

< 論文 >

## **Effects of the Experience of English recitation on Japanese EFL learners: towards multi-modal English speaking skills education**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the effects of the experience of English recitation on Japanese university students by analysing results of questionnaire surveys which were performed on students who participated in an English recitation contest either as contestants or audience members. Since the implementation of the Communicative Approach in the official English education in Japan, teaching of speaking and listening skills has been widely practiced in Japanese classrooms. However, there are still various aspects that need further improvement and investigations in English language teaching (hence: ELT) for Japanese students. One of these aspects is considered to be the teaching of public speaking skills; therefore an English recitation contest was planned and held at a Japanese university, in order to assist students to practice public speaking in English. During the contest, questionnaire surveys were performed on contestants and audience respectively. By analysing the results of the surveys, this article discusses the positive effects of English recitation on Japanese university students and the need for education of public speaking skills, especially multi-modal skills such as effective gesture and eye-contact.

### **1. Introduction**

This article discusses and analyses the effects of the experience of English recitation on Japanese English-as-foreign-language (hence: EFL) learners and considers these in relation to teaching needs of public speaking skills in English education at Japanese universities. It has been a quarter century since the implementation of Communicative Approach in official English education in Japan (Kurahachi, 1993). As years pass by, the need for English communication skills, especially practical speaking skills, has gradually been increasing due to the changing economic situation in Japan where global human resources are very necessary (Fuyuno, 2013a). Reflecting these educational and social changes, motivation for improving speaking skills among Japanese EFL learners have also been increasing (Fuyuno, 2013a, 2013b).

For enhancing learners' speaking skills, English recitation has been reported as one of a number of effective methods (Ishigami & Ito, 2009; Matsui, 2006, 2008; Stodolsky, Ferguson, & Wimpelberg, 1981). In the previous studies, it has been discussed that English recitation is effective

for improving learners' pronunciation, intonation, grammar awareness and other related factors. Therefore, in order to implement and evaluate these positive effects, we decided to hold an English recitation contest at our university. In the Fall/Winter semester of 2013, the first English recitation contest was held. During the contest, questionnaire surveys were completed by the contestants and the audience members respectively to evaluate the effects of the recitation contest.

Although various organizations, including secondary schools and universities in Japan, hold English recitation contests, not many are reported academically. Thus, this article aims to report the preparation process and the effects of the contest and consider these for improving teaching English speaking for Japanese learners.

The subsequent parts of the paper will be structured as follows: In the next section, previous studies that are related to the topic will be reviewed. Next, the outline of the recitation contest will be explained in section 3. A description of questionnaire surveys including results and discussion will follow in section 4. Finally, a concluding summary of the paper will be provided in section 5.

## **2. Literature Review**

The positive effects of English recitation have been analysed and discussed in various previous studies such as Matsui (2006, 2008), Murakami (1981) and Ishikawa and Nishigaki (2005). In general, the implementation of English recitation in ELT has been reported to be effective for improving learners' pronunciation, sentence intonation, grammar and motivation. Matsui (2006) describes positive outcomes from in-class recitation contests with learners' increased motivation. In his study, after practicing reading-aloud during lessons, the students participated in in-class recitation contests. In addition, according to Matsui (2006)'s study, the ranking in the contest and the overall grade of the English course showed a correlation.

Ishikawa and Nishigaki (2005) reported that English recitation is effective for improving reading comprehension as well as speaking skills. In the study of Ishikawa and Nishigaki (2005), students memorized English lines and presented them as skit-presentations. Regarding the contents of the skits, pre- and post-comprehension-tests were performed. The results of the post-test showed statistically significant improvement of content comprehension by the students.

Although studies such as Matsui (2006, 2008) and Ishikawa and Nishigaki (2005) include insightful information, they have tended to focus on secondary school students and in-class activities. As pointed out in Fuyuno (2013a, 2013b), the need for better speaking skills has also been increasing in higher education in Japan, and so has university students' motivation toward improving pronunciation. Moreover, in the changing global society, English public speaking skills such as presentation and speech skills are required more than before (Fuyuno, 2013a). With these considerations in mind, an English recitation contest at university level was expected to be a fruitful occasion for improving university students' English skills and motivation towards English learning.

