

What can an Intensive English Program Contribute to the Local Community? A Perspective of the Foreign Tourists Towards EFL Learners

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The number of foreign tourists has increased in Japan recently and the authors of this study organized a summer intensive program which included a field trip to the local port where big cruise ships come in. At the local port, the students in this program were given an opportunity to communicate with overseas passengers on the cruise ship in English. In Japan, our students often find it difficult to use English after they finish their lessons on campus and therefore the authors of this study believe that the field trip in this program would be beneficial to our students. The aim of this study is to explore the perception of the overseas tourists towards English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Japan. A small-scale questionnaire was used for the data analysis and a total of 15 responses were analyzed. The results of this study showed that overall, overseas passengers enjoyed participating in our intensive program and they reported that even though Japanese students tended to be shy to speak, they found the Japanese students' command of English to be good. Based on the results of this study, introducing speaking activities in class before we take our students to the field trip is recommended in order to make this field trip more effective in the future.

Keywords: EFL, higher education, field trip, collaboration with the local community

Introduction

Most of Japanese universities offer their students to learn English as part of the requirements towards their graduation and university students are often expected to master English for many reasons. One of the reasons to learn English for the students is to be able to communicate with people from overseas. In 2020, the Tokyo Olympic Games will be held and Tokyo expects to host huge numbers of guests from foreign countries. Moreover, there will be huge demands for volunteer support in English for these overseas tourists. The authors of this study believe that an increase of the numbers of overseas tourists visiting Japan brings more opportunities for Japanese learners of English to practice their English skills. Rao (2002) explained that interviewing native speakers of English outside of the class could be a good way for the learners to practice their English, but it is often not easy to do so in the English as a foreign language (EFL) environment. Therefore, the authors of this study attempted to start an intensive English program which

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included a field trip to the local port. On the field trip, thanks to collaborating with the local city hall, travel agent, and volunteer tour guide association, the students of the intensive English program were able to communicate with the foreign passengers who came on the cruise ship. The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of foreign passengers who went on a taxi tour with our students. The intensive English program with the field trip to the local port has now run for two years, both in 2016 and 2017. This study adopts a small-scale study and focuses on questionnaire results from overseas passengers on the cruise ship.

Literature Review

Wiriyaichitra (2002) presented an interesting point about learners of English. In Thailand, income from the tourism industry is the main source of income, but those who finished their university studies and works in the tourism industry do not seem to have a good command of English. Thus, there is a concern that tourists from overseas might develop a negative attitude towards Thailand. The authors of this study agree with this concern to some extent. Of course, having a good command of English is better than having a poor command of English. However, the authors of this study realize that Japan might face the same issue which Thailand faces as Wiriyaichitra (2002) mentioned. According to the World Bank Statistics (2017), the numbers of international tourist arrivals in Japan are increasing every year.

Table 1

The Numbers of International Tourists Arrival in Japan

The numbers of international tourist arrivals in Japan			
2013	2014	2015	2016
8,358,000.0	10,364,000.0	13,413,000.0	24,040,000.0

Source: The World Bank (2017): World development indicators, international tourism, and numbers of arrivals.

As Table 1 shows, the number of tourists that came to Japan in 2016 is almost three times larger than that in 2013. Thus, the authors of this study believe that it is a good opportunity for learners of English to practice their English with these tourists from foreign countries.

