

A Critical Analysis of English Language Entrance Examinations at Japanese Universities

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Akiko Takagi

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of university entrance exams on the perceptions and attitudes that Japanese students and teachers have towards English-language exams. It is a qualitative study conducted within the framework of a critical paradigm and specifically refers to the theory of critical language testing proposed by Shohamy (2001). The study was conducted within this framework to highlight the current problems of university entrance exams and emphasize the need for change. It also challenges the positivist view which is dominant in Japanese language testing research and expands the research area within the Japanese context.

The aim of the study was to empower both students and high school teachers who, as the highest stakeholders, are in a weak position and give them an opportunity to express their opinions and feelings through an open-ended questionnaire and interview. The study also intended to raise their awareness about their rights as test-takers to question the misuse of tests and encourage them to develop a critical view about the exam system.

The results demonstrated that university entrance examination has a negative impact on both language learning for students and high school teaching for teachers. The students experience a psychological burden while preparing for and taking the exam. Likewise, teachers feel pressured by various stakeholders including students, parents, and administrators. In addition, both students and teachers realize that entrance exams have an important influence on the life and future of a student and that they cannot be avoided in an exam-driven society.

The dissertation concludes with practical implications for both test-takers and testers to improve the current entrance examination system, in order to elicit positive feedback and better outcomes, as well as recommendations for further research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The issue of the university entrance examination has been discussed for a long time both in academic and social contexts. The university entrance exam is deeply embedded in Japanese meritocracy, and in fact, “large amounts of time, money, and energy are spent on entrance examinations every year at individual, school and national levels” (Watanabe, 1996, p.332). Reflecting on my high school days, the entrance examination had a great influence on my life. I had been ever-conscious of the entrance examination since I entered high school, and was deeply depressed when I did not do well on the entrance examination. Quite a few people including learners, teachers, principals, and parents are influenced by the entrance exams in Japan. However, the highest stakeholders, the students usually do not realize that they have the right to question the test results and methods as test-takers. I do not blame them for their innocence reflecting on my own experience. I never questioned the exam system, nor did teachers give me opportunities to reflect on my experience and critique the exam.

Before I learned about critical language testing in my doctorate course, I had never thought of examining the issue of the Japanese entrance exam in this framework. Although I was aware that the exam has a great impact on language learning and teaching, language testing was the research area I wanted to be involved in the least. I thought that only researchers who like scientific methods that use statistics are capable of dealing with research in this area. Now, however, I realize that any person involved with the exams as a learner, teacher, and tester have a responsibility and rights to consider its use and effects or deal with it as a researcher.

Yanase (2006) argues that in composing a university English entrance exam researchers who specialize in language testing should play a major role as experts in writing test specifications, making and conducting a fair test based on those specifications, and checking the validity of the test; but all the other people involved with the entrance exam should collaborate equally to clarify what kinds of English proficiency and aptitude are required of the candidates as members of a university community. I am in the position of a tester at a university and fully aware of my responsibility and the consequences of the exams. I would like to be a conscientious

tester who does not misuse my power and make an effort to contribute to improving the entrance exam as a member of a university community, even though I am not an expert in language testing research. Critical language testing is not well-known in the Japanese academic field, and conducting a study on such a controversial issue as the Japanese entrance examination in this framework is a challenging task. I am even worried about being criticized by other Japanese scholars when I present the results of the research because some may only regard me as a person who is ignorant about scientific methods and may not appreciate my study itself. However, I am convinced that it is the right thing to investigate the problem of the university entrance exam within the framework of the critical paradigm in order to provide meaningful discourse on language testing research in Japan. I also hope this study will make a contribution towards solving the issues concerned for many years on a practical level.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The university entrance examinations have been criticized for a long time; in particular, the English tests have received a great deal of criticism for their content from many non-Japanese researchers (e.g., Brown 1996; Murphy, 2001). The English component of university entrance examinations created by each university is particularly criticized because it heavily emphasizes grammatical knowledge and literacy skills. Kikuchi (2006) analyzed the entrance exams of 20 private and public universities conducted in 2005 and found that the difficulty, the types of items, and the skills measured have not changed substantially compared with the past exams. This indicates that students need to study discrete grammar points for the preparation of the entrance exam and do not see any relationship between communicative language learning and the exam. Although Koike (2007) claims that communicative view of English improved the university entrance exam and its use, it seems that there are still gaps between the recent national reform effort promoting communicative language teaching and the reality of the entrance exam and classroom teaching (Hiramatsu, 2005).

People also have criticized the use of the entrance exam itself because students' futures are decided by a one-shot exam. Due to a decline in the number of children these days, a variety of selection systems have been employed, so some students do not need to take a difficult entrance exam to enter a university anymore. Unpopular universities are even in danger of bankruptcy because of the scarcity of students, and accept all the

students who apply to the institutions. On the other hand, prestigious universities still attract quite a few students and entering the universities is very competitive. Thus, the exam is a major method to screen students. Although we need to keep this change in mind, we can conclude that the entrance examination still plays an important role to determine students' future lives in our society.

Despite the recent change of the background regarding the entrance exam such as the introduction of a listening component into National Center Test from 2006, my own small-scale study (Takagi, 2007) shows that the university entrance examination has a negative washback effect on language class teaching and learning in high school. Moreover, the students feel a tremendous psychological burden during the process of preparing for and taking the exam. They appear to be unaware of their rights and responsibilities as a test-taker, and simply regard the entrance exam as a necessary evil. Some of them even attribute their failure to their own efforts, without questioning whether the exam fairly assesses their English ability.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The positivist view has dominated language testing research in Japan, and the ethics and validity of the entrance exams from a critical perspective are not widely discussed. This is not surprising because traditional testing is a scientific field, and focuses on creating tests which are supposed to measure linguistic knowledge accurately (Shanomy, 2001b). One research area dealing with the issue of ethics is the washback effect. In Japan, little research has been conducted within this area (Gorsuch, 1998; Watanabe, 1996). I also found few studies which investigated the issue of the entrance exam in the framework of critical paradigm. Since the study of the washback effect is limited to the context of teaching and learning, the findings of the study do not seem to have had a great impact on changing the exam system. Thus, it will be meaningful to conduct research in a broader framework, that is, in the framework of critical language testing to give more impact to the need to change the system. I will attempt to conduct the study in this framework, hoping to challenge the positivist view and expand the research area in a Japanese context.

Criticizing the entrance examination openly is not easy in a Japanese society where strict academic hierarchy exists. Thus, the highest stakeholders, the students are

unwilling to speak their opinions and feelings freely in public. Although many university professors may want to finish their burdensome job of making and conducting an exam as swiftly as possible every year, they need to be fully aware that tests play an essential and important role in deciding students' futures, and should not neglect their responsibilities as testers. The second highest stakeholders, high school teachers seldom express their opinions on the entrance examination in public, either, although they complain in private. Probably, they regard themselves as being in a weak position in the hierarchy of the Japanese academic system. In other words, university professors who make the entrance exams have more power than high school teachers who teach students taking the exam. Most of the teachers appear to even accept the exam system without any questions and are simply busy preparing their students. This is probably because exams are deeply imbedded in Japanese society since the civil service examination established in China in 136 BC was adopted in Japan by the seventh century A.D (Stapleton, 1995). Teachers themselves undertook the same process of preparing for and taking the university entrance exam when they were a student, so it is natural for them to accept the exam system without any doubt.

One of the five views of testers' responsibilities mentioned by Shohamy (2001b) is "shared responsibility and shared discourse." She claims that testers and test-takers should collaborate to construct assessments using a variety of critical methods such as being critical about tests and test uses, collecting data on the effects and consequences of tests and warning against misuse. As Hamp-Lyons and Lynch (1998) point out, we rarely hear voices of the highest stakeholders, the test-takers. As a tester myself teaching at a university, I admit the limits of my knowledge of assessment and would like to share my responsibility with the other people concerned by conducting this study.

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to give students and high school teachers who are in a weak position in an academic hierarchy an opportunity to express their opinions and feelings, which they are rarely given in an academic context. This opportunity will empower them to improve the entrance exam system with testers and other stakeholders. From the test-taker's viewpoint, they have the right to question the misuse of tests and should be encouraged to develop a critical view toward the exam system. At present,

they do not seem to realize their rights. As for student participants, I selected the first-year university students who have experienced the entire process of preparing and sitting the entrance exam and decided to become English teachers. I hoped to raise their critical awareness of the issue of the entrance exam which they will face once they become English teachers. This study will also raise high school teacher's awareness of their rights and give them an opportunity to challenge the system. Currently, there are few studies which discuss the issue of the university entrance examination in the framework of critical paradigm, thus I hope that this study will illuminate the area which are not fully investigated yet.

1.4 Research questions

This study investigates students' and teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university entrance exams and their attitudes (positive or negative) towards English-language exams. The four research questions formulated are:

1. What are students' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their learning English in high school?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their teaching English?
3. What are students' and teachers' attitudes towards the English entrance exam in general?
4. How do students and teachers perceive the use and consequences of the English entrance exam for education and society?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study has both theoretical and pedagogical significance. First, the study will make a contribution to language testing research in a Japanese context since there is little research conducted not only on the issue of the Japanese entrance examination conducted in the framework of the critical language testing but also the ethical aspect of the language testing. The study will illuminate the use and consequences of the current entrance examination, challenge the positivist view which is dominant in language teaching research in Japan, and expand the research area.

Second, it is hoped that the study will raise the awareness of test-takers who are unaware of their rights. The study will provide test-takers with opportunities to

question test results and methods. It is important that the least heard voices are known to the public in order to promote further discussion on how to improve the university entrance education system. Based on the results of the study, I would like to present constructive suggestions and recommendations for improving the current practices of the entrance examination.

1.6 Organization of the thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter Two provides an overview of the system of Japanese education and the university entrance examinations and then examines the English language components of the entrance examinations. Chapter Three discusses the relevant literature in the field of critical language testing which is a rapidly growing area. I will also review the research on ethical aspects of language testing such as washback and impact conducted both in the international and local contexts. Chapter Four outlines the research methodology which gives a detailed description of the participants, the methods, the ethical issues, and the limitation of the study. Chapter Five presents the findings and analysis obtained from the questionnaires and interviews. I first examine the students' and teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their learning and teaching. Then I reveal students' and teachers' attitudes towards the English entrance exam. Finally, I discuss how students and teachers perceive the use and consequences of the English entrance exam for education and society. Chapter Six offers some suggestions for improving the current practices of the university entrance examinations followed by suggestion for future research.

Chapter Two: Background to the study

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some background on the Japanese educational system and explain the admission system for the universities relevant to this study. Section 2.1 gives an overview of the current school system, with a particular focus on high school. Section 2.2 outlines the current university admission system as it relates to certain aspects of Japanese society. Section 2.3 describes the significant role of the admissions exam in the academic- and career-based Japanese society. Section 2.4 describes the competitive environment of high school students trying to enter university. This section covers the complex nature of recent entrance examinations, citing headline news stories which show how students and teachers struggle to prepare for the entrance exam within limited class hours under a five-day week system. Section 2.5 provides an overview of the current reform of the university admission system, conducted under the strong leadership of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), through a review of the official documents issued by MEXT and the National Center for University Entrance Examinations. Finally, Section 2.6 outlines the English curriculum in secondary schools as well as the English education policy in relation to the university entrance exam. I will explain about the English curriculum because it will help readers to understand how greatly university entrance exams have a negative washback on English language and teaching in secondary school.

2.2 The Japanese school system

The current school system in Japan is based on the structure of the 6-3-3 system: six years of elementary school, three years of junior high school (lower secondary school), and three years of high school (upper secondary school) (Frasz & Kato, 1999). Education in elementary school and junior high school is compulsory. High school education is not compulsory, but more than 97% of students go on to high school (MEXT, 2007). The two major higher education institutions that follow the completion of high school education are the four-year college and the two-year junior college. There are three main types of universities in Japan: national, public, and private. As of 2007, there are 756 universities with 2,828,708 students (87 national, 89 public, and 560 private) and 434 junior colleges with 186,667 students (2 national, 34 public, and

398 private). Among the university students, 22.2% attend national, 4.6% attend local, and 73.2% attend private universities, and about 60% of the students are male. As for junior college, 94.1% of students attend private junior colleges, 88.8% of which are female students. The number of high schools (upper secondary schools) is 5,313 with 3,406,561 students. In 2007 a total of 51.2% of high-school graduates went on to tertiary education, which includes four-year universities and two-year junior colleges (MEXT, 2007).

High school courses are mainly classified into two categories: academic courses and vocational courses. Academic courses provide general education for students who wish to go on to higher education. The schedule for the academic courses is demanding, and students take required core courses of Japanese language, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign language. Students attend five or six school hours on weekdays (one school hour is 50 minutes). A typical school day starts at 8:35 in the morning and ends at 3:30 pm (Frasz & Kato, 1999). Students used to attend school on Saturdays, but they have not done so since April 2002 when a five-day-week system was introduced. Although high school is not compulsory, its curriculum is determined by *The Course of Study for High School* (National syllabus) which describes the objectives and the content of the subjects (Moriyoshi & Trelfa, 1999).

2.3 University admission system in Japan

Japanese society is often referred to as an academic- and career-based society or *gakureki shakai*. All the universities are ranked by *hensachi*, which is “the abstract notion of a national norm-referenced person-indexed score” (Brown, 1995). The type and rank of universities are crucial for students because graduates of prestigious universities have a greater chance of being hired by a large, well-known corporation (Lee, 2002). Clark (2002), who used to be the president of a private university, also points out that when hiring, Japanese companies do not consider students’ grades in university, although they are very interested in the name of the university a person graduates from.

Generally, the system of entering national and public universities is different from that of private universities. National and local public universities require applicants to go through two stages of screening procedures – the National Center Test (NCT)

designated by the National Center for University Entrance Examinations (NCUEE), which all the students have to take, and an entrance exam created and administered by each institution individually (Guest, 2008a). A preliminary common test was established under the leadership of the Ministry of Education for the purpose of creating a unified and national standard each university could use as a reference point (Guest, 2008b). The NCUEE, originally established in 1977 as a national agency, became an independent administrative institution in 2002. The members of the NCUEE include hundreds of professors from national, local public, and private universities. The primary aim of the NCT is to measure the basic academic achievement of university applicants upon the completion of high school. National, local public, and private universities use the test results according to their own criteria to judge the ability and aptitude of applicants to receive higher education (National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2007). The test is used in various ways based on the purposes of each university. Nine examples of the uses listed in the leaflet issued by the National Center for University Entrance Examinations (2007, p.7) include “adopt tests in all subject areas and subjects to assess applicants’ general basic academic ability”; “adopt tests in specific subject areas or subjects to select entrants for a part of the quota”; and “use applicants’ profile forms from their high schools and the results of the NCT as the primary examination. The universities conduct interviews with those who passed it.” The NCT is conducted throughout the country on two consecutive days in January in cooperation with participating universities. In 2008, 543,385 applicants took the test. Among them, 78.8% were final-year high school students and 20.0% were those who had previously graduated from high school. The number of applicants declined from last year by about 10,000 due to the decreasing in school age people and the falling birth rate (*Japan Times*, 2008, January 20). Among 29 subjects within the 6-subject areas offered on the test, about 97% of applicants took English tests (written and listening tests) (National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2008).

After the NCT, students apply for and take entrance examinations administered by each university as a second-stage examination based on the scores of the Center Test, which determine which university exam they will sit for (Guest, 2008). These university-specific examinations normally involve multiple-choice, short-answer, and long essay questions. Students take an exam in more than one subject, depending on

the field of study they intend to major in. For selected applicants, other methods of screening, such as interviews and essays, are applied. The students are screened based on the results of both the NCT and an exam administered by each university. Students usually have two chances to apply for admittance to universities (Moriyoshi & Trelfa, 1999).

Meanwhile, private universities have greater freedom in their screening procedures. They employ various screening systems and typically offer several means of entry besides the exam, such as entrance by recommendation, special policies and exams for returnees, and automatic admissions for students who attended feeder high schools (Brown, 2002). Although various screening systems exist, admission by a one-shot examination is still the major method most universities employ. In addition to that, almost 20% of the private universities also use the NCT. In 2008, 467 private universities used the NCT (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2007 October, 7).

In the recommendation system, the universities offer placement to students who have earned sufficient overall academic grades in high school. In many cases, graduates from non-elite academic high schools tend to choose entry by recommendation because they can manage to enter fourth-grade universities. Under this system, the students are evaluated separately from their test-taking peers. The students chosen by high schools do not need to take the entrance exam tests, which are often too difficult for many of the students who choose the entry by recommendation system. Their admission is decided based on recommendations from high school advisors, supplemented by GPA, a submitted essay, and/or an interview with the applicant (Mulvey, 2001). The students have a much higher possibility of admission in a university through entry by recommendation than by the ordinary entrance exams; although, in return, once accepted, they must accept the place and pay the expensive admission fees and tuition in order to secure university's income (Murphy, 2001).

2.4 Competitiveness of the entrance exam

The keen competition for admission to universities in Japan is often described as *examination hell* or *war*. The high value placed on prestigious universities leads to intense competition among high school students, who need to cram to prepare for the high-stake entrance exam. The issue of who graduated from where is a national

obsession in Japan. There are numerous publications that rank universities as well as tabulate the number of executives, politicians, and bureaucrats according to the institutions from which they have graduated (Ono, 2007).

Universities should not base their exams on the curricular content prescribed by MEXT. However, in order to select the best applicants, some questions on the exam require students to synthesize divergent material and look beyond the curriculum of an ordinary high school. Thus, it is a common practice for many high schools to use supplementary textbooks and past tests to prepare their students for exam-type questions in the third year. However, even the use of these supplementary materials does not sufficiently prepare many of the students who hope to enter a prestigious university, so they supplement their study by attending cram schools, correspondence courses, summer programs, and intensive practice sessions that include examples of the entrance exam questions (Moriyoshi & Trelfa, 1999). Students may attend cram schools voluntarily, but some are pressured by their parents to attend them after school (Takeuchi, 1997).

Figures for 2004 indicate that a total of 49,198 cram schools existed throughout the country (Ministry of International Affairs and Communications, 2005). There are two major types of cram schools. One is usually small-scale and aimed at elementary, junior high, and high school students. It supports students to catch up with school work and/or prepares them for the entrance exam. The other type offers various courses that prepare students for the exams of the specific university to which they intend to enter. This type of cram school is relatively large-scale, is run by a big company, and enrolls both high school students and students who failed the university entrance exam on their first attempt. In addition to the two supplementary institutions, there are tutoring companies which provide tutors for students. (Frasz & Kato, 1999; Watanabe, 1996). According to a survey conducted in November 2007, more than 80% of third-year students in public high schools participate in some kind of study outside the school, and among them, about 65% attend cram schools (MEXT, 2008). Some students attend cram schools to review regular schoolwork, but many students go to cram schools to advance beyond the regular public high school curriculum and prepare for the entrance exams. According to a survey, 43 percent of cram schools provide a considerably higher level of instructional content than that of public high schools, and 30 percent

arrange their classes according to students' individual abilities (Rohelen, 1998).

Most of the students who have failed their entrance examinations opt to spend one or more years as a *ronin* (literally, a samurai (warrior) without a master, but the same Japanese word is used for the students) after graduating from high school in order to try again to be admitted to a university of their choice, possibly after attending a private preparatory school (Watanabe, 1996). Examination hell is motivated by the hierarchical rankings of universities, and students try again if they are not accepted on their first attempt under *ronin* status. Examination hell does pay off, when evaluated by the returns *to* investments for preparing another year for the exam in a preparatory school because spending one year as a *ronin* increases earnings indirectly when it results in a student gaining entrance to a higher ranking college (Ono, 2007).

Nowadays, with a drop in the nation's birth rate, we face a new era of open admissions (in other words, every student can enter a university) and falling academic levels. The 18-year-old population (third-year high school students) has been decreasing since 1992, and the total drop in student numbers is predicted to reach 850,000 between the years 1992 and 2010 (Doyon, 2001). As a result, some people claim that entering a university is no longer competitive. However, the difficulty of the entrance examination is not due to an inadequate supply of openings at universities but rather the nature of the competition itself. The principal character of this competition is that applicants are always trying to aim for a university one rank higher than the one they are confident of entering (Takeuchi, 1997). Mr. Sakaguchi, a manager of a well-known chain of preparatory schools, points out that many students think that entering a university itself is not valuable. They have a tendency to try to enter a prestigious university. Thus, entering a national university or prestigious private university is becoming competitive. Although the number of applicants has been decreasing, severe competition among applicants who do wish to enter a prestigious university is the same (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2007, August 16). For this reason, it is not surprising that 20% of students who took the NCT are *ronin* students who aim to enter a prestigious university. Amano (1999) claims that in a career-based society where the name of the graduate's school is important, students will strive to get into a small number of brand-name universities no matter how much the screening system is reformed. In other words, the severe entrance examination war will persist.

An item of news which made the headlines in 2006 also indicates that severe competition for the entrance exam still exists. In November 2006, it was revealed that about 9% of all high school seniors in the country (663 of the nation's 5,408 public and private high schools) had not fulfilled the national curriculum requirements (*Japan Times*, 2006, November, 23). Some high schools deliberately avoided teaching certain compulsory courses (in most cases, world history) unnecessary for the university entrance exams so that their students would have more time to study subjects like English and mathematics, which are prominently featured in the entrance exams. According to the current publication of *The Course of Study for High School*, credits from 13 or 14 subjects are required for graduation, but fewer than seven subjects are required for the entrance exams (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2006, November 3). This practice has taken place mostly at elite high schools (*Japan Times*, 2006, November, 1). Regarding the problem, a prefectural superintendent of education criticized the entrance exam in that students are required to memorize as much accurate knowledge as possible (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2006, November 8). A staff member in a preparatory school claims that high schools have not been able to secure sufficient class hours to prepare students for the entrance exam since April 2002 because of the nationwide adoption of the five-day school week. He also points out the gap between the ideals of *Course of Study* and the real situation of the university entrance exam (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2006, October, 26). In addition to the problem, a survey by the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education revealed that about twenty Tokyo metropolitan high schools did not teach the required subject periods for "integrated study" officially introduced in 2003, and instead taught English and mathematics to prepare students for the university entrance exam (*Ashahi Shimbun*, 2006, December 12).

Another example which shows the competitiveness of the entrance exam is a murder committed by a *ronin* student. The competitiveness of the entrance exam system sometimes has tragic psychological consequences. In 2007, a 21-year-old cram school student, under strong pressure to pass a college exam after failing his dental college entrance exams for three years, was suspected of murdering his sister (*Japan Times*, 2007, January 8).

Although the entrance exams are still competitive for some students, it is also true that

more and more students are able to enter a university without too much effort. In other words, we have now two separate groups of students who still struggle with preparing for the competitive entrance exams in a high-ranked university and those who enter a low-ranked university without any efforts. Tsuruta (2003) mentions that the shrinking eighteen-year-old population is making university access easier. Moreover, university professors deplore the declining academic performances of their students, now that flexible university admissions make it easier for all students to enter the university. According to a nationwide survey by a research group, about one out of five college students did comparatively little studying to prepare for college entrance exams in their last year of high school from 2005 to 2006 (*Japan Times*, 2007, September 23). Amano (1999) points out that Japanese universities can now be separated into three groups: a) universities that are highly competitive; b) universities that are mildly competitive; and c) universities that are non-competitive. Prestigious universities still attract students, while unpopular universities at the bottom of the pyramid are in danger of bankruptcy because of the scarcity of students who apply to these institutions. In 1990, only 4.1% of all private universities were under-enrolled, while in 2008, 47.1% of them are under-enrolled (Geppo Shigaku, 2008). Mori (2002) points out that we have been facing paradigm shifts on the role of university entrance exams, and students have no longer been experiencing *examination hell*. The issue of student recruitment, especially for private universities, is getting more serious since tuition is their largest income source (Tsuruta, 2003). While factors other than the entrance exam have had an impact on the admission of students into universities, we cannot neglect the fact that quite a few students are still greatly influenced by the entrance exam. In spite of the fact that, as a result of the recent reform of the university admission system, students have several routes through which to enter a university, many students and parents still believe that the traditional entrance exam is the surest way to secure their place in a good university (Aspinall, 2003). In the next section, a more in-depth description of the reform of the university admission system conducted over the last thirty years will be described.

2.5 Reform of the university admission system

A reform of the university admission system has been conducted under the strong leadership of the MEXT over the last thirty years. It should be noted that the Japanese education system is highly centralized and both national and private universities must

be recognized by the national government and rely on government funds (Mori, 2002). In general, the Central Council for Education, formed by the Minister of Education (or the Ad Hoc Council on Education formed by the Prime Minister) have discussed issues of education and made recommendations for the revision of university entrance exams in an officially submitted report. The universities have followed these recommendations and made an effort to revise their exam content and admission criteria accordingly.

Individual universities used to make their own exam before the common test for national universities was introduced. The exam questions were so difficult and twisted that students were forced to prepare for the exam intensively, which caused the notorious *examination hell* (Hirezaki, 1999). Following the series of recommendations by the Board of University Entrance Examination Improvement, the first common test, the Joint First-Stage Achievement Test, was established in 1979 under the leadership of the MEXT in order to create a unified national standard that universities could use as a reference point. Since then, the common test has been revised by changing its name, content, and characteristics in response to advice of various MEXT committees as well as revisions of the high school curriculum (Guest, 2008b; National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2007).

In the mid-1980s, the Ad Hoc Council on Education formed by the Prime Minister recommended the revision of university entrance exams. Its purpose was to lessen the competitiveness of the entrance examination, which was mainly caused by the existence of a single entrance examination. In response to the recommendations, not only was a new unified test implemented, but individual universities also began to use other forms of admission criteria besides the exam, such as interviews, essays, and recommendations from high schools. In 1995, the Central Council of Education again pointed out that too much emphasis was being placed on the exam, which focuses on evaluating applicants' scholastic abilities, and made another suggestion regarding the diversification of admissions criteria. As a result, the admissions office exam became a new component of university admissions. In the admissions office exam, holistic evaluation of applicants in terms of various characteristics, such as performance in extra curricular activities, cultural performance, and volunteer work, was conducted (Mori, 2002; The Japan Association of National Universities, 2000).

In 2000, the Admission Committee of the University Council discussed the issue of the university admission system intensively. To carry out the proposal by the Central Council of Education, the Admission Committee issued a report on the reform of the admission system. The report points out that there is still a strong notion that admission by the exam is the fairest criterion in society. Moreover, they mentioned that in the current system, applicants do not have another opportunity to take the exam in the future once they have failed it at the age of 18 or 19 (MEXT, 2000). The committee offered various constructive suggestions and solutions in the report, and the NCT has improved based on seven suggestions made by the committee at that time (Education Rebuilding Council, 2007). For example, since 2002, universities can utilize students' NCT scores obtained in the previous year to select students for the current year. Additionally, examinees can request the NCUEE to disclose their NCT score. Since 2005, junior colleges have also been allowed to use the NCT score for selection. Most importantly, a listening test has been introduced into the NCT since 2006 in order to meet the content requirements of the new course of study. However, as the Japan Association of National Universities (2000) points out, many of the other suggestions were difficult to bring about; thus, the entrance examination system leaves much room for improvement. Recently, the Education Rebuilding Council (2007) made suggestions for the drastic reform of the entrance examination system in order to select highly motivated and high-achieving students. This indicates that the Japanese government is not satisfied with the reforms of the entrance exam made in the past, and thus, reform is a never-ending issue.

The MEXT have made a great effort to change not only the university admission system itself, but also English curriculum in secondary school by introduction of new English policy. The purpose of the reform is to increase students' communicative English ability. It also aims to encourage English teachers to have their students acquire communicative skills using a more communicative teaching style, not a traditional grammar translation method many teachers employ. However, MEXT's efforts seem to have little effect on the change of English teaching and learning in secondary school because of a strong washback effect of the university entrance exam. In 2.6 I will explain about current English curriculum and its reform. I also discuss how these reform and relatively new current curriculum do not work because of

negative influence of university entrance exam.

2.6 English curriculum in secondary school, and English education policy in Japan

Foreign Language is a required subject at lower and upper secondary schools in Japan. Although teaching foreign languages other than English is promoted in *The Course of Study*, English is mainly taught in schools. English is not a required subject in elementary school, but “English activities” have been allowed to be introduced within a new curriculum, Period of Integrated Study, started in 2002. According to *The Course of the Study* currently used (MEXT, 1999), upper secondary schools offer two subjects in English: “Oral/Aural Communication I” and “English I.” The former mainly provides oral communication practice and the latter provides comprehensive communication activities. Schools can choose either subject depending on the ability of the students. Other common subjects offered are Aural/Oral Communication II, English II, Reading, and Writing (MEXT, 2003b). Schools can also offer special subjects such as those involving understanding other cultures and current English, depending on their curriculum.

In a report on Educational Reform submitted by the Ad Hoc Council in 1986, it was stated that English education reform is necessary with the advance of globalization or internationalisation (MEXT, 1986). Although internalization remains a pre-eminent, long-term goal of the MEXT, the concept of the word is ambiguous. It is a popular term, and we hear it everywhere, but it has never been properly defined. According to Linicome (1993), other terms derived from the word, such as *internationality*, *international sense*, and *internationalist*, have been used in a wide variety of contexts. He blames the university entrance exam as the biggest obstacle to the internalization of Japanese education based on his interview with teachers and students in a prestigious senior high school. While quite a few of them agreed that it is necessary to internalize Japanese society and education, none advocated drastic changes in the current education system. One policy in response to the report by the Ad Hoc Council was the advent of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program in 1987, which invited young college and university graduates from overseas to serve as assistant language teachers (ALTs) in public junior high and high schools. The JET Program is conducted under the auspices of local governments in cooperation with MEXT, the Ministry of

International Affairs and Communications, and the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR). The purpose of the JET programme was to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other nations at the community level and, by extension, to encourage the teaching of communicative English (CLAIR, 2006).