### **3. Outline of the English Recitation Contest**

#### **3.1. Planning**

Before the English recitation contest was planned, an annual Chinese recitation contest had already been held for several years in the university. Since the Chinese contest had been popular and highly-evaluated by students and teachers, motivation for an English recitation contest increased. Reflecting these circumstances, the initial plan for an English recitation contest was initiated in the Fall/Winter semester in 2012.

Basic ideas, such as when to hold the contest, the number of entry levels and the number of assignments, were adopted from the Chinese recitation contest. It was decided to hold the English recitation contest one week before the Chinese recitation contest. The Chinese recitation contest had been held in the middle of the Fall/Winter (second) semester; this was due to the fact that the Fall/Winter semester was expected to be convenient for first-year students to participate because the students were expected to have become accustomed to university life after one semester.

#### **3.2. Preparation**

##### **3.2.1. Enrolment and Entry Levels**

Enrolment for the contest was opened 2 months in advance. The maximum number of participants was limited to 24 in order to manage the contest properly and effectively. Since there were a larger number of applicants than 24, the final contestants were decided by drawing a lot.

Considering the facts that there would be applicants majoring in English and applicants with experience of studying abroad, assignments for recitation were set at two levels in order to ensure fair competition. The levels were divided into Part 1 and Part 2 according to the length of assignments. The assignments for Part 1 lasted approximately for 2 minutes and those for Part 2, 4 minutes.<sup>1)</sup> There were three assignments offered in each part. They were chosen through teacher meetings considering the following factors: Appropriateness of content, possibility of copyright approvals and length.

At the enrolment for the contest, students who had studied abroad for more than three months and/or students majoring in English/English Literature were advised to participate in Part 2. Other students chose which part to enrol for themselves.

##### **3.2.2 Judges and Evaluation Items**

To evaluate and rate performances of the contestants, a team of judges was organized. The judges included two Japanese English teachers and two native-speakers-of-English (hence: NSE) teachers. All of them had been teaching English at higher education level for over two years.

The items for evaluation were decided in teacher meetings. The list of evaluation items are in Appendix A.

### **3.2.3 Preparation Sessions**

In order to assist students' recitation training during the preparation for the contest, preparatory sessions by teachers at the language education centre of the university were organized. By a school policy, each teacher at the language education centre works official office hours: 2 periods per week (1 period=90 minutes). From a month before the contest, the teachers' office hours were divided into thirty-minute slots. To match the session time to participants' class schedules, the preparation sessions were arranged into an appointment system. All contestants were qualified to book up to two sessions to receive advice from the teachers. The participants were advised to book slots with different teachers in order to receive advice from different perspectives.<sup>2)</sup>

In addition to the preparation sessions, all students had free access to assignment files through the university portal website. In addition, we also offered sample audio files that were recorded by a NSE teacher on the website.

## **4. Questionnaire Surveys**

### **4.1. Questionnaires**

In December 2013, the contest was held in one of class rooms in the university (Other details of the event can be found in Appendix B.). During the contest, questionnaire surveys were completed by the contestants and the audience members respectively. Both surveys were conducted anonymously, and were filled out in Japanese.

First, to the audience, a questionnaire sheet consisting of multiple-choice questions about publicity and a free description area for feedback was provided. Second, to the contestants, a questionnaire sheet consisting of multiple-choice questions about learning outcomes from the contest and a free description area for writing feedback was distributed. Samples of the original questionnaire sheets can be found in Appendix C.

All the contestants and audience were asked to complete the questionnaires, however not all of them did. This was mainly because some students came to the venue late so they did not receive the explanation about the questionnaires. Also, some others needed to leave the venue before the whole event ended due to other appointments, so they did not submit the questionnaire forms.

From the next section, the results of the questionnaire surveys will be discussed. In analyses of data, text-mining was performed to statistically analyse responses in the free-description area. Text-mining was conducted with KH Coder (Ver.2.beta.30e.) and ChaSen software.

### **4.2. Result of Audience**

There were 16 valid answers from the audience members. The results of the multiple-questions are shown below in Figures 1, 2, and Table 1.