There is another issue about non-native speakers of English. Cheng, Myles, and Curtis (2004) found non-native speakers have negative perceptions towards their own English when they were in university classes in Canada. One of the non-native English speaker participants in their study admitted that she did not find any difficulties in communicating to her lecturers. However, she felt in her class that her English was not really native speaker like and she felt a long distance with her classmates who were native speakers of English. Bernat (2008) also found a similar case about a Japanese teacher who taught English. The Japanese teacher admitted her English had a strong Japanese accent and worried about it. Sometimes, her students did not understand what she said in her class. However, Bernat (2008) claimed that it is important to acknowledge that this Japanese teacher's English is comprehensible and intelligible rather than native-like English. Rao (2002) also found that female Chinese students, in particular, tended to be shy to talk with native speakers of English. Rao explained that since learners of English had a lack of opportunity to practice their English, they have a lack of confidence in their English. The authors of this study also often find some students are not confident of themselves although they command English very well. Some students might be too shy of themselves, or they might just have a lack of experience communicating with foreign people in English. The

past studies above have focused on the perceptions of learners of English in particular, while this study focuses on the perception of foreign tourists, including both native and non-native speakers of English, towards learners of English.

Methodology

A small-scale questionnaire survey was conducted in both 2016 and 2017. On the day of the field trip to the local port, the authors of this study asked foreign passengers who went on a taxi tour with the students to answer the questionnaires with their permission. In September 2016, seven participants (two from Australia and five from Mexico) on the taxi tour answered the questionnaires. In September 2017, eight participants (one from Mexico, two from England, two from Germany, and three from Israel) on the taxi tour answered the questionnaires. In total, 15 responses from foreign passengers were collected for this study.

All the questions which were used in this study are listed below:

Q 1: Could you please tell us which country you are originally from?

Q 2: Did you enjoy spending time with Japanese university students?

Please circle a number (Never → 1, Strongly yes → 10)

Q 3: Was your Japanese students' English level enough for you to communicate?

Please circle a number (Never → 1, Strongly yes → 10)

Q 4: What did you want to know from your Japanese university students? Please write things which you wanted to know below.

Q 5: Did you get what you wanted to know by asking questions to your Japanese students in the end?

Please circle a number (Never → 1, Strongly yes → 10)

Q 6: If you have a chance to talk with Japanese university students, would you want to do it again?

Please circle a number (Never → 1, Strongly yes → 10)

Q 7: Could you please tell me a story(s)/things in which you were particularly interested and which your university students have told you in a taxi or places where you visited this time below.

Q 8: Was the length of time for today (a taxi tour) which you spend with your university student enough for you?

Please circle a number (Never → 1, Strongly yes → 10)

Q 9: Do you have any suggestions for us to improve the taxi tour?

A Taxi Tour

Thanks to the local travel agent, some of our students were able to join with foreign passengers who ordered a taxi tour through the local travel agent. On the taxi tour, passengers arranged some local spots to visit and the length of each taxi tour depended on where the passengers wanted to go and how long the cruise ship stayed in the local port. The popular length of the taxi tour was a three to four hour tour. When the passengers "checked in for" the taxi tour, the travel agent asked them whether they wanted to have our university students or not. This only happened if there were any seats left for our students in the taxi. Also, the travel agent made sure that the passengers knew our students were not tour guides, but rather the students came as volunteers and the student's role was to support a taxi driver who had no English skills. The taxi driver would be the tour guide for the foreign passengers and our students supported the taxi driver in English.

Thus, the participants who were from overseas in this study agreed with the condition explained by the local travel agent and took our students with them. The authors of this study prepared our students how to explain some local spots before the field trip to the local port. In fact, the authors of this study took our students on the field trip to the local city on Day 3 of this intensive English program. During the field trip, our students practiced how to explain things about some tourist spots in English. Therefore, although our students did not serve as tour guides for the passengers on the taxi tour, our students prepared for how to guide some local spots in English to some extent.

Results

First of all, the results of Q 2, Q 3, Q 5, Q 6, and Q 8 are summarized in Figures 1 to 5 and the results of Q 4, Q 7, and Q 9 are summarized in Tables 2 to 4 after all figures. The results of Q 1 were put in the methodology section in this paper, and thus, they were not included here. Overall, the results of the questionnaires show relatively positive results about the taxi tours with our students. To start looking at the details, the results of Q 2 are shown below.

