

The effects of university entrance exams on teaching pedagogy and student learning in Japanese high schools.

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Introduction

There are 2 main factors that influence high school English teachers in the ways that they teach.

Ministry of Education (MEXT)

The overall objective of English classes is to

- develop students' basic communication abilities
- deepen their understanding of language and culture
- foster a positive attitude toward communication
- be able to “carry on a dialogue” and “speak accurately about one’s thoughts and feelings”.

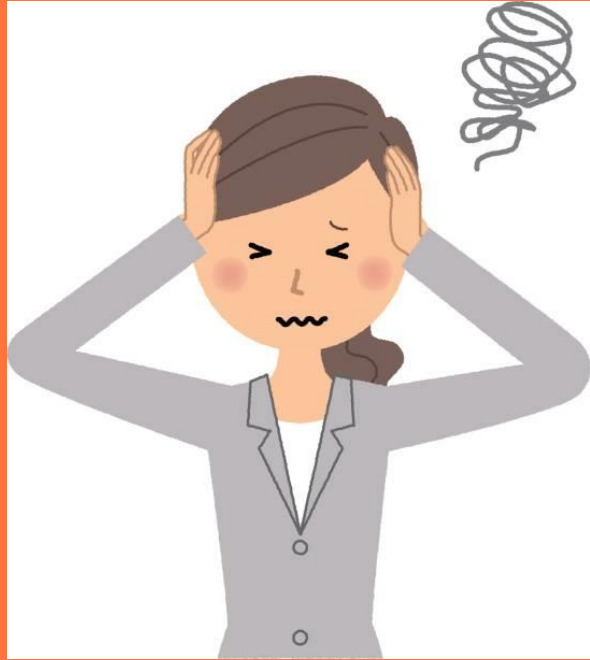
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Entrance Examinations

Tests are largely focused on

- grammar
- reading
- translation ability

They rarely contain an assessment of speaking.



Which factor do you think is more powerful?

Research Questions

Question 1

Do university entrance examinations affect teachers in a way that dissuades them from using speaking activities in the classroom?

Question 2

Do university entrance examinations affect student learning behaviour in a way that test preparation becomes their priority?

Research Design

The Sample

20 high school teachers and 20 high school students

5 public high schools located in Nagoya

Convenience sampling method

The Questionnaire

Combination of closed and open-ended questions

Questions included items on

- a) teachers’ teaching practices
- b) students’ studying behaviour
- c) opinions about entrance examinations

Summary

01

Although teachers regard the development of communicative ability as important, they seem to be using the majority of classroom time on test preparation. The extent to which this is true seems to be more applicable to the teaching of 3rd grade students than for 2nd grade students, suggesting that the effects of test washback become stronger as the time to take the examination nears.

02

Similarly high school students, who despite showing a strong desire to develop their speaking skills, seem to spend most of their study time memorising vocabulary and grammatical structures for the purpose of improving their test scores.

03

75% of teachers and 85% of students agreed that if entrance examinations contained a speaking test, they would spend more time on communicative language activities.

04

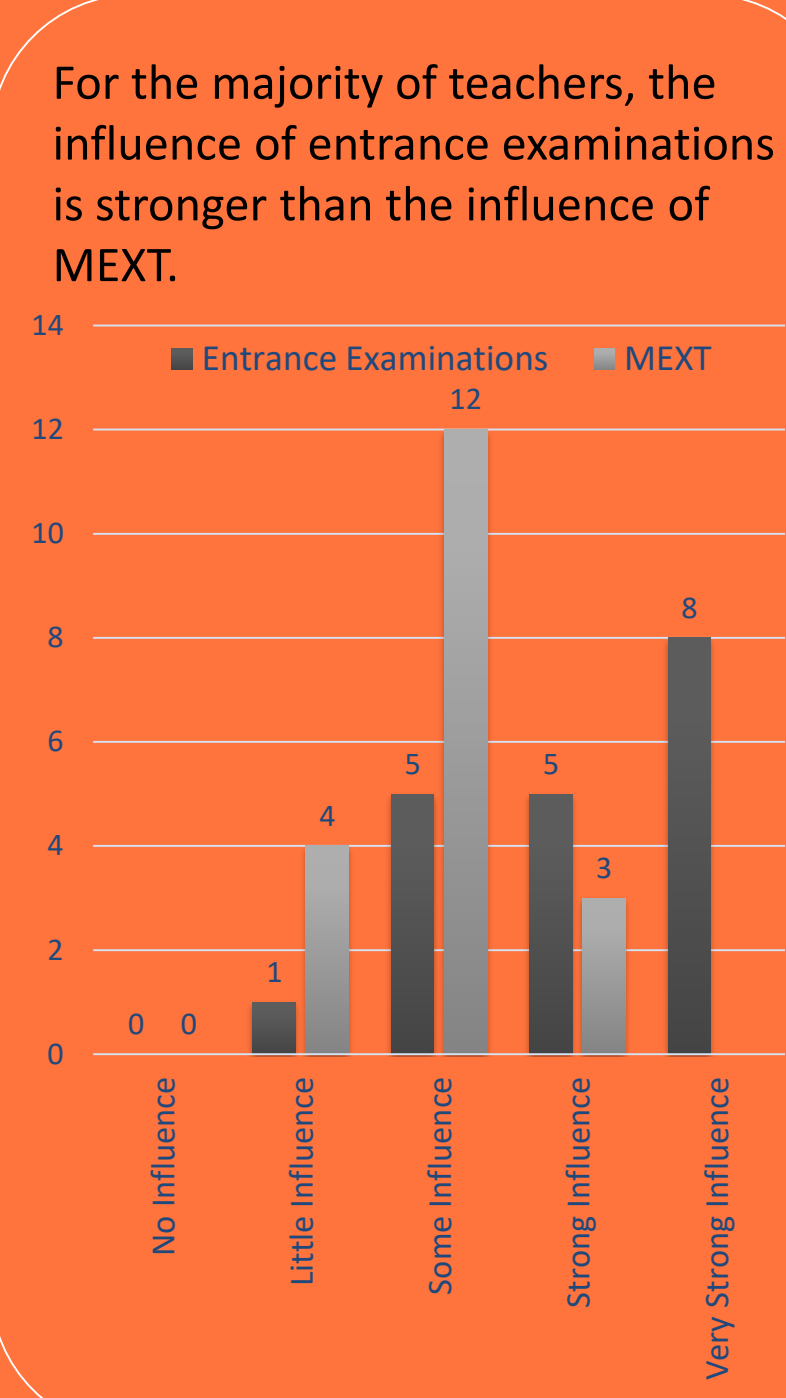
The results from this study suggest that government recommendation regarding teaching pedagogy and lesson content may not be realised if they are in direct conflict with the washback effects of university entrance examinations.