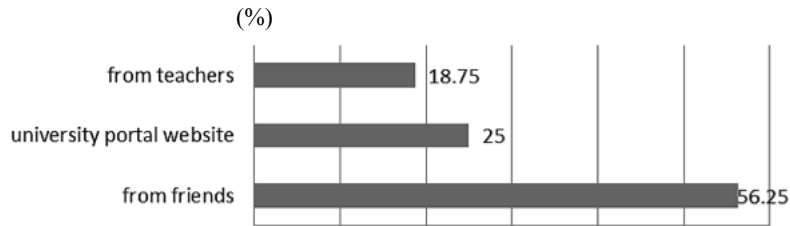


Figure 1. How did you hear about the contest?

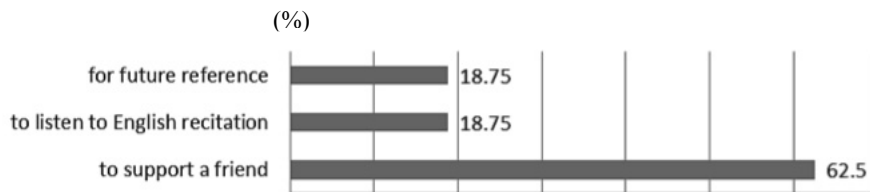


Figure 2. Why did you decide to come today?

Table 1

*“If the second contest is held next year...”*

If the second contest is held next year...	M (agree: 5, disagree: 1)
A. ...I'll attend if my friend becomes one of contestants.	4.56
B. ...I want to be in the audience again.	3.93
C. ...I want to participate as a contestant.	2.56

By observing the results in Figure 1 and 2, the major reason why the audience decided to join the contest seemed to be their friends. This was also the case in Table 1; the audience answered positively about future attendance if their friends were contestants. Also, for item B in Table 1 (*“I want to be in the audience again.”*), the average score is again quite high. This fact indicates that the audience was satisfied and stimulated by the quality of recitation performances at the contest. In fact, in responses to the free description area, there were positive comments about the recitation performances such as: *“I was motivated by their performance.”* *“Even with the same assignments, the performance of each contestant was unique and interesting.”* A detailed analysis of the responses follows below.

In the free description feedback, there were 346 Japanese words in total. After all the responses were computerized as a text database, text-mining was performed with KH Coder and ChaSen lemmatizer to analyse the data statistically. The data were first lemmatized and sorted, and then a co-occurrence network of the words was extracted with KhCoder. The extraction was conducted with words that had more than two raw-frequencies and were content words. Figure 3 shows the co-occurrence network of the words in the database (For the original Japanese version, please refer to Appendix D.).

