

# **Student Surveys from the PE Course of the General Education English Program at Shizuoka University**

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This paper reports on the results of a survey which was given to students in the General Education English Program at Shizuoka University. The program is being evaluated as part of a larger effort to improve curricula at the university. One important type of information to be applied to curriculum evaluation is student attitudes about the current program (Brown, 1995, p. 236; McDonough and McDonough, 1997, p.181). In order to collect data from students, two surveys were implemented in the 2010-2011 academic year. The survey for students in the Standard English (SE) Course is still underway at this writing and will be reported on at a later occasion. The topic of this article is a survey which was filled out by students who had completed the Power English (PE) Course. The goal of the survey was to gain some insight into students' attitudes about the PE Course, as well as the reasons for these attitudes. It was also hoped that the data would be helpful in understanding what students in the PE Course feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the PE Course.

The PE Course was begun in 2006, with the goal of giving students with higher motivation and ability an alternative to the standard curriculum. From that year the General Education English Program was divided into two separate courses, the SE Course and the PE Course. After acceptance to the university, students who are interested in joining the PE Course are required to apply. Placement decisions are made based on students' test scores. As the number of students who may join the PE Course is limited, the majority of students are assigned to the SE course. At the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year, 355 first-year students were assigned to the PE Course, and 1,702 first-year students were assigned to the SE Course. The PE Course places an emphasis on communicative ability, and is more demanding in terms of the amount of assignments students are required to do. PE students are required to take six classes to finish the PE Course, four in their first year, and two in their sophomore year.

## **THE SURVEY**

### **Method**

The students who participated were in their third year at the university and filled out the surveys after a ceremony in June, 2010, during which they received certificates of completion for the PE Course. There were also a number of students who were not able to attend the ceremony and filled the survey out at an administrative office where they had come to pick up their certificate. Of the 238 students who had completed the course, 184 submitted surveys. There were 84 male

respondents and 100 female respondents.

Many of the items for the 2010 survey were based on data from the previous year's survey. The 2009 surveys did not contain questions and only provided space for students to make comments about the PE Course. These comments were coded and several questions for the 2010 survey were based on common comments. For example, a number of students made favorable comments about the communicative focus of the PE course on the 2009 surveys. Accordingly, an item asking students about this was included on the 2010 survey. Also included were questions about students' basic information (gender and university faculty), test scores, and attitudes toward English. The three final questions of the survey ask for students' opinions about the difficulty level and amount of assignments as well as the amount of time they spent outside of class on assignments. The survey also provided space for written comments on its reverse side. These comments, along with survey data from the SE students, will be analyzed and reported on at a future date. The first page of the survey form is attached as the Appendix A.

## **Results and Discussion**

Data from the survey (with the content of the survey translated into English) are shown in Table 1. This section presents and discusses the results of the survey.

The results from Q4 show relatively high scores for the TOEIC test, with 76.8% of students scoring 550 or more. This cannot be taken as evidence of success of the PE Course, however. As mentioned above, students are admitted to the PE Course on the basis of higher scores on the Center Test and enter the program at a higher level of proficiency than the average student. Also, the TOEIC test is administered to first-year students at the end of their first semester, when students have yet to complete one third of the six PE classes.

Q5-Q10, which ask about students' affinity toward English, produced interesting results. First, only 1.1 percent of students strongly agreed with the statement, "I have confidence about English." 37% of the students agreed somewhat, bringing the total of students who agreed to 38.1%. The relatively low percentage of students who are confident about their English ability raises questions about the effectiveness of the PE Course. One could argue that students who enter a higher-level program and successfully complete six courses should demonstrate a higher level of confidence in their ability. On the other hand, one reason for the students' response may be cultural. A larger number of students than indicated by the survey response may indeed have had a reasonable amount of confidence in their English ability, but chose a neutral or negative response out of modesty, or a desire not to brag. 72.2% of students showed an affinity for studying English (Q6). This is not surprising, as the group of students who answered the surveys had opted into a program which they had been told was more demanding.