The word “communication” has become a slogan among teachers of English in secondary schools in Japan since MEXT revised the older version of *The Course of Study* in 1989. For the first time in the history of secondary school English education, MEXT emphasized the development of communicative skills as the main goal. Although the new version was published in 1998, the goals of TEFL at the secondary school level share the basic concepts of the 1989 version, which emphasizes the importance of communicative ability and the role of language learning (Takanashi, 2004). According to *The Course of Study* for upper secondary school implemented in 2003, the overall objectives of the foreign languages are “to develop students’ basic practical communication abilities such as listening and speaking, deepening the understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages (MEXT, 2003b).”

Although communicative skills have received greater emphasis in the curriculum, teachers have struggled to fully implement communicative activities in their classrooms for a variety of reasons. Browne’s (1998) study shows that the low quality and inadequate amount of pre-service training prevents English teachers from being well-prepared for the challenges they face. University entrance examinations have also had a large influence on language instruction. Gorsuch’s (2001) study indicates that the strong influence of university entrance examinations acted as a powerful deterrent to the teachers’ implementation of communicative language activities. Hiramatsu (2005) conducted interviews and observation in high schools in order to find the factors that come into play between policy change and its implementation at the level of the individual teacher. According to the interview data, although all Japanese teachers admit that oral communication is important, the pressure of the university entrance exams, which still focus on grammar and reading comprehension, prevented them from implementing communicative language teaching in their classrooms. The teachers struggled with balancing the two orientations in their actual teaching, and in reality, the emphasis was much more on English exams than on the use of communicative English

in class.

In 2001, a report was released by the Panel to Promote Revisions in English Language Teaching (a private advisory panel which consists of 22 members designated by the Minister of Education) in 2001 (MEXT, 2001). It pointed out that the university entrance examination needs to be improved in a way that corresponds to the high school curriculum, which emphasizes communicative competence. More concretely, they also stated that it is necessary to conduct more research on formats, contents, and methods of evaluation of the entrance exam from a perspective which does not hinder students' intrinsic motivation and willingness to learn. In addition, each university should show their applicants clearly what kinds of English ability they require.

The most recent policy which has had a great influence on English education is the 2003 Action Plan entitled "Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'." Although MEXT aimed to act for the improvement of English language education, the unusual plan (which clearly showed comprehensive goals of the English education in Japan) was shocking to quite a few English teachers because they felt that the description of the plan was so specific that they could not accept it (Tanabe, 2004). The plan consists of two major parts: I. Goal to cultivate "Japanese English Abilities" and II. Action to Improve English Education. The main goals described in Part I are to have all national Japanese acquire a certain level of English communicative abilities and to foster the abilities in school education by improving English classes, upgrading the teaching abilities of English teachers, enhancing systems for instruction, and strengthening the motivation for English learning. Part II consists of seven sections which describe actions to achieve the goals. In the section pertaining to the improvement of the evaluation system for selecting school and university applicants, MEXT suggested that communication abilities should be appropriately evaluated and that the utilization of listening tests or external proficiency examinations should be encouraged for the entrance examinations of universities and high schools (MEXT, 2003a).

Chapter THREE: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature relevant to my study. In section 3.2, I summarize the definitions of reliability and validity, which are often used to discuss the quality of language tests in the field of language testing. I then explore the issues of the ethics of language teaching beyond reliability and validity and present two views of the issue in section 3.3. I focus on the two main areas of the first view, washback and impact in section 3.4, and provide an overview of empirical studies on the effects of washback and impact both in Japan and within other contexts in section 3.5. Section 3.6 deals with the second view of the ethics of language testing, critical language testing, followed by an overview of studies on critical language testing in section 3.7. Next, I briefly explain the English language component of a Japanese university in section 3.8. I also present some of the criticism towards the Japanese university entrance exam made by previous university teachers and researchers, especially focusing on the issues of the reliability and validity. Section 3.9 discusses cultural, social, and political aspects of the Japanese entrance exam. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the literature review in Section 3.10.

3.2 Definitions of reliability and validity

Regardless of whether or not language teachers are interested in testing, the basic concepts of reliability and validity are important to the practice of teaching language (Gorsuch, 1997). Since the terms reliability and validity are often used in the traditional research field of language testing, I would like to define them before I provide an overview of the ethical issues of language testing. Reliability is “the extent to which test scores are consistent: if candidates took the same test again tomorrow after taking it today, would they get the same result?” (Alderson, Clapham & Wall, 1995, p.6). There are two components of test reliability: the performance of the test from occasion to occasion, and scorer reliability. Hughes (2003) makes several suggestions as to how to make tests more reliable. Some of the suggestions are: the tests should “exclude items which do not discriminate well between weaker and stronger students”(p.45), “provide clear and explicit instructions”(p.47), “use items that permit scoring which is as objective as possible” (p,48), and “provide a detailed scoring key” (p.49).

Validity is “the degree to which a test measures what it claims, or purports, to be measuring (Brown, 1996, p.231). Construct validity is the term that is being increasingly used to refer to the general notion of validity, because examiners make tests to measure theoretical constructs such as reading ability and fluency in speaking (Hughes, 2003). When we claim that a test has construct validity, it is necessary to show empirical evidence, which may take several forms, including content validity and criterion-related validity. A test has content validity “if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills, structures, etc. with which it is meant to be concerned” (Hughes, 2003, p.26). Content validity is important because a test is likely to be an accurate measure of what it is supposed to measure when it has content validity. Criterion-related validity “relates to the degree to which results on the test agree with those provided by some independent and highly dependable assessment of the candidates’ ability” (Hughes, 2003, p.27).

3.3 Ethics of language testing

The growing interest in the ethics of language teaching is related to the fact that language testers have had a positivist approach to their discipline in determining whether or not the objective of their inquiry really exists (Hamp-Lyons, 1997a). Ethics in language testing have been regarded as no more than an extended validity, but Alderson, Clapham, and Wall (1995) argue that ethics consists of a combination of validity and washback. Bachman (2005) states that extensive research on validity and validation has neglected test use, and that, in contrast, research on test use and consequences have ignored validity. Thus, it is necessary to form a link between validity and test consequences. McNamara and Rover (2006) insist that because language testing research is beyond the technical field, it is necessary for it to “develop an ongoing critique of itself as a site for the articulation and perpetuations of social relations” (p.40). This enables language testing research to overcome the limitation of validity theory, and leads to a wider discussion of language use and the specific functions of the test.

McNamara (2000) distinguishes two views towards the issue of the ethics of language teaching, both of which acknowledge the social and political role of testing. The first view deals with ethical language testing and stresses the individual responsibility of testers to ensure that language testing is ethical. The second view concerns critical

language testing and regards tests as sociopolitical constructs, since tests are designed as instruments of power and control and are necessary for critique. I will discuss the first view in section 3.4 and 3.5, and the second view in 3.6 and 3.7 more in detail.

3.4 Washback effect and impact

In terms of ethical language testing, two main concepts of concern are test washback and test impact. Washback and impact are different in the scope of their effects. Washback is limited to the educational context and refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Primarily, the effects of teaching and learning have been associated with consequential validity, a term coined by Messick (1989). Messick (1996) refers to washback as “only one form of testing consequences that need to be weighed in evaluating validity” (p.243).

The definition of washback itself does not determine whether washback is positive or negative (Spratt, 2005). Two kinds of washback exist: positive and negative washback. Alderson and Wall (1993) regard the undesirable effect of a test on teaching and learning as negative washback. In other words, although teachers and learners do not want to teach and learn for the test, they end up doing so. In contrast, tests have positive washback when teachers and students have a positive attitude towards tests, and when they willingly and collaboratively work to meet the objectives of the tests. Under these conditions, tests bring beneficial change in teaching and learning (Cheng & Curtis, 2004).

In the case of Japanese teaching and learning, the washback of the entrance exam is usually perceived as being negative:

There are probably many reasons why most Japanese high school graduates cannot use English for even the most basic purposes, despite receiving hundreds of hours of classroom instruction, but surely one of the most important is the washback effect of entrance exam on the classroom (Buck, 1998, p.18).

In addition to the distinction between positive and negative washback, Gates (1995) distinguishes washback as falling into two categories: strong and weak. He explains

that students and teachers tend to change their classroom behaviors if washback is strong, while weak washback has no or little impact on classroom behaviors. He also lists seven factors which have an impact on the strength of washback. These are: prestige, accuracy, transparency, utility, proficiency, monopoly, anxiety, and practicality. They are factors of test itself, test-makers and test-takers. For example, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), which is well-known in Japan is perceived to be both reliable and valid, and is thus transparent. In addition, the test meets the users' language needs. It is easy to administer and scores are reported back within one week. The test format can be considered to have minimal effect on the anxiety levels of the test-takers since multiple-choice tests are common to high-school tests and university entrance exams.

Impact is a broader concept, referring to the impacts that tests have both within the school and beyond (McNamara & Rover, 2006), and it investigates the relationship between test use and the society in which it is used (Fulcher, 1999). According to Wall (1997), the impact of a test is defined as the "effect it may have on individuals, policies or practices as a whole" (p.291).

Hughes' (2003) perception of washback includes "a part of the impact a test may have on learners and teachers, on educational systems in general, and on society at large" (p.53) and is similar to other people's common definition of impact. We should also notice that some researchers use the terms washback and impact interchangeably (Andrews, 2004), but Wall (1997) mentions that washback is more frequently used to refer specifically to the effects of tests on teaching and learning.

3.5 Studies on washback and impact

In the previous section, I have briefly described the ethical aspects of language testing, namely ethical language testing and critical language testing. Now that we understand the definition of washback and impact in light of ethical language testing, I would like to provide an overview of empirical studies on washback and impact conducted by previous researchers.

3.5.1 Studies on washback and impact outside of Japan

Little empirical research had been conducted on the issue of washback and impact in

the field of language testing before Alderson and Wall (1993) called for empirical research on the effects of washback. Since that time, researchers have conducted an increasing amount of research (e.g., Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Andrews et al., 2002; Cheng, 1997; Cheng, 1998; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Qi, 2005; Shohamy, 2001; Wall & Anderson, 1993).

The various classroom aspects discussed in washback studies can be categorized into curriculum, materials, teaching, learning, and affective domains. First, the study by Alderson and Wall (1993) which investigated the impact of a new English exam in Sri Lanka showed the effects of washback on the curriculum. The teachers narrowed curriculum by finishing or abandoning their textbooks, and then started intensive work to prepare students for the upcoming exam with supplementary materials. Cheng's (1997) study found that in Hong Kong, the introduction of a revised Hong Kong Certificate of Education Exam in English in Secondary School similarly changed the content of teaching curriculums. For example, reading aloud was replaced by role play activities and discussion (Cheng, 1997).

In terms of materials, Cheng (1997) reports that almost all schools within his study changed their textbooks when teaching towards the 1996 exam syllabus started as new materials became widely available on the market. Indeed, commercially published materials seemed to play an important role in preparing for the exam in Hong Kong classrooms, as shown by Andrew's (1995) study that reveals that teachers spent two-thirds of their class time with exam-related published materials. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) also find that teachers used exam materials to practice for TOEFL exams. Qi (2005) reports that teachers used mock tests to familiarize their students with test content, format, answer sheets, test environment, and other testing aspects, even within an ordinary class period.

Based on her qualitative study of the role of external testing in American elementary schools, Smith (1991, pp.526-527) presents seven common behaviors that teachers choose to teach as an exam draws near:

- 1) Teaching test-taking skills: Teachers train students to become 'testwise' in skills such as transferring answers to separate answer sheets and finishing the test in a

limited time.

- 2) Exhortation: Teachers give students advice for successful test taking, such as having a good night's sleep beforehand and having breakfast before the test.
- 3) Teaching the content known to be covered by the test: Teachers prepare the students for tests by reviewing the content of ordinary instruction, sequencing topics, and teaching new content that the test would cover.
- 4) Teaching to the test: Teachers use materials that mimic the test format and cover the same curricular territory as the test.
- 5) Stress inoculation: Teachers use test-related materials to boost the students' confidence and to work on the students' feelings of self-efficacy.
- 6) Practicing items of the test: Teachers conduct practice on items from the test itself, or familiarize students with parallel forms of these items.
- 7) Cheating: Teachers lead activities such as allowing the students to use extra time to finish the test, providing hints, rephrasing words, and providing correct answers.

In another example, Cheng (1997) reports that teachers felt that a new exam put pressure on their teaching, and that the exam made extra work for them. The data from classroom observation showed that teachers changed their ways of organizing classroom activities based on the textbook they used, and revealed that teachers relied on the textbook to understand the revised exam.

It is also clear that such tests have a significant effect on the students' learning. Andrews et al. (2002) studied the effects of the introduction of an oral component in high-stake tests on students' performance. The results of the study show that the new test had an effect on the students, although most apparent washback effects were of a superficial nature. The students seemed to become familiar with the exam format and to simply memorize formulaic phrases, depending largely on the rote-learning of exam-specific strategies. Although learning outcomes may have been only superficially met by the testing, students tended to regard positive test-taking experiences as overall successes. Cheng (1997) reports that quite a large number of students agreed with statements that all students work hard to achieve their best in public examinations, and that examinations force students to study harder.

Finally, concerning affective domains, we are aware that exams usually generate

negative feelings (such as anxiety and fear of the tests) among both teachers and students. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) find that most teachers in TOEFL preparation courses in the USA have a negative attitude towards the TOEFL exam itself, as well as adjusting their teaching methods for this exam. They feel pressured for time as the exam draws near. Furthermore, students sometimes show mixed feelings towards the exam. Cheng (1997) reports that many students admit that although examinations are one of their principal motivations for learning, they strongly dislike them.

So far we have perceived that the negative washback effects of tests are prevalent in various aspects of teaching and learning. We should also take note of other studies that deal with positive washback resulting from test taking. Qi (2005) investigated how the National Matriculation English Test in China, introduced in 1985 as a replacement for an old national university test, produced change in English teaching and learning in secondary schools. This finding was based on in-depth interviews of secondary school teachers and English inspectors. The results indicate that the test produced only limited intended washback effects, and factors such as teachers' beliefs, educational background, and teaching style hindered the manifestation of intended washback effects (Qi, 2005).

Here I would like to describe the distinction between high- and low-stake tests, for the former are more likely to cause washback. High-stake tests are those used to guide important decisions that immediately and directly affect students, teachers, administrators, parents, or the general public. Such decisions include graduation, promotion, and student placements, as well as the evaluation or rewarding of teachers, the allocation of resources to schools, and school or school system certification. In contrast, low-stake tests are those perceived as being unimportant in terms of rewards or sanctions directly connected to test performance (Madaus, 1988).

Compared with the effects of high-stake exams, the effects of the low-stake exams seem to be weaker. A study by Shohamy (2001b) showed that in Israel, an Arabic test was introduced for seventh-grade students in order to raise the status of Arabic language. After the test has been in operation in for eight years, the Arabic test had much less impact on teaching and learning as compared to high-stake English exams.

For example, relatively few teachers spent their class time preparing their students for the Arabic exam, while quite a large number of students did not even study the material covered by the test. In addition, neither teachers nor students regarded the test as being important or essential, and all the teachers insisted that the test did not promote learning in the upper grades. As a result, the teachers realized the results of the test had no personal or immediate impact on them, and dealt with the test as less important. Then the test “became a low-stake test” (Shohamy, 2001b, p.102).

Previous studies show that washback effects exist for exams, but their scope and influence vary in form and intensity. As Spratt (2005) point out, other factors besides the exam itself may have influence on generating washback. According to Shih (2007), previous research generated various findings that indicate that washback cannot be separated from social and educational contexts, and that washback varies from person to person. Relating to Shih’s claim, Shohamy et al. (1996) point out that various factors (such as the stakes, the purpose, and the format of the test) result in change of washback over time. After conducting research on the effects of washback related to the General Proficiency Test on English Learning in Taiwan, Shih (2007) concludes that existing theories do not fully explain washback in the test educational context. Shih goes on to propose a new tentative model. According to his new model, test washback regarding students’ learning and psychology is intertwined with extrinsic factors (e.g., socio-economic factors, school and educational factors, family, friends, colleagues, and personal factors), intrinsic factors (individual differences, personal characteristics, and personal perceptions of the test), and twelve additional test factors.

3.5.2 Studies on washback and impact in Japan

I have examined empirical research studies on washback and impact in the previous section. Section 3.5.2 introduces some studies conducted in Japan specifically.

Although quite a few studies on the effects of washback have been conducted in various contexts recently, fewer studies have been undertaken within the Japanese context. The study by Watanabe (1992) which deals with washback effect of university entrance exam on language learning strategies is one of the early studies that investigated the washback effect of the entrance exam in Japan, but the results were not entirely clear. He found that the exam did not have negative effects on the students’

use of learning strategies in that it did not narrow the range of strategies used by the students. Compared with the students who entered a university by recommendation, those who entered by the exam used more strategies. Watanabe (1992) explains that the entrance exam might have enabled the students to try out a wide variety of strategies, and thus the exam had positive effects on the students. He also found that students used the communicative learning strategies and socio-affective strategies less frequently. In this aspect, the findings were unclear as to whether or not this is an effect of the entrance examination.

Watanabe (1996) conducted further study on the relationship between university entrance exams and the use of the grammar translation approach to teaching. After observing and interviewing two teachers in a preparatory school, he concluded that teachers' educational background, personal beliefs, and teaching experience might outweigh the possible effects of the entrance exam. Ironically, the site where the research was conducted was an institution to prepare students for the university entrance examination, so the results of his study should be interpreted with extreme caution.

Another study conducted by Watanabe (2003) examined the validity of predictions that lessons in a senior high school preparatory exam course indicated negative washback. He observed and interviewed five teachers in three schools, and found that some lessons were characterized by negative influences, but that others were not. In class the teachers put much more emphasis on teaching test skills directly rather than developing students' communicative abilities using authentic materials. For example, one teacher used grammar exercises consisting of past examination questions and another used listening exercises taken from past exam papers. What was happening is very complex, and teachers had various reasons to explain why they were applying certain practices in class. He concluded that teachers' familiarity with a range of teaching methods, their psychological factors, and specific school cultures play a key role in mediating either negative or positive washback of the exam.

Beppu (2002) interviewed 45 teachers in 39 high schools in Japan to investigate washback of the entrance exam on their teaching. In general, most of the teachers were conscious of, and affected by, the upcoming exam. However, teachers' assumptions

about the exam had stronger washback effects on their teaching than the actual contents of the exam had. The teachers mentioned that they practiced activities such as translation from English into Japanese and studying minute grammar points because of the upcoming exam, but these minute grammar points were tested no more frequently on the exams than they had been in the past. The teachers seemed to use the entrance exam as an excuse to continue to use the grammar-translation method and to spend less class time with oral activities.

This finding is similar to the result of Watanabe's (2003) study, which revealed that teachers blamed the presence of the exam for the activities they were pursuing in class. Their blame seems to be based on their perceptions of the exam, although these notions might not reflect the actual content of the exam. Beppu (2002) claims that curricula made by the teachers themselves who are not aware of recent changes to the entrance exam greatly affect the contents of the English classes, and teachers still focus on minute grammar points—effectively replacing an oral communication class with a grammar class. Along with Beppu's study, Guest (2000) questions the validity of high school teachers' justification for employing a grammar translation method of teaching. He argues that the entrance exam has been modified and does not demand discrete grammatical knowledge any more, in contrast to what some high school teachers might claim.

More recently, Taguchi (2005) conducted a survey to investigate teachers' perceptions of oral communication (OC) classes and implementation difficulties in upper secondary high school. According to the results reported by 92 teachers, grammar and vocabulary instruction was the third most common activity reflecting teachers' need to prepare students for the entrance exams. In addition, observation data from four OC classes revealed that teachers spent half of the class period on grammar drills and quizzes, directing attention away from OC materials in order to prepare students for the exam. This indicates that washback regarding the entrance exam prevents teachers from implementing the communicative approach. These results are consistent with those of Gorsuch's (2001) study. He completed a survey of 876 Japanese high school English teachers regarding the teachers' level of approval towards communicative, audiolingual, and traditional (grammar-translation) activities, as well as the effects of a variety of influences (including university entrance exams and pre- and in-service

teacher education programs) on their instruction. The results of his study indicate that the strong influence of university entrance examinations acted as a powerful deterrent in regards to the teachers' implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) activities.

Noshino (2008) conducted an exploratory study of 21 Japanese secondary school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding CLT using a survey method. The results also showed that teachers' concern over entrance exams has a strong impact on their beliefs regarding the importance of grammar, vocabulary, and the *yakudoku* (grammar-translation) method compared with communicative activities. Interestingly, however, only two teachers reported that the entrance exam should be changed before employing CLT in the classroom. In contrast, one third of the respondents mentioned that educational reforms in classroom conditions (such as reduction of class size and increase of class numbers) are prerequisites for the effective use of CLT.

Although I have examined recent empirical research on washback and impact, the research has neither clarified which factors affect the intensity of washback nor identified which factors promote positive and negative washback. Since the nature of washback study is complex, researchers need to employ sophisticated research skills (Cheng, 2008b). She holds that researchers also need to “identify their own bias, analyze particular test and its context, and produce the predications of what washback/impact looks like prior to the design and conduct of the study” (Cheng, 2008b, p.359).

3.6 Critical language testing

In light of ethical language testing, section 3.5 has explored empirical studies about the effects of washback and impact both in Japan and within other contexts. The present section considers another aspect of the ethics of language testing—critical language testing. This section will explore the issues of the Japanese entrance examinations within this framework.

A broader perspective, in combination with a stronger understanding of the social and political role of testing, is crucial when considering language testing formulated in the framework of critical applied linguistics. Pennycook (1994), who advocates for critical

applied linguistics, claims that the consequences of language learning are not only educational, but also social and political. Although language testing has long been researched from a viewpoint of positivist and seems resistant to critical challenges (Pennycook, 1994), Elana Shohamy has developed a field known as critical language testing which deals with the social and political role of tests (McNamara, 2007). In critical language testing it is assumed that the act of testing is “both a product and an agent of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agendas that shape the lives of individual participants, teachers, and learners” (Shohamy, 1998, p.332). Her landmark text, *The Power of Tests* (Shohamy, 2001) examines the uses and consequences of tests in education and society and views tests as embedded in social, education and political contexts. Pennycook (2008) admits that Shohamy’s proposal for critical language testing clearly matches many of the principles that define other areas of critical applied linguistics.

Shohamy (2001) proposes various principles regarding critical language testing. One of these principles is that “critical testing views tests as tools directly related to levels of success, deeply embedded in cultural, educational and political arenas where different ideological and social forms are in struggle” (p.132). In fact, it can be argued that Japanese entrance exams can unfairly determine the outcomes of young Japanese lives. Success in the exam means success in their careers, because students in a prestigious university have more advantages than students in less-prestigious institutions do—especially in terms of job-hunting, since prestigious companies tend to hire students who graduate from a prestigious university (Lee, 2002). This fact alone can guarantee lifetime employment in a prestigious company.

Japanese entrance exams are definitely high-stake exams, not only because they determine the future of young people, but also because they determine much of the content of junior and high school education (Murphy & Sato, 2002). Menken (2008) warns that language policies are created by high-stake testing at every level of the educational system. This is done implicitly, without openly discussing the implications of the tests, and the test scores are interpreted as being neutral and independent from sociopolitical context. Shohamy (2006) mentions how strong the power of tests is. Tests have significant effects on the lives of individuals, since the control mechanisms of tests are enormous. Shohamy (2005) also points out that the test has detrimental

effects on test-takers because the results obtained from testing often determine high-stake decisions for individuals. For many high school students in Japan, tests are the sole indicators used for assessing their academic level, which in turn determines their university placement. Tests are also used “as disciplinary tools to impose behaviors on test-takers (e.g. in school systems) who are affected by their results” (Shohamy, 2006, p.103). Thus, many high school students feel fearful and anxious about tests and feel that they have no control over their behavior because tests and testers hold much more power than they themselves do.

In order to balance power between the testers and the test-takers, testers need to be fully aware of the power of the tests. More importantly, testers should fulfill their responsibilities to conduct a fair assessment as a conscientious tester. Shohamy (2001) mentions five views in terms of the responsibilities of the tester. One of the views regards shared responsibility and shared discourse. She claims that the balance of power between the authority of the testers and the test-takers should be changed. She suggests that it is essential that testers admit that their knowledge is limited, and that they further construct their knowledge by working with test-takers. As testers, teachers should be critical about tests and their use, collect data on the effects and consequences of the tests, and warn against misuses of the tests (Shohamy, 2001).

Many teachers who create the entrance exams for Japanese universities seem to lack an awareness of this responsibility. Poole (2003) describes how in a Japanese private university where he used to work, the tests are developed without any sense of responsibility. In this specific university, the English portion of the exams is developed from scratch every year by six teachers, none of whom are testing experts. They try to finish their burdensome job as swiftly and painlessly as possible by using previous exams as models. Murphy (2001) also criticizes how entrance exams are irresponsibly developed in a different private university. According to his experience, most Japanese professors believe that they can make up good questions using their intuition, and that following previous exam formats and discussing the exam with their colleagues will result in a good exam.

Shohamy (2001) mentions that testers should admit the limitations of their professional skills, and that it is imperative for testers to construct knowledge in a responsible way.

In addition, it is necessary to be critical about tests and their use, and to collect data on the effects and consequences of tests in order to warn against misuses and to protect those influenced by the act of testing. As for the use of the entrance exam in Japan, there is little empirical research on the effects and consequences. I strongly feel that I should contribute to that area as one of the testers.

McNamara and Roever (2006) stress the importance of well-rounded training for language testers, which would include training in psychometrics and second language acquisition. In Japan, professors whose backgrounds are diverse (including experience with English linguistics and English literature) are often involved in developing test items for the entrance exams administered by each university. It is not unusual that the test development committee does not include any specialists in language testing. Furthermore, McNamara and Rover (2006) claim that well-rounded training for language testers should go beyond applied psychometrics, second language acquisition, quantitative research methods, and test construction and analysis. They advocate that language testing professionals should have even broader training than this. In other words, testers should develop a critical view of testing and its social consequences, because those effects concern both the educational sector (such as university admissions and school graduations) as well as society at large.

Shohamy (2005) argues that teachers need to become more professional in their assessment by obtaining supplementary training and knowledge about testing, and that they need to understand the consequences and their different uses. Currently, many professors who make the entrance exams in Japan do not have proper training in assessment and testing. It is not realistic to require all professors to get training in applied psychometrics, but testers should be able to at least develop a critical view of testing and be aware of its social consequences.

In order to make tests more ethical, it is necessary to consult stakeholders and to take their views under serious consideration. Rea-Dickens (1997) mentions that language testers must be concerned about the involvement of all interested parties during the process of test development and test use in order to make the tests more ethical. It should be noted, however, that such concern is not prominent within the Japanese context.

Quite a few people are influenced by the entrance exams in Japan. In other words, exam stakeholders include learners, teachers, principals, and parents. Obviously, students are the highest stakeholders (Hamp-Lyons, 2000). Unsurprisingly, students do not realize that, as test-takers, they have the right to question whether the exams are used properly as a tool for determining their future. Reflecting upon my own learning experience, I cannot blame them for their naïve attitudes. I suffered from the entrance exams and, as a result, entered a university that I did not want to attend. Nevertheless, I never questioned the examination system when I was a student because I lacked a critical perspective. No teacher encouraged me to reflect on my experience and critique the exam, either.

Wall (2000) claims that, compared with the perceptions of teachers, students' perceptions of the tests are little known. She suggests that testers should talk to students directly rather than asking teachers about their students' thoughts and feelings. Hamp-Lyons and Lynch (1998) also point out that the voices of the highest stakeholders—the test-takers—are the least heard. Hamp-Lyons (1997b) mentions that it is not enough to evaluate tests from researchers' and teachers' perspectives alone, and she asserts that we need more research about how students view the effects of testing in terms of its impact on their lives. Students' views are among the most difficult to gauge, to make sense of, and to use (Rea-Dickins, 1997). Thus, testers should definitely not neglect their views if one is to form a fair assessment of the tests and their impact on society.

Teachers are the second-highest stakeholders of the testing. Recently, I conducted research on the beliefs of Japanese high school teachers concerning reading pedagogy (Takagi, 2006). One of the participants made an interesting comment regarding the question of why teachers stick to their teacher-centered teaching style. Although this particular teacher participant uses a learner-centred approach since his trial-and-error experiences have given him the confidence to do so, he remarked that his colleagues were afraid that the students' marks would drop if there was a sudden change in teaching methods. Moreover, the participant commented that his fellow teachers believed that the grammar-translation method is best suited to prepare students for scoring highly on the entrance exam. This indicates the degree to which ordinary high

school teachers are influenced by the entrance exams.

However, we cannot blame the teachers for their misconceptions. Because they know that test scores have significant effects on their students' lives, they naturally feel that they should help their students to pass the test (Gipps, 1994). According to Shohamy (2006), there are currently two views towards teachers and testing. One view regards teachers as bureaucrats, and the other view regards teachers as professionals. In cases where teachers are viewed as bureaucrats, it is because they are forced to meet the demands of the tests controlled and administered by an authority. It is natural that teachers adjust their behavior to meet students' needs, even if their practices are contradictory to their beliefs, such as in the cases where tests determine students' future lives. Although teachers are not usually involved in the decision-making processes of national tests, they are expected to become servants of the central systems by changing their behaviors to comply with the demands of the high-stake tests. This is especially true of Japanese high school teachers, who pay great attention to the university entrance exam. Shohamy (2005) argues that teachers need to become more socially responsible about the use of testing by pointing out misuses of the tests to the public. In addition, they should encourage their students to question tests and their uses and to critique their values and beliefs (Shohamy, 2005). In other words, teachers should not remain simply agents to exercise power and control of the central agencies without doubting their roles and positions.