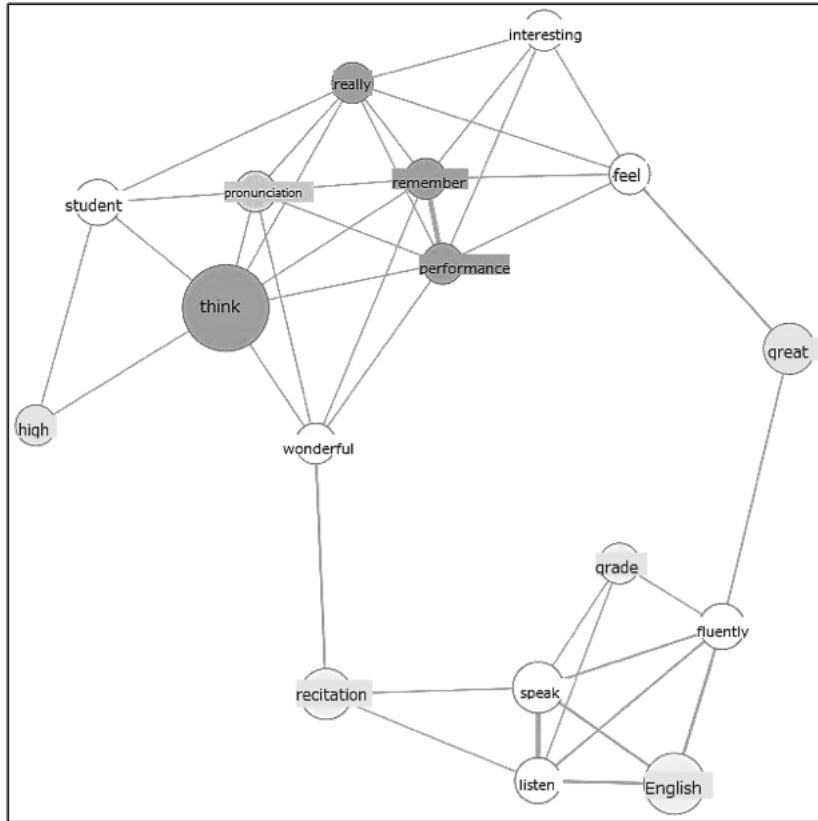


Figure 3. Co-occurrence network of words from the audience responses

As shown in Figure 3, there were positive adjectives and adverbs such as *wonderful*, *interesting*, *great* and *fluently*. From these uses of adjectives and adverbs, it is noticeable that the audience felt the performance of the contestants was of high quality and stimulating. In fact, many of the audience wrote that they were amazed and motivated by the recitations that were performed by their peer students. Some examples from the raw data are: “*I thought that the all contestants were great because they spoke English so fluently.*” “*I really respect the contestants for memorizing the long assignments and giving wonderful performances in front of such many people.*” “*In my daily life, I don’t usually have a chance to listen to someone of my age speaking English fluently. The contest was an exciting and stimulating opportunity for me.*” From these reactions from the audience, it seems that the recitation contest is effective for motivating not only contestants but also the audience.

### 4.3. Result for the Contestants

There were 18 valid responses from the contestants. Methods for analyses were the same as the survey of the audience. First, the results of the multiple-choice questions regarding the effects of the contest are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Results of multiple-choice questions*

Questions about learning outcomes		
#	<i>Participation in the contest was...</i>	average score (agree: 5, disagree: 1)
1	...effective for improving English pronunciation.	4.61
2	...a good chance to practice public speaking.	4.39
3	...effective for improving English listening skills.	4.17
4	...effective for understanding English content.	4.06
Questions about planning and management of the contest		
#	<i>Regarding the contest...</i>	average score (agree: 5, disagree: 1)
5	The number of preparation sessions was adequate.	3.44
6	The scheduling of the preparation sessions was suitable.	3.44
7	The difficulty level of the assignment was suitable.	3.83
8	The content of the assignment was appropriate for the contest.	4.06

From the results of question 1-4, it can be clearly seen that contestants felt that the participation in the recitation contest was effective for improving their pronunciation, public speaking skills, listening skills and understanding of English.

However, from the relatively low scores for questions 5 and 6, the design and scheduling of preparation sessions seem to need some improvement. As previously mentioned, the sessions were offered up to twice for each participant, but not all of the participants used the two slots due to other appointments such as lectures, club activities and/or part time jobs.

In fact, the scheduling of the preparation sessions was challenging. At first, the preparation sessions were offered mainly in morning periods. However, the participation rate was not high, and some participants mentioned that they had many lectures in morning periods. Thus, two weeks before the contest, the preparation sessions were offered in afternoon and evening periods as well as morning periods by re-scheduling. However, from the results of the questionnaire survey, students tended to be occupied with activities such as club activities and part time jobs in evening time, and did not have enough chances to attend preparation sessions.

Regarding results of the free description field, there were 357 Japanese words in the answers. To extract key words and a co-occurrence network of words, text-mining was performed on the data using KhCoder and ChaSen. The extraction was conducted with words that had more than two raw-frequencies and were content words. Figure 4 shows the co-occurrence network of the words from the responses by contestants (For the original Japanese version, please refer to Appendix E.).