The fact that only 47.2% of the students showed an affinity for speaking English (Q10) is an

Table 1 Results of PE Course Student Survey

|    |   | n=184 PE Course total |                       |                              |                       |                     |      |       |
|----|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------|-------|
|    |   | Male                  | Female                |                              |                       |                     |      |       |
| 1  | Gender  | 84                    | 100                   |                              |                       |                     |      |       |
|    |   | Humanities*           | Science               | Education                    | Informatics           | Agriculture         |      |       |
| 2  | Faculty (respondents /students in PE course)  | 75/104                | 18/21                 | 48/61                        | 23/30                 | 20/22               |      |       |
|    |   | >180                  | >170                  | >160                         | >150                  | <150                |      |       |
| 3  | Center test score   | points                | points                | points                       | points                | points              |      |       |
|    |   | 45.6%                 | 30.0%                 | 19.4%                        | 3.9%                  | 1.1%                |      |       |
|    |   | >730                  | >650                  | >550                         | >450                  | <450                |      |       |
| 4  | TOEIC score from the first semester of 2008   | points                | points                | points                       | points                | points              |      |       |
|    |   | 5.5%                  | 16.6%                 | 54.7%                        | 20.4%                 | 2.8%                |      |       |
|    |   | 1 strongly agree      | 2 agree somewhat      | 3 neither agree nor disagree | 4 disagree somewhat   | 5 strongly disagree | MEAN | SD    |
| 5  | I have confidence about English   | 1.1%                  | 37.0%                 | 33.2%                        | 21.7%                 | 7.1%                | 2.97 | .958  |
| 6  | I like to study English   | 20.8%                 | 51.4%                 | 18.6%                        | 7.7%                  | 1.6%                | 2.18 | .905  |
| 7  | I plan to use English for work in the future  | 10.9%                 | 26.8%                 | 39.3%                        | 18.6%                 | 4.4%                | 2.79 | 1.013 |
| 8  | I like to read English  | 9.8%                  | 45.7%                 | 27.2%                        | 15.2%                 | 2.2%                | 2.54 | .940  |
| 9  | I like to write in English  | 4.9%                  | 27.2%                 | 35.9%                        | 26.6%                 | 5.4%                | 3.01 | .978  |
| 10 | I like to speak English   | 13.0%                 | 34.2%                 | 32.6%                        | 17.4%                 | 2.7%                | 2.63 | 1.006 |
| 11 | The PE Course was helpful in improving my English                                   | 20.2%                 | 61.7%                 | 7.7%                         | 7.7%                  | 2.7%                | 2.11 | .907  |
| 12 | The PE Course was fun   | 29.5%                 | 49.2%                 | 15.3%                        | 3.8%                  | 2.2%                | 2.00 | .896  |
| 13 | It would have been better if there were more choices for courses                    | 18.0%                 | 32.2%                 | 32.2%                        | 16.4%                 | 1.1%                | 2.50 | 1.005 |
| 14 | It was good to have classes with foreign teachers                                   | 49.5%                 | 33.2%                 | 13.0%                        | 3.8%                  | 0.5%                | 1.73 | .870  |
| 15 | There was ample explanation about courses before registration                       | 10.9%                 | 33.7%                 | 37.0%                        | 16.3%                 | 2.2%                | 2.65 | .952  |
| 16 | It would have been better if there were more classes focusing on grammar            | 10.4%                 | 25.8%                 | 31.3%                        | 25.8%                 | 6.6%                | 2.92 | 1.095 |
| 17 | The TOEIC class was helpful   | 28.3%                 | 45.7%                 | 16.3%                        | 6.5%                  | 3.3%                | 2.11 | .997  |
| 18 | It was good to be able to use English for communication in classes                  | 27.7%                 | 53.3%                 | 15.2%                        | 2.2%                  | 1.6%                | 1.97 | .816  |
| 19 | Studying with a computer was helpful  | 13.0%                 | 31.0%                 | 28.8%                        | 19.6%                 | 7.6%                | 2.78 | 1.135 |
| 20 | Class sizes were appropriate  | 38.0%                 | 48.4%                 | 9.8%                         | 3.8%                  | 0.0%                | 1.79 | .769  |
| 21 | It was good that there were differences in course content, depending on the teacher | 29.3%                 | 48.9%                 | 16.3%                        | 3.8%                  | 1.6%                | 1.99 | .872  |
|    |   | agree                 | disagree              | didn't do                    |                       |                     | MEAN | SD    |
| 22 | Doing presentations in English was good   | 44.5%                 | 13.7%                 | 41.8%                        |                       |                     | 1.97 | .931  |
|    |   | 0-15 minutes          | 15-30 minutes         | 30-60 minutes                | 1-2 hours             | >2 hours            | MEAN | SD    |
| 23 | Average amount of time spent outside of the class                                   | 10.9%                 | 28.8%                 | 42.4%                        | 14.1%                 | 3.8%                | 2.71 | .969  |
|    |   | very difficult        | somewhat difficult    | just right                   | somewhat easy         | very easy           | MEAN | SD    |
| 24 | Difficulty of coursework  | 0.5%                  | 26.1%                 | 55.4%                        | 14.7%                 | 3.3%                | 2.94 | .748  |
|    |   | very large amount     | somewhat large amount | just right                   | somewhat small amount | very small amount   | MEAN | SD    |
| 25 | Amount of homework  | 2.2%                  | 17.4%                 | 75.0%                        | 4.9%                  | 0.5%                | 2.84 | .555  |