Rea-Dickins (1997) argues that the participation of stakeholders (such as teachers and parents) promotes greater fairness in the language testing process. According to him, participation not only provides a forum for their concerns, ideas, complaints, and opportunities for justification of decisions made, but also equips them with information about the assessment process so that they can take appropriate action.

3.7 Studies on critical language testing

Section 3.6 outlined the concept of critical language testing and referred to some issues surrounding the Japanese entrance examination within this framework. Section 3.7 reviews and synthesizes the literature that deals with studies within the concept of critical language testing.

Compared with an abundance of studies on washback and impact all over the world, there have been relatively few studies conducted within the framework of critical language testing. Shohamy (1993) analyzed the impact of three national language tests by using several kinds of data, including documentation, interviews, surveys, and classroom observation. She found that the introduction of the tests into classrooms narrowed the curriculum, and that the results of the tests were used to blame or reward the teachers. Based on these results, she concluded that testing reforms are often imposed when policymakers introduce tests as a ‘quick fix’ to communicate educational priorities when they are under pressure from the public and the media. In Shohamy’s (2001) study, test takers provided narratives that described their experiences of second language test taking, as well as the effects of these tests on their lives and futures. These narratives clearly showed that test takers have low confidence in tests and feel that testing is detached from real learning and real-life performances.

In the Japanese context, we literally do not have any studies that deal with the issues of the entrance examination within the framework of critical language testing (although there are some studies on the effects of washback on the entrance examination). This is probably because the positivist view is dominant in the research community of language testing, where many studies deal with psychometrics. Also, the concept of critical applied linguistics is not well known in the field of English education. In addition, critical pedagogy may not be well received within the Japanese educational context because Japanese teachers do not want to run into conflicts with other teachers and authorities.

When Johnston (2003) invited his MA students to share their ideas about critical pedagogy, one Japanese female teacher claimed that, because foreigners are treated as outsiders, “it would be more culturally acceptable for a foreigner than for a native teacher to engage in critical pedagogy” (p.67). She explained how difficult it is for Japanese teachers to introduce critical pedagogy. One of the explanations she gave was that critical pedagogy creates conflicts and confusion in teacher–student relations. According to her, critical pedagogy threatens the clear boundary between teachers (who are supposed to have dignity) and their students.

McNamara (2008) attributes problems and difficulties in preventing progress in social

and political aspects of testing to the language-testing profession, which is reluctant to seriously engage with language testing from social and political perspectives. He also points out that work in validity theory in general lacks an appropriate model in the broader social context, and that such a model would be useful in considering the social and political functions of tests. McNamara (2008) goes on to explore a further problem that is related to the concern about who, exactly, should conduct research. He holds that it would be ambiguous for the developers of the tests to also be responsible for the critical perspective that the tests are based on (McNamara, 2008). I understand his argument, but many researchers may simply not be interested in conducting testing from a critical perspective, and furthermore, many may not be aware of the importance of conducting research about social and political aspects. Thus, I believe that it would be meaningful that I present an example of research in order to raise awareness of Japanese researchers and expand the research field of language testing in Japanese context.

Shohamy (1998a) states that “tests are most powerful as they are often the single indicators for determining the future of individuals” (p.332). The Japanese entrance exam holds true to this statement, and it seems appropriate to deal with the ethical issue of the Japanese entrance exam within the framework of critical language testing. Although washback and impact may be more widely-known research areas in terms of the ethics of testing, I consider the general framework of washback and impact studies to be too constrained to effectively deal with the issue of the entrance examination in the Japanese context. First of all, although the major research area of washback is the relationship that testing has with teaching and learning, the effects of the entrance examination are clearly beyond the scope of the classroom. As for impact study, it is too neutral because we cannot discuss the issue without first considering relevant sociopolitical aspects. In addition, the issue is out of the testers’ control because ethical language testing puts the burden of responsibility on testers (Hamp-Lyons, 2000).

Shohamy (2001) explains the reasons why tests are so powerful, so influential, and so dominating, and why they continue to play a central role in our society. Citing Bourdieu (1991), Shohamy (2001) argues that there is a wide public acceptance of and confidence in tests between testers (who want to dominate) and test-takers (who want to be dominated in order to maintain their place in society). In the case of Japanese

testing, universities might want to maintain their top statuses in an educational hierarchy, while high school students accept their own weak positions, believing that entering a prestigious university by a fair exam system will secure them a bright future. On top of that, those who make the tests might spread myths (either intentionally or unintentionally) about the usefulness of the tests by having high school students, teachers, and parents believing that tests are fair and meaningful, as Spolsky (1998) suggests.

3.8 Criticism towards the Japanese university entrance exam

In the previous section, I mentioned that we literally do not have any research on the university entrance examination in Japan that falls within the framework of critical language testing. However, previous researchers have criticized the entrance exam from various viewpoints. In section 3.8.1, I present some of the general criticisms made towards the exam, mainly by university teachers and researchers. In section 3.8.2, I explain the two types of English tests for the entrance exam: National Center Test (NCT) designated by The National Center for University Entrance Examinations (NCUEE), and a test created by each university. I then provide an overview of the studies that deal with the issues of the reliability and validity of both of these tests.

3.8.1 General criticism towards the Japanese university entrance exam

Japanese university entrance examinations have been subject to criticism for a long time, but most of these critiques are not based on empirical research. In this section, I focus mainly on criticism of the English component of the entrance exam. Watanabe (2003) reports that about 80% of the 500 claims, assertions, and anecdotes that appeared in mass media in the past ten years were concerned with negative aspects of the examination. Various people have expressed their views in the media about how the English test should be treated in the current exam system. For example, Kawanari (2000) radically argues that the English test should be eliminated from the entrance exam. He states that it is almost impossible to assess students' communicative ability by a paper and pencil test, and it is natural that students become much more concerned with so-called 'exam English' rather than developing their speaking and listening skills. He continues by claiming that, if society wants the students to acquire real communicative ability, than the English test should be eliminated. Clark (2006), a vice president of a private university, claims that English should be an elective subject in

high school, just as it should be in university entrance exams, and only those who are genuinely interested in learning English should be subjected to these courses and tests. According to him, it is not necessary for all learners to achieve very high levels on difficult university English entrance exams, which arguably cause detrimental effects on language education in Japan (Clark, 2006).

University English teachers also tend to argue how negative the effects of the entrance exam are on their students in academic journals. However, these claims are often made without empirical evidence. For example, university teachers attribute their students' lack of motivation in learning English to the entrance examination. Berwick and Ross (1989) assessed first-year students' attitudes and motives for learning English, and discovered that college students had a low motivation for learning, and that there was little relationship between their motivation and their performance on the proficiency tests. They explain that the students are obliged to compete with each other during the entrance exam, and thus the intensity of motivation to learn English hits a peak in the last year of high school (Berwick & Ross, 1989). Once they enter a university, they can neither sustain their motivation nor adjust to formal and academic learning in a university class (Berwick & Ross, 1989). While this explanation may be true, it is based only on speculation—not on empirical evidence.

3.8.2 Issues of reliability and validity in an English test in the entrance exam

High school students usually take two kinds of the university entrance exams in the last semester of their third year: NCT and the exam created and administered by each individual institution. Almost all national universities require students to take an English test in the NCT as part of their screening process, thus about 97% of students took English tests in 2008 (National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2008). The NCT English test functions as a type of placement test. It consists of a listening test (scored out of 50) and a reading test (scored out of 200), and all the questions are in multiple choice format. Its two main purposes are to determine the students' aptitude for academic study in a university level, and to stratify students so that they can choose an appropriate university to apply to (Guest, 2008). Concerning the exam created and administered by each individual institution, almost all universities require English or another foreign language as part of their screening process (Watanabe, 1996). The English component usually plays an important role in

the entrance examination, both in regards to national (public) universities and private universities, because the test score of the English component is usually the most heavily weighted of all the scores.

Quite a large expert body, comprising of national, local, and public university and high school teachers, is involved in developing and administering the NCT. Three out of 16 committees are in charge of test development. Committee I on Test Development has over 400 members, and it develops and actually prepares the test items for each subject. Committee II, which has over 100 members, checks and verifies the composition, contents, answers, and wording for the test items developed by Committee I. Committee III also checks the test items prepared by Committee I, with a particular focus on the formats, expressions, and conformity of levels of difficulty among different subjects. Because of the fact that the NCT is the only standardized English entrance exam, MEXT has made a great effort to improve the test over the years (MEXT, 2000).

Although the NCT has been relatively well received by previous researchers—perhaps since quite a few professors/researchers are involved in developing the tests—some researchers argue about its reliability and validity. For example, Ichige (2006) criticizes the test for not measuring communicative ability appropriately. She conducted an item analysis of tests administered in 2003, 2004, and 2005. Following this, she pointed out ambiguity of the purpose of the test, as well as an apparent mismatch between the language theories underlying communicative language teaching and the theory on which the NCT is based. In contrast, Guest (2007) questions the validity of Ichige's (2006) basic research rationale, and argues that the test has never been meant to measure communicative skills. He argues that objectivity in marking is crucial, since 500,000 applicants take the test, and that it is impossible to include productive tests (such as interviews, as Ichige suggests) on the condition that the results of test must be made known to the applicants within a week. He also mentions that MEXT advises universities to revise their exam to assess communicative ability precisely because the NCT cannot do that effectively (Guest, 2007).

Guest (2008b) compared the 1981 and 2006 versions of the NCT, examining categories such as text type, topic and genre, task type, and skills required. His analysis shows

that the 2006 test is superior to the 1981 test, and that it meets suggestions regarding test construct validity made by Brown (2000). Guest (2008b) also concludes that if there is an effect from washback due to the English test, than it is a positive one because students need to practice and develop a number of different skills (including listening skills) in order to succeed in the exam. Guest (2006) argues that the ultimate function of the NCT is to rank and stratify examinees to enable them to make reasonable choices for their second exam that each university will subject them to. In addition, the NCT measures a basic academic aptitude by employing high school pedagogical content as a reference point. Thus, criticisms that the exam does not reflect or enhance real-world communicative ability are not valid, because the exam is not intended to measure such skills in the first place.

In contrast to the careful collective development of the NCT, the annual entrance exam is constructed by each university independently. Individual university entrance exams are not under the purview of the Ministry of Education (Gorsuch, 2000). Thus, there is a wide variety of types of entrance exams, which cannot be standardized.

In contrast to the relatively good reputation of the NCT English test, various researchers have criticized the English exams created by individual universities for their difficulty and biased types of test items. Kimura and Visgatis (1996) compared the difficulty level of 48 entrance examination reading passages with that of passages taken from four high school English textbooks approved by MEXT. They found that the examination reading passages are more difficult than the high school textbook passages. Mulvey (2001), who examined 51 studies, found that there is little evidence of a logical relationship between entrance exam content, textbook contents, and reading pedagogy in practice in junior and senior high schools.

Brown and Yamashita (1995a) made a comprehensive review and critique of the entrance exam by analyzing ten examinations from private and public universities, as well as 21 NCT exams. They found that many of the test questions are based on all or portions of passages, and are extremely difficult. In addition, the exams of many of the public universities predominantly used translation items as main item types. Their analysis of the tests indicated that 'testwiseness' is of great benefit to the test takers, and attending a preparatory school is advisable to prepare for the exam. They also

pointed out that students' chance knowledge of particular topics and their vocabularies helps some students to get a good score on the exam (Brown & Yamashita, 1995a).

Brown and Yamashita (1995a) conclude that there is a serious threat to both reliability and validity because the tests are relatively short and the types of items are not compatible with current language testing theory and practice. Dancsok (2006) re-examined and expanded on the work done by Brown and Yamashita (1995a) and Guest (2000). He felt the necessity of including the exams of less-prestigious universities in the research, because previous studies dealt mainly with exams from the elite universities. Although Dancsok (2006) found that most of the tests from less-prestigious universities analyzed included communicative meaning questions (which assesses the holistic comprehension of passages, dialogues, or phrases), the vocabulary level and passage lengths seemed to prevent the students from succeeding on the test. Indeed, according to Kikuchi (2006), who analyzed the entrance exams of 20 private and public universities in 2005, the difficulty, item types, and the skills measured have not changed substantially compared with the study conducted by Brown and Yamashita (1995a, 1995b) a decade previously. After closely examining the types of questions that appeared on several universities' exams in 2004, Kobayashi (2005) also claims that there has not been any change regarding the reliability and validity of the entrance exam.

Based on the above studies, some may assume that high school students still struggle with preparing for the exam by focusing on discrete grammar points and memorizing a large amount of vocabulary. However, other researchers claim that the entrance exam has been improved. For instance, Abunai (1997) states that the number of questions on listening and dialogues has increased, while the number of grammar questions has decreased. Oka (2000) argues that a growing number of questions requires more exposure to 'natural' English and cannot be answered based on grammatical knowledge alone. Moreover, Uto and Yanase (2000) investigated the proportion of the questions testing the translation of English into Japanese in the entrance exam in 1998. They found that the ratio of the questions which require translation of English into Japanese was 30% in public universities, while it was only 3% in private universities (Uto & Yanase, 2000).

Relating to the analysis of the reading section of the English test in the entrance exam, we often hear criticism that the grammar-translation method, *yakudoku*, is still prevalent in high school English classes because of the high-stake entrance examinations, and that its continual presence hinders the reform of Japanese English education. In *yakudoku* class, teachers give grammatical explanations for a reading passage in Japanese, and then translate an English passage into Japanese word by word. For example, Gorsuch's (1998) study revealed that many high school teachers cannot ignore the strong influence of university entrance examinations, and thus 70% to 80% of the teachers employ the traditional *yakudoku* method.

We have noticed several changes in the reading section of the university entrance exam recently, but oral skills are still not being fully assessed. In March 1993, MEXT issued guidelines for developing communicative ability, particularly listening and speaking skills. These guidelines advocate teaching language in a way that would be useful for students. As a result, more and more departments at national universities started to include listening tests since MEXT issued the guideline (Murphy, 2001). However, this trend stopped after the listening part was introduced to the NCT in 2005. In 2004, 55 universities of all universities in Japan (35.3%) and 131 departments of all the departments (23.8%) included a listening test, while in 2008, 23 universities (14.8%) and 41 departments (7.6%) included a listening component (MEXT, 2003, 2007). In contrast to the national universities, most private universities have never implemented a listening test (Murphy, 2001). Murphy (2001) points out that administrators in private universities are very keen about the effects that the tests have on their schools' financial situation. For that reason, many private universities are unwilling to add a listening test (or even something as conventional as an oral interview) because they are afraid that this type of component may prevent students from taking the exam.

As for assessing English speaking, few universities introduce a speaking test. Technical concerns such as feasibility and financial problems might be a fundamental obstacle to including a speaking component. Speaking tests are not included in the senior high school entrance examination, either. Akiyama (2004) investigated the possibility of introducing a speaking test for senior high school and found that students and teachers in junior high school support the reform, while senior high school teachers, policy makers, and test developers oppose the reform due to skepticism about

the reliability of such a test. Interestingly, he points out that in addition to objections on practical grounds, there were objections on cultural grounds in terms of the cultural values that the test reflects (Akiyama, 2004). Since one of the educational goals in Japan is to build the moral character of citizens who study hard with constant effort, speaking skills are not regarded as evidence of intellectual achievement for they do not necessarily require the discipline and hard work that the Japanese school system encourages (Akiyama, 2004). Amano (2000) states that the university entrance exams have played a role in building the character of applicants, so that the elite students who will maintain the status quo are consistently selected. Thus, the central issue is not the actual content of the test and its validity in terms of its agreement with curricular guidelines, but rather whether the difficulty level of the test is sufficient to select appropriate candidates (namely, those who have the characteristics of diligence and effort).

3.9 Cultural, social, and political aspects of the Japanese entrance exam

In Section 3.8, I have reviewed the general criticisms towards the entrance exam and issues of reliability and validity of the English tests. In this section, after discussing cultural, social, and political aspects of the exam, I mention criticisms towards the English tests made from various ethical viewpoints. Without understanding those related aspects of the exam, we will not fully understand why problems beyond the level of reliability and validity are paid great attention within the Japanese context.

The use of examinations is not an unusual practice in East Asian countries (Cheah, 1998). Cheng (1996) mentions that “the examination is the soul of ethos about education in East Asian societies”(p.9). Lee (1991, p.9) also argues against the implications of “exam-oriented schooling” in East Asian societies, and mentions that the hidden curriculum of such educational systems is “education for earning, not learning.” Stapleton (1995) explains that the underlying reason why the students are so motivated by the exam is related to the Confucian structure of society. The civil service examination established in China in 136 BC was adopted in Japan by the seventh century A.D., and the tradition has remained until today. Exams, as a natural outgrowth of Confucian thought, promote virtues such as diligence, persistence, and memory as mentioned previously. This idea is also supported by Tsuneyoshi’s (1990) claim that the examination model resonates with traditional Japanese values such as effort, hard

work, and mental fortitude, and Japanese people value exam work as an opportunity for mental training.

Locastro (1990) insists that the English component of the entrance examination cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader context of Japanese society. According to him, the Japanese entrance examination system is the product of attitudes towards language learning and reflects cultural values and beliefs (Locastro, 1990). In addition, since the Meiji era, one important objective in Japanese education is to gain knowledge from the West, which has meant training students to read and translate texts from English. As a result, the Japanese educational system has emphasized the training of students to read and write using the grammar-translation method—and not to develop the competence to communicate orally with others.

Historical consideration is also necessary in terms of the issue of the entrance exam. Since an increasing number of high school graduates go on to post-secondary education, universities have developed rigorous exams to maintain their prestige and to appear to be highly selective. Considering these Japanese educational, social, and historical contexts in mind, we can now fully investigate the meaning of the entrance exam and its future.

The entrance exam is incredibly prominent in Japanese society. This is because Japanese people in general believe that their success in life hinges on their success in the entrance exam (Brown, 1995b). Fujita (1991) also states that the Japanese have a strong belief that selection by the exam is meritocratic and fair. Although the exam is believed to be a fair method of screening students, some constraints are pointed out (mainly by non-Japanese teachers). First of all, some teachers are not only concerned with the reliability and validity of the exam itself, but also criticize test developers and universities who irresponsibly fail to guarantee the validity and reliability of the exam. Exams are seldom subjected to any standard analyses or other validation, since they are made by a committee of teachers on annually rotating basis (Buck, 1988). In addition, no university openly reports their exam reliability and validity (Murphy, 2001a). Murphy (2001a) also criticizes the process of developing the exam questions. According to his experience, “most professors I have dealt with simply believe they can make up good questions using their intuition, and that if they follow previous exam

formats and discuss them among their colleagues the end product will be a good exam” (Murphy, 2001a, p.38). Buck (1988) even says that if a university’s English test looks difficult, people regard the university as maintaining very high standards. In addition, Murphy and Sato (2003) criticize test developers for being illiterate in assessment and incapable of making tests. They also point out that universities are reluctant to share data about the exam so that others cannot judge if the exams are valid or reliable.

The second main area of critique revolves around the concern over issues of equal access and fairness. Clearly, English tests have been employed as gatekeeping devices for access to employment, higher education, and the professions, which leads to a sense of competition pervading all levels of education (Ross, 2008). The use of language assessment has been a part of meritocratic policies in relatively homogeneous Asian countries, but now faces questions of equal access and fairness. Although issues of equal access and fairness should be essential when testing functions as a gatekeeper, there is great doubt about these issues concerning the entrance exam in Japan.

Thirdly, exams function not only for the selection of applicants, but also for other purposes. Fees charged to take the entrance exam are an essential source of revenue for private universities, which get less financial support from the government as compared with national universities. For example, at a prestigious university such as Waseda University, nearly 15,000 students take the exam every year and pay 30,000 yen each, bringing the university about 450 million yen in annual revenue. Thus, there are considerable financial incentives to resist abolishing the entrance examination system in private universities.

As we have seen above, concerns and criticisms about the Japanese entrance exams are raised mainly by non-Japanese teachers and researchers who have taught in Japan. Compared with non-Japanese teachers, Japanese teachers seem to be less-outspoken critics of the entrance examination, although from personal experience I know that many of them complain about the entrance examination in private.

The issue of the entrance examination is a sensitive problem. Japanese teachers hesitate to openly criticize the exams because criticizing them implies criticism of the professors who make the exams or criticism of authority (that is, MEXT), which is in

charge of the system. Murphy (2004) describes his experience resigning from his tenured full professor position due to his refusal to chair the exam committee. He made consecutive suggestions to his university to change the exam and to test its reliability and validity. After the university refused his suggestions, he decided to resign his position. I admire his courage to take some action to change the entrance exam system in his university, even though he ended up resigning his tenured position after he struggled with “inner dis-identification with the exam system” (p.701) while he was involved in the practice as well as attempting to take a responsibility to be a good and honorable tenured professor. However, I wonder if he would have had the courage to take such actions if he were Japanese. He might have hesitated because he would know that his radical actions may endanger his position, and it would be unlikely that the system would change immediately after his actions. Although he now holds a position at another university, it would be more difficult for a Japanese professor to regain employment after resigning from a university for such a reason.

Brown (2002) encourages Japanese teachers to solve the problem of the entrance examination system by themselves, because “this is a Japanese problem, one that only Japanese will ever be able to solve” (p.25). At the same time, he wonders if he should speak out on the issue because, as an outsider, he may be at less risk of being fired and does not have to worry about the consequences of the criticism that Japanese teachers might face. McNamara (2007) points out that it is unclear who will conduct future research in this area. In other words, there is a question of whether test developers should also be responsible for examining the issue from a critical perspective. However, Smith and Imura (2004) claim that the reform of the entrance exams “lies in the hands of universities and university teachers” (p.39).

3.10 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the ethical aspects of language testing in Japan beyond reliability and validity. It especially focused on two pivotal components of ethical language testing, washback and impact, as well as critical language testing. Although there are quite a few studies about washback and impact, we noticed that few studies were conducted within the framework of critical language testing. This chapter also provided an overview of the criticism of the Japanese entrance exam, both on the level of reliability and validity, and in regards to ethical perspectives, referring to

cultural, social, and political aspects of the Japanese entrance exam.

I currently work at a university as an associate professor. I am required to make the entrance exam with other colleagues every year. Since I am new in my position and the second youngest in my department, I am expected to follow previous exam formats. I do not intend to take radical action to change the system of the entrance exam in my workplace, because I know that it will not have a tremendous effect on solving the problem. However, I am aware that this is a Japanese problem, and that a Japanese researcher should be responsible for changing the system. At the same time, I would like to be responsible for being critical about the exams and their use by being one of the test developers for my university. I need to hear the voices of high school teachers and students who are in a weak position to make their opinions heard in public. Based on their opinions, I can critically examine the current entrance exam system and suggest ways to improve the exam. I hope that such an attempt will be the first step towards enlarging a new research field centered on language testing, which may influence the entrance exam system in Japan down the road.

In the next chapter, the research methodology of this study will be described. Considering the social and political aspects of the Japanese entrance exam, we need to discuss the issue beyond traditional research of language teaching, which deals primarily with psychometrics. Thus, I will employ critical language testing as the theoretical framework of my study. However, I cannot neglect the issues of the reliability and validity of the exams themselves. I also need to take the effects of washback and the impact of the exams into consideration when I discuss the issue of the Japanese entrance exam from various critical perspectives.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

In this chapter I describe the research methodology of my study. In section 4.1, I describe the approach and justification of my study; in section 4.2, I present and explain my research questions; in section 4.3, I provide information about the participants, and then discuss ethical considerations in section 4.4. I discuss the data collection procedure in section 4.5 and section 4.6 describes the processes used to analyze the data. Section 4.7 refers to the dependability and credibility of the qualitative data and finally, in section 4.8, I discuss the limitations of the study.

4.1 Approach and justification

In this section, I would like to explain the philosophical foundation of my approach to educational research. The approach adopted for this study is critical. The critical paradigm emerged because of the dissatisfaction with scientific and interpretive paradigms (Mertens, 1998). Critical researchers regard the two paradigms as unsatisfactory for explaining social behaviour because they neglect the political and ideological contexts of educational research (Cohen et al., 2000). The critical paradigm is concerned not only with understanding human behaviour, but also with developing social critique and instituting social and institutional change.

The issue of the entrance examination cannot be separated from social and ideological concepts, and it is not enough to interpret and understand individual perceptions. Rather, it is essential to provide information related to impacts on the awareness of participants and those concerned in order to promote a constructive discussion, which will lead to a change of the system. As described in Chapter 3, there is little empirical research which deals with the ethical aspects of the entrance examination from a critical perspective despite the fact that the entrance examination has a significant impact on both students and teachers. In other words, the university entrance examination in Japan is “both a product and an agent of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agendas that shape the lives of individual participants, teachers, and learners” (Shohamy, 1998, p.332). For this reason, I employed the critical approach rather than the interpretive approach for this study. The results of the research will reveal students’ and teachers’ unique perceptions and attitudes towards the entrance exam, which will be grounds for a constructive argument to improve the use

of English tests in the university entrance examination in Japan.

Ontologically speaking, the critical paradigm stresses the influence of social, political, economic, gender, and disability values, while multiple realities can be accepted as in the interpretive paradigm (Mertens, 1998). There can be neither objective knowledge nor a neutral or disinterested perspective because everyone is socially located and thus knowledge is always influenced by a social interest (Usher, 1998). Socially constructed knowledge reflects the interest of the researcher in a particular society. The value of knowledge is determined by the social power of the people who advocate the knowledge. The epistemological assumption here is that the relationship between the knower and the participants is interactive. The researcher tries to emancipate disempowered people and promote individual freedoms in order to combat inequality and transform society in accordance with egalitarian principles (Cohen et al., 2000). The main approach of critical researchers in education is ideological critique, that is, uncovering interests which make people empowered or disempowered (Scott & Usher, 1999).

For the present study, I attempt to empower students and high school teachers who are in the weakest position in the Japanese educational hierarchy. They are forced to adapt their learning and teaching to meet the requirements of the entrance examinations since the exam has a significant impact on them. They currently have little impact on educational policy or the practices of the entrance examinations since there are few opportunities to express their views and opinions in public. The study will provide students and teachers with the opportunity to critically reflect on their exam experiences and express their opinions to the public in a safe environment. Students and teachers usually don't have an opportunity to consider and discuss the use and consequences of the entrance exams. They tend to accept the exam as a necessary evil and concentrate on preparation without thinking the issues through deeply. Providing teachers and students with an opportunity to critically reflect on exams will be the first step towards having them see their own daily teaching and learning practice to prepare for exams from a different perspective. Once they think about the issue from a critical perspective by themselves, they may be aware that they should not accept the current practice of entrance exams ignorantly, and start thinking about what they can do to change their practice.

One of the criticisms of the critical paradigm is that it assumes that critical rationality is not itself ideological (Scott & Usher, 1999). Habermas, a leading critical theorist, failed to explain “the criteria of rationality in terms of which emancipatory knowledge generated by a critical social science could be validated or rejected” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.139). Although critical researchers seek to emancipate the disempowered, emancipation of the disempowered may not lead to an egalitarian society. Critical researchers regard a certain group of people as occupying a disempowered position, but the researchers themselves may have a distorted view. I admit that hearing the voices of testees and high school teachers will not immediately lead to the fair use of the entrance exam or an egalitarian society. However, I claim that at least the university educators and political authorities who make and conduct the entrance exam should be aware of the neglected viewpoints of people in disempowered positions. It will be a starting point for discussion on reform of the current practice. Moreover, some scholars who are skeptical about the critical paradigm may argue that empowering one disempowered group may unfairly disempower another group of people. As for the issue of the entrance exam, it is unlikely that empowerment of testees and high school teachers will disempower university professors who currently make the exams and political authorities who have such great power over testees and teachers.

Scott & Usher (1999) question how critical rationality itself can be justified because it can be another oppressive ideology. However, this criticism is not persuasive enough because, as Quantz (1992) claims, no researcher can be value-free or neutral and needs to choose a position when conducting research. If every researcher takes a different stance and has a different value, it is impossible for any researcher to see the world from a non-partial and undistorted viewpoint in a true sense. I regard the current entrance examinations as problematic, and the issue should be investigated from a critical viewpoint. The exam system should be improved to consider the opinions of those who are in a disempowered position. Otherwise, the current university entrance exams will never be improved as a fair assessment. The present study is small scale, and some may question its impact on society. However, large-scale social changes will not happen unless we make an effort to undertake a small-scale study which addresses unfair and unequal situations. Furthermore, empowering students and teachers directly

through research will be meaningful in that they can regard the research as directly relevant to their everyday lives.

4.2 Research questions

This study investigates university students' and high school teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university entrance exams and their positive and/or negative attitudes towards English language exams. I generated the research questions based on my deep concern about the critical issue in the Japanese social and educational context. I hope that the findings of this research will have a certain impact on various people's attitudes towards the issue of the entrance exam and generate further research from a critical perspective. In addition, I expect that the study will raise the awareness of those concerned, and may lead to people taking action to change the status quo. The four research questions formulated are:

1. What are students' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their learning of English in high school?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their teaching of English?
3. What are students' and teachers' attitudes towards the English entrance exam in general?
4. How do students and teachers perceive the use and consequences of the English entrance exam for education and society?