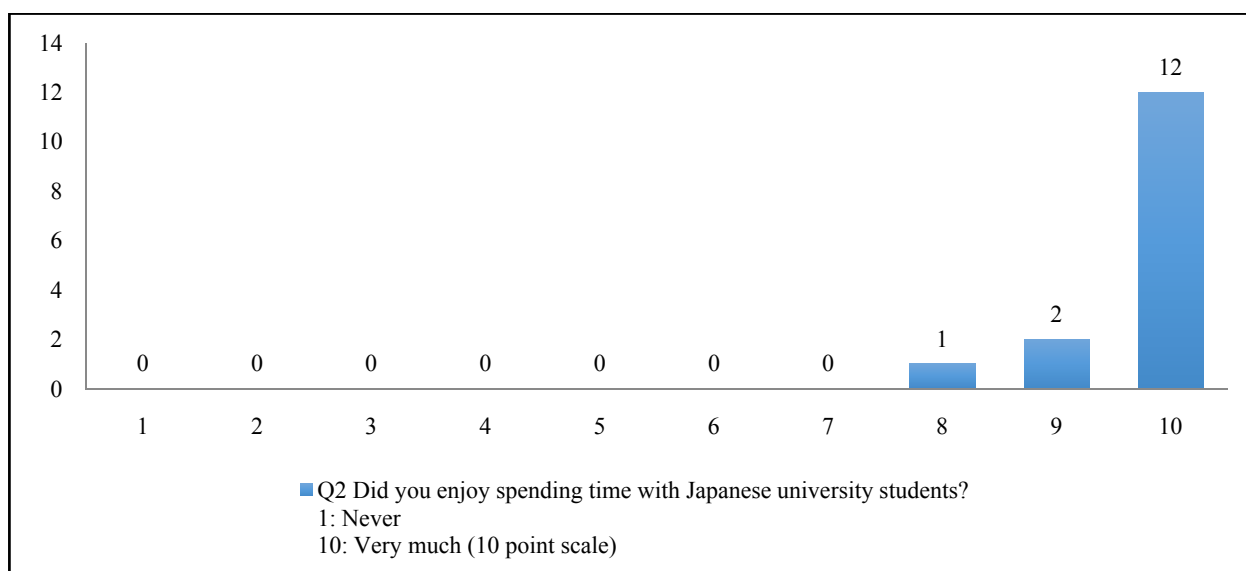


Figure 1. The results of Q 2.

In Q 2, all the answers were highly scored between 8 to 10. In particular, 12 foreign passengers scored the highest score on this question.

As seen in Figure 2 showing results for Q 3, once again, 10 foreign passengers scored between 8 and 10 while four of them scored between 5 and 7. Although the students' English level, in particular for speaking and listening skills, varied in this study, all students kept above TOEIC 600 which was a requirement in order to enroll in this program.

Figure 3 shows the results of Q 5. Twelve foreign passengers scored between 8 and 10 while two passengers scored 6 and one passenger scored 2. Overall, foreign passengers tend to be satisfied with the information which was explained by our students.

The results of Q 6 show that most foreign passengers agreed to do a taxi tour with university students again, except one passenger who recorded a relatively low score.

Figure 5 shows the results of Q 8. All foreign passengers scored above average. The length of each taxi tour depended on the foreign passengers. Some of them chose a three-hour taxi tour and others chose a four-hour taxi tour. The results of this question could be influenced by the different length of taxi tour.