\*The full name of the faculty is the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science.

unexpected result. This seems remarkably low for a group of students who had opted into and completed a program which features a communicative focus. Speaking activities are central to three of the classes students must take to complete the PE Course. Although the percentage of students who reported an affinity for speaking English is low, the data suggest that many of the students who

gave a neutral or negative response to Q10 were nevertheless satisfied with the communicative emphasis that the PE Course offers. Only 6% of students disagreed with Q12 (The PE Course was fun) and only 3.8% disagreed with Q18 (It was good to be able to use English for communication in classes).

Responses to Q8 showed that 55.5% of students have an affinity for reading English. This is a larger number than the 32.1% affinity for writing English (Q9) or the 42.7% affinity for speaking English (Q10). One reason for this may be the nature of the educational experiences that students have had at the secondary level. It has been pointed out that many secondary teachers are more concerned with covering the material in textbooks and preparing students for entrance exams, and less concerned with fostering communicative ability (Wada, as cited in Stewart, 2009, p. 10). Thus, many students enter university with more experience reading and listening to English. This may cause them to feel more comfortable using these receptive language skills.

82.7% of the students agreed with Q14 (It was good to have classes with foreign teachers), giving this item the second largest affirmative response of the survey. While this result may seem to indicate that the students generally prefer native-speaking teachers, that is not necessarily the case. The TOEIC course is almost exclusively taught by faculty who are Japanese, and 74% of the students agreed that it was helpful (Q17). Furthermore, 78.2% of the students agreed that it was a positive thing that differences among teachers provided variety in course content (Q21). Therefore, the response to Q14 probably demonstrates students' positive appraisal of the balance in the PE Course between native-speaking and Japanese teachers. Typically, PE students take three classes with a native-speaking teacher and three with a Japanese teacher. It will be interesting to see the responses to two items on the SE Survey data on the topic of native-speaking teachers. In contrast to the PE Course, SE students typically take five or six courses with a Japanese teacher, and at most one course with a native-speaking teacher.

The degree of satisfaction for the PE Course was determined by using the average of items Q11 and Q12. The correlation between Q11 and Q12 is  $r=0.55$  ( $p<.01$ ). The average score for satisfaction was 2.05 and the standard deviation was .794. This score falls in the positive range of the scale, with 1 being the most positive response and 5 the most negative. It appears that a majority of PE students are satisfied with the program in general.