In questions 1 and 2, I intend to investigate how university students and high school teachers view the influence of the university English entrance exam on their learning and teaching based on their experiences. I do not mean to impose my view on the participants. I rather attempt to clarify whether they perceive that the exam has some influence on their teaching and learning. If so, I further explore how they are influenced by the exam. Question 3 focuses on what kinds of attitudes students and teachers have towards the English entrance exam. My questions relate to whether they have a positive or negative attitude, and the factors which have influenced them to develop their attitudes toward the exam. Finally, in question 4, I attempt to raise participants' awareness of the issues in a broader context and seek suggestions to improve present conditions.

4.3 Participants

4.3.1 Students

There were two groups of participants: students and teachers. In relation to the former, the participants consisted of thirty six first-year university students (eight males and twenty nine females) at four national universities. I selected the first-year university students and not high school students because I assumed that they still had a vivid memory and could recall their experiences of preparing for and taking the exam in a calm manner after experiencing the entire process of preparing and sitting the entrance exam. In addition, I had difficulty in accessing high school students from an ethical standpoint considering my position as a university teacher who is involved in setting the entrance exam. Moreover, I did not want to place extra pressure on the students in the sensitive situation in which they are studying hard to prepare for the exam. Among first-year university students, I especially focused on students who decided to become English teachers because I hoped to raise their critical awareness of the issue of the entrance exam which they will face once they become English teachers. All the students were from the Department of English Education or a related department at four national universities (fourteen from A university, six from B university, eleven from C university, and six from D university) whose curriculum is tailored to the needs of the students who already have a clear vision of becoming an English teacher at the time of entry into university. Students in D university are those at the university for which I work, and the students in the other universities are those whose teachers were acquaintances of mine or my colleagues; thus, the participants represent an opportunity sample. Originally, there were 37 participants, but I excluded one participant because he had a totally different background from the other students; he graduated from an international school in Hong Kong, and did not take English classes.

Two of the thirty six students graduated from private high schools, while the others attended national or public high schools. All the students, except for two, belonged to a general course. Four students entered university through a recommendation-admission system, in which students recommended by their high school principals are assessed based on their academic records and interviews. All the other students took the entrance exam to enter university. Thirty one students entered university immediately after graduation from high school, while five students spent another year preparing for

the exam after failing their first attempt. Although five students had studied or traveled abroad for less than four weeks, the others had no such experience.

For the interview, I asked the students at my university to cooperate since it was difficult to have further access to the students from other universities. All six students (three male, and the other three female) whom I asked agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix One for student participants' information).

4.3.2 Teachers

The second group of participants consisted of thirty one Japanese teachers who have taught English in high schools in Japan. With regard to the group of teachers, I had difficulty finding participants who were full-time high school teachers because I knew only a few personally. I hesitated to ask the teachers to introduce me to other teachers who would participate since they were extremely busy with their work, and the topic of this research was sensitive. Thus, I asked two professors at my university and another university for help, and they kindly introduced me to more than forty high school teachers. For this reason, I was unable to adjust the demographic balance of teachers when I selected the participants, but eventually thirty one teachers (twenty one male and ten female) volunteered to take part in the study. Fortunately, they consisted of a variety of teachers in terms of gender, age, and length of teaching experiences of English classes for third-year students.

Six participants were in their 20s, seven in their 30s, eleven in their 40s, and seven in their 50s. Sixteen had bachelors degrees, and fifteen had masters degrees or higher. Thirteen of the participants had TEFL degrees, and five among them had an additional degree with other disciplines. Seven had English linguistics degrees, five had American/English literature degrees, and six had degrees from other disciplines. Sixteen participants had studied or traveled abroad. Among them, ten had stayed for less than six months, five for one year, and one for two years. All the teachers, except for five, teach in the general course. With regard to their experience of teaching English classes for third-year high school students, one participant had none, ten had experience of less than six years, thirteen had less than ten years, and six had over ten years.

Although the teachers who volunteered to complete a questionnaire constituted an opportunity sample, I was able to carefully select teachers to request their cooperation for interview in terms of gender and age because I thought that their opinions might be influenced by their gender and length of teaching experience. I selected six teachers (three male and three female). Two were in their twenties and early thirties (less experienced), two were in their forties (experienced), and the other two were in their fifties (more experienced) (see Appendix One for teacher participants' information and see Appendix Two for biographical details of the six teachers).

4.4 Ethical considerations

Researchers have the responsibility to consider ethical issues whenever they conduct research. Bryman (2001) outlines the violation of four ethical principles: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. First, I was careful not to physically or mentally harm participants. Their participation was voluntary. I maintained their confidentiality by explicitly mentioning the issue of confidentiality before presenting the questionnaire and conducting the interview. For the questionnaire, participants were not required to write their names, and any names of persons and organizations which appeared in their answers were replaced with pseudonyms. I also treated the data carefully and ensured that the names of participants interviewed as well as the organizations to which they belonged were not identified or identifiable in my paper. All students were given pseudonyms.

Participants have the right to choose to participate in a study without any threat under the condition that they are fully informed about and understand the nature and process of the study and its potential risks (Cohen et al., 2000). Thus, I asked participants to fill in the consent form (see Appendix Three). In the consent form, I mentioned that confidentiality will be maintained and that participants can withdraw from the study at any time. I also requested their permission to record the interview and explained how the data would be dealt with in order to maintain confidentiality.

Next, I addressed the sensitive issue of invasion of participants' privacy. I made the intention of the research clear as well as the fact that anonymity would be maintained so that any personal information which would invade their privacy was eliminated in writing the thesis. In relation to the collection of questionnaires, the students who

volunteered submitted their questionnaires in sealed envelopes. Finally, in order to avoid deception, I clearly explained the purpose of the research to the participants, and explained that I would use the information in my doctoral thesis, and that the information may also be used for publication and conference presentations.

4.5 Data collection methods and procedures

4.5.1 Justification of data collection methods

In this study, I adopted a qualitative research methodology because the purpose of the study is not to generalize the finding using methods such as surveys, experiments, and quasi-experiments. For researchers in the position of the qualitative research paradigm, certain characteristics of research design are required such as “understanding emerges from an emic and insider’s perspective, the researcher functions as the instrument of research, and research is inductive in nature and emphasizes in-depth understanding (Jones et al., 2006)”. Carspecken & Apple (1992) point out that “critical qualitative research begins the process of inquiry in much the same way as does other qualitative research (p.511).” Critical paradigm concerns itself with emancipation, which requires both self-reflection and an analysis of power relationships (Swainn, J. & Pratt, J., 2003). As a result, critical researchers focus on “interpretive understandings of systems of belief and modes of communication using the methods of historical-hermeneutic science” (Blaikie, 1993, p.55).

Among several methods, I chose the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview because they are appropriate for encouraging participants to freely and openly discuss particular aspects of their experience of the issue of the entrance examinations (Wellington, 2000). Few previous studies in Japan (reviewed in Chapter 3) have employed methods which explore students’ and teachers’ views on the entrance exam at a deeper level, thus such methods seemed to be appropriate for the illumination of the aspects which have not yet been fully explored. The use of at least two methods was also necessary as a form of triangulation to support credibility (Mertnes, 1998). I will explain about each method more in details in the next sections.

4.5.2 Questionnaire

Questionnaires are designed to reveal peoples’ opinions on attitudes through how they express themselves (Thomas, 1998). Narrative items enable respondents to identify

various factors which influence their experiences and opinions. As a result, narrative responses can reveal the unique patterns of different people's knowledge and attitudes. A questionnaire survey does not rely on an observer who may fail to consider the views of those observed, thus researchers can avoid affecting their own views on drawing conclusions from the data obtained (Pring, 2000). However, the survey cannot completely avoid the problems raised by an observation method. Like a researcher, an observer looks at the world in their own way, those being researched through the use of a questionnaire survey cannot escape from answering questions according to their own understanding. In addition, since there is always ambiguity in how to interpret what a respondent means in answer to a questionnaire, "it is always reasonable to ask further what a person meant by answering the question in the way what he or she did" (Pring, 2000, p. 39). Thus, I conducted a follow-up interview after completion of the questionnaire survey.

4.5.2.1 Development of an open-ended questionnaire

I developed an open-ended questionnaire in Japanese, and then back-translated it into English. It is essential to take certain steps to plan and construct formal questionnaires and interviews; thus, I followed a general procedure suggested by Genesee & Upshur (1996). The questionnaire for the students was four pages in length, and consisted of two sections: personal information and questions about the English entrance examinations for universities (see Appendix Four). The second section had eleven open-ended questions to which the students were asked to respond as expansively as possible. Questions 1-4, Questions 5-7 and Questions 8-10 correspond to Research question 1, Research question 3, and Research question 4 respectively. In Question 11, they were asked to write any opinions they would like to add other than that which related to the ten previous questions. The questionnaire for the teachers was similar in format, length, and content to the one for students (see Appendix Five). Questions 1-5, Questions 6-8 and Questions 9-11 correspond to Research question 2, Research question 3, and Research question 4 respectively.

The first three questions in the students' questionnaire asked about their experiences of preparing for the university English entrance exam in and outside of high school. The fourth question asked about students' feelings towards the entrance exam and the influence of the exam on their learning of English. The fifth to seventh questions asked

students' opinions about the contents, needs, and purpose of the English entrance exam. The eighth and ninth questions asked if the exam reflects the purpose of education in the Fundamental Act of Education and other educational policies. The tenth question asked if the exam will have an influence on students' future such as their choice of profession and growth as humans. Similarly, the first five questions in the teachers' questionnaire asked about their English classes and the influence of the English entrance exam on their teaching, curriculum, and regular tests. Questions 6-11 were almost the same as those in the student questionnaires.

4.5.2.2 Piloting

It is essential to ask respondents or colleagues who understand the purpose of the questionnaire to review it in order to improve it (Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Wellington, 2000). The purpose of the pilot study is to discover weaknesses in the questionnaire. The questionnaire should be tested on a sample of participants who will be participating in the final survey (Thomas, 1998). For that reason, I asked a colleague at my workplace who had taught high school classes for several years, to criticize and provide recommendations for improving the questionnaires for both students and teachers. I revised the wording of the questionnaires based on his comments. After that, I piloted two less experienced and experienced high school teachers to check the questionnaire for teachers, and two first-year students to check the questionnaire for students via e-mail. The two students said that the questionnaire was clear and easy to understand, so I did not change any parts about the questionnaire for students. As for the teachers' comments, one teacher suggested minor changes in the part of personal information. Thus, I changed the item "experience abroad" into two items: "experience in teacher training abroad" and "experience in studying abroad." The other teacher suggested some changes in wording to make the questions clearer.

4.5.2.3 Procedures

First, in September 2008, I sent a questionnaire to the students. I used two methods to collect the questionnaires from the students. For the students in my university, I directly distributed the questionnaires to eight students, six of whom volunteered to participate in the study and then completed and returned the questionnaires. For the students at the three other universities, I sent the questionnaires to the three professors who teach these students. The professors distributed the questionnaires, and the

students who volunteered submitted the questionnaire in a sealed envelope to their professor within one week, after which each professor returned the questionnaires to me by post.

Second, in September-October 2008, I sent an open-ended questionnaire to teachers by e-mail. Of the 45 teachers contacted, 31 returned the questionnaires. One teacher returned it by fax, two teachers returned it by post, and the other teachers returned it by e-mail.

4.5.3 Interviews

In an interview, we can explore peoples' views in ways that cannot be achieved by other methods and report the findings using the participants' words. This enables researchers to convey the views of participants to the reader of the research report faithfully (Ribbins, 2007). In interview methodology, it is assumed that researchers can investigate social elements by gathering or constructing knowledge through listening to and interpreting what and how participants respond (Mason, 2002). I employed a semi-structured interview because the face-to-face semi-structured interview provides a researcher the opportunity to collaborate with participants to raise their awareness and empower them. Semi-structured interviews are much less rigid and are more flexible than structured interviews. The goal is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002; Nunan, 1992). I hoped that the flexibility of the interview would enable participants to express their thoughts and opinions beyond written comments in an open-ended questionnaire. This would provide the potential for thick description in a safe environment where the interviewee would still have a general idea of how the interview would proceed.

Skillful interviewers are required to manage themselves and those interviewed in an effective way. This entails both getting the question and the relationship right (Ribbins, 2007). First, I avoided lengthy and obscure questions in order to get the question right. When the participant did not understand what I meant, I rephrased the question. Second, I established rapport and neutrality in order to get the relationship more comfortable. More concretely, I made positive verbal and nonverbal responses to what a participant said. Also, I created an atmosphere where interviewees felt safe to tell me

anything without imposing my own views upon them. For both interviews with the students and teachers, I tried to find the balance between maintaining control of the interview and allowing participants the space to re-define the topic of the entrance exam to generate novel insights (Willing, 2001). I encouraged the interviewees to speak freely and openly by asking questions beyond the prepared questions in order to understand what they would like to say more in detail. I also restated interviewees' comments and incorporated them into subsequent questions. Spradley (1979) provides a useful guide to formulating four different types of question; descriptive, structural, contrast, and evaluative questions. I kept these questions in mind when conducting interviews.

4.5.3.1 Interviews with the students

In November 2008, following the collection of the questionnaires, I directly asked the six students in my university to cooperate by being interviewed, and all agreed. All interviews were conducted in my office over a cup of coffee, and lasted for approximately 30 to 40 minutes. I used Japanese for the interview so that the students would be more likely to express their feelings freely and openly. Before the interview, the students signed two consent forms. They kept one and I kept the other. All students agreed to be audio-recorded.

I recorded the entire interview, but did not take notes. Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) mention that note-taking might disrupt the quality of communication between the interviewer and interviewee, and I decided to avoid this disadvantage in order to maintain a good rapport with the participants. Moreover, I chose to record the interview rather than making interview notes so as not to make an unconscious selection of data favoring my biases, as Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) point out may occur. During the interview, I tried to be open-minded and to make them feel relaxed enough to express their opinions. I used the same questions which I developed for the questionnaire for the interview because the purpose of the interview was to clarify at a deeper level the thoughts and opinions elicited by the questionnaire. Before the interview, I had already looked at the questionnaire answers to get a general idea of the outcome. However, I did not use their specific answers to the questionnaires because I wanted them to talk freely with a fresh mind without sticking to what they wrote in the questionnaire at the moment of the interview. Both the students and I had a copy of the

filled-in questionnaire, and referred to them whenever necessary. Following the order of the questions written in the questionnaire, I asked the students to state their opinions and feelings in more detail. All of the participants gave more detailed explanations and opinions about the questions.

4.5.3.2 Interviews with the teachers

With regard to the teachers, I conducted interviews from December 2008 to February 2009. I first contacted the teachers by e-mail to set up the schedule and location of the interview, and asked permission to audio-record the interview. Five teachers permitted me to record the interview. However, one mentioned that he hesitated to be interviewed but that he may permit me after I explained the details in the interview. After I explained the purpose of the study when I met with him, he declined to be recorded, but permitted me to take notes and use them as data. Three interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the teachers' school, one was held in a classroom at my university, one took place in my office, and one in a café. All interviews were conducted in Japanese and lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. Before the interview, the teachers signed two consent forms. They kept one and I kept the other.

I recorded the entire interview, but did not take notes except in the case of the one interview described above- for the same reasons as with the student interviews. Since it was the first time seeing them, except for one who is a friend of mine, I tried to create a warm atmosphere by showing with smiles and earnest nods that I was listening to whatever was being said by the interviewee and that it was being taken seriously. Although the participants seemed to be a little nervous at the beginning of the interview, they gradually became relaxed and very talkative. Following the order of the questions written in the questionnaire, as was done with the student interviews, I asked the teachers to express their opinions and feelings in more detail. As well as the interview with the students, I had already looked at the questionnaire answers to get a general idea of the outcome before the interview. However, I did not use their specific answers to the questionnaires because of the same reason described before. Both of the teachers and I had a copy of the filled-in questionnaire, and referred to them whenever necessary. All of the participants provided more detailed explanations and opinions about the questions. One aspect which differed from the student interviews, however, was the final question added to the questionnaire. The new Course of Study for high

school was made public in December 2009 after I had already conducted the questionnaire survey. In the new Course of Study, there is a statement that the students should be given ample opportunities to use English in the English subjects, and English classes should be conducted mainly in English to provide an environment for actual communication in class. This statement received a great deal of attention in the media. Therefore, I added the questions about the new Course of Study and asked if it will have any influence on the preparation for the entrance exam and the English test itself.

4.6 Data analysis

4.6.1 Methods of data analysis

One of the issues we should consider in all phases of research is the influence of my own and the participants' social identities. The influence is especially evident in the phase of the data analysis and interpretation as well as in the presentation of findings and discussion (Jones et al., 2006). I am aware that I am in the position of a professor who makes an entrance exam and cannot deny the existence of a power relationship between myself and the participants. However, I attempted not to impose my own privilege or my views on what my participants expressed when I analyzed and interpreted the data.

I took a number of steps to analyze the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews. Esterberg (2002) states that "data analysis is a process of making meaning (p. 152)" in qualitative study. We cannot use all the data gathered during our qualitative research project, and need to reduce the data into a manageable size. As we listen to our recordings or read our transcripts, we start to make sense of the data (Watling & James, 2006). Analyzing qualitative data is "an interpretive task" (Ezzy, 2002, p.73). We construct rather than find interpretations through social processes. The interpretive process of analyzing qualitative data includes transcribing, reading and coding data, writing memos, and checking interpretation with participants. Analyzing qualitative data is also a process of obtaining meaning. It is a creative process and researchers need to extract meaning from raw data (Esterberg, 2002).

According to Fielding (2002), coding is fundamental to analyzing the qualitative data. Coding is the process of identifying chunks or segments in the data and giving each of them a label to find out themes, patterns, or concepts (Ezzy, 2002; Hesse-Biber &

Leavy, 2006). In order to make sense of the data, I employed the process of coding described by Chamaz (2000) and Esterberg (2002): Open-coding, development of themes, and focused coding. Open-coding refers to the initial stages of data analysis. The words used by participants are carefully examined. Researchers usually examine the data line-by-line to keep them close to the data without imposing their own views (Chramaz, 2000). The purpose of open coding is to see what is going on in the data, so we do not use established codes and attempt to find particular themes and categories in the data (Esterberg, 2002).

The next step is to develop themes. After open coding, it is likely that some themes begin to emerge. If some themes are interesting and relevant, we need to work on codes intensively to figure out what kinds of themes we can develop. In order to see what kinds of themes emerge frequently, some researchers make index cards and sort them out while others cut up a copy of the interview transcript into pieces.

After identifying some recurring themes, we can start focused-coding. Like open-coding, researchers read through the data line-by-line. This time, however, they focus on key themes identified in the process of open coding and development of themes and set apart the quotes assigned the same codes together into a file. In the process of focused coding, the codes may be broken down into more categories. In this section, I have outlined methods of analyzing qualitative data in general. I will explain the procedure of the data analysis of this research more in detail in the next section.

4.6.2 Procedure of data analysis

First, I put all the data of the questionnaires and interviews into excel files for later analysis. With regard to the questionnaires, I put each comment into an excel file so that all the comments for all the responses to each question were together in one file. In relation to the interview, I transcribed all the data myself and put this information into a word file. This enabled me to immerse myself in the data and helped me to understand what the interviewee tried to say. I e-mailed a copy of the transcript of the interview to each student and teacher and asked if they had any additional comments on the transcript, or if they would like to delete or revise any parts. All participants, except for two teachers, said that they did not have any parts that they would like to alter. I deleted and revised some parts of the transcripts in accordance with the two

teachers' requests. The parts they requested for change were minor ones such as change of vocabulary choice and wording. The parts they asked to delete were the ones they wanted to talk with me off the record privately.

Second, I printed out all the data, and carefully read through their comments in both the questionnaires and interviews. I did this to proofread what I had typed as well as to get a general idea of the written comments. Stake (1995) refers to qualitative analysis as a "matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as final compilations" (p.71). In this sense, reading through the comments helped me to get a first impression of the data.

Third, after I started to immerse myself in the data, the next step was to make sense of it. Many researchers use versions of grounded theory to work with their data and develop meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I started data analysis of the questionnaire through the three-stage process of coding: open-coding, development themes and focused coding. In open coding, I tried to discern patterns and commonalities emerging from the data. I wrote down tentative codes by highlighting key phrases in the margins of the data in the excel file. I avoided the descriptive level of coding and tried to carry out a more categorical, analytic, and theoretical level of coding. After I finished a significant amount of open coding, some recurring themes began to emerge. I sorted through all the data to see which codes emerged most frequently. Although previous literature helped me to get an idea of essential themes, I avoided imposing my sense of what ought to be there as it may have led to my missing what was actually there in my data (Esterberg, 2002). Once I began to identify several key recurring themes, I moved on to focused coding. I went through my data in accordance with open coding, but this time I focused on the key themes identified during open coding. In this stage, I created a long Word document with all the quotes which I had identified for each code. I also assigned each category a name by rereading each quotation in each category. I then broke each category into further sub-categories when necessary (see Appendix Seven). During data analysis, I wrote analytic memos. In these memos, I wrote down my thoughts about what was important in my data as well as my hunches and ideas. Memos helped me to facilitate the interpretive process of the qualitative data obtained because they are "products of researchers thinking and talking about their research (Ezzy, 2001, p.71)."

After I finished analyzing the data from the questionnaires, I also conducted the analysis of the interviews along the same line. The results of the interviews were mainly used to support the data obtained from the questionnaires. The analysis and interpretation are not necessarily two different phases and the researchers often engage in the process of data analysis and interpretation simultaneously (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). In this study I conducted both analysis and interpretation at the same time, and presented and discussed the results of both questionnaires and interviews together.

4.7 Dependability and credibility

The concepts of reliability and validity in the critical paradigm are similar to those of the interpretive paradigm, because critical and interpretive researchers both prefer qualitative methodology and “critical qualitative research begins the process of inquiry in much the same way as does other qualitative research” (Carspecken & Apple, 1992, p.511). First of all, research should be reliable. In both paradigms, since there is no single version of reality, replication is considered to be an artificial goal (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and instead, dependability is sought (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Unlike the stable results of the scientific paradigm, change is expected, but the research process should be tracked by an audit. The researcher needs to follow the most appropriate procedures and draw the most sensible conclusions, making the most rational connections between phenomena (Mertens, 1998).

The next criterion is validity, which is divided into internal validity and external validity. Validity is explained as “the correctness or precision of a research finding” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p.273). Internal validity is called credibility in the critical and interpretive paradigm, and the researcher needs to show that the reality the participants perceive corresponds to the reality the researcher interprets and portrays in the research. The researcher should support the credibility of the research by various means such as triangulation and member checking (Mertens, 1998). Brown (2001) lists seven kinds of triangulation and suggests that for practical reasons researchers should select from among those which are available. Among these, I used two types of triangulation for this study: data triangulation and methodological triangulation. I consulted both teachers and students with diverse backgrounds as a source of data for the triangulation. I also conducted both questionnaires and interviews to gather data using different

methods for methodological triangulation. Frankel & Wallen (2008) suggest asking one or more participants in the study to review the accuracy of the research report, which is called member checking. I asked one teacher and two students to review the accuracy of the research report to ensure that my interpretation of the data was fair after completion of the analysis of the results of that data. I did not ask all the participants because I knew that they, particularly the teachers, were especially busy, and hesitated to ask another favor. In addition, as an external audit, I asked one of my colleagues to review the results and discussion of the study to confirm the accuracy of the research report, as Frankel & Wallen (2008) suggest. After receiving the comments and suggestions from him, I revised my report to clarify some areas for the reader.

External validity in the scientific paradigm “refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized to the wider population” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.109). However, transferability of research to other contexts is emphasized over generalizability in the critical and interpretive paradigm. The practitioner must determine degrees of similarity between different contexts (Wallen & Frankel, 2001); in other words, the researcher should provide a rich description of the research context in order to enable the reader to draw conclusions (Mertens, 1998). For this study, I tried to provide thick description with sufficient detail to allow the reader to determine whether transfer to other situations can be considered.

In addition to the criteria mentioned above, we should also consider criteria that are unique for research in the critical paradigm. Mertens (1998) claims that it is crucial that researchers avoid bias resulting from differences in gender, race, religion, and disability status in the data collecting stage. Moreover, researchers should acknowledge their own standpoint and the context of the research. Eisenhart and Howe (1992), citing the feminist Roman’s argument, explain that critical researchers should be aware of power relations between the researcher and the subjects and choose appropriate methodologies to make the research valid. Carspecken and Apple (1992) also underscore the importance of being aware of power relationships. Since the researchers already have an advantage over the research participants, they should not abuse their power. More concretely, critical researchers should always analyze and interpret their data through negotiation with the participants. In this sense, while collecting and analyzing the data, I tried to collaborate with the participants in order to

raise their awareness and empower them in their lives. Currently, I am in the position of setting the English exam at a university as a full-time professor. When I conducted the questionnaire and interview, I was aware of the power relationship between me as a researcher and a tester, and the students as testees or the teachers who prepare their students for the exam. However, I made my position and the purpose of my study clear and listened to their voices attentively and humbly.

4.8 Limitations of the study

The study has some limitations, although I did my best to gather rich and meaningful data in accordance with certain procedure. First of all, the number of written comments in the questionnaires varies from person to person. Some participants did not write down their opinions on the questionnaire as expansively as I had expected. One of the reasons may be that the participants did not feel like writing a lot because there were too many questions to fill in. Students might not have seen the benefits of filling in such a long questionnaire. In addition, preparing for and taking the entrance exam is an unpleasant experience for many of the students, so they might have felt uncomfortable reflecting on and writing down their painful experiences in detail. Also, filling in long answers might have been burdensome for teachers because they were already very busy with their heavy workloads. In fact, according to a survey conducted by the Japan Teachers' Union (Izukura, 2007), Japanese teachers were the busiest and had the heaviest workloads among the seven countries in the study.

Second, I found a limitation of the questionnaire survey. Although I conducted piloting when I constructed the questionnaire, some questions still seemed to be ambiguous or difficult to answer for the participants. In the questionnaire I received comments on the inappropriate wording in one question and complaints about another being difficult. There was also a case where the interviewee understood the meaning of a question in the questionnaire only after I clarified what I meant when she asked the intention of the question in the interview. Especially, many of the participants expressed difficulty in answering question 8 in the students' questionnaire and question 9 in the teachers' questionnaire because the questions were too difficult or abstract. Although the questions intended to investigate Research Question 4, I removed them from the analysis to avoid presenting partial views of a small number of the participants who answered the questions.

Third, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee might have had some influence on the quality of the data I received. As I mentioned, all the students I interviewed were from my department. Although they seemed to talk with me in a relaxed atmosphere, they might have been consciously or unconsciously concerned about the power relationship. More concretely, it is assumed that they might have hesitated to state their honest opinions about the entrance exam developed by faculty members in my department, including me, although they did not know exactly who set the English exam. Moreover, I should also keep in mind that the opinions might have been different if I had interviewed students who had failed the exam or who did not like English very much. However, one of the purposes of the study is to raise the critical awareness of the entrance exam of those who will become English teachers in the future. Thus, I chose the particular participants with a clear purpose in mind, and hoped that the interview with me raised their awareness. With regard to high school teachers, I did not know them personally very well. Nevertheless, many of the teachers seemed to state their honest opinions and feelings, probably because I guaranteed their privacy with informed consent. The fact that I was younger than many of the participants might have made them feel relaxed and, therefore, sufficiently comfortable to express honest opinions in the interview. In addition, they fully understood the purpose of my study, and thus willingly cooperated.

Finally, there is a concern about the participants I selected. I purposely selected high school English teachers and students who hope to become English teachers. However, I could not avoid selecting an opportunity sample since I did not personally know many high school teachers and students. Nevertheless, all the participants kindly answered the questionnaires and interview questions, and I obtained rich data. Since I explained to some extent the background of the participants, I believe that the findings are still meaningful for answering my research questions.

Chapter Five: Results and Discussion

According to each research question, I present and discuss the results of the questionnaires and interviews in this section. I use tables and quotations to support the interpretation of my data. This chapter consists of four main sections. Section 5.1 describes Research Question 1, regarding the students' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their learning of English in high school. Section 5.2 addresses Research Question 2, which relates to high school teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their teaching of English. In section 5.3, I examine Research Question 3, on students and teachers' attitudes towards the English entrance exam in general. Finally, in section 5.4, I discuss Research Question 4, regarding students and teachers' perceptions of the use and consequences of the English entrance exam for education and society. Findings are presented and discussed together within each section according to themes. The themes emerged from the data and are organized to link to each research question. I have listed the categories and frequency of responses after the analysis of the data from the questionnaires in the form of tables to show the results and the analysis of the data. Some tables have subcategories shown in italics under the main categories. One participant referred to more than one category, and thus the total number of the frequency is more than the number of the participants. I have presented and explained the results using the tables and have quoted students' and teachers' comments, from both the questionnaire and the interview. A percentage shows the ratio of students who referred to the category. Each section concludes with a summary discussion.

5.1 Research question 1

Research Question 1 was: *What are students' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their learning of English in high school?*

I present the results according to four themes. The first four sections (5.1.1–5.1.4) comprise the influence of university entrance exams on students' learning in class, the usefulness of preparation for the exam, the influence of university entrance exams on students' learning outside of school, and the influence of English entrance exams on students' feelings and methods of studying English. I summarize the results in section 5.1.5.

5.1.1 Influence of university entrance exams on students' learning in class

Forty-seven responses were provided by the students in the questionnaire and four main categories were identified: learned the content known to be covered by the exam, practiced using exercises using previous exam, used materials that mimic exams, and nothing special (see Table 1). The table shows that some students noted more than one activity that they engaged in to prepare for the exam. The majority of students state that English classes they took in high school were aimed to prepare them for university entrance exams; only four students said that there was no activity aimed for the exam. The most frequently mentioned method of preparation was for students to learn contents known to be covered by the exam, as the following excerpt shows:

The English classes aimed exactly for the entrance exam. We had regular vocabulary tests in order to remember a lot of vocabulary for the exam. We also practiced reading a lot of long passages in a special morning class before regular classes. All the classes lead to improve skills for vocabulary and reading for the exam (S29).

