year we were curious about the reasons for their change in behavior (AUAP versus Sophomore English), so we conducted a survey similar to this current project. As our results proved interesting, we decided to explore this project a bit further by conducting a more focused survey to high, middle and low-level students.

## **Objectives**

The following were the objectives of this project:

- 1) to identify the effects on student affect and behavior of returning to Japan following their period of study abroad using data gathered via surveys of students
- 2) to identify possible causes of declining affect and behavior, where they exist
- 3) to posit teaching strategies that may be useful in countering the detriments associated with returning to a Japanese environment

## **Method of Research**

This is an ethnographic project which involved a survey of ninety-three Sophomore English students who filled out a survey which included eighteen questions about the differences of AUAP classes and Sophomore English at Asia University. In an attempt to represent all levels, without surveying all thirteen levels, levels one and two were selected to represent the higher level; levels six and nine to represent the middle level; and level thirteen to represent the lower level.

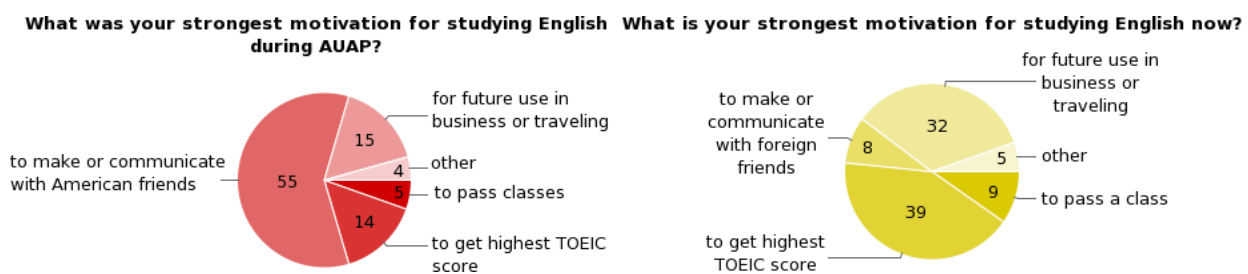
The students were asked to rate their opinions about their current motivation to study English, their study habits and English confidence, enjoyment of studying English, and Japanese usage in the classroom versus when they were in AUAP.

### About the Subjects

The subjects of this project voluntarily and anonymously participated in a survey written and given by the authors. All of the subjects participated in AUAP and have various English background educations ranging from attending high school and university in an English speaking country (apart from AUAP) to having only studied English in Japan.

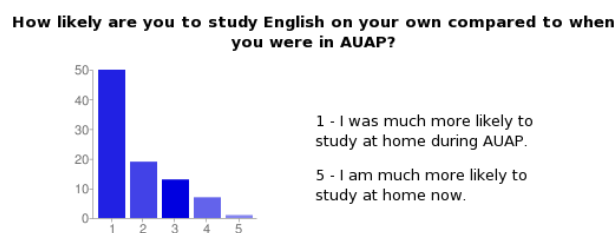
### Motivation and Study Habits

Upon their return to Japan and current enrollment at Asia University, the largest percentage of students surveyed (about 39%) were more motivated to study English for TOEIC purposes whereas while in America, their highest motivation for studying English (55%) was to communicate with American friends.



These results were expected given the dramatic change in their English environment. In America, students had an immediate communicative reason to use English, whereas currently, their graduation depends on their TOEIC score.

Furthermore, the results show that the students were more likely to study English on their own during AUAP:



However, the survey revealed that the students' study methods pre- and post-AUAP were more or less the same with speaking, listening, reading, and watching movies in English. (see Appendix B: Survey Results).

### Confidence

Our survey results show a clear and precipitous drop in students' confidence in their own English abilities, as shown in the following charts:

**Rate your level of English confidence during AUAP.**



**Rate your level of English confidence now.**

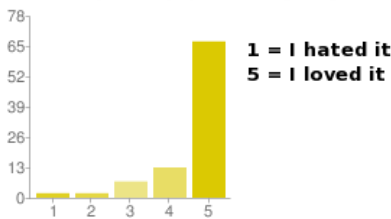


At a glance, one can see that these graphs are almost mirror images of one another. Following their return to Japan, only 17 respondents (roughly 18 percent) indicated greater-than-neutral confidence in their own English, while 40 respondents (about 43%) reported that their confidence was lower than neutral.