Results

80% of teachers believed that the inclusion of a speaking test was a “good” or “quite a good” idea.

75% of teachers agreed that they would use more classroom time to develop students’ speaking ability if entrance examinations contained a speaking test.

For the majority of teachers, the influence of entrance examinations is stronger than the influence of MEXT.



Influence Level	Entrance Examinations	MEXT
No Influence	0	0
Little Influence	1	4
Some Influence	5	12
Strong Influence	5	3
Very Strong Influence	8	0

Teachers frequently use reading activities, grammar translations, writing compositions, and past examination practice for 3rd grade students.

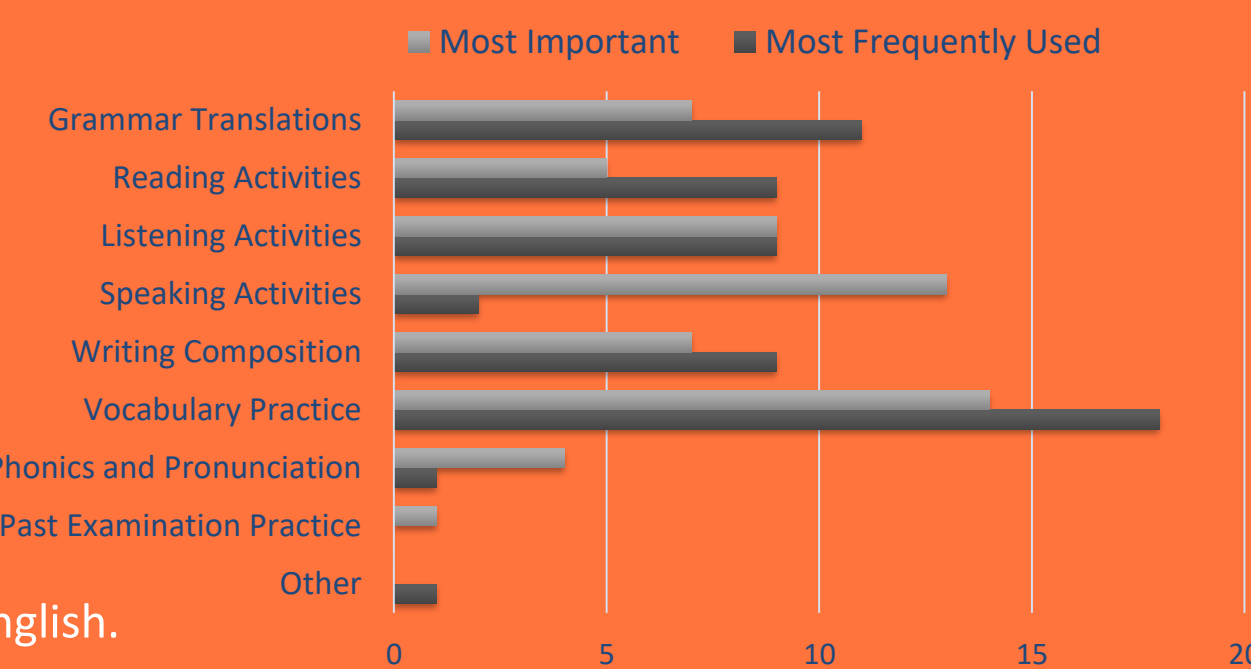
63% of teachers claimed that they currently spend 81-100% of classroom time preparing students for tests.

For the majority of students, developing communicative competence in the English language is more important than preparing for entrance examinations. However, 60% of students reported spending less than 40% of their study time developing their speaking ability.

75% of students believed that the inclusion of a speaking test was a “good” or “quite a good” idea.

85% of students agreed that they would use more time to develop their speaking ability if entrance examinations contained a speaking test.

The majority of students identify vocabulary practice and speaking activities as the most important activities. However, most students reported that they most frequently use vocabulary practice and grammar translations when they study English.



Activity	Most Important	Most Frequently Used
Grammar Translations	10	12
Reading Activities	10	10
Listening Activities	10	10
Speaking Activities	15	10
Writing Composition	10	10
Vocabulary Practice	18	18
Phonics and Pronunciation	10	10
Past Examination Practice	10	10
Other	10	10