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Learned the content known to be covered by the exam	23	6
<i>reading exercises</i>	6	2
<i>vocabulary building</i>	5	
<i>grammar exercises</i>	5	
<i>listening exercises</i>	2	1
<i>writing exercises</i>	1	3
<i>learned the points that will be covered on the exam from teachers</i>	4	2
Practiced exercises using previous exams	11	2
Used materials that mimic exams	9	2
Nothing special	4	
Total	47	10

Table 1. Activities conducted to prepare for the exam in English class

Among the contents, the exercises covered in class that students referenced most were reading exercises such as reading a long passage rapidly or translation of an English passage into Japanese, vocabulary building, and grammar exercises. These items are often emphasized on the entrance exam, so it is not surprising that they are emphasized in English classes.

The second and third most frequently referenced items were doing exercises using past exams and materials that mimic exams. In this way, students seem to become familiar with the forms of the exams, and this boosts their confidence. This should also be useful for teaching test-skills such as transferring answers to separate answer sheets and finishing the test in a limited time (Smith, 1991). According to Rina, the preparation for exams was conducted not only in an ordinary English class, but also in an extracurricular class on Saturdays. She explained in the interview that:

The school offered an extracurricular class for the NCT on Saturdays. Participation was voluntary, but 80% of all the students attended the class. After we took a mock exam made by a preparatory school, teachers checked the answers, and then explained difficult and important points.

As the above excerpt shows, it is not unusual for the students to go to school on weekends to prepare for the exam because ordinary classes on weekdays are not sufficient.

5.1.2 Usefulness of preparation for the exam

Table 2 shows students' perceptions of usefulness of preparation for the exam in school. In the questionnaire, 29 students answered "useful," two said "neither useful nor not useful," and six said "not very useful." The total shows the number of responses to the categories. For the group of students who answered "useful," the activities that were useful for the students (five main categories) are listed in the table. For the group of students who answered "not useful," the reasons why preparation was not useful (three categories) are listed.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Useful	29	5
Learned the content known to be covered by the exam	15	4
<i>grammar exercises</i>	4	
<i>listening exercises</i>	4	1
<i>reading exercises</i>	3	1
<i>writing exercises</i>	2	3
<i>vocabulary building</i>	1	

<i>learned the points that will be covered on the exam from teachers</i>	<i>1</i>	
Practiced exercises using previous exams	4	1
Learned test-taking strategies	3	2
Used exam-related materials beyond the textbook	1	
No particular reason mentioned	11	
Total	34	7
Neither useful nor not useful	2	0
Not very useful	7	1
Needed self-study for the exam	3	1
Cram schools were more useful	1	
No particular reason mentioned	3	
Total	7	1

Table 2. Usefulness of preparation for the exam in English class

Quite a few students (80 %) said that English classes in high school were useful for the exam. Although 11 out of 29 students did not raise particular reasons for this in their questionnaires, the other students explained why the in-class preparation in class is useful. They found that the content covered in class was particularly useful. For example, one student (S34) declared:

I found that rapid reading and listening exercises at the beginning of each class were useful. Writing exercises were also useful. Correcting on writing by my teacher was very useful because it is difficult to practice writing by myself.

One student even said, “*The same questions I practiced in class appeared in the exam.*” Students found that practice using previous exams was also useful because they were able to become accustomed to the test format and the allocation of an appropriate amount of time for each question within the limited time period. Mai explained how useful the writing exercises her teacher assigned were in her interview:

My teacher made a special handout which aimed to exercise writing which would appear in an exam made by a university. We worked on the handout at home, and then the teacher checked our writing. He gave advice on what kinds of expression we should use. Sometimes an assistant English teacher came to our class, and explained about important points. They were very useful because it is difficult to prepare for writing questions by myself.

Four students out of seven who said that English classes are not useful claimed that studying in cram school or self-study were more useful for preparing for the exam. Ken stated in his interview:

English classes in high school were not useful because the teacher translated every sentence into Japanese. This was waste of time, and the pace was very slow. We could not even finish the textbook. The level was too low to prepare for the exam. This is why I had to prepare for the exam by myself.

This shows that, although some students did not rely on English classes, they prepared for the exam outside of the class.

5.1.3 Influence of university entrance exams on students' learning outside of school

In addition to preparation in school, many students put a lot of time and energy into preparing for exams both in cram schools and at home, where they repeated the same exercises they had done in school. Table 3 shows the number of students who prepared for exams outside of school. For each group of students who attended a cram school or studied at home, the activities they engaged in are listed.

Among the students who prepared outside of school, 19 students out of 36 (52%) attended a cram or preparatory school, and 17 students (44%) prepared at home. On the other hand, only four (11%) did not engage in any particular type of preparation outside of school. Four out of six students I interviewed studied both at a preparatory school and at home in the third grade. For example, Rina, who started going to a preparatory school in the first grade, said that she took classes at a preparatory school after school four or five days a week. Even when she did not have a class at the preparatory school, she studied in the study room at the school. Another student, Mai, also attended a preparatory school, and went there after school four times a week. Although Shin did not go to a preparatory school and studied only at home in the third grade, he enrolled in a preparatory school after he failed an exam and graduated from high school. He went to the preparatory school every day and worked hard. Among the students interviewed, only Yumi did not attend preparatory school. Cram or preparatory schools are “the most infamous part of the Japanese education system”

(Hood, 2001, p. 6). They play an important role in supplementing regular schoolwork and preparing students for entrance exams.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Attended a cram or preparatory school	19	5
Learned content known to be covered by exams	16	3
<i>reading exercises</i>	7	3
<i>grammar exercises</i>	4	4
<i>vocabulary building</i>	4	3
<i>listening exercises</i>	1	1
<i>writing exercises</i>		1
Used materials that mimic exams	5	2
Practiced using previous exams	2	3
Total	23	8
Studied at home	17	4
Learned content known to be covered by exams	11	5
<i>vocabulary building</i>	7	2
<i>reading exercises</i>	2	1
<i>grammar exercises</i>	1	1
<i>writing exercises</i>	1	1
Used materials that mimic exams	5	1
Practiced using previous exams	2	2
Read aloud	1	
Did correspondence at home	1	
Total	20	8
Nothing special	4	0

Table 3. Activities conducted to prepare for exams outside of school

At cram or preparatory school, students were involved in similar activities to those in school (three categories): learned content known to be covered by exams, used materials that mimic the exam, and practiced using previous exams. The most referenced activity was learning content known to be covered by exams. Among the contents, reading exercises, grammar exercises, and vocabulary building were most frequently pointed out. For example, one student (S28) stated, “*I went to a cram school. I mainly did grammar and idiom exercises. In addition, I translated every English sentence into Japanese when I tackled reading exercises.*” Cram schools and preparatory schools supplement the high school curriculum (LoCastro, 1990), and students rely on the teachers in such preparatory schools as experts who will prepare them for entrance exams. In the questionnaire, S32 stated, “*All the classes in a preparatory school aim for exams. The teachers analyzed the questions that appeared in previous exams thoroughly, and prepared well for the classes.*” Another student

(S13) pointed out that cram schools not only used the previous exams, but also provided students with original materials developed by the school that mimicked previous exams.

Ken, who failed an exam in the third grade, studied at home to prepare for the next year's exams for two months after graduating from high school. However, he found it difficult to study alone, and ended up attending a preparatory school. He stated that the classes in the preparatory school mainly used the previous exams as a textbook and covered everything he needed for the exams, including listening, grammar, and reading. Half of the students attended a cram school according to the results of the questionnaire. I assume that they attend a cram school because they would be well prepared if they were taught by expert teachers who were familiar with both contents of the exams and test-taking strategies, and who efficiently used materials that mimicked exams.

The students also studied hard at home for exams and five categories were identified: learned content known to be covered by exams, use materials that mimic exams, practice using previous exams, and read aloud. The most popular activity they engaged in was to memorize a lot of vocabulary. S20 bought a wordbook specifically for the exams and concentrated on vocabulary building. S8 said that he recited vocabulary to himself on their way to and from school. This shows that he made use of even a short amount of time to study hard. Practicing using items from previous exams was also a popular activity. S9 noted that he had reviewed exam questions from the past 14 years.

Among the four students who did not study out of school, three did not explain further, but S2 explained that study in school was satisfactory because his school put emphasis on English subjects. Although he did not use extra materials at home, he prepared and reviewed thoroughly in his English classes.

5.1.4 Influence of English entrance exams on students' feelings

When students were asked if English entrance exams had influenced their feelings and methods of learning English, 27 students (75%) said that they felt a certain amount of influence, while 9 students (15%) reported no influence (see Table 4). Among the students who felt an influence, 15 (55%) students referred to positive feelings and five

categories were identified: more interested/motivated in English, wanted to become an English teacher, had fun, felt achievement, and increased English ability. On the other hand, 12 students (45%) reported negative feelings and 12 categories were identified. Some students expressed both positive and negative feelings.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Had Influence	27	6
Positive feelings	15	3
More interested/motivated in English	8	1
Wanted to become an English teacher	3	3
Had fun	2	
Felt achievement	1	
Increased English ability	1	
Total	16	4
Negative feelings	12	4
Felt anxiety	3	2
Felt boredom	1	
Couldn't avoid English exams	1	
Had difficulty	1	
Felt forced to study	1	1
Felt pain	1	1
Felt upset		1
Felt shocked because of gap in knowledge	1	
Lost interest in studying English	1	
Had bad feelings	1	
Regretted not studying English hard	1	
Felt annoyed		1
Total	12	6
No Influence	9	0

Table 4. Influence of English entrance exam on students' feelings

Eight out of fifteen students with positive feelings felt more interested and motivated in learning English and in English itself. S35, who already liked English, became more inspired to learn English, saying, *"I never had negative feelings while I prepared for exams because I liked English. The more knowledge I gained, the more I wanted to increase my knowledge."* For S29, studying for exams was a good chance to become more interested in English. She noted that *"Because I studied for the exams, I knew more about the English language, and liked English more."* Another student (S8) notes that he was more motivated to learn English when he got high marks on his English tests.

Studying English for exams not only motivated students to learn English but also helped to determine the future of three students. For S33, *“I came to like English thanks to studying for exams. In addition, studying English for the entrance exams made me decide to be an English teacher.”* For three students out of the six I interviewed, studying for exams triggered their interest in becoming an English teacher. Shin was greatly influenced by his high school English teacher, and stated in the interview:

My English teacher taught me various things for the English exams. Since I liked his class, I came to like English. He supported and cared for us a lot. He taught us enthusiastically early in the morning and after school. If I had not taken and prepared for exams, I would not have realized his kindness.

It is ironic that studying for the exams is one of the principal motivations for students, as Cheng’s (1997) study indicates, and can even determine their future as an English teacher. Two students had fun while they studied English. S14 was happy when she was able to read English, and S19 felt fulfilled when she learned something new. S1 expresses feelings of achievement, *“Studying for the exams was hard, but I felt a sense of achievement. I became patient and developed a sense of familiarity with English. I felt motivated to study intrinsically, and grown-up.”*

When we consider that all the participants hope to become English teachers and like English, it is not surprising that many students maintained positive feelings while they were working diligently for their exams. On the other hand, we have to keep in mind that twelve students developed negative feelings, as reported in other studies (e.g., Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996) although a smaller number of the students showed negative feelings in this study. Three students felt anxiety and suffered from extreme pressure. One of them (S23) said:

Since I could not and did not want to spend another year to prepare for the entrance exam, I felt tremendous pressure to pass the entrance exams. As NCT approached, I studied extremely hard. Since I was confident in English, I concentrated on preparing for English tests thoroughly. I studied with relaxed feelings at the beginning. However, I became more and more anxious and felt

greater pressure as the exams approached. As a result, all I did was to concentrate on memorizing important points.

The other students showed a variety of negative feelings. One (S5) claimed that studying for exams was boring, and reading an English novel was much more interesting. Another (S12) lost interest after he spent days and days memorizing difficult English vocabulary. For many students, memorizing vocabulary and points of grammar was a popular method of studying for exams. Akira claimed in the interview that it was hard for him to memorize things every day until the day of the exam, since he did not like to memorize. S34 noted that he felt forced to study English because of exams. As another example, S17 felt shocked by the gap between what he had to study for the exams and what he wanted to study.

Although nine students found that studying for the English exams did not influence their feelings, seven did not explain this further. Two students simply said that since they liked English, preparation for the exams did not affect their feelings.

5.1.5 Summary discussion

According to the results of the data relating to Question 1, we come to the conclusion that students perceive that university entrance exams influence not only their learning of English but also affective aspects strongly as previous studies have shown (e.g., Anderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Cheng, 1997; Cheng, 1998). Since this effect is so strong, the students regard activities that prepare them for exams as normal in English classes. Exams not only have a strong effect on students' learning in school, but also have a strong impact beyond the school. As a result, students work very hard for the exams everywhere: in school, at home, and at cram schools. Because entrance exams determine their future (Murphy & Sato, 2003), it is understandable that students are always conscious about gaining skills for exams rather than developing communicative skills that are not directly related to the exams. It is often pointed out that preparatory schools play an important role in the exam system in Japan (LoCastro, 1990). Also they make a great deal of money from the students preparing for exam (Murphy & Sato, 2003). The results confirmed that students rely heavily on preparatory schools.

In preparing for entrance exams, the students clearly focused on the skills assessed in

exams. They do not seem to care about communication skills, which are emphasized in the recent English curriculum, since they are not relevant to the exams they take. Law (1994) argues that mental habits among students preparing for exams are so strong that there is a considerable lag before study habits change, even when the examinations themselves gradually begin to encourage more communication skills. His claim may be partly true but—judging from the opinions of the majority of the students who, in reflecting on their experience, admitted that preparation for exams was useful—it is doubtful that exams really encourage communication skills.

The results of the data showed the characteristics of the washback effect as described in Alderson & Wall (1993). It appears that Japanese university entrance exams have a strong washback effect on students. Buck (1998) mentions that Japanese university exams have a negative effect on students since the students concentrate on preparing for the exams rather than and without achieving the basic educational goals set by educational planners. This is also the case here according to the results of this study. The students only care about improving their test-taking skills and thus do not develop communicative skills, even though MEXT has set forth using English as a means of communication as an educational goal. We cannot definitely say that washback from university entrance exams is negative for students in emotional aspects as usually perceived, because half of the students had positive feelings towards the test. This is due to the characteristics of the participants who hoped to become English teachers and enjoyed studying English. In spite of the fact that all of the students liked English, 45% of them had more or less negative feelings when preparing for the exams. In other words, some students feel fearful and powerless because they have no control over their learning behavior. This indicates the detrimental effect entrance exams have on students in their affective domains as Shohamy (2005) claims.

The results also indicated that many of the students do not have a critical view towards entrance exams and simply concentrated on preparing for the exams as a successful learner. Their attitudes and behaviors may be attributed to the way that Japanese students generally accept what they are taught by their teachers who are in a superior position (Locastro, 1990). We can easily imagine that the students in this study will teach as they were taught once they become English teachers since they internalize models of good and bad teaching through “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie,

1975). It is a vicious circle and entrance exams will never change if this circle continues. Thus, it is essential to at least raise critical awareness in test-takers.

5.2 Research question 2

Research Question 2 was: *What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their teaching of English?*

I present the results according to the following four themes in 5.2.1–5.2.4: The influence of university entrance exams on teachers' teaching in English classes, students' pressure on teachers' teaching, the influences of university entrance exams on the English curriculum, and the influence of university exams on regular English exams. Section 5.2.1 is further divided into three parts, relating to: teachers' awareness of English entrance exams, activities teachers pursue in English classes to prepare for English entrance exams, and teachers' perceptions of the influence of English entrance exams on their teaching. Section 5.2.4 summarizes the results.

5.2.1 Influence of university entrance exams on teachers' teaching in English classes

5.2.1.1 Teachers' awareness of English entrance exams

The majority of teachers (27 teachers in the questionnaire, and 5 in the interview) said that they were aware of English entrance exams for universities when they taught English in class. Seventeen out of nineteen teachers described the reasons that they were conscious of exams and seven categories were identified (see Table 5).

Categories (Reasons)	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=17)	Interview (N=6)
Many students take the entrance exams	10	2
To raise students' awareness	2	
To motivate students to learn English	2	2
To meet students and parents' needs and expectations	1	1
To recruit more students to the high school	1	1
To meet the high school's needs		1
Because it is natural	1	
Total	17	7

Table 5. Reasons that teachers are aware of English entrance exams for universities in their teaching

Firstly, more than half of the teachers (n=10) keep the exams in mind simply because

many students take the exams. It will be discussed more in detail in the next section. Although the teachers did not explain their reasons in further detail, we can assume that they felt pressure from students, parents, and administrators when we look at other issues raised by the participants. One teacher (T13) stated, in relation to students and parents' expectations, that:

Students and parents in high-ranking high schools place great expectations on us to have the students acquire the skills to pass an entrance exam. Especially in an area where few preparatory schools exist, the expectations from the students and parents are higher. If I don't meet their expectations, students' motivation to learn English become lower. Even if I conduct any other kinds of classes which give the students a sense of fulfillment and achievement, they are not satisfied.

In Asian countries, the academic success of children is a family honour (Ellinger & Beckham, 1997); thus, parents are also very concerned about students' success. In relation to this, one teacher clearly articulated in the questionnaire that the number of exam passers will be an attractive factor for recruiting applicants to his high school. In addition, Dai commented in the interview:

Junior high school students usually investigate past records of students advancing to college and university in a high school they apply for. When I asked my students why they chose our school, many of them referred to good records concerning ratio of students who go on to prestigious universities. Although school atmosphere and extracurricular activities were also stated, the biggest concern for them is the number of successful graduates in entrance exams.

Not only students, but also administrators are concerned about the number of successful graduates, as Keiko noted in the interview. She said that she constantly faces a lot of pressure from her school administrators and teachers who are in charge of career guidance; they explicitly set targets for the number of successful students in exams. In addition, as T22 states, some schools officially set a goal of increasing the number of successful students who pass exams.

In contrast, some students and parents do not have high expectations of high schools in

preparing for exams; they rely on preparatory schools, not the high school. To deal with this, teachers attempt to motivate students to learn also in their English class. One teacher (T9), who had a sense of crisis regarding students' attitudes toward classes in high school, claimed that he explicitly taught the contents of exams to raise students' awareness of the importance of learning in high school:

I want my students to realize that learning in high school is also useful for an entrance exam. Many parents and students are fixed on the idea that they should rely on a cram school or a preparatory school for preparation for an exam, and do not regard learning in high school as important.

In a further development, exams are used as a tool to motivate students to learn English, as two teachers said. T3 felt that whether or not students could answer questions in entrance exams is the most essential issue in current English education in Japan. He claimed that if students can get a high score in exams, they are motivated to learn English. Getting a high score is a starting point for students to become more interested in learning English; thus, he stated that he is conscious of university exams in his teaching. Similarly, Ryota stated in the interview that he keeps university exams in mind to motivate students to learn English. He sometimes gives an actual example of exam questions. As a result, he notices that his students concentrate on his class.

5.2.1.2 Activities teachers carry out in English classes to prepare for English entrance exams

When teachers were asked how they teach English classes if they are aware of entrance exams, 18 teachers described what they do in class and four categories were identified: use materials that mimic the exam format, give practice exercises using previous exams, teach content known to be covered by exams, and summarize reading passages (see Table 6). All the activities raised by the teachers correspond to those described by the students in the previous section.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=18)	Interview (N=6)

Use materials that mimic the exam format	12	2
Give practice exercises using previous exams	5	2
Teach content known to be covered by exams	13	9
<i>reading exercises</i>	5	2
<i>grammar exercises</i>	4	2
<i>vocabulary building</i>	2	2
<i>writing exercises</i>	1	
<i>pronunciation exercises</i>	1	1
<i>listening exercises</i>		2
Summarize reading passages	1	
Total	31	13

Table 6. How teachers who are aware of English entrance exams for universities teach their English classes

The activity referred to most often is to use materials that mimic the exam format. Teaches asserted that they usually employ commercially available materials. This indicates a washback effect in terms of materials, as shown in Andrew's (2004) study. T22 explained that she finishes the authorized textbooks by the first semester of the third year, and uses an exercise book for exams for the rest of the year. As Mulvey (1999) points out, textbooks authorized by MEXT barely prepare the students for the exams, whose content are beyond the textbook. This is why it is common for teachers to use supplementary textbooks in their class. T10 argued that it is essential to familiarize his students with parallel forms of NCT to pass the exam:

I put an emphasis on familiarizing my students with forms of NCT. Our students cannot reach the level of getting a high score in the second screening of the university exams. Thus, they need to get high score in NCT in the first stage. I have the students take a mock exam within a limited time. Otherwise, they do not feel sense of tension in an exam.

Giving practice exercises using previous exams is also a common practice for teachers. The purpose of using previous exams is to enable students to become familiar with the test formats and focus on contents that often appear in the exam. In addition, students acquire test-skills such as answering multiple-choice questions without reading a passage in detail, and finishing a test in a limited time. As with Qi's (2005) study, teachers use mock exams to familiarize their students with exams within an ordinary class period.

Quite a few teachers teach the content known to be covered by exams. Clearly, they focus on skills that are often required in an exam, such as reading, grammar, and vocabulary. T6, who is greatly concerned with exams, said, *“I teach only skills which are required for exams such as explanation of sentence patterns and how to read sentences before and after discourse markers.”* For him, teaching reading seems to mean acquiring reading skills for an exam. T18 explained that teaching the reading passages in authorized textbooks is not sufficient to prepare students for the variety of levels and forms of reading questions that appear in entrance exams. Thus, he uses extra materials to improve students’ reading skills in a way that is applicable to an English test. Listening is taught mainly to prepare for the listening test in NCT that was introduced recently, which was also stated by students. Since speaking is usually not required for an exam, no teachers teach it. Although one teacher teaches pronunciation, he articulated that this is to prepare students for multiple-choice pronunciation questions in NCT.

As presented above, the teachers teach the content to be covered by exams. However, they do not always recognize the actual contents of exams fully. Some researchers (e.g., Beppu, 2002; Guest, 2000; Watanabe, 2005) argue that teachers conduct their class activities to prepare their students for exams based on their assumptions about exams, without realizing that there have been recent changes in the actual contents of exams. For example, they claimed that teachers employ a grammar-translation method and teach discrete grammar points, but minute grammar knowledge has not been required in recent tests. However, the results in my study indicate that teachers analyze the recent exams and keep pace with the change. In addition, they attempt to cover various types of and skills for exam questions, such as reading, grammar, vocabulary, and listening; they avoid speaking activities, which are not directly related to exams.

5.2.1.3 Teachers’ perceptions of the influence of English entrance exams on their teaching

In section 5.2.1.1, I investigated if teachers keep exams in their mind when they teach English whether or not they feel some influence from the exams. In this section, I focus on their perceptions of influence of the university entrance exams and their teaching behaviors if they feel influence. According to the results, 87% teachers (27

teachers in the questionnaire, and all of the six teachers in the interview) answered in the affirmative (see Table 7). This convinces us that many teachers keep exams in mind while teaching as I discussed in section 5.2.1.1. because they feel a strong influence of the exams. Akari articulated that she was not concerned about the entrance exams in her teaching when I asked in the first interview question (she was the only teacher who was not concerned about exams among the six teachers interviewed). Nevertheless, she ultimately admitted that the exams have a great influence on her teaching. Her first priority is to motivate students to learn English intrinsically, but at the same time, she understands that passing the university entrance exam is a great concern for her students. Although Watanabe (1996) argues that a teacher's educational background, beliefs, and teaching experience outweigh the possible effects of the entrance exam, Akari's case indicates that washback effects are so strong that some teachers alter their classes unwillingly in a way that is contrary to the teacher's personal beliefs. Moreover, the great number of teachers who feel an influence on their mentality and their teaching behaviors, suggest that entrance exams have an enormous washback effect.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Has influence	27	6
Influence on teachers	14	5
<i>teach the contents related to exams</i>	5	5
<i>tailor their teaching for exams</i>	3	
<i>give priority to teaching contents related to exams</i>	3	
<i>use materials related to exams</i>	2	1
<i>use exams to motivate students</i>	1	
Influence on students	9	1
<i>demand for teaching for exams</i>	5	
<i>concern about regular exams</i>	2	
<i>motivate students to learn English</i>	2	1
Other	2	
No further explanation	2	
Total	27	6
Has no influence	4	0

Table 7. Teachers' perceptions of the influence of the English entrance exams for universities on their English classes

Teachers' perceptions of the influence of the English entrance exams are classified into two main themes: influence on teachers and influence on students. Among 27 teachers, 14 teachers (including all of the six teachers interviewed) realized the influence of

exams in their awareness and teaching behaviors and five categories were identified: teach the contents related to exams, tailor their teaching for exams, prioritize teaching contents related to exams, use materials related to exams, and use exams to motivate student. Five teachers said that they teach contents related to exams in their classes. For instance, one teacher (T26) started to deal with listening exercises for exams, after listening questions were introduced in NCT in 2006. She gives her students a commercially available listening textbook specialized for exams, and conducts regular listening tests. Although she has started to teach listening, however, she only familiarizes students with the exam format in listening. Thus, learning outcomes superficially meet the testing requirements; this finding is similar to the results of the study by Andrews et al. (2002). Keiko predicts and teaches the content that often appears in exams after analyzing past exam questions. Hiroto, who teaches in a private school, affirmed that he is totally influenced by exams and teaches tricks related to solving questions in NCT in order to help his students obtain high scores in NCT in the top-level third-year class. Although he wants his students to enjoy reading English, he stresses test-taking strategies:

Class time is too limited to have my students realize the pleasure of reading. Because there is a huge gap between their current English level and the level of NCT, I have no choice but to teach tricks. In that sense, I feel sorry for my students.

In contrast, Hiroto does not teach anything related to exams and tries to create a fun class environment for the second-year class, where few students go on to a university.

In three extreme cases, the teachers tailor their class completely for exams. One teacher even remarked that if students can translate English into Japanese, they can pass an exam; thus, he does not need to teach anything other than this. Three teachers thought it was unfortunate that they are forced to give priority to teaching content related to exams, and have to give up eliciting communicative English skills due to the limited class time. T14 says, *“I want to teach four skills in a balanced way. However, because of entrance exams, I tend to focus on teaching reading and writing skills in addition to explanation of detailed grammar rules.”* T30 commented:

If possible, I want to teach more advanced contents based on an authorized textbook we use such as public speaking and paragraph writing. However, I do not have time to teach them since I have to teach materials specialized for the exams.

One teacher (T6) uses entrance exams to motivate students to learn English instrumentally rather than raising their intrinsic motivation. He says, *“I teach English to have my students pass entrance exams. Getting a high score in a mock exam leads to a sense of achievement and fun for students.”* Ryota declared in the interview that he found it deplorable that many students these days study only for exams, compared with past students, who studied for various reasons. This suggests that students in the past were more independent learners and sought intellectual stimulus by themselves. However, because of the lower birthrate, many students these days are spoiled by their parents and given everything they need, thus students may tend to accept what they are told by their parents and teachers without deep thought, and simply concentrate on preparing for exams under the high expectations of their parents and teachers to enter a prestigious university.

Entrance exams influence students' ideas and learning behaviors, in addition to teachers' awareness and teaching behaviors. Three categories identified were: demand of teaching for exams, concern about regular exams, and motivate students to learn English. Students are too concerned about passing exams, according to five teachers' comments. For instance, T17 pointed out that students are unmotivated in classes that include a lot of oral activities, since they are not directly related to the exam. Another teacher said that students are not interested in a class that seems useless for an exam. He continued to say that his students do not study and prepare seriously for such classes, and spend much more time doing exercises with a textbook distributed by a cram school at home. The reason why comments about students' concern for regular exams made by two teachers show the influence of university exams is because, according to the teachers, getting high grades in regular exams is essential for students who wish to enter a university by recommendation, without taking a paper test.

5.2.2 Students' pressure on teachers' teaching

As I presented in the previous sections, quite a few teachers have a strong awareness of

English entrance exams and feel that they influence their teaching. Not only teachers, but also students are highly concerned with the results of English exams, and expect teachers to tailor their English classes to prepare students for these exams (see Table 8). Ryota remembered that his students criticized him for not being useful for entrance exams in his class, although he has not had any comments like this from students recently. According to the results, 19 teachers (61%) have had specific requests in their classes from their students (11 categories). All the requests asked for preparing for the exams, and students' requests are diverse. In addition, these activities are those teachers usually do in their English classes. An implication of this is that both students and teachers are always concerned about the exams, and take it for granted that they will prepare for exams in class. The results also indicate that students want more exam-orientation activities even though they are not always sure what these activities were.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Has had student requests to:	19	3
Translate an English passage into Japanese	4	
Teach about how to read a long reading passage	3	2
Explain grammar points	3	
Use materials that mimic the exams	2	
Do exercises useful for the exams	2	
Do a lot of exercises	1	
Teach how to write an essay	1	
Do writing exercises	1	
Do listening exercises	1	1
Give advice on the exams	1	
Do a lot of activities	1	
Total	20	3
Has not had student requests	12	3

Table 8. Students' requests in English classes to prepare for the English entrance exams for universities

Students make a variety of requests. The request made most frequently is related to translation. T29 noted that, since her students ask for translation, she always gives them the Japanese translation of a passage. Although she does not want to use a grammar-translation method, she cannot avoid it because she knows that her students

feel a sense of achievement if they can translate a reading passage into Japanese. Gorsuch (1998) points out that teachers tend to employ the grammar-translation method based on the strong influence of entrance exams but, as evident in the previous section, few teachers referred to translation as an activity they do in class. The above results indicate that students, rather than teachers, probably have a learner belief that learning by translation is useful to prepare for the exams, probably because they pass high school exams using the same method. This may be supported by a comment by T17. Her students asked her to teach English using a grammar-translation method rather than other kinds of methods that include more aural activities.