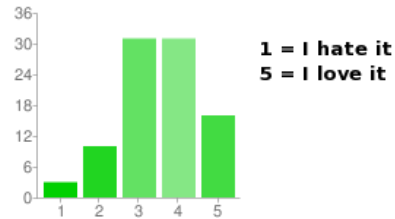
### Enjoyment

The decline in enjoyment of English from AUAP to Sophomore English was even more pronounced than that of confidence.

**How much did you enjoy learning English during AUAP?**



**How much do you enjoy learning English now?**

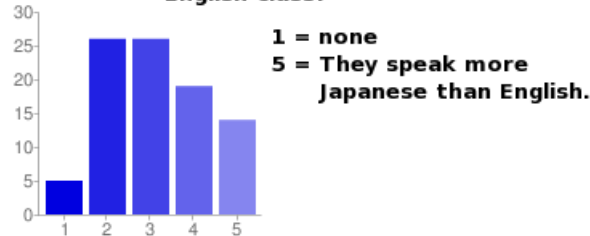


67 students (about 72%) reported having “loved” studying English in AUAP, while this figure declines to only 16 (about 17%) for Sophomore English, though it should be noted that, overall, students still reported enjoying English study.

### Language Use in Class

About half of the classes surveyed (54% of respondents) implemented an “English Only” policy, and students reported a wide range of English to Japanese ratios in their classes as below:

**How much Japanese do students speak in your Sophomore English class?**



Most students who gave a reason for speaking Japanese in class cited laziness or lack of confidence. Only one student said that the “English Only” policy was not very strict.

The students’ usage of Japanese in the Sophomore English classroom is relevant due to the strict English only policy in the AUAP program and outwardly shows the decline in their confidence and

motivation to speak English in the classroom after returning to Japan. In addition, social pressures to use English in front of peers is also a factor that tempts students to revert to Japanese and decrease their participation.

## **Conclusion**

### **Limitations of Research**

As with any self-reported data, we cannot expect our survey results to be free of bias stemming from respondents' inability or unwillingness to answer accurately. It should be noted that any bias in the data likely softens the contrast between AUAP and Sophomore English, since students were surveyed by their Sophomore English teachers and may have felt pressure to "be nice" when filling out the surveys. It's also worth noting that the curriculum of Sophomore English at Asia University is regarded as being fairly high, probably as difficult as the most challenging of AUAP classes.

While our data over the last two years represents a respectable sample size of returned Asia University students with consistent results, we cannot say whether Asia University is a representative case within the context of Japanese university programs that offer study-abroad opportunities. In particular, it may be a unique one in that AUAP students undergo AUAP as members of almost entirely homogeneous groups, buffering them somewhat from direct, prolonged participation in American society. This may result in fewer adjustment challenges than would be faced by students elsewhere, since it may soften the contrast between AUAP and Asia University. Regarding programs with less of a guided, bounded approach to studying abroad, we can reasonably speculate that students will face greater adjustment challenges upon returning to Japan, as the contrast with their recent experiences abroad will be that much starker, and they are likely to be leaving behind more and deeper personal relationships than our students. Teachers charged with classes or programs elsewhere will doubtless have their own intuitions as to whether our school's experience is comparable to their own.

### **Meeting the Needs of Returned Students**

Based on our survey results and impressions as teachers of both AUAP and returned sophomore students, it seems that the greatest problems Japanese EFL learners face on returning to a Japanese university atmosphere are heavily declining confidence in and enjoyment of English. To address how to counter this decline in a setting of repatriated students, we first have to speculate as to what is causing it. We suggest that the following are contributing factors:

- decreased contact with native speakers, especially native-speaking peers
- decreased contact time with the teacher and less personal reliance on the teacher
- a lack of immersion in English and a lack of English language resources
- a lack of need for English in daily life and a lack of affective reward for English use
- a Japanese classroom culture/atmosphere which discourages vocal participation

It will, of course, be difficult for teachers to overcome the loss of contact time with native speakers. However, many, if not most, students who have participated in study abroad programs have contacts in the U.S. with whom they can communicate electronically. When this is the case, asking students to correspond with these friends as a matter of coursework will help blend the sometimes insular world of the Japanese university English class with the exciting (but problematically remote) world of the study abroad experience, where English had a tangible social purpose for our students. Another option is to seek internet venues by which students can communicate in real English situations. Choices here might include internet forums for websites on any topic or more focused efforts at building interpersonal connections via websites like [conversationexchange.com](http://conversationexchange.com), which maintains a database of users seeking language exchange partners for e-communication.