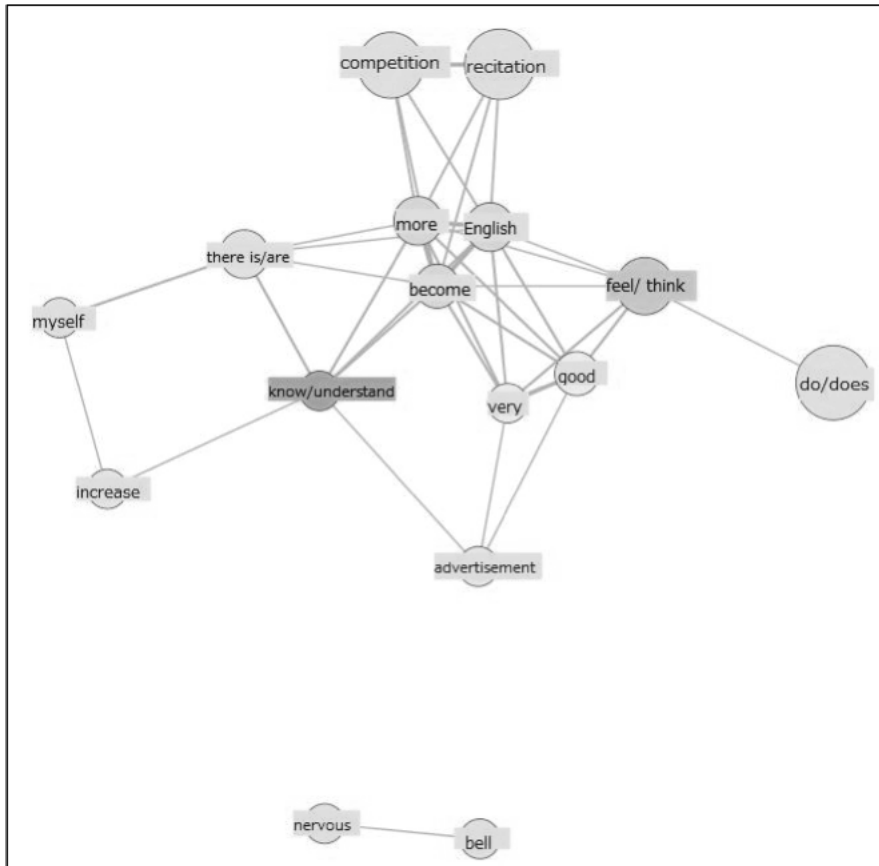


Figure 4. Co-occurrence network of words from the responses of contestants

From the diagram, we can observe a positive impression by participants, because there are words such as *very*, *good*, *become*, *more* and *increase*. In fact, when the raw data were examined, most comments were quite positive about the contest and its effects on their English learning. Examples from the raw data are as follows: “*I think the English recitation contest was a very good opportunity to practice English speaking.*” “*This event was a good chance for improving my English.*” “*Please increase the number of events like this.*” Furthermore, most participants wrote that they hope the contest continues and that they hope to participate in the next contest again.

However, some issues that need to be addressed were also pointed out by the contestants. The first was the school bell that rang during the contest, interrupting several performances. The bell



could have been stopped beforehand, thus the feedback will be useful for future reference. The next problem was the insufficient publicity; some of the contestants mentioned that their friends did not know about the contest until the contestants asked their friends to attend. The results from the audience showed the same weakness. More than half of the audience answered that they heard about the contest from their friends, not from the portal website or other publicity tools (cf. Figure 1). More effective advertisement should be planned and practiced for the next contest.

## **5. Conclusion**

In summary, from the results of the questionnaire surveys on the audience and contestants, holding an English recitation contest affected positively both the audience and contestants. By engaging in focused practice for the contest, the contestants felt positive effects on improving their pronunciation, public speaking skills, listening skills and comprehension. On the other hand, their peers who attended the contest in the audience felt motivated by the high quality performance by the contestants.

As future prospects, there are two points that need to be considered and improved. Firstly, preparation sessions may need reconsideration as regards planning and contents. Especially, feedback from teachers included comments that multi-modal speaking skills such as gestures and eye contact need to be taught in the sessions, on the basis of shared principles between teachers and judges. After the contest, the teachers and judges had discussed their opinions. It was suggested that some gestures and eye-contact of contestants were unnatural; they were either excessive or too infrequent. Therefore, it would be useful to provide proper advice regarding gestures and eye-contact during the preparation sessions. To do so, more investigation about teaching methods for those skills should be conducted.

Secondly, advertisement of the contest should be improved in any future contest; because attending a recitation contest can be a good opportunity for both contestants and audience. Unlike speech contests where participants are required to create contents as well as to perform, recitation contests can offer opportunities for students to focus on practicing pure speaking and performing skills such as accent, sentence intonation, gestures and eye-contact. With the focused training on speaking skills, students can improve speaking skills and gain higher motivation towards English learning. In fact, in the first English recitation contest discussed in this paper, the first-prize winner was non-English-major student in both Part 1 and 2. By watching the performance of those peer students, even students who have lower confidence or motivation in English learning can feel inspired. With a better publicity, more students may participate in the contest as audience members, and it can provide a stimulating experience for the students.

