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## Rethinking Global Jinzai Policy: Exploring University Students' Attitudes

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Discussions on English education policies often focus on their reception by teachers. However, this can overlook what students think about policy, and students' support of policies may be crucial to their success. This is especially relevant to English education at universities, given the autonomy that university students have. To understand what students think about policies, a survey on certain aspects of Japanese educational policies and English language education was conducted at a private university. The survey focused on students' attitudes towards *guroubaru jinzai* or global workers, a buzzword in Japanese EFL policies. Overall, students reported interest in becoming global workers, but they did not feel that this was realistic for themselves. This suggests that to gain the support necessary from students for their own cultivation as global workers in line with current EFL policies, it may be necessary to show the relevance to their own lives, from their own perspectives.

文科省の英語教育におけるポリシーの1つは「グローバル人材育成」であるが、大学英語教育では、学習に対する学生の主体的な意識や態度が重要である。中堅大学の学生を対象とした調査の結果、彼らは「国際的に活躍することが現代社会で求められている」と認識している一方、「そのような人材になることは自分にとって現実的ではない」と考えていることが分かった。理由の1つは「英語に対する自信のなさ」であるが、同時に「英語学習」には興味を持つ学生も多かった。「グローバル人材の必要性の認識」と「英語学習に対する興味」を利用することで、中堅大学の学生にとっても文科省のポリシーの実現が可能であると考えられる。

English education policies play an important role in the development and implementation of curricula and are rightfully given great attention in language education research. Within such contexts, there is often a tendency to focus on how English education policies are received by teachers, given that teachers' cooperation is essential for effective policy implementation (Tahira, 2012). However, this focus on what teachers feel about policy often means that the other important players on the ground are overlooked: students. As opposed to educators, who are to some degree expected to be aware of these policies, students may not have many opportunities to become familiar with the specifics of education policies. However, Japanese university students are exposed to the ideas behind policy in a variety of ways, both through the syllabi, themes, and methods used in classes and also through the big three university policies—universities' own admissions, curriculum, and diploma policies—which are shaped by larger governmental educational policies and which the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) has increasingly demanded be made more transparent to students (Tanabe, 2019).

Although students' experiences are often overlooked in curriculum design for academic study (e.g., Barkhuizen, 1998; Christison & Krahnke, 1986; Furuhata, 1999; Qin, 2012), being that they are subject to these policies on a regular basis through their experiences at school, students naturally form their own opinions about their appropriateness and effectiveness, even if they cannot vocalize those opinions in terms of specific policies. How students feel about these ideas is relevant to policy implementation because students' support is crucial to ensuring their success. If students do not think the goals and visions expressed to them through their English educational experiences are relevant to them, they may not be cooperative in the classroom. When unclear policies are implemented inconsistently, students can become dissatisfied and demotivated, leading to the opposite of the desired effect (e.g., Shvidko, Evans, & Hartshorn, 2015, on English-only policies in the classroom).

This is especially relevant to university-level English education. As young adult learners in the process of becoming independent, university students experience a

high level of autonomy. They can and do make personal decisions about how much, how seriously, and in what ways they should engage in their studies: Will they come on time to class? Will they do homework? Will they actively participate in class? These are all things that university students are in control of to a higher degree than are secondary school students. In the case of Japan, one can hypothesize that students will not necessarily take this autonomy as an opportunity to improve themselves through their studies. Compared with young people from other countries, Japanese youth appear to have relatively low self-confidence (Dekovic, Engels, Shirai, de Kort, & Anker, 2002; Ogihara, Uchida, & Kusumi, 2016). Passive attitudes towards higher achievement have been observed in a number of different areas: Not only university students, but also workers and younger students report a low interest in internationalism (e.g., Bandou, 2013; Okuyama, 2013). There also appears to be a widespread lack of interest in career development and especially in achieving promotions to managerial positions (Takahashi, 2017). In general, students' negative beliefs about their own abilities can lower their confidence in English (Fukuzawa, 2016). As such, policies dependent on a great deal of pre-existing confidence and exertion on the part of students may not be successful. On the other hand, policies that specifically draw out and support the development of confidence may be more successful.