Regardless of the strategies used, We think most teachers will agree that it will not be possible to sustain or restore the feelings of connection to English that students felt during their study abroad experiences from our classrooms in Japan. Nevertheless, there may be qualities of Japanese university classrooms that work to the *detriment* of those positive feelings. Not meeting often enough is a common problem, as are lacks of classroom English policies, focus on content that is too difficult and often favors academic topics over conversational ones, and not providing opportunities for small talk in English. These are failures to capitalize on the energy students possess on coming home from overseas. Meeting often is critical to increasing students' trust in the teacher and one another for purposes of creating a classroom culture that nourishes participation and enthusiasm. Teaching language that students expect to use in actual English communication will contribute to a sense that the language has meaning in their lives, especially if we give them opportunities to use it to communicate with friends they made overseas.

As long as we are doing all we can to give the students an atmosphere they feel positive about, one which encourages communication in English and instills a feeling that English is relevant, we need not fret that students' English experiences in Japan do not rival those they had while studying abroad; that is natural and out of our hands. But failing to take advantage of momentum acquired while overseas would be a lost opportunity for us as educators.

## Appendix A Student Survey

**Where did you go to AUAP?** AUAPでの派遣大学はどこでしたか？

- WWU
- CWU
- EWU
- ASU
- I didn't go to AUAP. 参加しなかった
- Other: その他 \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your Sophomore English level?** ソフモア英語はどのクラスですか？  
\_\_\_\_\_組

**How many times have you taken Sophomore English?** ソフモア英語の履修は何回目ですか？

- This is my first time. 初めて
- This is my second time. 二度目
- This is my third time or more. 三回目または以上

**What is your highest TOEIC score?** あなたのTOEICの最高得点は何点ですか？  
\_\_\_\_\_点

**What was your strongest motivation for studying English during AUAP? (Choose one)** AUAP中、何のために英語を勉強しましたか？（一つのみ選択）

- to pass classes 単位を取るため
- to get highest TOEIC score TOEICで高得点をとるため
- to make or communicate with American friends アメリカ人の友達と交流できるようになるため
- for future use in business or traveling 将来仕事や旅行に使えるため
- Other: その他 \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your strongest motivation for studying English now?** 現在は何のために英語を勉強していますか？（一つのみ選択）

- to pass a class 単位を取るため
- to get highest TOEIC score TOEICで高得点をとるため
- to make or communicate with foreign friends 外国人の友達と交流できるようになるため
- for future use in business or traveling 将来仕事や旅行に使えるため
- Other: その他 \_\_\_\_\_

**Rate your level of English confidence during AUAP.** AUAPの時の英語に対する自信について、あてはまるものにチェックしてください。

1 2 3 4 5

No confidence  
自信がない

Very confident  
自信がある

**Rate your level of English confidence now.** 現在の英語に対する自信について、あてはまるものにチェックしてください。

1 2 3 4 5

No confidence  
自信がない

Very confident  
自信がある

**How likely are you to study English on your own compared to when you were in AUAP?** AUAP  
中と比べて、どれくらい自分で英語を勉強していますか？（学校での授業を除く）

1 2 3 4 5

I was much more likely to study at home during  
AUAP.  
AUAP中の方が家で勉強していた

I am much more likely to study at home  
now.  
現在のほうが家で勉強している

**How did you study English on your own during AUAP?** AUAP中はどのように自分で英語を勉強しましたか？ (Check all that apply.) 複数回答可

- Watching English television or movies 英語のテレビ番組や映画を観る
- Listening to English music 英語の歌を聴く
- Reading English 英文を読む
- Extracurricular classes 課外授業に参加
- Speaking English to others 英語で話す
- Other: その他 \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you study English on your own now?** 今はどのように英語を勉強していますか？ (Check all that apply.) 複数回答可

- Watching English television or movies 英語のテレビ番組や映画を観る
- Listening to English music 英語の歌を聴く
- Reading English 英文を読む
- Extracurricular classes 課外授業に参加
- Speaking English to others 英語で話す
- Other: その他 \_\_\_\_\_