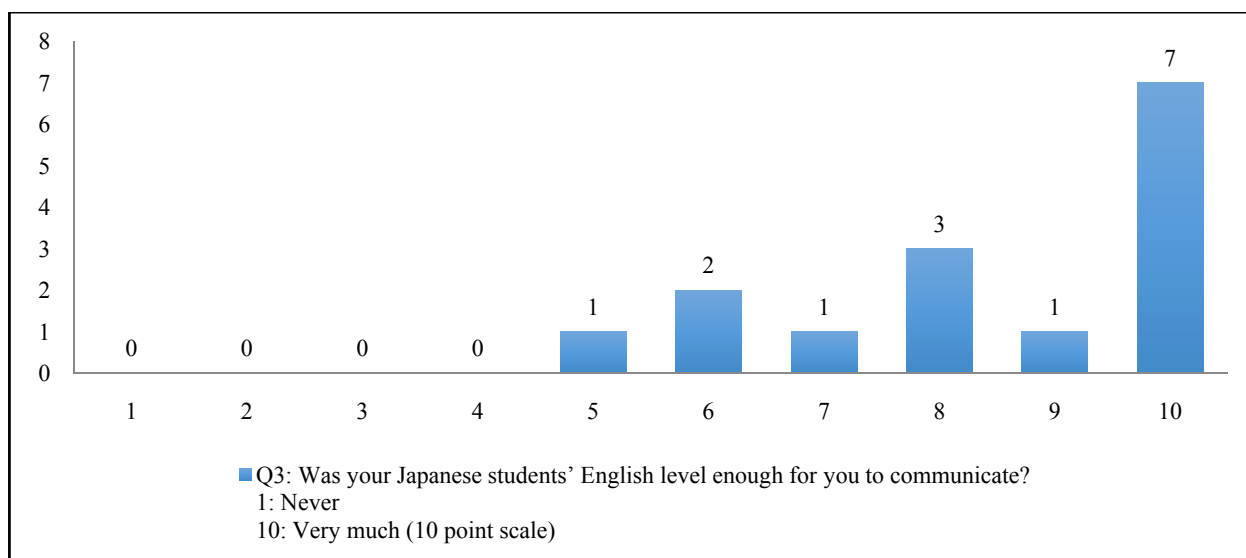


Figure 2. The results of Q 3.

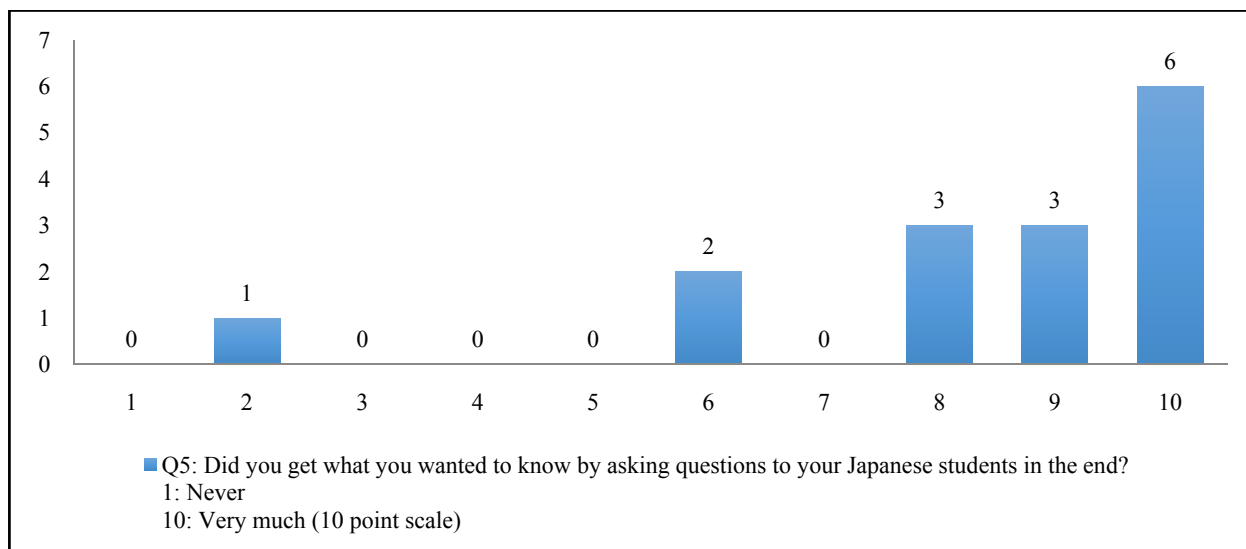


Figure 3. The results of Q 5.