Given these issues, understanding Japanese university students' attitudes towards the *contents* of English education policies may help explain why policies are or are not successful and provide insight into how to foster positive attitudes towards policies and consequently how to encourage students to engage more proactively in their studies. To that end, this paper is a report on a survey conducted amongst university students on their attitudes towards the ideas behind *guroubaru-jinzai*, literally "global talent" (hereinafter *global jinzai*), as one important aspect of contemporary English education policies. Global jinzai has come to mean globally minded or oriented individuals ready to work in diverse international settings. Since first appearing circa 2011, global jinzai has become central to many of the grants distributed by MEXT, and the development of global jinzai has often been brought up as a motivation behind ambitious projects such as English-medium instruction programs and classes (overviewed in Yonezawa, 2014). However, there is some ambiguity about what these policies on global jinzai mean. For many universities, they may seem ambitious given that remedial education is in demand due to the rise in open enrolment (Mori, 2002; Yamada, 2009). One can expect there to be some controversy and inconsistencies in how the ideas behind the concept of global jinzai are perceived, especially by students who are supposed to become global jinzai. As such, students may have mixed feelings towards the concept of global jinzai, which suggests it would be a fruitful avenue by which to start exploring how students perceive policy concepts.

## Methodology

The data described in this paper were obtained as part of a larger project on English language education at a mid-tier, private university—referred to as University X throughout—in Tokyo, conducted by the authors and Samuel Rose. The major goals of the project were (a) to improve English language education at the university and foster positive connections across faculties and (b) to understand how MEXT's policies are evaluated and perceived on the ground at universities. The project began with surveys and follow-up interviews with teachers at the university, focusing on MEXT's policies and their relevance to the university (reported in Unser-Schutz, Rose, & Kudo, 2019); student surveys were then conducted both within and across the faculties at the university on MEXT's policies, English study resources, and English study and motivation. Specific interventions are being planned using these results, including compiling lists of resources at the university, offering new campus study resources, and providing faculty development workshops to present the team's findings.

University X is typified by a relatively low level of centralization, with English courses planned and maintained independently by each of its eight faculties. There are no interfaculty organizations connecting English classes across the faculties, with the possible exception of the international exchange center, which is not directly involved in English education at the university. Nonetheless, the faculties do share some connections through university-wide educational policies that are used as a base within their individual policies. Globalization has been included as a major part of the university-wide policies, and the university has also started monitoring TOEIC scores by requiring testing for all 1st- and 2nd-year students. Most of the faculties offer required English courses, but not all of them have full-time English teachers on staff, and most of the faculties average at the D or low C level on the TOEIC proficiency scale.

The purpose of the survey reported on here was to explore students' attitudes to the concept of global jinzai as well as their attitudes towards English education more generally. University X has taken several actions indicating its support of this concept, such as its inclusion in the title of a university-led project. It has also been included as a theme in several faculty development sessions, and the university's policy on the advancement of globalization specifically includes a section on the development of global jinzai. In this sense, global jinzai is an important concept at the university, even if it is not necessarily written in the policies of the individual faculties or included in student brochures. The survey was conducted in January 2019 and was given to 961 students in three liberal arts and humanities faculties (business, letters, and psychology) who had completed their required English courses, specifically after their 1st year for the faculties of business

and letters and after their 2nd year for the faculty of psychology. This was done because students would be most exposed to and able to evaluate English education in their faculties and how MEXT's policies are reflected directly after they have completed their required courses. The survey was conducted in Japanese in order to facilitate students' ease of answering and consisted of eight background questions, 28 five-point Likert-scale questions on English language education and study resources, and four open-ended questions on resources at the university. The aims of the survey were explained to students, who participated voluntarily and were given the opportunity to opt out.

A total of 961 valid responses were obtained; women were somewhat disproportionately represented ( $N = 516$ ), but this is reflective of the makeup of the faculties in general. The average age of participants was 19.2 years. Approximately 42% of the students had been abroad at some time, most for short-term school excursions or vacations, which might have affected students' beliefs about English language education given that most had not been exposed to international settings for extended periods. As not all of the questions were relevant to the current study, only those listed in Table 1 will be examined here; the remaining questions can be found in the Appendix. The English translations were prepared by the research team. Questions 3 to 6 focus on global jinzai, whereas questions 1 and 2 focus on students' general motivation towards English study. Questions 1 and 2 are included here to allow us to consider whether students' attitudes towards global jinzai are affected by their attitudes towards English more generally.