Reading and grammar are the skills students want to improve most for exams. Some students have a vague idea about how to improve their reading skills for an exam, but hope to learn anything useful for exams, as T10 described:

The most frequent request I have received from my students is to teach about how to read a long reading passage. Students need to acquire various skills to read a long passage such as vocabulary, grammar knowledge, background knowledge, and effective information processing. However, they vaguely ask me to teach how to read a long passage without understanding what kinds of skills they need to acquire.

Other students ask teachers to teach how to solve reading questions in an exam, because they do not know how to study; this contrasts with grammar, which they can memorize for exams, according to T2. As another example, Hiroto stated in the interview that many students ask him to do a lot of reading exercises. He has the impression that his students are weak in reading and very concerned with improving their reading skills.

Although some students make requests in class, others are satisfied with and rely on classes that already focus on preparing for exams, and therefore do not make further requests, judging from the comments by T9, T12, and T25. For instance, T9 commented, “*Since I always attempt to conduct a lesson which can be applied to entrance exams, I rarely have requests from my students.*”

5.2.3 Influence of university entrance exams on the English curriculum in high school

The influence of university entrance exams is not limited to the class level. Twenty-one teachers out of 31 (68%) report that they perceive an influence on the English curriculum in their school and three categories were identified: teacher content for the exams, set up special classes for exams, and set up more English classes (see Table 9).

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Has influence	21	6
Teach content for the exams	10	4
Set up special classes for exams	8	4
Set up more English classes	3	5
Total	21	13
Has no influence	8	0
No answer	2	0

Table 9. Teachers' perceptions of the influence of the English entrance exams for universities on the English curriculum in high school

The theme most frequently referred is teaching content for exams. For instance, T3 noted that his school has established an English curriculum from the first year to the third year with the goal of having students acquire skills to pass university exams. T13 said that his school has set up a curriculum to cover all types of listening questions that will appear in NCT. Three teachers confessed that they have replaced an oral communication class with a reading or grammar class, which deviates from the curriculum guidelines set by MEXT. This is an open secret, and many schools do the same (Taguchi, 2005). English teachers in Mio's school emphasize teaching grammar for exams. They try to explain all the important grammatical rules in the first year, and spend time reviewing grammar and doing exercises in the second and third years. However, since they cannot finish all the grammar points in the first year in regular English I classes, they replace half of an oral communication class with a grammar class. This clearly shows a washback effect on aspects of curriculum; narrowing curriculum by finishing or abandoning their textbooks, while schools do intensive work to prepare for the exam, as Alderson & Wall's (1993) study indicates.

The second most frequent theme is setting up special classes to prepare for exams. Eight teachers remark that their schools offer special classes such as "listening for

NCT,” “grammar training,” and “reading for university exams.” Dai’s school offers satellite classes for a major preparatory school. His school has introduced the classes for students who cannot attend a preparatory school because of inconvenient transportation. In his regular class, he values balancing four skills and building up students’ basic English ability:

I make every effort to have my students overcome the hurdle of entrance exams. However, I don’t ask my students only to solve exam questions at an early stage. Rather, I want them to acquire proper and basic English skills...I use a lot of pair and group work activities. I attempt to set tasks in which each student uses their brain and English orally.

Nevertheless, Dai does not deny depending on specialists in a preparatory school and introduces a satellite program into his school just before entrance exams. In the program, a specialist from a well-known preparatory school teaches exam techniques. He admits that his students need to know tricks to solve exam questions and cannot avoid relying on specialists because his teaching time is limited. This indicates that not only students, but also teachers, admit that the industry of cram and preparatory schools is a necessary supplement to meet the gap between the school curriculum and the exam contents.

Thirdly, three teachers stated that their school sets up extra English classes within the curriculum because English test scores usually have greater weight than other subjects in exams. For example, nine English classes are offered for students in the third year in T6’s school. Setting up more English classes within the curriculum is not sufficient to prepare for exams. As five interviewees said, it is a common practice to offer extracurricular supplementary English classes. In Keiko’s school, all the students are required to take a morning supplementary class for 50 minutes from 7:40 a.m., before their regular class every day. Moreover, supplementary classes are offered for second- and third-year students. Although participating in these classes is voluntary, 60% of students take them. During the summer vacation, all the students have to take one-week summer courses. Keiko literally has no summer vacation because she has to teach the classes for 21 days in total (one week for each grade). She explains that English, math, and Japanese teachers are the busiest and have more supplementary

classes than teachers of other subjects, since these three subjects are considered the most important in entrance exams. Similarly, Hiroto's school offers many extracurricular supplementary classes. Students take supplementary lessons four times a week, including on Saturdays. In addition, they have to take supplementary courses during the summer, winter, and spring vacations.

5.2.4 Influence of university entrance exams on regular English exams in high school

Table 10 presents teachers' awareness of the English entrance exams for universities in regular English exams in high school. Twenty teachers (65%) were concerned with university exams, and their comments are grouped into three categories.. As Akari and Dai explained, more than two teachers who teach the same grades usually write regular exams cooperatively by rotation in Japanese schools.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Is concerned	20	5
Use similar formats to the entrance exams	13	4
Use questions from previous exams	7	1
Include questions beyond the level of the textbook contents	6	1
Total	26	6
Is not concerned	8	1

Table 10. Teachers' awareness of the English entrance exams for universities in regular English exams in high school

Firstly, 13 teachers use similar formats of entrance exams. More concretely, some teachers employ formats such as multiple-choice questions, true or false questions, and reordering words to make a sentence: these are common types of questions in NCT. Other teachers set exam questions that are all written in English, modeling an entrance exam for a high-ranking university. Keiko includes questions that have similar formats to those on entrance exams, especially in regular exams for third-year students, to have them get used to the entrance exam format. Regular exams in Mio's grade include vocabulary, grammar, and listening questions from extra materials every student has to prepare for exams. Her students take regular quizzes with questions drawn from extra materials. Nevertheless, Mio includes exam-based questions to motivate students to study hard, since they regard regular exams as more important than quizzes.

Using questions from previous university exams is the second theme; this was raised by seven teachers. Teachers include questions from previous exams from various universities as part of a regular exam. For instance, T30 said that 10 to 20% of her regular exams consist of such questions. Ryota, who teaches high-level students, uses previous exam questions to save time in making good questions suitable to the level of his students. At home or in cram school, his students already study English beyond the level of the authorized textbook he uses in his class. As a result, he has to give challenging questions to satisfy his students.

Thirdly, teachers commented that they include questions beyond the contents of the textbook they use in class. Previous researchers (e.g., Kimura & Visgatis, 1996; Mulvey, 2000) pointed out a gap in difficulty between the content in an authorized textbook in high school and questions in entrance exams. Keiko stated in the interview that she sometimes includes challenging questions to shock her students, as well as to have them study harder for entrance exams. Teachers try to make their students aware that there is a gap and urge them to study hard by including difficult content in their regular exams.

5.2.5 Summary discussion

The results relating to Question 2 demonstrated that entrance exams have a strong washback effect on teachers, and high-stake exams definitely determine much of the content of the high school curriculum (Murphy & Sato, 2003). Analysis of the data shows that the participants engage in six out of the seven common behaviors that teachers use for an exam presented by Smith (1991). The seven behaviors are teaching test-taking skills, giving advice for successful test-taking, teaching the content known to be covered by the test, using materials that mimic the test format, using test-related materials, and conducting practice on items from the test itself. Exams usually should come at the end of teaching and test what students have learned (Cheng, 1997), but high-stake Japanese university entrance exams have a reverse direction and teachers change the curriculum to prepare their students for the exams.

Teachers' opinions indicated that teachers are under pressure from various stakeholders. First, the teachers have a strong awareness of entrance exams and are pressured by

students and their parents in a way similar to the results found by Nishino (2008). This probably has a tremendous impact on their beliefs regarding their teaching and employment of particular kinds of classroom activities, such as exercises using materials that mimic the exams' reading, grammar, and vocabulary exercises. Since tests have such a significant effect on students' futures, teachers also work hard to help their students to pass their exams (Gippes, 1994). In addition to pressure from students and parents, they receive pressure from their school administrators. As stated in Section 5.2.1, the school curriculum has an enormous amount of time allocated to preparing for English exams. This shows that administrators put pressure on teachers (Shohamy et al., 1996; Smith, 1992) to achieve their school's goals and earn their reputation. Although teachers did not refer to it in this study, other studies show that teachers also have pressure from their colleagues. Teachers need to work together with their colleagues in their subject. For example, they meet to decide which materials they will use in regular and supplementary classes and collaborate with developing regular exams as described in section 5.2.4. In O' Donnell's (2005) study which investigated beliefs about teaching and the current curricular activities Japanese secondary English teachers have, the teachers referred to pressure from colleagues to conform to their standards of teaching. Even though teachers have different beliefs, for instance about whether developing communicative competence is important, they cannot avoid teaching for exams because the primary goal in their school is successful preparation for entrance exams. Many teachers stated that the school curricula and regular exams in many schools are tailored for the entrance exams. This means that teachers have to collaborate with their colleagues to follow the school curriculum, and alter their teaching behaviors to the curriculum.

In order to meet expectations from various stakeholders, teachers ignore the new guidelines by MEXT which emphasize communicative ability and continue to teach for exams; this is similar to the observation by Murphy & Sato (2003). Judging from the fact that many of the students go on to a university, it appears that the participants in this study are from relatively high-level academic schools. Although MEXT has promoted communicative teaching in secondary schools, teachers in high-level high schools continue to conduct activities geared to the exam, while lower-level high schools are more likely to implement communicative teaching (Browne & Wada, 1998). The teachers in this study conduct activities to prepare their students because they have

tremendous pressure from various stakeholders.

When I consider teacher's perceptions and behaviors from a critical view point, they accept the current practice of entrance exams and do not seem to develop their critical view towards the use of the exams. They may transmit the knowledge necessary to pass the entrance exam to their students as usual practice since entrance exams are deeply embedded in Japanese culture. However, they often complain about the entrance exams in private. In addition, some participants in this study expressed their desire for teaching the development of communicative skills, not for exams. Murphy (2001a) wonders why teachers do not speak out more strongly for changes in the entrance exams. We cannot find the answer to his question, but they may get too used to preparing their students for exams without being aware of students' rights as test-takers or do not pursue changes since they are in a weak position in the academic hierarchy.

5.3 Research question 3

Research Question 3 was: *What are students and teachers' attitudes toward the English entrance exam in general?*

I present the results according to the following three categories in section 5.3.1–5.3.3: the appropriateness of English entrance exams for universities, the disparity between the purposes of foreign language teaching in high school and English entrance exams, and the necessity of the English test in university entrance exams. I summarize the results in section 5.3.4.

5.3.1 Appropriateness of English entrance exams as an assessment tool

In this section, I consider how students and teachers perceive English entrance exams as an assessment tool. I did not ask my participants to discuss the two kinds of tests (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities) separately in the questionnaire. Thus, the results did not show clearly whether students and teachers refer to one or both exams, although some clarified this.

5.3.1.1 Students' views

Table 11 show students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the English entrance exams they took and the reasons for their opinions. The results show that students have

opposing opinions about the university entrance exams.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Appropriate	15	2
Assessed various skills	8	2
Assessed true ability because of the change in the format	2	
Could not answer by guessing	1	
Reflected my effort	1	
No reason mentioned	3	
Total	15	2
Inappropriate	18	4
Problems of format	6	3
<i>Multiple-choice questions are inappropriate</i>	5	3
<i>Similar formants every year</i>	1	
Problems of skills assessed	5	1
<i>Do not assess communication skills</i>	3	
<i>Partially assess skills</i>	1	1
<i>Listening questions are too artificial</i>	1	
Assessment criteria are unclear	1	
Have seen the same questions before	1	
Other factors have a great effect	1	
Passed exams without sufficient ability	1	
Test-taking strategy matters	1	
Total	16	4
Other	2	0
No answer	1	0

Table 11. Students' perceptions of appropriateness of the English entrance exams

Fifteen students (42%) regarded the English entrance exams as appropriate and five categories were identified as reasons. The most commonly mentioned reason was that English exams assessed various skills and areas. In particular, they referred to reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening, and pronunciation. However, no student referred to writing and speaking skills. Even though all the skills raised by the students are only receptive skills assessed in NCT, the participants seem to consider that balanced skills are assessed, even if productive skills are not.

Two students referred to the change of format in the NCT they took. They thought that the change in format revealed applicants' true English ability. Although they did not explain about this further, I assume that some students who only relied on test-taking strategies by practicing questions from previous exams were unable to get a high score

when the format of the exams changed. This is why the two students found that true ability was assessed in the NCT they took. The other reasons were that “*I could not answer questions by guessing*” and “*it reflected my effort.*” These are subjective comments, and the students could probably not assess the exams critically.

In contrast, 18 (50%) students regarded the English entrance exams as inappropriate and seven categories were indentified as reasons. The most commonly stated reason for this was the problems of formats. In particular, students considered that the multiple-choice questions in NCT do not appropriately assess their ability. S28 and S33 pointed out that there is a possibility that test-takers will obtain a high score by guessing the answers to questions. S33 complained that students’ futures are decided based on such a test. Shin also complained in the interview that it is unfair to use the multiple-choice questions in NCT to determine students’ future:

The multiple-choice questions in NCT are not appropriate to assess students’ English proficiency. I have heard that a student failed in exams because of mistakes in filling in a computer-scored answer sheet. I have also heard that some students received a high score even if they chose answers by guessing. It is unfair that such exams decide the university a student enters.

Even if objectivity in marking is crucial in NCT (Guest, 2007), it is understandable that students complain that their future is determined by a multiple-choice test in which students have a possibility to obtain a high score by guessing.

The second frequently referred reason for believing that the exams are appropriate is the issue of which skills are assessed. Two felt that communication skills are not assessed in exams. Although listening questions have been introduced into the NCT, S5 considered them inappropriate because the conversation in the test is too artificial. Guest (2007) argues that NCT has never tried to assess communicative skills. However, Kawano (2004) clearly articulates that the listening test was introduced to assess communicative ability. Thus, we should consider this student’s criticism carefully. S12, who criticized fixed formats in the exams, said, “*If students acquire test techniques, they can get a high score.*”

Other students raised various issues. For instance, S3 stated that she has encountered the same question in the exam as one she answered in preparing for it. Another student (S12) noted that exams are inappropriate because students can obtain a high score as a result of learning test-taking strategies in their intensive preparation for exams as I said earlier.

5.3.1.2 Teachers' view

Compared with the students, who had clear opinions (the exams are either appropriate or inappropriate), teachers gave more mixed opinions (see Table 12). In addition, more teachers were in favor of the present exams in general, and only five thought of them as inappropriate.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Appropriate	13	2
Assess ability needed for university	4	2
Vocabulary level is appropriate	3	1
Assess information processing ability	2	
Assess achievement appropriately	1	
Assess English as an academic subject appropriately	1	
Assess students' intelligence appropriately	1	
See correlation between the scores of regular exams and university entrance exams	1	
No reason mentioned	1	
Total	13	3
Partially appropriate	8	1
Appropriate parts		
Vocabulary and grammar level are appropriate	1	
Amount and difficulty are appropriate in NCT	1	1
Assess basic English ability	1	
Assess basic English ability in NCT and reading and writing skills in an individual test	1	
Assess vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills appropriately	1	
Questions are appropriate	2	
No reason mentioned	1	
Total	8	1
Inappropriate parts		
Levels of some individual exams are too high	2	1
Translation questions are inappropriate	2	
Discrete grammar questions are inappropriate	2	
Do not assess advanced level English ability	1	
Need more questions that assess practical English ability	1	
Do not assess communication skills		

Pronunciation questions are inappropriate	1	
Multiple-choice questions are inappropriate	1	
Total	11	1
Inappropriate	5	2
Do not assess speaking skills	2	1
Gap exists between contents learned in high school and tested for in exams	1	
Multiple-choice questions are not appropriate	1	1
The purpose is only to select students	1	
Total	5	2
Other	4	0
Don't know	1	0

Table 12. Teachers' perceptions of the appropriateness of the English entrance exams

Thirteen teachers (42%) regard English entrance exams as appropriate and eight categories were identified. According to four teachers, English entrance exams are appropriate because each university has different criteria, and assess particular English skills each university would like to check for in their applicants. Three among the four teachers referred to reading skills as necessary in university and did not refer to other skills. English reading is a required subject for freshmen in most universities. These teachers probably imagine that their students need to learn English as an academic subject in university rather than for other purposes.

Three assessed exams as appropriate simply because the vocabulary level is appropriate. Two stated that the number of reading passages appearing in the exams require students to process information rapidly, which assesses students' English ability properly. Judging from the above and other reasons, teachers seem to teach English as knowledge, not as a means for communication. This is why they consider the contents in tests as satisfactory in assessing students' knowledge. T3 even complained about listening tests, as follows:

Students cannot get a high score in listening parts unless they have an experience of studying abroad. This is why it is unfair to assess listening skills in exams. No other subjects ask students to learn by ear.

This statement indicates that the teacher accepts the examination culture as natural, and thinks of learning English as an academic subject rather than for communication. The

teacher's view also reflects Japanese cultural values and beliefs in which effort, diligence, and memory are considered virtues (Stapleton, 1995). T3 might think that listening tests do not reflect the effort of students who work hard to memorize a lot of vocabulary and concentrate on exercises. In contrast, students who have stayed abroad can easily get a high score in listening without making an effort.

Eight teachers who assessed exams as partially appropriate described similar reasons (seven categories) to the teachers who regarded English exams as appropriate. Concerning the inappropriate parts, eight categories were identified. Teachers pointed out a difficulty in that exams are set by each university; some researchers also point this out (e.g., Kimura & Visgatis, 1996; Kikuchi, 2006). Dai complained in the interview that some exams questions are too difficult:

Exams in some universities are too difficult. They ask their applicants to read specialized content which their university students read. I understand that universities need to select applicants in their exams. Even so, they should set exam questions appropriate for high school students.

In addition, translation questions and discrete grammar points are criticized. Although Guest (2000) claims that these are no longer popular, such questions still exist, as the teachers pointed out. Other criticisms are that entrance exams do not assess communication skills or students' real-life command of English. For example, T22 argued:

Exams assess partial skills, but integrative skills are not assessed. Vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills are assessed, but receptive skills such as writing and speaking skills and communication skills are not assessed...I have my students acquire skills to solve questions in exams rather than English skills for communication necessary in society.

Relating to this, T5 claimed that multiple-choice pronunciation questions included in NCT do not assess whether students pronounce a certain word accurately.

Finally, only five teachers regarded exams as inappropriate and four categories were

identified. It was surprising that only a very small number of teachers regarded exams as appropriate. Two teachers commented that speaking skills are not assessed. T16 suggested that these skills should be assessed, although it may be difficult to measure them due to limitations in financing and human resources. One (T17) pointed out that there is a gap between contents learned in high school and in exams, and she cannot follow the curriculum guidelines set up by MEXT in preparing her students for exams in prestigious universities. Another teacher (T31) noted that exams act as a gatekeeper for university entrance rather than assessing students' English ability appropriately. This relates to later findings about exams used as a gatekeeper and will be discussed in section 5.4.3.

5.3.2 Discrepancy between the purposes of foreign language teaching in high school and English entrance exams

In section 5.3.1, I have presented and discussed students and teachers' perceptions of the contents of English exams in general. Here, I will focus on their views on English exams when they consider foreign language instruction in high schools presented by MEXT.

5.3.2.1 Students' views

About 70% of students pointed out a clear-cut discrepancy between English entrance exams and the purposes of foreign language instruction (see Table 13). Most students claimed that this is because students' practical communication abilities are not assessed in exams. Exams assess "*only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary*" (S23). In addition, "*communicative abilities do not mean reading abilities assessed in exams*" (S20). Mai thought that both NCT and exams created by each university are problematic since they emphasize reading and writing skills. According to her, communication abilities cannot be assessed only through those skills, In fact, she did not do well in listening tests in the exams, although she was able to read well.

Likewise, four students who pointed out a discrepancy also claimed that receptive skills such as understanding information and the speaker or writer's intentions and deepening the understanding of language and culture are assessed, but productive skills such as expressing their own ideas are not assessed in exams. In order to assess more productive aspects of communication in exams, Ken suggests that oral speaking tests or group discussions should be introduced into the exams in addition to paper tests. At

the same time, he understands the difficulty of doing so in terms of costs and human resources.

Lastly, only four students claimed that there is no or little discrepancy. However, their reasons (four categories) are not persuasive or evident. For two students, the reading skills assessed in exams show practical communication skills. One student (S10) simply noted that “*I acquired communicative skills to some extent,*” but we do not know what he really meant by this.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
No/little discrepancy	4	0
Assessed acquired communicative ability	1	
Assessed skills of understanding	1	
Assessed practical ability by reading	1	
No reason mentioned	1	
Total	4	0
Some discrepancy	4	1
Assessed some abilities, but not others	4	1
Total	4	1
Clear-cut discrepancy	25	5
Communication abilities are not assessed	24	5
No reason mentioned	1	
Total	25	5
Don't know	1	0
No answer	1	0
Other	1	0

Table 13. Students' views on the discrepancy between English entrance exams and the purposes of foreign language instruction

5.3.2.2 Teachers' views

Compared with students' opinions, those of teachers are more diverse (see Table 14). As with the students, the 12 teachers (38%) who pointed out a clear-cut discrepancy remarked that communicative abilities are not assessed in exams. At the same time, some teachers argued that since such skills cannot be assessed in paper exams, speaking tests or other means of assessment should be employed. Hiroto argued in the interview that communicative abilities and abilities assessed in exams are very different:

Students can solve questions in NCT if they have test-taking strategies. They can also solve questions in exams created by each university to some extent. Trends of questions are similar every year, thus I teach my students test-taking strategies, not have them acquire communicative abilities.

As for teachers who see some discrepancy (32%), they have similar opinions to the students. Many of the teachers point out that the productive skills described in the purposes of foreign language instruction are not assessed in entrance exams, while receptive skills are. T27 pointed out that it is difficult to assess productive skills in paper tests. In addition, T15 even doubted whether practical communicative abilities, such as students expressing their own ideas, can be assessed; this respondent pointed out various limitations such as having few testers who can assess such skills, and assessing such skills fairly. Another (T18) wondered if a “positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages” can or needs to be assessed in the first place. T19 pointed out that exams are mainly used to select applicants; thus, the purpose will be never reflected in the exams.

Finally, six teachers commented that there is no or little discrepancy, and seven categories were identified. T10 said that even if communicative abilities themselves are not assessed, the knowledge that is the basis of such abilities is assessed. T26 stated that NCT is drawn up in consideration of the Course of Study, and it is not necessary to assess practical communicative abilities because these are ambiguous expressions.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
No/little discrepancy	6	1
Assess communicative abilities in writing and listening	1	
Assess knowledge	1	
Assess some abilities at least	1	
NCT is carefully designed	1	
NCT is drawn up considering the Course of Study	1	
Various formats and topics are used	1	
Mass media say so		1
Total	6	1
Some discrepancy	10	2
Assess some abilities, but do not assess other abilities	9	1
Exams are means of selection	1	
NCT assess basic abilities properly, but exams created by		

different universities are diverse.		1
Total	10	2
Clear-cut discrepancy	12	3
Communication abilities are not assessed	11	2
Students' levels are too diverse.		1
No reason mentioned	1	
Total	12	3
Other	4	

Table 14. Teachers' views of the discrepancy between English entrance exams and the purposes of foreign language teaching

5.3.3 Necessity of the English entrance exams

I found that students and teachers criticized the contents of exams, and pointed out the discrepancy between the purposes of foreign language instruction in the *Course of Study* and English exams. In this section, we discuss teachers and students' opinions related to the necessity of the English university entrance exams.

5.3.3.1 Students' views

Despite the criticism of the English exams themselves, a majority of students (77%) agreed that English tests are necessary in university entrance exams and ten categories were identified (see Table 15).

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Necessary	28	6
English is a required subject in high school	6	1
English is necessary in society	6	1
For a global society	3	2
English is necessary in university	3	
English is necessary to get employment	1	
To assess English ability	1	1
To communicate with foreigners	1	
To cultivate new perspectives and critical thinking	1	
To motivate students to study English	1	1
No reason mentioned	5	
Total	28	6
Not necessary	2	0
English not considered as a language	1	
Only assesses ability to answer questions efficiently	1	
Total	2	0
Depends	6	0
If a student enters a department that requires English	5	

If a university puts emphasis on English	1	
Total	6	0

Table 15. Students' views of the necessity of the English test in university entrance exams

Although some students explained why English tests are necessary, as I intended, others explained why studying English itself is necessary. For six students, it is natural that English tests are included in entrance exams because English is a required subject in high school. If we employ Gardner and Lambert's (1972) classification of motivation, students study English due to an instrumental motivation. Similarly, the necessity of learning English as a required subject, for those who pursue a related major in university, and the necessity of English to get employment refer to instrumental motivations. On the other hand, only one student gave a reason related to integrative motivation, "to communicate with a foreigner." The second and third themes are rather vague, and cannot be classified into any kind of motivation. Six students had a vague idea that English is necessary in society. For instance, S29 commented, "*English is necessary in society. Students will not study English if they are not forced to study, so English tests should be included in exams.*" Rina also had a vague image that people will need English in society some day in the future. She claimed in the interview:

English is a common language in the world. After we go out into the society after entrance exams, we will definitely need English somewhere. Students need to study in high school to some extent by the time they take entrance exams. Otherwise, students will have difficulty in using English when they need it in society.

As the above excerpts show that students have an ambiguous idea that English necessary in society but do not express when and what they need for it clearly.

"Global society" stated by three students is another phrase which shows students' vague idea. According to S32, acquiring basic communicative ability is necessary for a global society as minimum knowledge. Akira, who also felt that English is necessary in global society, described his view that all students should study English in high school.

He claimed in the interview:

We cannot cultivate communication abilities in studying for exams. We study grammar and vocabulary. Even if we cannot communicate in English, we acquire basic knowledge. In this way, we can read English at least.

The contemporary internationalization movement is conspicuous for its longevity and ubiquity in Japan (Lincicome, 1998), and internationalization has been “a pre-eminent, long-term goal of the Japanese Ministry of Education” (Fujita & Maher, 2008, p. 395). Although students are familiar with the phrase “global/international society,” they do not use English in their daily life. As a result, it is assumed that students have an ambiguous idea that English is important and learning English for exams may be useful in the future.

5.3.3.2 Teachers’ views

Like the students, quite a few teachers (83%) admitted that English entrance exams are necessary (see Table 16). As with the students, some teachers explained the reasons why English exams are necessary, while others explained why studying English itself is necessary. As reasons, 11 categories were identified.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Necessary	26	6
To motivate students to study English	9	4
Because English is necessary in university	7	1
Because English is necessary in society	3	1
Because of a global society	2	1
To cultivate critical thinking	2	
As means of communication	1	
As knowledge	1	
To become an educated person	1	
To assess achievement in high school	1	1
To keep up with international society	1	
Because English may be necessary in the future		1
Total	28	9
Not necessary	1	0
Japanese is more important	1	
Total	1	0

Depends	3	0
If a university requires English	3	
No reason mentioned	1	
Total	4	0
Other opinion	4	0
No answer	1	0

Table 16. Teacher' views of the necessity of the English test in the university entrance exams

The reason referred most often is to motivate students to study English. For nine teachers, university entrance exams are necessary to motivate students in this way. We understand that teachers are greatly affected by entrance exams; however, they also seem to use entrance exams to force students to study English. In an EFL environment such as Japan, compared with ESL environments, it may be difficult for students to study for integrative reasons. In fact, according to Takagi's (2003) survey, the strongest motivation for Japanese high school students to learn English is to pass an exam. T18 claimed that his students do not understand the reason for learning English, so an entrance exam is a goal that is easy for students to understand. Similarly, Dai admitted that exams play an important role to motivate students to learn English. Although he believes that English is necessary in society and for employment as an international language, he has difficulty in making his students realize the importance of English. Thus, he feels that English should be a required subject to motivate students to study it as an immediate goal. Although teachers can encourage students to study English for integrative or intrinsic reasons rather than using exams as a means to motivate students, they tend to rely on exams, probably because both students and teachers are strongly influenced by them.

The second most frequently stated reason is that English is necessary in university. More concretely, teachers commented that students take an English class as a required subject, read English articles, or have an opportunity to study abroad. Moreover, T20 noted, "*Since university becomes more and more internationalized, students need to keep their English ability for communication.*" Other reasons why English (exams) are needed included "*to cultivate critical thinking,*" "*as a means of communication,*" "*to be an educated person,*" and "*to keep up with international society.*" These reasons imply that teachers have an ambiguous idea that English will be necessary for students in the future. However, it may be also true that students do not have an urgent necessity or

strong motivation to learn English judging from the reasons why the English exams are necessary raised by their students such as a required subject in high school, necessary in society, and necessary for a global society; thus, teachers regard English exams as a good way to motivate students to learn English.

5.3.4 Summary discussion

The results show that students have contradictory opinions about the entrance exams themselves. Some students accept current paper tests as appropriate in assessing their English ability, while others analyze entrance exams critically and point out various problems with them, such as format and the skills assessed. The students who criticized current exams have a critical view about exams and are clearly aware that tests determine their future (Shohamy, 2001). They warn that there is a possibility that students will get a high score only through the acquisition of test-taking strategies. If students who know test-taking strategies well can get a high score, it is unfair and violates fairness standards. Fair standards are one of four standards proposed by Nevo & Shohamy (1986) which are intended “to ensure that a testing method is conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard to the welfare of tested individuals as well as those affected by test results” (p. 151). Such exams are also unfair in that students who can afford to go to preparatory schools have a better chance to learn test-taking strategies and get a high score in exams.