As Table 2 shows, foreign passengers tend to know more about our students' life in general. Comments, such as "What they are studying at their university?" or "More about students, such as their hobbies, families, life in the local city" suggest that foreign passengers tend to enjoy communication with our students. A comment "Some Japanese words" suggests that this passenger seems to show his/her strong interest in Japan. It is also interesting to see comments, such as "the history of the area where we visited" and "Japanese history". Atkinson (2015) insisted in the importance of introducing facts about history in English for foreign people in his book in order to increase the numbers of tourists from overseas. Comments, such as "the history of the area where we visited" and "Japanese history" in our study are covered by Atkinson's point.

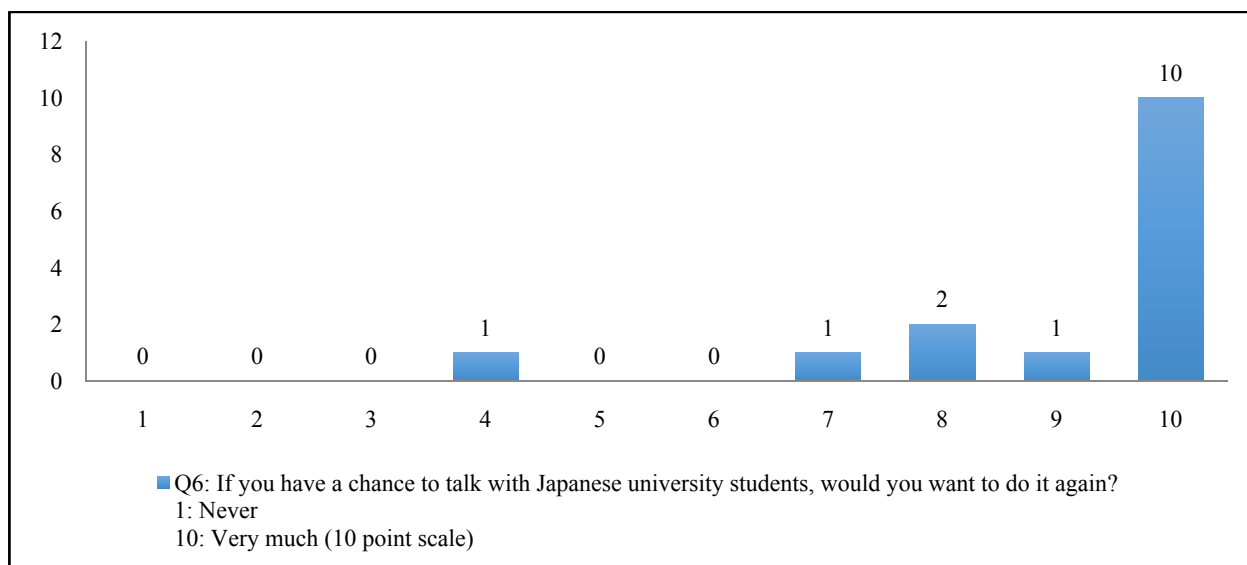


Figure 4. The results of Q 6.