Table 1. Statements Analysed in Current Paper

Statement	Level of agreement
1) I am interested in studying English.	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5
2) I like English.	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5
3) I want to become <i>global jinzai</i> .	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5
4) I want to become someone who is active internationally.	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5
5) Becoming someone who is active internationally is realistic for me.	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5
6) Becoming someone who is active internationally is necessary in today's society.	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5

Note. Likert-style survey: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*.

The questions used in this survey were modified from a survey of teachers at University X, reported on in Unser-Schutz et. al (2019), the results of which are summarized in Figure 1. The results indicate that teachers were somewhat negative about how realistic MEXT's education policies were for University X (2.64 out of 5) as well as their appropriateness for Japan more generally (2.36). However, they felt more positively about the actual contents of MEXT's English-education policies: "Preparing students to be globally minded workers—e.g., global jinzai—is a realistic goal of University X" scored 3.21; the same question, restated more generally beyond University X, scored 3.86. These results indicate that teachers believed being global jinzai was an important goal for English education in Japan but were less certain whether it was achievable by their students. Whether students also report such a gap will be touched upon in the following discussion.

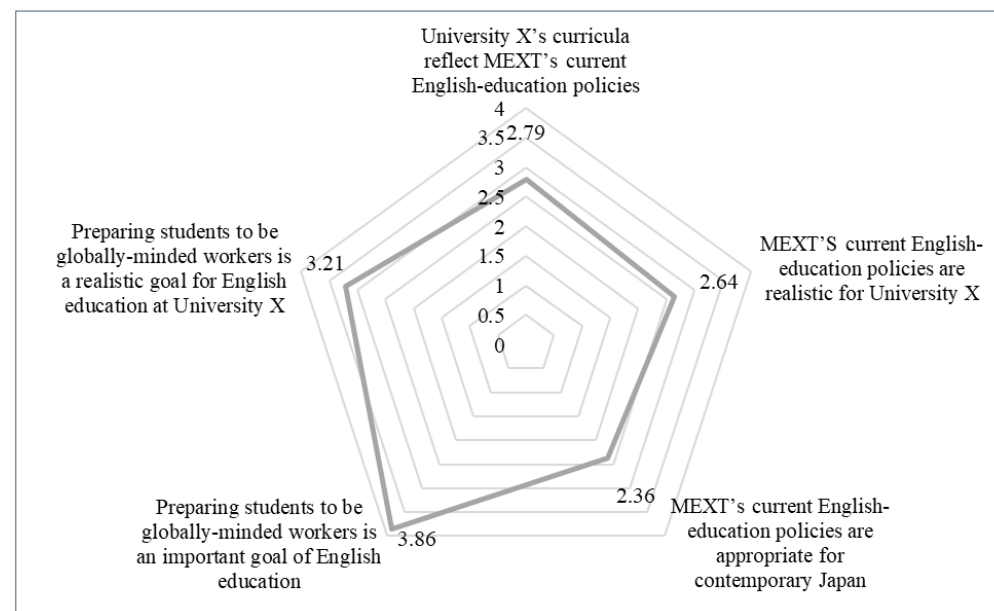


Figure 1. Teachers' attitude towards policies (from Unser-Schutz et. al, 2019).

## Results

Overall, 76% of students (740) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Becoming someone who is active internationally is necessary in today’s society” (Figure 2). This suggests that they realized the necessity of being active internationally. However, their responses to a related statement “Becoming someone who is active internationally is realistic for me” were very different. As Figure 3 shows, 61% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed. This means that only 12% of students (119) tended to feel becoming an internationally active person was realistic for themselves.