**How much did you enjoy learning English during AUAP?** AUAPの英語の授業はどうでしたか？

1 2 3 4 5

I hated it  
嫌いだった

I loved it  
楽しかった

**How much do you enjoy learning English now?** 今の英語の授業はどうですか。

1 2 3 4 5

I hate it  
嫌い

I love it  
楽しい

**Is there an English only policy in your Sophomore English class?** あなたのソフモア英語の授業では、英語しか話してはいけないというルールはありますか？

- Yes はい
- No いいえ

**How much Japanese do students speak in your Sophomore English class?** あなたのソフモア英語クラスでは、皆どれくらい日本語を話しますか？

1 2 3 4 5

None  
全く話さない

They speak more Japanese than English.  
英語より日本語を話す

**If students in your class speak Japanese, why do you think they do it?** クラスで日本語を話している場合、なぜ日本語を使うのだと思いますか。

**How do you think your English level compares to your classmates' levels?**

クラスメイトと比較してあなたの英語レベルはどう感じますか？

1 2 3 4 5

I think my English level is lower than my classmates'.

クラスメイトより下手だと思う

I think my English level is higher than my classmates'.

クラスメイトよりよく出来ると思う

**How do you think social pressure from your classmates affected your participation in AUAP classes?**

AUAP中、授業への参加度合（積極性）という部分でクラスメイトからの影響を受けましたか。受けたとしたら、どのような影響でしたか。

1 2 3 4 5

I think social pressure greatly decreased my participation in AUAP classes.

より消極的になる

I think social pressure greatly increased my participation in AUAP classes.

より積極的になる



## Appendix B

### Survey Results

Where did you go to AUAP?

WWU	19	20%
CWU	32	34%
EWU	27	29%
ASU	15	16%
I didn't go to AUAP.	0	0%
Other	0	0%

How many times have you taken Sophomore English?

This is my first time.	90	97%
This is my second time.	2	2%
This is my third time or more.	0	0%

What was your strongest motivation for studying English during AUAP?

to pass classes	5	5%
to pass the TOEIC	14	15%
to make or communicate with American friends	55	59%
for future use in business or traveling	15	16%
Other	4	4%

What is your strongest motivation for studying English now?

to pass a class	9	10%
to pass the TOEIC	39	42%
to make or communicate with foreign friends	8	9%
for future use in business or traveling	32	34%
Other	5	5%

Rate your level of English confidence during AUAP.

1	8	(9%)
2	18	(19%)
3	32	(34%)
4	29	(31%)
5	6	(6%)

Rate your level of English confidence now.

1	13	(14%)
2	27	(29%)
3	34	(37%)
4	14	(15%)
5	3	(3%)

How likely are you to study English on your own compared to when you were in AUAP?

1	50	(54%)
2	19	(20%)
3	13	(14%)
4	7	(8%)
5	1	(1%)

How did you study English on your own during AUAP?

Watching English television or movies	66	(73%)
Listening to English music	47	(52%)
Reading English	60	(66%)
Extracurricular classes	26	(29%)
Speaking English to others	84	(92%)
Other	9	(10%)

How do you study English on your own now?

Watching English television or movies	47	(52%)
Listening to English music	61	(67%)
Reading English	50	(55%)
Extracurricular classes	7	(8%)
Speaking English to others	35	(38%)
Other	9	(10%)

How much did you enjoy learning English during AUAP?

1	2	(2%)
2	2	(2%)
3	7	(8%)
4	13	(14%)
5	67	(72%)

How much do you enjoy learning English now?

1	3	(3%)
2	10	(11%)
3	31	(33%)
4	31	(33%)
5	16	(17%)

Is there an English only policy in your Sophomore English class?

Yes	50	(54%)
No	40	(43%)

How much Japanese do students speak in your Sophomore English class?

1	5	(5%)
2	26	(28%)
3	26	(28%)
4	19	(20%)
5	14	(15%)

How do you think your English level compares to your classmates' levels?

1	19	(20%)
2	22	(24%)
3	35	(38%)
4	10	(11%)
5	4	(4%)

How do you think social pressure from your classmates affected your participation in AUAP classes?

1	0	(0%)
2	7	(8%)
3	25	(27%)
4	20	(22%)
5	38	(41%)

How do you think social pressure from your classmates affects your participation in Sophomore English class?

1	5	(5%)
2	13	(14%)
3	50	(54%)
4	17	(18%)
5	5	(5%)