Results from a multiple regression analysis (Table 2) shed some light on the reasons students were satisfied. The focus on communication (Q18), the variety provided by different teachers (21), and the presence of foreign teachers (Q14) had a strong causal relationship with students' satisfaction. The same was true for confidence in English ability (Q5) and enjoying reading in English (Q8). Interestingly (and encouragingly), it appears that many students in the PE program were satisfied that the coursework was somewhat demanding (Q24).

Table 2 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

|     | $\beta$ |    | $p$  |
|-----|---------|----|------|
| Q18 | .261    | ** | .000 |
| Q21 | .222    | ** | .001 |
| Q13 | -.201   | ** | .000 |
| Q14 | .220    | ** | .002 |
| Q5  | .147    | ** | .009 |
| Q24 | .163    | ** | .004 |
| Q8  | .127    | *  | .031 |

Over half of the students who filled out surveys agreed that more choice would have made the PE course better (Q13). Furthermore, the multiple regression analysis reveals a strong negative causal relationship between agreement with Q13 and satisfaction with the program (see Table 2, above). This suggests that a majority of the students are not satisfied with the amount of options they have within the course. This is not surprising, perhaps, considering that students are required to take six courses in order to complete the PE Course, and are only offered a choice for one of these. It is impossible to infer from the survey data whether most students who wanted more choice were referring to choices of different types of courses, or the ability to choose which section of a course they take. However, 36.2% of the students agreed that more classes focusing on grammar would make the program better (Q16). In addition to the 36.2% who wanted the option of a grammar course, there are most likely many other types of course choices which would make the PE Course better in the eyes of students.

### CONCLUSIONS

The students' high level of satisfaction with the PE Courses suggests that placing students who have higher motivation and ability into separate classes is meeting with approval from the students, at least those in the PE group. This is one element of the PE Course which is a significant improvement over the previous program. The survey data suggest some of the more specific reasons for students' affirmative response to the PE Course. These include classes with foreign teachers, variety in the courses, and a challenging level of coursework.

The results also show that there are areas where improvement is possible. First, as a group, students who have completed the program do not show a very high level of confidence in their English ability. As mentioned above, it is difficult to determine whether this should be viewed as a problem with the program, or as an issue related to students' endemic attitudes and self-reporting. Still, one would hope that most students who have chosen the PE Course and successfully completed the six classes would demonstrate at least a moderate level of confidence in their English ability. Second, less than half of the students reported enjoying speaking English. Considering that students choosing the PE Course are aware of its communicative focus, and that three of the courses in the PE Course feature speaking as a main component, this is a somewhat puzzling result.

Assuming that students who enter the PE Course are motivated to improve their oral skills, and that the three speaking courses are effective, one would expect to see a higher percentage of students show an affinity for speaking English after having completed the program. Although there are many potential explanations for the students' lack of affinity for speaking English, it is possible that a number of students who are not motivated to improve speaking skills are enrolling in the PE Course because it is the only opportunity they have to take higher-level classes.

The lack of choice for PE students may be one of the most serious weaknesses of the current program. The survey data show that a majority of PE students wished the program had offered them more choice. As mentioned above, PE students are assigned to five of the six courses they take, and may choose which section they want for a sixth course. One alternative to the current program would be a system without two separate two-year courses, but with a mechanism which enables highly motivated and proficient students to study together in classes which are stimulating and demanding. Such a system would be more flexible, and may be more effective in meeting students' diverse needs.

It is widely recognized that care must be taken in interpreting the results of surveys, and that following up is key (Richards, 2001, p. 301). Analyzing the written comments that PE students provided will be an important next step. When gathering data from students in the PE program in the 2011-21 academic year, it will be crucial to design items which will allow us to dispel any ambiguity which exists in this year's data. Analyzing the data which SE students are providing through surveys this year will also produce valuable information. Finally, the survey data provide some valuable hints, but they are only one type of data among many which need to be considered in evaluating the current program. As we move forward with curriculum evaluation and development, the voices of part-time and full-time faculty members must be listened to, administrative implementation of curricula must be considered, and students needs must be evaluated and reflected in well-articulated goals for the program as a whole.