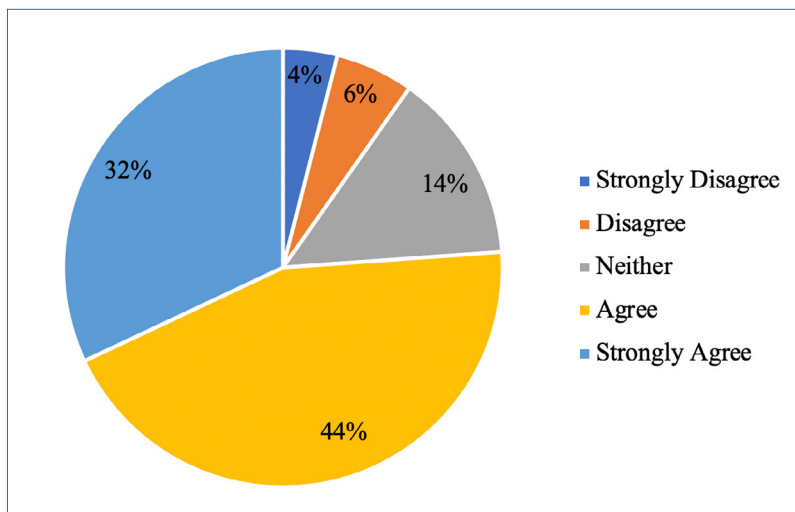


Figure 2. Becoming someone who is active internationally is necessary in today’s society.  $N = 961$ .

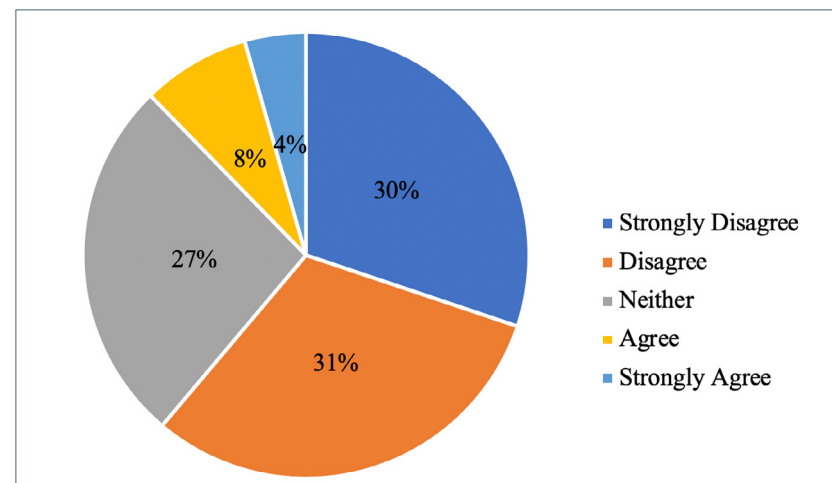


Figure 3. Becoming someone who is active internationally is realistic for me.  $N = 961$ .

Here, a gap between MEXT policy and students’ perception of their reality can be observed. Theoretically, all students study in accordance with MEXT’s policies, in so far as MEXT’s policies frame their university studies. MEXT is pressing universities to develop global jinzai, so this would suggest all students should become just that—global jinzai. Yet in reality, even though students seemed to agree with the actual ideas behind the policy, they did not think it is realistic for themselves, suggesting they may not be cooperative toward these goals. This is reflected in the results shown in Figure 4: 44% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they themselves want to become someone who is active internationally, meaning nearly half of the students wanted to become such a person. This reinforces the interpretation that even if students could not believe being active internationally was realistic for themselves, they do want to become such a person.

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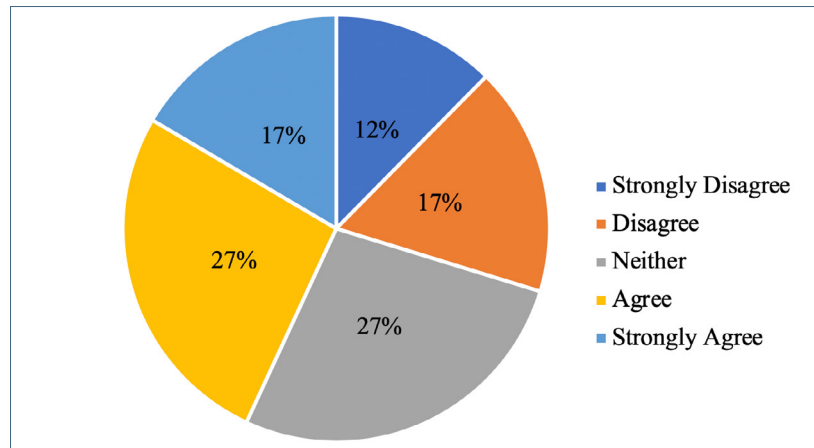


Figure 4. I want to become someone who is active internationally.  $N = 961$ .