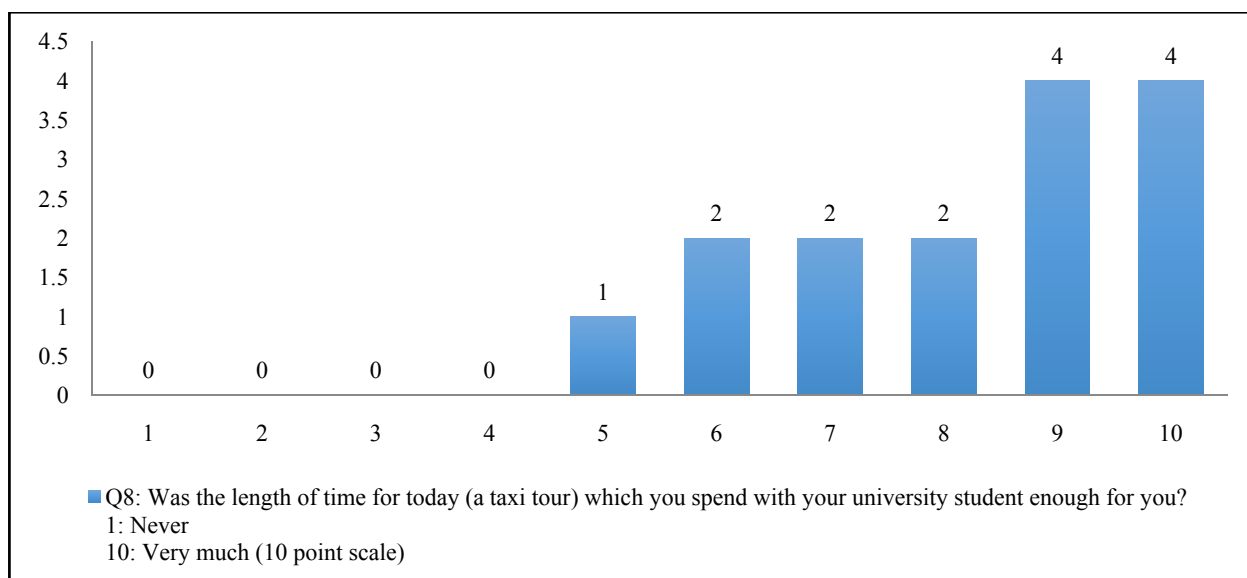


Figure 5. The results of Q 8.

Table 2

The Results of Q 4

Q 4: What did you want to know from your Japanese university students? Please write things which you wanted to know below.
What they are studying at their university (four answers)
Japanese culture (four answers)
The area where they live (three answers)
More about students, such as their hobbies, families, and life in the local city (three answers)
The history of the area where we visited (two answers)
Japanese history (one answer)
Some Japanese words (one answer)

Table 3

The Results of Q 7

Q 7: Could you please tell me a story(s)/things in which you were particularly interested and which your university students have told you in a taxi or places where you visited this time, below.
The history of where we visited (four answers) The story of Shogun (one answer) Japanese cultures (two answers) About students, such as hobbies, interests, families, etc. (three answers) About the water fan and Mt Fuji (one answer) Generally interesting (one answer)

The results of Q 7 show similar results of Q 4. Once again, the overseas passengers in this study were, in particular, interested in Japanese history and cultures as well as interested in about our students, such as their hobbies, interests, and families.

Table 4

The Results of Q 9

Q 9: Do you have any suggestions for us to improve the taxi tour?
No, this tour was incredible/amazing/excellent (three answers) I want students to talk more about themselves, such as interest, cultures, hobbies etc. (three answers) It is a very good idea to have such an English class (one answer) Students must speak more. Do not fear making any mistakes in English (one answer) I want to know more about the history (one answer) I want students to skill up their English and knowledge of the places where we went (one answer) I want students to have better English skills, so we can communicate better (one answer) Generally ok (one answer)

The results of Q 9 show mostly positive comments from the overseas passengers in this study. Comments, such as “No, this tour was incredible/amazing/excellent” or “It is a very good idea to have such an English class” suggest that the overseas passengers enjoyed their taxi tours with our students. It is also very interesting to see comments, such as “Students must speak more. Do not fear making any mistake in English” and “I want students to have better English skills, so we can communicate better”. These comments suggest that overseas passengers encourage our students to communicate with them.