## REFERENCES

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## Appendix A The Survey Form (Page 1)

## 平成 22 年度 PE コース 受講者用 修了時アンケート

このアンケートは、PEコースの授業改善のための情報となります。個人の回答は統計的に処理されますので、個人が特定されることはありません。また、本アンケートの結果は、授業改善のための資料、研究活動のデータとして利用いたします。

静岡大学 英語科目部 FD委員会

## Q1. あなた自身について教えてください。当てはまる欄に○を一つ記入してください

|    |  | 男       | 女      |         |           |          |
|----|--|---------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|
| 1  | 性別を教えてください                             |         |        |         |           |          |
|    |  | 人文学部    | 理学部    | 教育学部    | 情報学部      | 農学部      |
| 2  | 学部を教えてください                             |         |        |         |           |          |
|    |  | 180点以上  | 170点以上 | 160点以上  | 150点以上    | 150点未満   |
| 3  | あなたのセンター試験の点数を教えてください(だいたい結構です)        |         |        |         |           |          |
|    |  | 730点以上  | 650点以上 | 550点以上  | 450点以上    | 450点未満   |
| 4  | あなたの2008年前期末のTOEIC点数を教えてください(だいたい結構です) |         |        |         |           |          |
|    |  | とてもそう思う | 少しそう思う | どちらでもない | あまりそう思わない | 全くそう思わない |
| 5  | 英語に自信がある                               |         |        |         |           |          |
| 6  | 英語を勉強するのが好きだ                           |         |        |         |           |          |
| 7  | 今後仕事で英語を使うつもりだ                         |         |        |         |           |          |
| 8  | 英文を読むのが好きだ                             |         |        |         |           |          |
| 9  | 英文を書くのが好きだ                             |         |        |         |           |          |
| 10 | 英語で話すのが好きだ                             |         |        |         |           |          |

## Q2. PE コースの授業全体について教えてください。当てはまる欄に○を一つ記入してください。

|    |                                  | とてもそう思う | 少しそう思う   | どちらでもない  | あまりそう思わない | 全くそう思わない |
|----|----------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 11 | PEの授業は自分の英語の上達に役立った              |         |          |          |           |          |
| 12 | PEの授業は楽しかった                      |         |          |          |           |          |
| 13 | もっと科目の選択肢があった方がよかった              |         |          |          |           |          |
| 14 | 外国人の先生の授業を履修できてよかった              |         |          |          |           |          |
| 15 | 履修前、教員から授業についての説明を十分受けた          |         |          |          |           |          |
| 16 | もっと文法の授業があった方がよかった               |         |          |          |           |          |
| 17 | TOEICの授業は役立った                    |         |          |          |           |          |
| 18 | 授業でコミュニケーションの道具として英語を使えてよかった     |         |          |          |           |          |
| 19 | コンピュータを使った学習が役立った                |         |          |          |           |          |
| 20 | クラスの人数が適切だった                     |         |          |          |           |          |
| 21 | 教員によって授業内容に違いがあってよかった            |         |          |          |           |          |
|    |                                  | そう思う    | そう思わない   | 未実施      |           |          |
| 22 | 英語でのプレゼンテーションがよかった               |         |          |          |           |          |
|    |                                  | 0-15分   | 15-30分   | 30分-1時間  | 1-2時間     | 2時間以上    |
| 23 | 教室外の課題にかけた平均的な時間(一科目につき)を教えてください |         |          |          |           |          |
|    |                                  | 大変難しかった | すこし難しかった | ちょうどよかった | すこし簡単だった  | とても簡単だった |
| 24 | 授業の難易度を教えてください                   |         |          |          |           |          |
|    |                                  | 大変多かった  | すこし多かった  | ちょうどよかった | すこし少なかった  | 少なすぎた    |
| 25 | 宿題の量を教えてください                     |         |          |          |           |          |