However, students seem to respond differently when asked using the buzzword global jinzai. Using the same statement but changing the wording “someone who is active internationally” to “global jinzai” resulted in Figure 5: 49% of the students agreed or strongly agreed, 5% more than with the previous statement. Thus, more students responded positively when the ambiguous term global jinzai was used. The degree to which this differs based upon the phrases used is shown in Figure 6. Here, the number of students who answered *neither* is almost identical (263 and 262) meaning the same students likely answered *neither*. The number of students who wanted to be active internationally was 417, but 476 students reported wanting to be global jinzai, meaning that 59 students who did not report wanting to be active internationally think that they do want to be global jinzai. The buzzword global jinzai can be heard frequently, which may make students feel that becoming global jinzai is a good thing. In this sense, MEXT’s policy is successful in so far as it attracts students’ attention; that it is less supported when stated in concrete terms, however, suggests it may not be well understood.

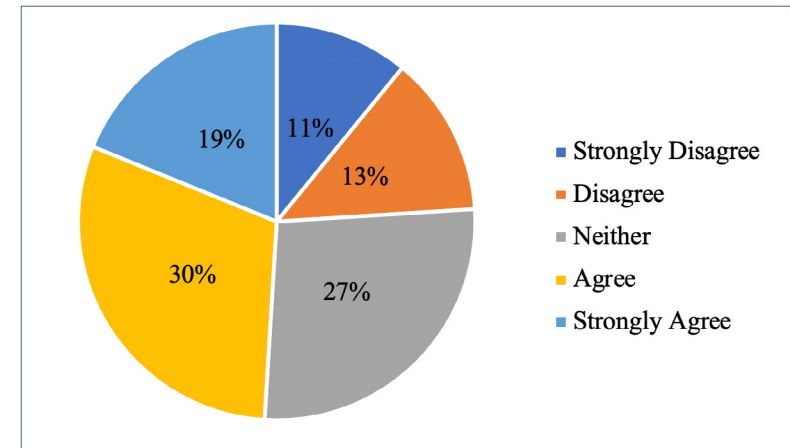


Figure 5. I want to be global jinzai.  $N = 961$ .

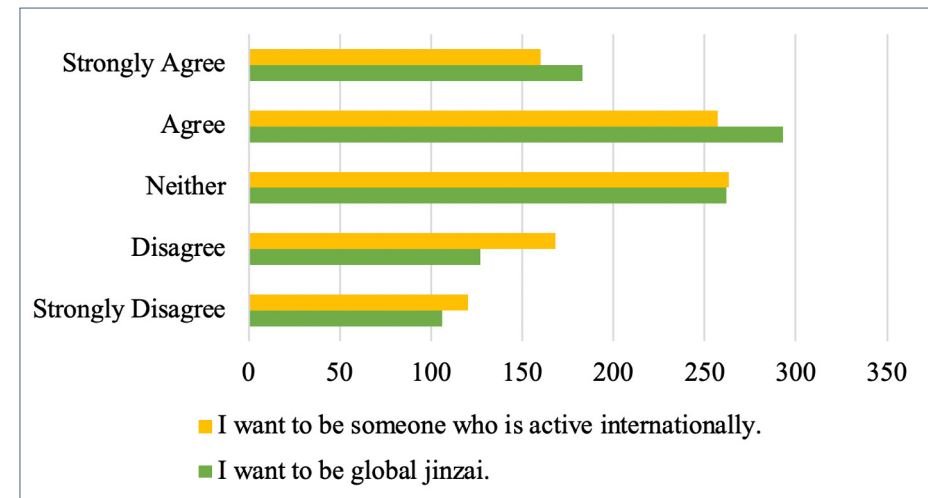


Figure 6. Compared responses to interest in being active internationally using different phrases.  $N = 961$ .

Students' attitudes towards English and studying English must also be understood, for English proficiency is one of the essential parts of becoming global jinzai. Students were asked to evaluate two related statements about this. First, the statement was phrased using only *English*. This was done as there may be some variation in how students perceive English: Some might like English as a communication tool, but not as an object of study; others might like it as they feel they are good at studying English. Choosing an ambiguous phrase allowed for a wider—and potentially more positive—interpretation. As Figure 7 shows, 35% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I like English,” and 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed. That is, 378 students responded positively to liking English, but 336 (almost as many) students did not like English very much. This may not be very encouraging for English teachers.