Discussion

The questionnaires showed some interesting results and there are some discussions based on the results of this study. Firstly, it is a surprise for the authors of this study to find some passengers were interested about either Japanese or local area history. As the results of Q 4 (What did you want to know from your Japanese university students? Please write things which you wanted to know below) and Q 9 (Do you have any suggestions for us to improve the taxi tour?) demonstrated, some foreign passengers showed their interest in the history of both Japan and the local area where they visited. This suggests to the authors of this study to review the contents of English lessons on campus in this intensive English program. We could attempt to teach future students in this intensive program some knowledge about the history of Japan and the local area to some extent in English. However, this intensive program is not a history class in English, and therefore, it is important to pay attention to what extent history is taught and to make sure our future students are able to explain the history that they learn in class on the field trip to the local port.

Secondly, once again, on the results of Q 9, there were answers, such as “Students must speak more. Do not fear making any mistakes in English” and “I want students to have better English skills, so we can communicate better”. These comments suggest the passengers encouraged the learners of English to practice English with them. At the same time, the results suggest that our students could be shy although they attempted to do their best. If this is the case, then our students could miss the opportunity to practice English with the foreign passengers. Tanaka (2007) pointed out a negative feature when learners of English are given an opportunity to talk with native speakers in the English as a second language (ESL) environment. He gives two reasons for it. The first reason is that the learners of English did not have sufficient English proficiency to communicate with others. The second reason is that the learners of English were shy and they felt like they should not disturb the daily life of their host family. Due to these reasons, although the learners of English can access a great opportunity to talk with native speakers of English, they did not use the opportunity to talk. In order not to miss the great opportunity to communicate with foreign people in English, our participants need to be positively encouraged. One suggestion for this is that more speaking activities in class on campus before our students go to the field trip could be introduced for the students in this intensive program.

Thirdly, in this study, on the day of the field trip to the port, there were both native speakers and non-native speakers who participated in this study. In particular, the native speakers are from both Australia and England. The non-native speakers are from Mexico, Israel, Mexico, and Germany. The authors of this study regard positively the opportunity to communicate with non-native speakers of English for the learners of English, as well as native speakers of English. Since English is widely used as a lingua franca around the world, the authors of this study believe that exposing learners of English to a variety of English gives them a benefit. Some of our students will have an opportunity to communicate with non-native speakers in English for the purpose of business in the near future. Therefore, although our students might have found it difficult to be exposed to unfamiliar English varieties, the authors of this study believe that it still benefits our students. Having said that it is also important to consider our students preparation for communication with unfamiliar English varieties for them. One suggestion for it is to introduce and teach English varieties in the classroom before the field trip to the local port.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the authors of this study started the intensive English program which included a field trip to the local port. At the local port, our students joined a taxi tour with foreign passengers to support the passengers and taxi driver in English. The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of foreign passengers who went on a taxi tour with our students. Based on the results of this study, overall, the foreign passengers enjoyed their taxi tours with the university students. In particular, the results of Q 5 (Did you get what you wanted to know by asking questions to your Japanese students in the end?) showed that all foreign passengers showed higher scores. Also, the results of Q 4 (What did you want to know from your Japanese university students?) showed that they were interested in university students’ life, hobbies, majors at university, and so forth. These comments from the foreign passengers suggested they regarded the taxi tours with our students positively. This study developed three main discussions based on the results. Firstly, the foreign passengers were particularly interested in the history of the local areas where they visited. Thus, the students of this program will need to prepare for it before they go to the field trip to the port next time. Secondly, some of the students were shy to communicate with foreign people although some foreign passengers encouraged them to talk. This suggests we

include more speaking activities in class on campus before the field trip to the port. Thirdly, the foreign passengers were both native and non-native speakers of English in this study. Since English is widely used around the world by native and non-native speakers of English, the authors of this study believed the opportunity to communicate with both native and non-native speakers of English would bring our students benefits. This study was limited to explore the perspectives of foreign passengers, and thus, the authors of this study try to see insights of the learners' perspectives towards the field trip to the local port in this intensive English program.

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