### Note

- 1) During the contest, the contestants recited the assignments within time limitations: 2.5 minutes for Part 1 and 5 minutes for Part 2.
- 2) However, due to schedule problems, some participants booked two slots with the one same teacher.

### Reference

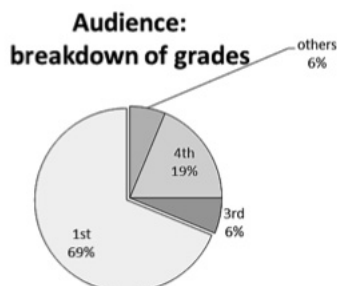
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Appendix A  
Evaluation Items

★Score: 1to 3, 1=poor, 2=so so, 3= good	
審査基準 items	
<音声> phonology/sound	各項目3点満点
・一つ一つの音が英語音声として正しく調音できている (articulation of each sound)	
・リエゾンなど英語の音変化を正しく表現できている (linking of words and liaison)	
・単語のアクセントを正しく表現できている (word accent)	
・文としてのイントネーションを正しく表現できている (sentence intonation)	
・不自然に途切れることなく流暢に英語を運用できている (overall fluency)	
<発表> presentation	各項目3点満点
・声量が適度で、会場全体にはっきりと聴こえる (voice volume)	
・プレゼンターとしてふさわしい、自信と熱意のある態度で発表できている (confidence and enthusiasm in attitude)	
・内容をふまえて、聴衆に内容が伝わるように表現できている (expression of the content)	
・聴衆とアイコンタクトが取れている (eyecontact with the audience)	
・ジェスチャーや表情の変化などを効果的に用いている (effective gester and facial expressions)	

Appendix B  
Event Details

Date	4th December 2013
Time	15:10 - 18:00
Venue	a classroom of the university (capacity: approx. 100 people)
Contestants	Part1: 12 students, Part 2: 12 students
Audience	approx. 30 students (excluding the contestants)



Appendix C  
Questionnaire sheet for audience

1) ご所属：あてはまる番号に○をつけて、( ) 内にご所属をご記入ください。  
1. 学生：( ) 学部 ( ) 年生 2. 教員：( )  
3. その他：( )

2) 英語歌唱大会について、どのようにお知りになりましたか。1つお選びください。  
1. 学内ポータルサイトを見て 2. 学内ポスター・チラシを見て 3. 友人に聞いて  
4. 教員に聞いて 5. その他：( )

3) ご来場理由を1つお選びください。  
1. 友人の応援 2. 英語の歌唱を聴いてみたかった 3. 学習の参考に 4. その他：  
( )

3) **学生の方へ** ご来場いただき、どのようにお感じになりましたか。番号に○をつけてください。

★もし来年度以降に、第二回歌唱大会が開催されるとすれば…

a. 友人が出場するなら応援に来たい  
1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

b. またオーディエンスとして参加したい  
1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

c. 歌唱者として大会に参加してみたい  
1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

4) 歌唱大会へのご感想・ご意見などをお聞かせください

Questionnaire sheets for contestants

1) 暗唱大会参加による効果について

事前準備と大会参加を通して、どう感じましたか。番号に○をつけてください。

・英語発音力向上の役に立った

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

・人前で英語を話すことに慣れる機会になった

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

・リスニング力向上の役に立った

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

・英文内容理解力向上の役に立った

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

—その他、暗唱大会や今後のイベントについてご意見があればご記入をお願いします。

2) 事前指導と課題文について

- 事前に受けられる個別指導の回数（1人2回まで）は適切だった

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

- 個別指導の曜限の設定は適切だった

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

- 暗唱課題文の難易度はちょうどよかった

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

- 暗唱課題文の内容は暗唱大会にふさわしかった

1 2 3 4 5  
全くそう思わない ←————→ とてもそう思う

- その他、事前指導や課題文についてご意見があればご記入をお願いします。