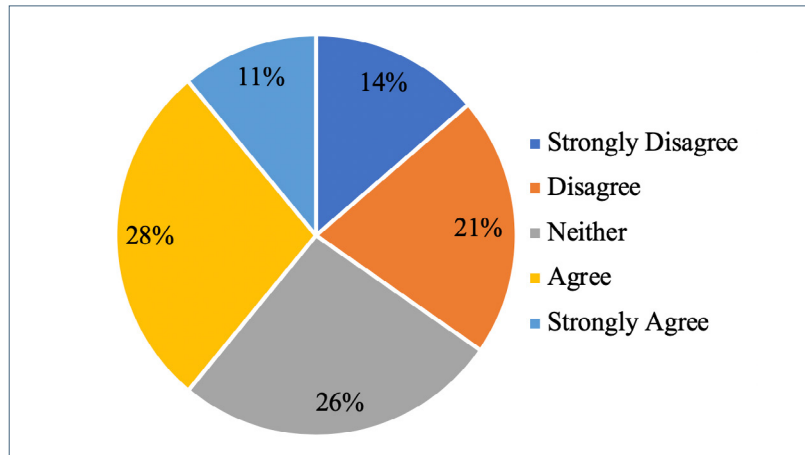


Figure 7. I like English. N = 961.

However, the answers to the next question indicated a different result. To the statement “I’m interested in studying English,” 60% of the students agreed or strongly agreed; 581 students reported being interested in studying English, as can be seen in Figure 8. The students who like English account for only 39%, but those who are interested in studying English account for 60%, suggesting many more students are interested in studying English than those who like English itself. These results are compared in Figure 9, where it is clearly shown that 35% of students have negative attitudes towards English itself, but this drops to 21% when referring to interest in

studying English. The 26% who felt that they neither liked nor disliked English is reduced to 19% for interest in studying English. These results mean that there are students who do not like English but who are interested in *studying* English. This may be a result of students’ feeling that studying English is necessary in contemporary society.

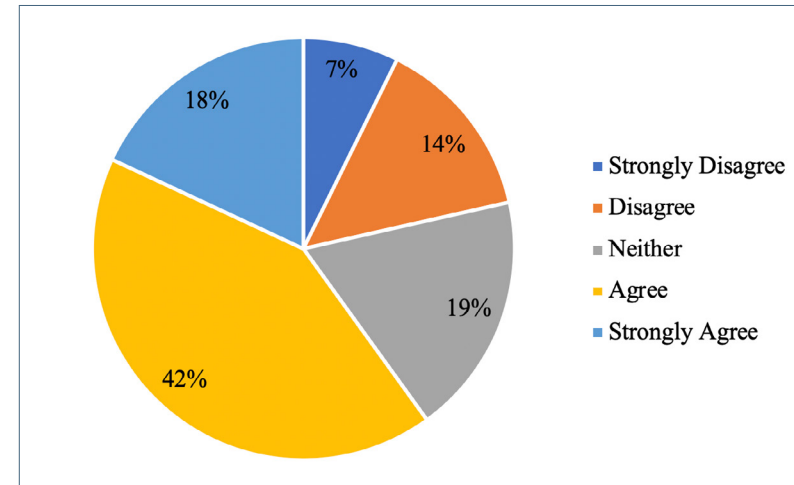


Figure 8. I'm interested in studying English. N = 961.