Compared with the students, more teachers accepted the current exams as relatively appropriate. They may not have developed critical views toward entrance exams consciously because they are so used to preparing their students for entrance exams. Moreover, they may take it for granted that they should follow the hidden goal of their school, that is, to pass the entrance exam in their exam-oriented society as Murphy & Sato’s (2003) study shows. I understand that some students concentrate on preparing for exams and do not think of exams critically as the highest stakeholder. However, teachers who have more experience and authority should not neglect the rights of test-takers and should not simply accept their role as a teacher who prepares their students for exams.

Although both students and teachers have different views concerning the appropriateness of exams themselves a majority of them pointed out a clear-cut

discrepancy between English entrance exams and the purposes of foreign language instruction. The main problem is that communicative abilities are not developed in English classes despite the fact that communication skills are emphasized in the purposes of foreign language instruction. Ichige (2006), who analyzed three NCTs, found that there is an evident contradiction between what NCT intends to measure and what the MEXT aims to develop in students. Guest (2007), who criticizes Ichige, claims that MEXT encourages universities to measure students' communicative ability in their entrance exams, not in NCT. The results of this study indicate that communicative skills are assessed neither properly in NCT nor in exams created by universities. Wall (1996) claims that examinations should reflect the full curriculum in order to improve the examination system. This suggests that communicative abilities should be developed in the school curriculum as MEXT intends and should be assessed in entrance exams.

I have stated that students and teachers have made some complaints about entrance exams. Nevertheless, a considerable number of students and teachers accept that English entrance exams are needed. It seems that they consider English entrance exams to be unavoidable, and use them as a major motivator to study English for instrumental purposes. In addition, they have an ambiguous view that English may be useful in the future. From a different perspective, they cannot imagine a situation in which they would not teach or study English for exams because the university entrance exams are at the center of the educational culture, and intertwined with teachers and learners' perceptions of their classroom experiences and local school cultures (Gorsuch, 2000).

5.4 Research question 4

Research Question 4 was: *How do students and teachers perceive the use and consequences of the English entrance exam for education and society?*

I present the results according to the following two categories in section 5.4.1-5.4.3: the reflection of educational policy in the entrance exams and the influence of entrance exams on students' life and future. I summarize the results in section 5.4.3.

5.4.1 Reflection of educational policy in the entrance exams

In this section, I present and discuss the finding on how students and teachers perceived the reflection of educational policies in the English entrance examinations

for universities and MEXT. In the questionnaire, I presented the most recent policy, “Goals to Cultivate ‘Japanese with English Abilities,’” as an example.

5.4.1.1 Students’ views

Twenty-five students (67%) said that entrance exams do not reflect the educational policy presented as an example in the questionnaire, while only five students (14%) said that they do reflect it (see Table 17). Overall, the reasons that entrance exams do not reflect educational policies are related to communicative abilities (six categories). Although developing communicative abilities is emphasized in the policy, students feel that these are not really assessed in entrance exams or promoted in high school curriculums.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Reflect educational policies	5	1
Level of the exams reflects the policies	2	
Contents of exams reflect the policies	1	
Level and contents of the exams reflect the policies	1	
Basic communicative abilities are acquired in high school	1	1
No reason mentioned		
Total	5	1
Do not reflect educational policies	25	5
Developing communicative abilities is ignored in the high school curriculum	12	2
Paper tests cannot assess communicative abilities	6	
I cannot communicate well	2	
Few high school graduates acquire communicative abilities	1	
English for exams is irrelevant to communication	1	2
English is not important for some people		1
No reason mentioned	3	
Total	25	5
Don’t know	2	0
No answer	4	0

Table 17. Students’ views of the relationship between university entrance exams and educational policies

The reason referred to most is that developing communicative abilities is ignored in the high school curriculum. This result is similar to the one presented and discussed in the section 5.3.2. Both students and teachers claimed that clear-cut discrepancy exists

between the purposes of foreign language instruction and English entrance exams. Here again, students stated the same issue. For instance, S24 claimed “*I only studied for entrance exams in high school, and did not acquire communicative skills.*” Similarly, S7 commented:

I was able to communicate about daily lives when I was in junior high school because we had a communicative class. However, we rarely had a class to develop communicative abilities. I even lost communication skills I acquired in junior high school.

As some students among the twelve students point out, few opportunities are offered for developing communicative abilities in high school because of the preparation for entrance exams; thus, a discrepancy exists between educational policies and the entrance exams.

The second reason listed is that paper tests cannot assess the communicative abilities described in the policy. For instance, S28 claimed, “*passing entrance exams does not mean that a test-taker has communicative abilities.*” According to Mai, who clearly distinguished between English for exams and for communication, her high school English teacher often said, “*These expressions are only used for entrance exams*” when her teacher taught English expressions in a writing class.

5.4.1.2 Teachers’ views

Compared with the students, teachers had more diverse views. Eight teachers (26%) acknowledged that entrance exams reflect educational policies, while 17 teachers did not (see Table 18).

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Reflect educational policies	8	2
Exams have been changed	2	1
Exams assess skills required in the policy	2	
Entrance exams will help to promote the policy	1	
Judging from the level of the exams	1	
Judging from vocabulary level	1	
Students acquire required skills in studying for exams	1	1

Total	8	2
Do not reflect educational policies	17	4
Communicative abilities are not assessed	7	2
Only some students reach the level required in the policies	3	1
Speaking skills are not assessed	2	
Writing should be emphasized more	1	
Exams are only to select students	1	
Levels in exams are not appropriate	1	1
Some exam questions are inappropriate	1	
No reason mentioned	17	4
Total		
Other opinion	6	0

Table 18. Teachers' views of the relationship between university entrance exams and educational policies

Teachers raised various reasons why they felt that entrance exams reflect educational policies and six categories were identified. Two teachers claimed that exams have been changed in the past twenty years, as some researchers argue (e.g., Abunai, 1997; Oka, 2000; and Uto and Yanase, 2000). One of the teachers pointed out that the introduction of listening is a significant change, and reflects educational policies that focus on the promotion of communicative abilities. Another teacher who supported recent educational policies expressed her expectation that exams would help to promote the policies. Another teacher (T30) said:

Students will get skills required in the policies as the result of studying for exams. For example, they will increase their vocabulary, be able to read a certain amount of English in a limited time, and increase their listening skills. These skills will enable the students to pass the second level or the pre-second level of the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP)."

From her comments, she seem to think that students' English ability required in the policy is assessed only by paper tests.

On the other hand, those who found that entrance exams do not reflect educational policies also named several reasons for this and eight categories were identified. Seven teachers noted that communicative abilities are not assessed in exams. T22 argued that entrance exams have not changed much since new policies were introduced. She felt

that the Japanese do not need to acquire the English skills stated in the “Goals to Cultivate ‘Japanese with English Abilities.’” She noted:

I understand that improving communicative abilities is essential. However, I do not get a real sense of it because I don't encounter a situation when I need these abilities. Reading and writing have been more emphasized than listening and speaking for a long time. It will take time to change this since it is a kind of cultural matter. Since reading and writing are also important, not only communication but also reading and writing should be given equal importance.

Likewise, Mio said in the interview that discrepancies exist between what is required in the entrance exams and what the policies aim toward.

Entrance exams require academic English, not practical English which emphasizes communication. When we consider the contents of a high school textbook, we will never be able to develop students' communicative abilities MEXT aims at in their policies.

Two teachers complained that speaking skills are not assessed, and one teacher said that writing should be emphasized more. Both issues are related to communicative abilities, which are not fully assessed in the current entrance exams.

Three teachers also argued that only excellent students reach the level required in the policies. T3 noted:

The majority of junior high school students already fail in English learning...Junior high school students who pass the third level of the STEP are assessed as bright students. High school students who pass the second level of the STEP are also assessed as bright students. Only the bright students can achieve the level MEXT aims at in their policies.

One teacher said that university teachers regard exams as a tool to select students. Relating to this, Akari claimed in the interview that some exam questions are not appropriate and suggests that these inappropriate questions should be altered, even if

the exams are used to select students:

If exam questions are easy and appropriate, all the students will get a high score. Since exams are to select applicants, I understand that universities ask students to answer very detailed grammar questions. However, if there are too many such questions, it is not acceptable. When I see a lot of questions which are never used in daily lives as native speakers say, I feel sad. It is true that students will never acquire communicative skills if they prepare to answer such questions.

5.4.2 Influence of English entrance exams on students' life and future

In this section, how students and teachers perceive the influence of English entrance exams on students' life and future is discussed. Looking at the results in details, most participants seem to feel how preparing for entrance exams or studying English for exams will influence students' life and future.

5.4.2.1 Students' views

According to the results of the questionnaire (see Table 19), 20 students (56%) said that entrance exams have some influence on their lives and future, while 13 students (36%) claimed that they have little influence. In the interview, all the students pointed out some influence on their own lives and futures.

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=36)	Interview (N=6)
Has influence	20	6
Expand one's future	12	4
Motivate students to study English	4	1
Motivate students to study for exams	2	
Personal development	1	
Negative feelings toward English (Negative)	1	1
Total	20	6
Has little influence	13	0
Studying English is only to pass the exams	4	
Memorizing only for exams	3	
Exams are only to check English ability	1	
No difference between those who study and those who don't study	1	
People forget English	1	

English is necessary only for some people	1	
No reason described	2	
Total	13	0
Depends	1	0
Don't know	1	0
No answer	1	0

Table 19. Students' views of the influence of entrance exams on students' life and future

In the former group, all the participants except one student referred to a positive influence. This is not surprising, because they are all English education majors and succeeded in their entrance exams. Four categories were identified for positive influence, and they were expand one's future, motivate students to study English, motivate students to study for exams, and personal development. Ten students said that studying English for the entrance exams expands one's future, including one's choice of profession. S22 commented:

For those who want to get a job where English skills are needed, acquiring English knowledge before entering a university is beneficial. Even for other people, acquiring English skills will be important because the English language is around us.

Another student (S34) described that studying for exams may lead students to choose an English-related major. Rina referred to the importance of English in entrance exams in deciding one's future from a different viewpoint. She explained in the interview:

Whether or not a student is good at English has an effect on the choice of a university. If a student is good at English, he/she may choose an English-related major. Even if a student is not good at English, English entrance exams play an important role. Once a student chooses a university, her/his future is also narrowed down to some extent.

As Rina pointed out, English tests play an important role in the exams because many universities require English both in the NCT and second-stage exams held by each university.

Four students noted that the entrance exams motivate students to study for exams. As S2 notes, the existence of entrance exams forces or motivate students to study. Since students can survive without English in a daily life, we cannot deny the fact that students might not study English so hard if English were not required in exams.

Among other reasons, one participant noted that studying for entrance exams leads to students' professional development. More concretely, Akira explained in the interview:

Making efforts not only for English tests but also for entrance exams in general develops students' endurance. In this sense, studying for exams will have some influence on students' future, profession, and so on.

This statement shows the Japanese idea that exams promote virtues such as diligence and persistence (Stapleton, 1995).

Among the students who stated that exams have little influence, four claimed that studying English is only to pass the exams, and does not lead any consequence. These students seemed to regard preparing for entrance exams as part of their high school life, and did not think of it further, since exams are deeply embedded in Japanese culture. Likewise, three said that memorizing English is only for entrance exams and does not have any other influence on their future.

5.4.2.2 Teachers' views

As for the teachers' views, 18 teachers (58%) said that entrance exams have some influence on students' life and future, while only 6 (19%) thought that they had little influence (see Table 20).

Categories	Frequency	
	Questionnaire (N=31)	Interview (N=6)
Have influence	18	5
Decide success of one's future	7	1
Personal development	3	3
Motivate students to study English	2	
Learn from reading English passages	2	
Acquire English ability needed as a businessman		1
Students may hate English (Negative)	1	

Pressure students (Negative)	1	1
No reason described	2	
Total	18	6
Have little influence	6	1
Exams are only to check English ability	2	1
Students just concentrate on exercises for exams	1	
No reason described	3	
Total	6	1
Don't know	3	0
No answer	4	0

Table 20. Teacher' views of the influence of entrance exams on students' life and future

The majority of those who remarked the influence of entrance exams raised positive aspects and five categories were identified. Four teachers commented that studying English for entrance exams expands one's future. This was also the most common theme in the results of the students' questionnaires. T3 pointed out the importance of English for entrance exams:

Whether or not a student gets a good score in exams has a great influence on students' choice of university. Also in choosing a profession, students who are good at English have a broader choice such as an international career. On the other hand, students who are not good at English will have a narrower choice within Japan.

The teachers' views imply that students' success in life hinges on their success in the entrance exam (Brown, 1995b).

Three teachers referred to personal development. For example, Keiko considered that the process of preparing for the entrance exams leads to students' personal development. She said in the questionnaire:

Especially, students who are not good at English make an effort to achieve a certain level. Students may not have an opportunity to use English in the future. However, it is important to continue to make an effort to overcome difficulty or make an effort patiently even if grades don't improve so easily. These experiences will lead to students' confidence.

Keiko added in the interview that she always encourages her students to study hard for the exams by saying that “*You cannot do well in your life only by doing what you like.*” Her view reflects Japanese virtues such as diligence and persistence which were also discussed in 5.4.2.1.

Two teachers pointed out that studying for exams motivates students to learn English. Two other teachers said that students learn something from reading English passages, such as differences in the structures of the English and Japanese languages, cultural differences, and global issues.

Although most of the categories were positive, as I described, there were also two negative categories (students may hate English and pressure students). One teacher (T20) pointed out that students may hate English. He stated that cramming for exams may contribute to students’ hating English. He suggested that we should reflect on why we need to study English in the first place. Another teacher (T27) felt that studying for English tests might put pressure on the students, except for the three or so out of one hundred students who really like English. Relating to this, although Akari agreed that studying for exams will be meaningful for youngsters, she also admitted that there are some harmful effects. She gave examples of students who experienced negative effects in her school:

One student had an emotional breakdown because of too much hard work. Another student suffered from her parent’s pressure. Another student became selfish. He skipped classes which are not directly relevant to exams or even skipped school to prepare for exams at home.

These examples may be extreme, but they illustrate how much pressure is placed on students as they prepare for their entrance exams.

There were also teachers who felt that entrance exams have little influence on students’ life or future. For two teachers, exams only check English ability. One said that students just concentrate on doing exercises for exams in preparation, including checking vocabulary and acquiring grammar knowledge, which is not likely to affect their future. Mio said in the interview that students only achieve limited English ability

in preparing for entrance exams:

I don't think that English ability in preparing for exams at the high school level will be useful in their profession. What students learn in university is much more important and directly related to their profession.

5.4.3 Summary discussion

The results of the study indicate that educational policies do not have a significant impact on either entrance exams or English teaching and learning in high school. Shohamy (2001) argues that tests are sometimes used as a means of implementing and manipulating various policies. However, this is not the case in the Japanese context. Recent Japanese educational policies aim to promote students' practical communication abilities in English. Moreover, MEXT intends to promote them by also emphasizing the importance of communication in the new *Course of Study* for upper secondary schools implemented in 2003 (MEXT, 2003b). After current educational policies and the new *Course of Study* were officially announced, a listening test was introduced to assess communicative abilities. This is one of the reforms called "improvement in the evaluation system for selecting school and university applicants" stated in an action plan entitled "Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'" (Tanabe, 2003). However, the listening test does not seem to have had a powerful impact on changing students' and teachers' classroom behavior. In addition, the entrance exams created by each university have not changed much, either. This result is also supported by Kikuchi & Browne's (2009) study. They found that students felt that their teachers did not implement the goals of the *Course of Study* effectively in their class because the teachers are under overwhelming pressure from entrance exams. MEXT usually implement policies from the top-down without listening to the voices of students and teachers sincerely. Considering this, it is not surprising that educational policies do not have a significant impact on the reform of university entrance exams.

As for the influence of English university entrance exams on students' lives and futures, both students and teachers in this study identified a relatively positive influence. However, the results revealed that English exams function as gatekeeping devices for access to universities and professions (Ross, 2008). As Shohamy (1998a) states,

English entrance exams play an essential role in deciding Japanese students' future. If a student is good at English, it is likely that he/she will have more chances to succeed in the academic world. In a sense, all the students participating in this study are successful students who passed an entrance exam, thus many of them might have only referred to the positive aspects concerning the influence of entrance exams. The Japanese seem to have a belief that selection by entrance exam is meritocratic and fair (Fujita, 1999) and test scores tend to be regarded as neutral and independent from the sociopolitical context surrounding Japan (Menken, 2008). However, exams exercise enormous power over students' lives and we should not neglect unsuccessful students who fail in exams and struggle with the failure.

The results also uncover that exams are deeply embedded in Japanese education, and preparing for exams is part of students' and high school teachers' lives. Both students and teachers believe that studying for exams is a good opportunity to nurture students' persistence and diligence as well as to train mental fortitude (Tsuneyoshi, 1990). As a result, some participants take university entrance examinations for granted without being aware of their rights as those affected by the exams, rights which include viewing exams critically and questioning their use as, Shohamy (2001) argues.

I have presented and discussed the results of the questionnaires and interviews in this section. I used tables and quotations to support the interpretation of my data. In the next chapter, I discuss implications and recommendations for test-takers and testers in order to consider how we should improve current practices, on the basis of the results of the study. This is followed by an overview of how this study has contributed to existing knowledge. I also present suggestions for possible areas of future research and presents conclusion.

Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusion

This chapter opens with a brief summary of the findings of four research questions. Section 6.2 presents a discussion of implications and recommendations based on the results of the study. This is followed by an overview of how this study contributes to existing knowledge in section 6.3, and suggestions for possible areas of future research in section 6.4. The chapter ends with a conclusion in section 6.5 and personal reflections in section 6.6.

6.1 A summary of the findings of the research questions

6.1.1 Research Question 1: *What are students' perceptions of the influence of university English entrance exam on their learning English in high school?*

The results show that students perceive that university entrance exams influence their learning English both in and out of school. The students are particularly concerned about the skills assessed by exams, and thus concentrate on preparing for the exams. On the other hand, they disregard development of communication skills, which are emphasized in the English curriculum set by MEXT but are not relevant to the exams. The results also show that some students feel a psychological burden while preparing for and taking these exams. For example, they stated they felt anxiety and suffered from extreme pressure, found studying English for the exams boring, and lost interest in English as a result of studying for the exams. Although all the participants like English and hope to be English teachers, half of the students have negative feelings towards the exams. This indicates the strong negative effect of the exams on students' emotions.

6.1.2 Research Question 2: *What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of the university English entrance exam on their teaching of English?*

The results demonstrate that entrance exams have a strong washback effect on teachers and that high-stake exams definitely determine much of the content of English classes and corresponding curriculum. High-stake Japanese university entrance exams require teachers to change their curriculum to prepare students for the exams. In fact, the school curriculum allocates an enormous amount of time for preparing for English exams. In class, teachers teach test-taking skills and the content known to be covered by the tests, use materials that mimic the test formats, and conduct practice tests using

items from the tests themselves. The results also show that teachers are under pressure from various stakeholders. Both students and their parents expect English teachers to teach for the exams. In addition to pressure from students and parents, teachers receive pressure from their school administrators. The administrators expect teachers to achieve their schools' goals and to improve their reputations by helping as many students as possible pass university exams. In order to meet expectations from various stakeholders, teachers seem to ignore the new guidelines set forth by MEXT, which emphasize communicative ability and concentrate on teaching for exams.

6.1.3 Research Question 3: *What are students and teachers' attitudes toward the English entrance exam in general?*

According to the results, students have contradictory opinions about these entrance exams. Some students accept current paper tests as appropriate in assessing their English ability, while others analyze entrance exams critically and point out various problems with them, such as format and the skills assessed. Compared to the students, more teachers accept the current exams as relatively appropriate. They do not seem consciously critical toward entrance exams because they are so used to preparing their students for these exams. Moreover, they may take for granted that they should follow the hidden goals of their schools, that is, to pass these entrance exams, as part of a Japanese exam-oriented society. Although both students and teachers have different views towards the appropriateness of exams, a majority of them point out the clear-cut discrepancy between English entrance exams and the educational goals set by MEXT. The main problem is that communicative abilities are not developed in English classes, even though communication skills are emphasized in the *Course of Study*.

6.1.4 Research Question 4: *How do students and teachers perceive the use and consequences of the English entrance exam for education and society?*

The results indicate that educational policies do not have a significant impact on either entrance exams or English teaching and learning in high schools. Although MEXT emphasizes the importance of communication in the new *Course of Study*, neither students nor teachers have changed their classroom behaviors, and they continue to disregard communicative skills and teach for the exams. As for the influence of English university entrance exams on students' lives and futures, both students and teachers identify a relatively positive influence. This is mainly because all the students

participating in this study are successful students who like to study English and who already passed an entrance exam. However, the results reveal that English exams function as gatekeeping devices, potentially barring access to universities and professions. In this sense, we should not neglect unsuccessful students who fail exams. The results also uncover that exams are deeply embedded in Japanese education, and that preparing for exams is part of students' and high school teachers' lives. For this reason, some participants take university entrance examinations for granted, without being aware of their rights to view exams critically and question their use.

6.2 Implications and recommendations

In this section I discuss implications and recommendations for test-takers and testers in order to consider how we should improve current practices. The results of the study show that the university entrance examination has a negative washback effect on students' language learning and teachers' teaching in high school. The students feel a psychological burden while preparing for and taking the exam. Likewise, teachers feel pressure from various stakeholders such as students, parents, and administrators. In addition, both students and teachers realize that entrance exams have a great influence on students' lives and futures and that they cannot be avoided in our examination-driven society. If a washback effect on teaching and learning prior to the entrance exam was unavoidable, testers should at least attempt to improve the current entrance exam in order to elicit a positive washback and make use of it for better consequences.

According to Hamp-Lyons (1979) and Shohamy (2001), "test-takers" include students, teachers, principals, and parents, while "testers" include university professors, policy-makers, government agency, and researchers and more. In this section I talk about implications for some test-takers and testers who are the most relevant to my study. In section 6.1.1, I outline implications for students and high school teachers, the stakeholders with most invested in the process. Section 6.1.2 discusses implications for university professors who write questions for the exams. Finally, in section 6.1.3, I will refer to implications for university administrators and officials of the MEXT.

6.2.1 Implications for students and high school teachers

The main implication for students and high school teachers is that they should be

aware of their rights as test-takers. Both students and teachers as test-takers have the right to question the misuse of tests and should be encouraged to develop a critical view toward the exam system (Shohamy, 2001). However, the results of the study showed that many of the participants do not realize their rights. Although some participants already have critical views of the exams, others do not and simply accept current exams without any doubts. One of the main purposes of this study was to raise their critical awareness of them. The study raised the awareness of test-takers who are unaware of their rights as a test-taker to some extent in a sense that I encouraged them to reflect entrance exams from a critical viewpoint. It also provided test-takers with opportunities to express their opinions about the methods and consequences of tests. However, I was not able to raise the critical awareness of all participants fully. It is essential that the public hear the least heard voices of test-takers in order to promote further discussion of improvement of the university entrance education system. Test-takers should not accept the current entrance system as it is and without any questions. More concretely, students should not be ignorant consumers of what the cram schools industry offers to those who take entrance exams. As I discussed in Section 5.1.4 in Chapter 5, preparatory schools play an essential role to prepare the students and earn money from the students. We cannot blame the students for relying on the industry because succeeding in exams decides their important future. However, students should be at least aware that the industry takes money from ignorant students.

Not only students but also high school teachers should be aware that they have their rights as test-takers. Although they do not take tests, they are considered as test-takers in a broad sense because they are affected by the test results (Shohamy, 2001). Thus, they should not concentrate only on preparing their students to pass these exams while forgetting the main purpose of English education in school. Instead, they should be encouraged to develop a critical view of tests and to question their use. Whenever they have an opportunity to express their opinions about current entrance exams or to share their views with testers in private or in public, they should not hesitate to do so and should speak out more strongly to change the exams.

6.2.2 Implication for university professors

It will be difficult to change the entire Japanese university entrance exam system immediately. However, if university professors fulfill their responsibilities as

conscientious testers, they will at least be able to improve English exams in their universities soon. As a result, more and more professors will come to conduct and use the exams properly, and this may contribute to changing the whole system in the long run. Thus, I offer the following suggestions regarding how university professors should work to develop a fairer exam and to become responsible testers.

6.2.2.1 Developing a fair exam

First of all, the English tests should properly assess test-takers' communicative skills, as this will promote a positive washback effect on learning and teaching in high school as well as the school curriculum. A majority of the participants claimed that the current university exams do not fully assess communicative ability. As Wall (1996) claims, examinations should reflect the full curriculum in order to improve the examination system. In other words, communicative skills which are emphasized in the new *Course of Study* should be assessed in entrance exams. Professors should be careful to set questions that assess communicative ability properly and to avoid questions such as asking discrete grammatical points or translation. In addition, they should consider including not only questions that assess grammar and reading skills, but also listening, writing, and speaking skills in their English tests.

Second, test formats should be improved to assess English proficiency more appropriately. Tests should include more open-ended items rather than selected-response items, and should test higher-level cognitive skills, as Heyneman and Ransom (1990) suggest. If using multiple-choice questions is the only way to screen a large number of students in a limited amount of time, the universities should report if their tests are valid and reliable. Murphy (2001) criticizes the fact that no Japanese university openly reports on its exam reliability and validity. If universities openly reported on the reliability and validity of their English tests every year, test-takers would know that their knowledge and ability were being assessed properly. An in-house entrance exam committee usually develops each year's exam, and, understandably, it is a difficult and burdensome task to produce new valid and reliable exams every year. Shizuka, et al. (2006) admit that writing quality multiple-choice item questions is a time-consuming task even for a team of professional item writers. If this is the case, one possibility is to introduce a commercially available standardized test, as Poole (2003) and Yanase (2006) suggest. Also, it would be ideal if workshops

or training opportunities regarding how to create reliable and variable language tests should be provided for university professors.

Third, English tests should not be unreasonably difficult. Some participants in the study mentioned that the English tests are too difficult. In fact, an analysis of the tests by previous researchers shows that the reading passages in the exams are more difficult than those passages found in high school textbooks (Kimura & Visgatis, 1996). Unreasonably difficult tests are unethical for test-takers because they cannot see that the tests truly and accurately assess the ability they purport to test (Punch, 1994). Universities are responsible for proving that their English tests evaluate what students learn. If tests are beyond the high school curriculum, testers should inform students what aspects of English proficiency and aptitude they intend to assess in their exams beforehand. Understanding the purposes of the test, and the intended use of the results, will also promote positive washback (Bailey, 1996).

6.2.2.2 Becoming a responsible tester

The results of the study showed that both students and high school teachers are greatly influenced by entrance exams, and many think that entrance exams should be improved. University professors should listen to these opinions and take them into consideration in order to create a fairer assessment rooted in an awareness of the significant consequences of the tests' impact on test-takers' futures. One of the responsibilities the testers should fulfill is that of "shared responsibility and shared discourse" (Shohamy, 2001, p. 147). The testers, that is, university professors, have been regarded as the authority of testing and test-takers are in a passive position. However, university professors have only limited knowledge of language testing because many of them have not received training in language testing. Thus, testers should make an effort to expand their knowledge in collaboration with test-takers. As one method to share discourse with test-takers, Murphy (2001) suggests an activity to engage university students in critical thinking about the merits of their entrance university exams. Teachers could have students read an article about an entrance exam, reflect on their own entrance exam experiences, and then offer advice to test makers or propose alternatives in the form of writing, and share narratives with their classmates. As follow-up activities, teachers could produce a booklet of entrance exam histories for the class and provide administrators with a copy, or have the students write a letter to

MEXT to ask for changes to the entrance exam. It should be optional for university professors to introduce this kind of activity, but in doing so, they will be able to uncover test-takers' views and enter into a discourse with the test-takers through the activity. Moreover, if they are involved in pre-service teacher education, they will be able to raise students' critical awareness regarding entrance exams. This will encourage pre-service teachers to have a critical view of tests and to question their use.

6.2.3 Implications for university administrators and officials of the MEXT

Although it is essential that university professors who write exam items are conscious of their responsibilities and make an effort to improve the exams, university administrators and officials of the MEXT should also be aware of their responsibilities because their decisions have a greater influence on changes to the university entrance exam system on a macro level.

The first recommendation is for university administrators and officials of the MEXT to be aware of the perceptions and attitudes that students and teachers have towards the influence of entrance exams and the exam itself. The results of this study demonstrated that entrance exams have a strong washback effect on both teachers and students in terms of materials, learning, teaching, curriculum, and affective domains. Also, the majority of participants perceive discrepancies between recent educational policies and English entrance exams. Although recent Japanese educational policies aim to promote students' practical communication abilities in English, such abilities will not be promoted unless the university entrance exams are changed.

Second, university administrators and officials of the MEXT should have the research capacity to make sure that exams are reliable and variable. Also they should ensure that exam results are believable, credible, and fair to test takers and score users (Bailey, 1996). As Shohamy (2001) suggests, empirical data should be collected to examine using different criteria: utility, accuracy, feasibility, and fairness standards.

Third, it is recommended that university administrators and officials of the MEXT consider a wider variety of methods of selection than paper tests alone. Many universities already use different kinds of admission selections methods, but many students are still selected mainly by the exam. Thus, methods other than the exam are

not such an attractive choice at present. Students should be provided with more choices for admission selection methods. Moreover, we should consider whether or not the method that selects students only by their entrance exam scores is appropriate. None of the major admission tests is used as the sole admission criteria in the United States (Brown, 1995). University administrators should reconsider whether one-shot test scores really judge students' academic ability. The tests are used to decide important issues in students' lives, and testers should be well aware of this fact. In addition, one-shot exams force students to devote their time to extensive, often tortuous preparations. This is one reason why Japanese students become tired of learning and lose their motivation to learn English by the time they enter a university. Thus, the introduction of a holistic evaluation method using multiple criteria, such as academic records, essays, letters of recommendation, and interviews should be considered in the future.

6.3 Contribution to existing knowledge

The present study has contributed to existing knowledge under the following two points: contribution to the language testing area in Japan and recommendations for changing entrance exams at the practical level.

First, the study contributed to the language testing area in that the results of the research provided a new perspective for discussing the issue of entrance exams. As was described in Chapter 1, there have been few studies of the problems associated with university entrance exams conducted within the framework of the critical paradigm, since the scientific paradigm is dominant in the research area of language testing. Also, few studies have been conducted into the ethical aspects of language testing. This study will be a good example for other researchers to learn what qualitative studies conducted within the critical framework look like, and will encourage them to conduct research along similar lines. This will lead to a challenging of the positivist view and expand the language testing research area in the Japanese context.

The second major area of contribution to testing knowledge in Japan is that the results of the study indicated how university entrance exams should be improved on a practical level. Although the results of the study are not likely to have an immediate impact on changes to the entire entrance exam system, the study has shown how

students and high school teachers perceive entrance exams. Based on the recommendations drawn from the results, each university professor, including me, will realize the problems related to the current English entrance exam system and consider some of the aspects pointed out in this study by the test takers when devising new exam questions.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

This study has a limitation in a sense that the analysis and interpretation of the results illuminated a reality presented by 36 first-year university students in national universities and 31 English teachers in high schools. Although the results can be transferrable to other contexts, they cannot be generalisable, and further research is recommended. In section 6.3.1, I discuss the need to widen the participant pool. Section 6.3.2 suggests the use of other research methods. Finally, in section 6.3.3, I suggest the need for more research on language testing in the critical paradigm.

6.4.1 Need for research on a variety of participants

First, we should seek the opinions and views of a wider variety of participants in order to capture a balanced picture about the issue of entrance exams. In this study, the participants were first-year university students who have decided to become secondary school English language teachers. I selected these particular students purposefully to raise their critical awareness of the issues concerning the entrance exam that they will face once they become English teachers. I was able to achieve this initial purpose to some extent, and it was meaningful for me to listen to their thoughts. However, all of the students in this study like English and successfully passed entrance exams. As a result, many of them expressed a relatively positive view towards the current entrance exams. For future research, it would be meaningful to hear the voices of students who are not good at English or who failed the exams.

This study focused on students and teachers in order to make their voices heard in public. Rea-Dickens (1997) mentions that language testers should be concerned with the involvement of all interested parties during the process of test development and test use in order to make the tests more ethical. In this sense, it will be also meaningful to inform the testers about students' and teachers' views of entrance exams obtained in this study and to investigate how they view the development of a more critical view of

testing. In this way, the testers will become aware of the tests' social consequences after they learn the perceptions of the highest stakeholders. In addition, we should seek the views of other stakeholders, such as parents, principals, and policy-makers, and administrators in preparatory school in order to foster a constructive and open discussion of how to improve current exam practices.

6.4.2 Consideration of using other research methods

I regard the questionnaires and interviews used for collecting data as useful and replicable for other future studies. However, as mentioned in Chapter 4, there was a limitation to the use of the questionnaire survey. Although I carefully constructed the questionnaire, some wording was inappropriate and ambiguous. Also, I sometimes had difficulty understanding what participants meant in their answers to the questionnaires. Compared with the questionnaire, I found that I was able to get much richer data and understand what people wanted to say more deeply in the interviews. In future studies, an in-depth interview can be used as the main source of data collection, to allow researchers to explore fully what underlies all the factors, such as respondents' opinions and feelings (Richie & Lewis, 2003). In addition, I suggest employing other methods, such as observation and the analysis of documents. For example, researchers can observe English classes and compare what students and teachers believe and perceive concerning preparation for entrance exams and what they actually do in class. As for using documents as data, researchers can analyze documents related to university entrance exams and policies for English education published by MEXT and policy-makers in order to examine how the policy-makers have attempted to improve the university entrance exam system in relation to educational policies.

6.4.3 Need for more research on language testing in the critical paradigm

Finally, more studies on issues related to entrance exams should be conducted using a critical paradigm. This study is a small-scale one, and its findings may not be significant. However, the results of the study are valuable because the study empowered the participants in that the voices of the highest stakeholders—the test-takers and high school teachers—were made public. If this kind of study becomes more popular, the chance that these stakeholders' voices will reach testers will increase, and this, in turn will raise testers' ethical awareness. As a result, more university teachers may make an effort to create an exam that is valid and reliable.

6.5 Conclusion

Before conducting this study, I was not sure if the participants would express their opinions about the entrance exams in an open and candid way. Specifically, I was concerned that the participants might worry about power relationships between them as test-takers and me as a university teacher and a tester in the interview. However, my concerns proved unfounded, as both the students and teachers shared their personal experiences and opinions fully with me. I assume that the participants shared honest views with me because I am a relatively young woman and created a warm atmosphere during the interview. It was a great opportunity for me to listen to their internal thoughts about the issue of the entrance examination. In fact, one high school teacher told me during her interview that she was happy to meet and share her views with a university teacher who is concerned about entrance exams. She insisted that, unless university teachers themselves are aware of the problems related to the entrance exams, the exams will never change. I also realized how powerful qualitative research is for understanding a reality of which I was not previously aware. Although conducting research within the critical paradigm was challenging for me, this study enabled me to tackle the sensitive but unavoidable problem of the university entrance exams head-on.

In both the questionnaires and interviews, some respondents complained about the contents of the entrance exam and its use, while others seemed to be unaware of a test-taker's rights and responsibilities and simply regarded the entrance exam as a necessary evil. Although test-takers' rights is a new issue (Shohamy, 2001) and Japanese students and teachers are not accustomed to viewing language testing from a critical viewpoint, I will continue to inform students and high school teachers that they have such rights, and that they are given an opportunity to claim their rights in public, in order to truly reform the Japanese university entrance exam system. Also, as a university teacher who is involved in pre-service teacher training, I should make pre-service teachers aware of the rights mentioned above and encourage my students to exercise them in relation not only to the issues of university entrance exams but also to other issues related to English education from a critical viewpoint.

Finally, I would like to continue conducting a similar kind of research with other participants in different contexts within the critical paradigm. Bachman (2000)

mentions that “validity and fairness are issues that are at the heart of how we define ourselves as professionals, not only as language testers, but also as applied linguists” (p. 25). This implies that we should pay more attention to research on ethical issues of test use in language testing. Even if I do not specialize in language testing, I would like to conduct further research on ethical issues as a teacher and as a researcher who is sensitive to test-takers’ rights and testers’ responsibilities.

6.6 Personal reflection

This study has provided me a great opportunity to tackle the issue of university entrance exams in the framework of critical research. This was a challenging but rewarding experience for me. I found that it was difficult not only to raise awareness of my participants’ views, but also to encourage them to view the issue from a critical viewpoint. Also, I found that it was not easy to change the views of the participants, who accepted the entrance exams as they currently are. I might have been too modest, especially in conducting interviews; I was not able to challenge the participants’ views effectively because I was afraid of damaging the relationships between myself and the participants. At the same time, I also did not want to impose radical or political views on the participants because I knew that these views would not be well-received in our culture, where modesty is respected.

Despite the cultural and social constraints, I still regard a critical approach as important and meaningful. The critical approach is a view we Japanese lack, and we should thus promote this approach in our research, to improve our education. We should also have a more balanced view in our research. All three approaches—scientific, interpretive, and critical paradigms—have both strengths and weaknesses, respectively, but each paradigm plays a role in improving our educations. As a Japanese researcher, I am aware that a critical approach will not fit well in a Japanese research context if it is introduced in the way Western researchers conduct reforms. Rather, we need to modify our approach into a more modest one while still aiming to change and transform our educational system, including the language testing system, into a better one. If we patiently try to expand and accumulate research using a critical approach and emphasize the importance of conducting research using this approach, the results will have some impact on stakeholders and persuade individual stakeholders to take action. In this sense, I believe that this study provides a firm start to this process of change.

Appendices
Appendix One
Participants information

Name	Sex	High school he/she attended	Course in high school	Admission system used	Failed in the first attempt	Experiences in studying abroad
Mai	F	public	general	primary	no	no
Akira	M	public	general	primary	no	no
Rina	M	public	general	primary	no	no
Ken	M	public	general	primary	yes	no
Shin	F	public	specialized	primary	yes	no
Yumi	F	public	general	primary	no	no

Table 21. Student participants information

Name	Sex	Age	Degree	High school he/she works for	Course she teaches	Experiences in studying or training abroad	Years of teaching 3 rd year Ss
Dai	M	40s	MA	public	general	yes (1 month)	6 years
Akari	F	50s	BA	private	general	yes (1 year)	20 years
Hiroto	M	20s	BA	private	general	yes (1 year)	1 year
Keiko	F	30s	MA	public	general	yes (2 years)	3 years
Mio	F	40s	MA	public	general	no	10 years
Ryota	M	50s	BA	public	general	no	15 years

Table 22. Teacher participants information

Appendix Two

Biographical details of the six teacher participants

Dai is in his forties and majored in English linguistics when he was an undergraduate. He studied in Manchester and Boston for about two months when he was a university student. He then taught at a mid-level public school for five years and a high-level public school for eight years. He has been at another mid-level public school for the last six years. During his career, he also received his MA in English education. He currently teaches third-year students.

Akari is in her forties and majored in Russian language when she was an undergraduate. She taught at a low-level public high school for eight years and at a mid-level public high school for ten years. She has been teaching at a high-level private high school for the last 12 years. She currently teaches third-year students.

Hiroto is in his twenties and majored in English education when he was an undergraduate. He studied in Australia for one year as part of a working holiday programme when he was a university student. He taught at a mid-level private high school for two years and has been at another mid-level private high school for one year. He currently teaches third-year students.

Keiko is in her thirties and majored in intercultural communication when she was an undergraduate. She taught at a mid-level public high school for seven years and then took leave from her work. After she earned an MA in TESOL at an English university, she came back to the same school and has taught there for the last two years. She currently teaches first-year students.

Mio is in her forties and majored in English linguistics when she was an undergraduate. She taught in various schools as a contact teacher for five years. Subsequently, as a full-time teacher, she taught at a commercial and industrial high school for two years and an integrative course at a public high school for eight years. She has been at a relatively high-level school for eight years. While conducting the interviews, she was in the middle of a two-year leave from her work and studying an MA programme at a

Japanese university.

Ryota is in his fifties and majored in English linguistics, English literature, and English education when he was an undergraduate and graduate student. He taught at a middle-level public high school for 23 years, and has worked for a high-level public high school for seven years. He currently teaches third-year students.

Appendix Three

Consent form

I am conducting a doctoral study on the issue of the university entrance exam and I would appreciate if you could participate in my study. The aim of this interview is to ask your opinions on the English test in the university entrance exam (National Center Test and tests created by national universities).

I would like you to read the following before I conduct the interview with you.

(1) Concerning your rights as an informant

- You can withdraw from your interview whenever you so desire.
- You can decline to answer any question.
- You can ask to stop or suspend audio-recording at any time.

(2) Concerning your privacy

- I will tape record the interviews and keep the tapes under lock and key.
- Only I will listen to and use the tapes.
- I will destroy all the tapes when I no longer need to keep them (on completion of writing up the thesis).

(3) Concerning publication of the study

I will use the information for my doctoral thesis, publication in academic journals, and conference presentations. I will take great care not to invade your privacy by publishing your name, and your school will not be identified.

Your consent:

___ I agree to participate in this study and that the data can be used in Akiko Takagi's doctoral dissertation for the University of Exeter and subsequent publication. I also agree that two consent forms are documented, and one will be kept by me and the other will be kept by Akiko Takagi.

Name _____ Date _____

3. Course you attended in high school
 - a. general course b. integrative course
 - c. specialized course ()

4. Admission system you used to enter the university to which you currently belong
 - a. primary general admission b. secondary general admission
 - c. admission by recommendation

5. Experiences of preparing for the entrance exam during the year after you graduation from high school
 - a. yes b. no

6. Experiences of studying abroad
 - a. yes length () places () b. no

II. Questions about the English entrance examinations for universities (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities)

Please answer each question as fully as possible.

1. Do you think that English classes you took in high school aimed to prepare you for the English entrance examinations for universities? If so, please describe why and what the English classes were like.

2. Were English classes in high school useful for preparing for the English entrance examinations for universities? Please answer giving reasons.

3. Did you prepare for the English entrance examinations for universities outside of English classes in school? If yes, please describe what kinds of preparation you did. If you have experience of going to a cram school or a preparatory school for preparation, please describe what you studied there.

4. Did the English entrance examinations for universities influence your feelings or ways of studying English? If so, please describe the kinds of influence they had on you.
5. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities) assessed your English ability appropriately? Please describe, giving reasons.
6. Do you think that the English test is necessary for the university entrance exams? Please describe, giving reasons.
7. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities reflect the purposes of Foreign Languages described in The Course of Study for Upper Secondary School? Please describe, giving reasons.

Reference : The Course of Study for Upper Secondary School Foreign Languages

1. Overall Objectives

To develop students' practical communication abilities such as understanding information and the speaker's or writer's intentions, and expressing their own ideas, deepening the understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages.

8. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities reflect the purposes of the Fundamental Law of Education? Please describe, giving reasons.

Reference : The Fundamental Law of Education (Article 1. Aim of Education)

Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving to nurture the citizens, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labour and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of the peaceful state and society.

9. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities realize educational policies by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (e.g. Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”). Please answer, giving reasons.

Reference : Goals to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”

English language abilities required for all Japanese people

【Goals】

English language abilities required for all Japanese nationals

“On graduating from junior high school and senior high school, graduates can communicate in English”

- On graduation from a junior high school, students can conduct basic communication with regard to areas such as greetings, responses, or topics relating to daily life. (English-language abilities for graduates should be the third level of the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) on average.)
- On graduation from a senior high school, students can conduct normal communication with regard to topics, for example, relating to daily life. (English-language abilities for graduates should be the second level or the pre-second level of the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) on average.)

English language skills required for specialized fields or for those active in international society

“On graduating from university, graduates can use English in their work”

- Each university should establish attainment targets from the viewpoint of fostering personnel who can use English in their work.

10. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities influence the future of high school students (e.g., profession, family life, and personal development)? Please describe, giving reasons.

11. If you have any other opinions about the English entrance examinations, please write them down.

Thank you for your cooperation with this questionnaire.

Appendix Five

Questionnaire for teachers

Questionnaire about the English entrance examinations for universities

Introduction

I am Akiko Takagi and I work for the department of English Education at Osaka Kyoiku University. I am currently conducting a study on the English entrance examinations for universities.

I am using this questionnaire to ask high school teacher's opinions. The purpose of this questionnaire is to ask your opinions as a high school teacher about the English entrance examinations for universities (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities).

I will use the results of the questionnaire for academic purposes only: writing my doctoral dissertation, publishing in academic journals and making a conference presentation. I certify that I will not use the information obtained from this study for other purposes. I will also ensure that your name, school, and any other personal information will not be identified and your anonymity will be protected with special care.

When you finished filling in the questionnaire, please send it to Akiko Takagi (takagi@cc.osaka-kyoiku.ac.jp) by October 31st, 2009 as an attached file by e-mail. If you would like to answer the questionnaire by hand, I will send you a questionnaire with a self-addressed stamped envelope. So please let me know your address.

I would like to send you the results of the data if you wish. Please write down your name and mailing address at the end of the questionnaire.

I am aware that it will take up your valuable time, but I would be grateful if you could cooperate with this study.

If you have any queries about this study, please contact me at the following address.

Address 4-698-1 Asahigaoka, Kashiwara,
 Osaka, 582-8582
 Department of English Education

9. Length of experience teaching English to third-year students
() years

II. Questions about the English entrance examinations for universities (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities)

Please answer each question as fully as possible.

1. When you teach regular English classes, are you conscious of the English entrance examinations for universities? If you are, please describe the reasons and how you teach your class.
2. Do your students have any requests about your English class to prepare for the English entrance examinations for universities? If they do, please describe what kinds of request your students have. (e.g. They ask that translation of English into Japanese should be more emphasized.)
3. Do the English entrance examinations for universities influence the way in which you teach your English? If so, please describe what kinds of influence they have.
4. Do the English entrance examinations for universities influence the English curriculum in your school? If so, please describe what kinds of influence they have.
5. Do you give regular exams in school based on your awareness of the English entrance examination for universities? If so, please describe what kinds of tests you give.
6. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities) assessed your students' English ability appropriately? Please describe, giving reasons.
7. Do you think that the English test is necessary for the university entrance exams? Please describe, giving reasons.
8. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities reflect the

purposes of Foreign Languages described in The Course of Study for Upper Secondary School? Please describe, giving reasons.

Reference : The Course of Study for Upper Secondary School Foreign Languages

1. Overall Objectives

To develop students' practical communication abilities such as understanding information and the speaker's or writer's intentions, and expressing their own ideas, deepening the understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages.

9. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities reflect the purposes of the Fundamental Law of Education? Please describe, giving reasons.

Reference : The Fundamental Law of Education (Article 1. Aim of Education)

Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving to nurture the citizens, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labour and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of the peaceful state and society.

10. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities realize educational policies by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (e.g. Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”). Please answer, giving reasons.

Reference : Goals to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”

English language abilities required for all Japanese people

【Goals】

English language abilities required for all Japanese nationals

“On graduating from junior high school and senior high school, graduates can communicate in English”

On graduation from a junior high school, students can conduct basic communication with regard to areas such as greetings, responses, or topics relating to daily life. (English-language abilities for graduates should be the third level of the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) on average.)

On graduation from a senior high school, students can conduct normal communication with regard to topics, for example, relating to daily life. (English-language abilities for

graduates should be the second level or the pre-second level of the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) on average.)

English language skills required for specialized fields or for those active in international society

“On graduating from university, graduates can use English in their work”

Each university should establish attainment targets from the viewpoint of fostering personnel who can use English in their work.

11. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities influence the future of high school students (e.g., profession, family life, and personal development)? Please describe, giving reasons.

12. If you have any other opinions about the English entrance examinations, please write them down.

Thank you for your cooperation with this questionnaire.

The contact information for sending the results of this study

Address:

Name:

- Ⓐ national/public b. private

8. Course you currently teach

- Ⓐ. general course b. integrative course
c. specialized course ()

9. Length of experience teaching English to third-year students
(4) years

II. Questions about the English entrance examinations for universities (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities)

Please answer each question as fully as possible.

1. When you teach regular English classes, are you conscious of the English entrance examinations for universities? If you are, please describe the reasons and how you teach your class.

I keep English entrance exams in mind. Whether or not students possess the ability to answer exam questions is a reality that underlies English Education in Japan. Even if students acquire oral skills, they often rarely have opportunities to use them, nor do they realize that they should actually use these skills. When students regard English as an academic subject and get a high score on an English test, they realize that they are good at English and start to study English autonomously. Once they become an autonomous learner, teachers can teach students according to their reasons for learning English, such as gaining communicative skills or garnering the ability to pass an entrance exam. In short, I have my students study English as an academic subject, and then I encourage them to like English by achieving a high score on tests.

2. Do your students have any requests about your English class to prepare for the English entrance examinations for universities? If they do, please describe what kinds of request your students have. (e.g. They ask that translation of English into Japanese should be more emphasized.)

Although my ideal is different, students ask for translations. They seem to feel a sense of achievement after they have successfully translated an English reading passage into Japanese. So, I always like to translate English passages in class. I also receive a lot of questions about effective ways to memorize, although I cannot help them.

3. Do the English entrance examinations for universities influence the way in which you teach your English? If so, please describe what kinds of influence they have.

Exams have a great influence. In the first place, students do not want to learn a language which uses different characters and grammar from Japanese. In addition, they do not use English in their daily lives. The only reason that the students study English is for entrance exams because English plays an important role for their success in an exam. If students get a high score in an English test in university entrance exams, they have a better chance to succeed in their application. I cannot teach English neglecting this fact.

4. Do the English entrance examinations for universities influence the English curriculum in your school? If so, please describe what kinds of influence they have.

Entrance exams influence the English curriculum. We establish a step-by-step English curriculum from the first year to the third year with the goal of having students acquire the necessary skills to pass university exams.

5. Do you give regular exams in school based on your awareness of the English entrance examination for universities? If so, please describe what kinds of tests you give.

I do not focus on entrance exams in regular exams at school. What is required in regular exams and what is required in entrance exams are different from each other. The purpose of a regular exam is to check the students' understanding about the contents covered in regular classes. One of the important factors in regular exams is that students who study hard for the class often achieve a high score.

6. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities (National Center Test and tests conducted by national universities) assessed your students' English ability appropriately? Please describe, giving reasons.

The exams assess English ability as an academic subject. Since the entrance exams do not emphasize oral abilities, the present exams are satisfactory. As for listening tests, they are unfair. Students cannot obtain a high score on listening tests unless they have experience studying abroad. This is why it is unfair to assess listening skills in exams. No other subjects ask students to learn by ear.

7. Do you think that the English test is necessary for the university entrance exams? Please describe, giving reasons.

The English tests are absolutely necessary. If English tests are abolished, all the remaining tests will be conducted in Japanese. As a result, the content that students learn, as well as the students' thoughts and views will be solely in Japanese. It is extremely beneficial to learn ways of thinking in English. Moreover, students will not study English if it is not required in exams, so it is necessary to include English as a subject on an entrance exam.

8. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities reflect the purposes of Foreign Languages described in The Course of Study for Upper Secondary School? Please describe, giving reasons.

I understand that university entrance exams should reflect the purposes of studying Foreign Languages, but in reality the abilities assessed on entrance exams are far from communicative abilities. However, we cannot mediate this because oral abilities cannot be effectively assessed by tests. One of the purposes of studying Foreign Languages is to develop practical oral communication skills. Students need to acquire these skills to convey their thoughts and information, not the accuracy of grammar and pronunciation. If entrance exams continue to assess the accuracy of grammar and pronunciation, the current state of teaching and learning in high school will never change.

9. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities reflect the purposes of the Fundamental Law of Education? Please describe, giving reasons.

Education should be conducted based on the purposes of the Fundamental Law of Education. In fact, learning English will expand the views of students. It is not a reasonable approach to learn only Japanese in an insular country. In a sense of broadening the views of students, learning a foreign language will contribute to the creation of a peaceful state and society.

10. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities realize educational policies by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (e.g. Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”). Please answer, giving reasons.

I do not think so. The majority of junior high school students already fail in English learning. We produce many more students who hate English than students who possess English abilities. Junior high school students who pass the third level of the STEP are assessed as bright students. High school students who pass the second level of the STEP are also assessed as bright students. Only the brightest students can achieve the level that MEXT aims at in their policies. If the goal of the policy is only to raise the brightest of students, the goal has already been achieved.

11. Do you think that the English entrance examinations for universities influence the future of high school students (e.g., profession, family life, and personal development)? Please describe, giving reasons.

I think that there is a big influence. Whether or not students are good at English or get a good score on tests or mock exams provides a great influence on students' choice of university. Also, in terms of career choice, students who are good at English will expand their possibilities to the international job market. On the other hand, those who are not good at English will have no choice but to seek employment within Japan.

12. If you have any other opinions about the English entrance examinations, please write them down.

As for National Center Tests, MEXT should continue to improve the current formats. However, the listening element of the exams is not a fair assessment. Exams developed by national universities require students to break alphabetical codes rather than assess the students' English ability. Students seem to regard English as questions they have to solve in English education in Japan. I wonder if teachers would rather make their students aware that learning English is solving questions in English in order to improve educational effectiveness in Japan.

Appendix Seven

Example of categorization (Answers to question 3 in teachers' questionnaire)

Teacher code	Categories	Sub categories	Comments
T19	Influence on teachers	Teach the contents related to exams	Entrance exams influence me to some extent. I need to teach the tricks of translating a Japanese passage into English and train my students to translate English sentences into Japanese. I also feel that I should tell the students what is written in a reference textbook for entrance exams.
T24	Influence on teachers	Teach the contents related to exams	Entrance exams have an influence on me. In writing class I cannot allow students to make any grammatical mistakes in exams, although some mistakes are allowed for actual communication. In English I and II classes, I put emphasis on reading skills.
T25	Influence on teachers	Teach the contents related to exams	Exams have a great influence on me, especially when I teach second-year and third year students. I have my students memorize a lot of English expressions, summarize paragraphs, and teach reading skills, such as understanding the origination of English paragraphs and noticing reference terms.
T26	Influence on teachers	Teach the contents related to exams	Since listening tests were introduced into the National Center Test, I have had our students purchase a listening textbook for exams, teach listening, and take frequent listening quizzes. In addition, I have students review mock exams, and teach using the previous exams whenever necessary.
T29	Influence	Teach the	I teach phonetic symbols, have my students read

	on teachers	contents related to exams	aloud, and emphasize intensive reading.
T1	Influence on teachers	Tailor their teaching for exams	I think that exams have some influence. Most exams, especially those made by national universities put emphasis on reading long passages and essay writing. As a result, I focus on teaching students reading and writing skills. I do not emphasize teaching for grammar questions, such as cloze tests.
T21	Influence on teachers	Tailor their teaching for exams	I tend to focus on translation and grammar skills.
T27	Influence on teachers	Tailor their teaching for exams	I focus on teaching translation, which is only required in exams. I also write a lot of grammatical explanations on the blackboard.
T14	Influence on teachers	Give priority to teaching contents related to exam	I want to teach the four skills in a balanced way. However, because of the nature of entrance exams, I tend to focus on teaching reading and writing skills in addition to explanation of detailed grammar rules.
T22	Influence on teachers	Give priority to teaching contents related to exam	Exams have some influence. I need to urge students to prepare for exams at an early stage. Thus, I check previous exam questions and introduce them in class by saying "this question appeared in University A." Furthermore, because I always need to be careful about covering everything for exams, I cannot do other kinds of activities in class.
T30	Influence on teachers	Give priority to teaching	If possible, I want to teach more advanced content based on an authorized textbook we use, such as public speaking and paragraph writing.

		contents related to exam	However, I do not have time to teach them, since I have to teach materials specialized for the exams.
T4	Influence on teachers	Use materials related to exams	Exams have some influence. I use special materials for exams.
T31	Influence on teachers	Use materials related to exams	Exams have some influence. I use special materials for exams. I would want to teach a wider variety of skills and introduce activities if I do not need to prepare for exams.
T6	Influence on teachers	Use exams to motivate students	Exams have influence. I teach English to have my students pass entrance exams. Getting a high score in a mock exam leads to a sense of achievement, and is fun for students.
T9	Influence on students	Demand for teaching for exams	Students are forced to study for exams, but they cannot develop their speaking and listening skills in this way. Also, they cannot have much fun with learning. Although I believe that project work is effective for students' learning, the students are unwilling to do such work because it is not related to exams.
T15	Influence on students	Demand for teaching for exams	Exams influence me to some extent. In fact, students are not interested in a class that seems useless for an exam. The students do not study and prepare seriously for such classes, and spend much more time doing exercises with a textbook distributed by a cram school at home.
T17	Influence on students	Demand for teaching for exams	Students are unmotivated in classes that include a lot of oral activities, since they are not directly related to the exam.
T18	Influence on students	Demand for teaching for	Exams have some influence. Our school places emphasis on developing writing skills in our

		exams	curriculum and sets clear goals for each grade. Although we require second-year students to start writing paragraphs from the second semester, third-year students are not motivated to write paragraphs because they are not required in entrance exams.
T28	Influence on students	Demand for teaching for exams	Exams have some influence. Students directly request the opportunity to acquire skills for exams in class.
T7	Influence on students	Concern about regular exams	Exams do not influence my teaching directly. However, students who wish to enter university by recommendations are always concerned about grades and scores on regular exams.
T20	Influence on students	Concern about regular exams	Students who hope to enter a university by recommendation are very concerned about academic records, mainly determined by regular exams. This has a good influence, but at the same time the students' motivation depends on their academic achievements.
T2	Influence on students	Motivate students to learn English	Exams are the biggest motivation to learn English.
T3	Influence on students	Motivate students to learn English	Exams have a great influence. In the first place, students do not want to learn a language which uses different characters and grammar from Japanese. In addition, they do not use English in their daily lives. The only reason that the students study English is for entrance exams because English plays an important role for their success in an exam. If students get a high score in an English test in university entrance exams, they have a better chance to succeed in their

			application. I cannot teach English neglecting this fact.
T12	Others		After I finish teaching an authorized textbook by the Ministry of Education, I use a textbook which collects previous university exam questions. I do not use them not for exams. The textbook is easy to get and the reading passages are authentic. Reading passages in an authorized textbook are too simplified, and lose the heart of authentic English. In this sense, reusing passages in exams introduces authentic and high quality material.
T13	Others		It is a very difficult question. Exams may have an influence or may not have an influence.
T8	No further explanation		Exams have some influence.
T23	No further explanation		Exams have some influence.
T5	Has no influence		Not especially.
T16	Has no influence		Exams do not have any influence.
T10	Has no influence		Since questions in university entrance exams are diverse, I try to develop students' four skills rather concentrating on preparing them for exams.
T11	Has no influence		I do not feel a strong influence. Of course, each students needs to seek a different level of academic achievement for the universities they plan to go to. However, what I want to teach is not influenced by whichever universities students will sit an exam for.

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