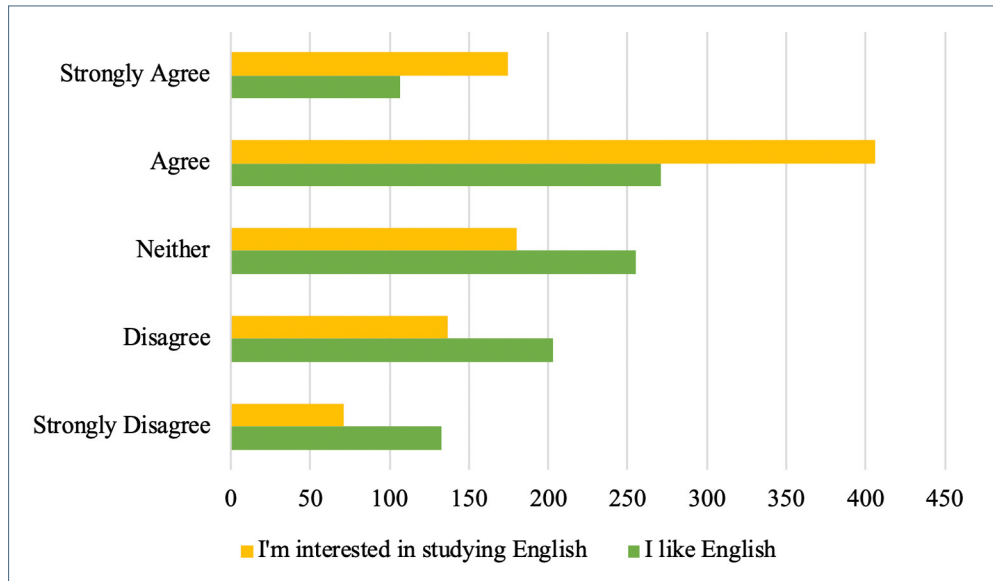


Figure 9. Students' attitudes towards English vs. studying English compared.  $N = 961$ .

## Discussion

Overall, these results show that the students appeared to think that becoming global jinzai is necessary today, and they wanted to become global jinzai. That is to say, they seemed positive towards the concepts powering many of today's EFL policies. However, they did not feel it was realistic for themselves, suggesting that they may not necessarily be cooperative in the implementation of such policy. One hypothesis may be that they think it is unrealistic because of their lack of confidence in English: As Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) note, "Self-confidence ... is crucial for a person to be willing to communicate (p. 135)." The research team previously conducted another survey about students' attitudes toward travelling abroad and living abroad (Kudo, 2018). In that study, students were asked if they were interested in travelling or living abroad and if not, why; most of them reported being disinterested because their English skills were not strong enough. This may also be true here. If so, teachers can have some hope. It is clear that they believe it is necessary for them to study English, even if they do not like English very much. This indicates that it would be possible for them to work harder at improving their English skills, if they were given the opportunity to see it as realistic for them. Because they already

are interested in being global jinzai, this can be an important part of motivating them to study English; if they gain confidence in English, they can also gain confidence that they can become global jinzai. In the long term, gaining confidence in English may help them feel that MEXT's global jinzai policies are realistic for themselves.

The results also suggest that gaining students' cooperation is critical and also possible. Because they do not feel these goals are realistic for them, many students will not likely make the extra effort individually to achieve those goals. However, the fact that students were positive towards the ideas behind the policies themselves suggests that the potential to gain their cooperation exists, if students can be convinced that these ideas are also relevant and realistic for themselves. This is especially important for students at mid- or lower tier schools, because students who have gained admission to top-tier schools already have experiences of success that can help foster motivation, and because students at top-tier schools already try to improve themselves *without* goal-setting through policy (University Evaluation Consortium, 2015). Some possible interventions to help students feel policies are relevant and realistic for themselves include encouraging—or possibly requiring—study abroad; increasing students' opportunities to use English on campus, such as through open-access learning centres (Rikkyo University, 2019), conversation lounges (Nagoya Gakuin University, 2019), and English weeks (Jissen Women's University, 2019); and revising curricula so that students are able to achieve success in the relevant areas earlier in their course of study (e.g., if communicative skills are desired, classes focusing on communicative skills should be given earlier in the program). It may also be important to use language that reflects students' own perspectives, which would be consistent with recent trends towards learner-centred methods in EFL in Japan (Holsworth, Usuki, & Koshiba, 2016).

Policy reviews often focus on how teachers perceive them, and teachers' perceptions have an impact on students because it is through their teachers that they often learn about educational policies. As noted earlier in the review of Unser-Schutz et. al (2019), teachers at University X also felt that becoming global jinzai was not realistic for their students, but they did think it was an important goal for English education more generally. That is to say, teachers and students both felt fairly similarly about these issues. Theoretically, if teachers can help their students become interested in English, then students would likely gain confidence and become more motivated to become global jinzai. However, this may not happen, as teachers themselves lack confidence in their students. This suggests that encouraging teachers to hold positive attitudes towards students' potential is also an important task in making students feel like the larger goals propagated by the government are realistic for them.

## Conclusions

As this study has shown, although students generally reported being positive towards the idea of becoming global jinzai, they did not always feel that it was an appropriate goal for them personally. Looking towards the future, this suggests that successfully encouraging students to become global jinzai will require helping them envision themselves as global jinzai, hints of which may be obtained from the growing body of research on future and possible selves, such as Yashima (2009). This may be a difficult task, given that the negative attitudes students express towards their own potential are similar to other, widespread discourses on precarity in contemporary Japan. Precarity refers to an existential state lacking predictability or security, more summarily defined as “insecurity in life: material, existential, social” (Allison, 2012, p. 349). There is a general sense of precarity in contemporary Japanese life, which is associated with the dismantling of the welfare state and changing employment laws (see Allison, 2013). By indicating that the ambitious goal of becoming global jinzai is desirable but not personally attainable for themselves, students appear to accept the status quo.

Creating an environment where students can feel safe while taking risks will be vital to helping students feel such goals are personally achievable. This may be the greatest task ahead, given that government officials themselves have often implied that they are not supportive of all students. At a press conference on October 24, 2019, Kochi Hagiuda, the minister of MEXT, was asked about the perceived unfairness of pushing students to take English qualification examinations through private companies in order to gain admission to universities, which would allow students from wealthy families to retake the tests as often as needed to achieve the desired scores and which would not be possible for families for whom the fees associated with such tests represent significant burdens. In response, Hagiuda said that students should follow their *mi no take* [their own height]—that is, do what is appropriate for their own (economic) situation (summarized in Tokyo Shinbun Tokyo Web, 2019; for an overview of the impact of Hagiuda’s statement, see Kamihara, 2019). Such statements normalize the stratification of English education, tacitly admitting a two-tier internationalization: one that is ambitious and achievable only by those who already have access to the tools and training needed to succeed and the other that is more superficial in form. Given the source of such remarks, it is easy to imagine that some students will have a hard time believing that these goals are even meant for them. Properly grappling with the implication of this will also clearly be an important part of improving students’ conceptions of global jinzai and English education policies more generally.

## Bio Data

**Beni Kudo** is an assistant professor at Rissho University. She is currently interested in how to motivate students who are not confident in English to study English. She is a researcher of English literature and culture, and she is also interested in how knowledge of other cultures is helpful to communicate for English learners.

**Giancarla Unser-Schutz** is an associate professor at Rissho University. She is currently interested in how to improve motivation and interest amongst students in non-EFL-specialist faculties. She also conducts research outside of EFL on the linguistic characteristics of manga as well as Japanese naming practices. Her publications may be found at <http://rissho.academia.edu/GiancarlaUnserSchutz/>. <[giancarlaunserchutz@ris.ac.jp](mailto:giancarlaunserchutz@ris.ac.jp)>

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## Appendix

### Questions in Survey (English Translations)

#### Background questions

1. What faculty/department are you enrolled in? (List of faculties/departments at university)
2. What year student are you? (1 / 2 / 3 / 4)
3. How old are you?
4. What is your gender? (Male / Female / Other)
5. Have you ever been abroad? (Yes / No)
6. If you have travelled abroad: What was the purpose of your travels? (Pleasure / Study / Visiting family / Other)
7. If you have travelled abroad: Where did you travel to?
8. From what age did you start studying English?

#### 5-point Likert scale questions

9. I am interested in studying English.
10. I like English.
11. I want to take writing classes.
12. I want to take reading classes.
13. I want to take listening classes.
14. I want to take speaking classes.
15. I want to take TOEIC strategies classes.
16. I want to become *global jinzai*.
17. I want to become someone who is active internationally.
18. Becoming someone who is active internationally is realistic for me.
19. Becoming someone who is active internationally is necessary in today's society.
20. There are faculty members I can talk to about studying English.
21. I would like to use an English studying room if there were one.
22. I would like to use an English learning corner that I could get books from easily if there were one.
23. English Education is prioritized in my faculty.

24. There are enough required English classes in my faculty.
25. There are enough elective English classes in my faculty.
26. There are too many English courses in my faculty.
27. Students in my faculty are interested in English education.
28. There are enough English study materials at University X.
29. There are enough English study spaces at University X.
30. The study abroad system at University X is sufficient.
31. I want to read Japanese comics in English.
32. I want to read foreign comics in English.
33. I want to read foreign magazines in English.
34. I want to read foreign novels in English.
35. I want to play foreign games in English.
36. I want to use computer software for studying English.

#### Open-answer questions

37. If you don't think your faculty has enough required or elective English courses, what kind of courses would you like to have?
38. If you don't think University X has enough English study materials or spaces, what kind of materials or spaces would you like to have?
39. What kinds of actions do you think would help improve English studying satisfaction at University X?
40. What is your purpose for studying English? Answer freely.