English Education in a Brazilian Community in Japan: A Case Study in a Brazilian School in Ibaraki Prefecture

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Introduction

Among the foreign residents living in Japan, Brazilians make up the largest contingent from Latin American countries (Ministry of Justice, 2017). Although there have been many studies on the language and education of Brazilian students living in Japan, the majority of previous investigations have focused on topics such as Japanese language acquisition, maintenance of Portuguese, and how the students cope with Japanese schools (Takenoshita et al., 2013; Ishikawa, 2014; Feijo, 2016). In those studies, problems such as children having difficulty in local Japanese schools in terms of academic achievement and integration into peer communities are pointed out. This is because, in many cases, Japanese is not their first language (L1), so they are not fluent enough to follow along in classes and to communicate with others. Of course, it is often important for them to acquire Japanese in order to integrate into Japanese society and to succeed in the future. However, acquiring Japanese language may not be the only way for them to lead a desirable life. In light of the fact that Japanese society is becoming more international and chances to interact with people from all over the world are increasing, the role of English cannot be ignored as a potential gateway to future success.

Nevertheless, there is little literature that empirically examines Brazilian children's academic achievement in English. Therefore, this paper will attempt to address that deficiency. Since there are a large number of Brazilian people, there are also Brazilian schools in Japan, which provide their students a curriculum in line with the formal Brazilian education system. In these

Brazilian schools, the language used for instruction in classes is Portuguese, a first language for most Brazilian children in Japan. The English language is also taught in these schools as a second language (L2) in accordance with Brazilian education standards. In this case study, I will investigate and discuss the English education as well as the students' attitudes toward English at a Brazilian school in Ibaraki Prefecture, based on a questionnaire survey. There are two main reasons for choosing a Brazilian school as the subject of study: (1) This Brazilian school recently introduced a policy to put more emphasis on English education, providing more chances for the students to learn English; and (2) the students of a Brazilian school may have different attitudes toward or contact with English compared to students attending local Japanese schools.

Background

Brazilian communities and Brazilian schools in Japan

Since the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law in 1989, Japanese descendants, or Nikkei, have come to Japan to stay on Long Term Resident Visas (Onai, 2005). Therefore, a considerable number of Nikkei and their spouses (who are not necessarily Nikkei) from different countries have moved into Japan, mainly looking for better pay. Among the Nikkei population, Brazilians have always been in the majority. Although the population decreased after the global economic crisis in 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster in 2011, there were still 180,923 Brazilian nationals residing in Japan as of 2016 (Ministry of Justice, 2017). Since the Brazilian immigrants often work in factories as contract laborers together with other Brazilian coworkers, they often live in places where factories are concentrated. Those places include Aichi and Shizuoka Prefectures. Ibaraki Prefecture, where this survey was conducted, has the ninth largest Brazilian population among the 47 prefectures in Japan (Ministry of Justice, 2017).

Many Brazilian children residing in Japan attend local public schools, but there are also children who attend Brazilian schools. However, attending a Brazilian school usually costs more than attending a local Japanese school, and there are far

fewer Brazilian schools. For many Brazilian families, the schools are simply too far away from where they live to send their children to them. Nevertheless, depending on the financial situation of the family and the distance involved, the children may have a choice to attend a Brazilian school instead of a Japanese school.

The option of attending a Brazilian school is most likely to be available, as one would expect, in cities with a large Brazilian population, where most such schools are found (Park, 2008; Ishikawa, 2014; Feijo, 2016). As of today, there are a total of 34 licensed Brazilian schools in Japan (Embassy of Brazil in Tokyo, n.d.). There are three licensed Brazilian schools in Ibaraki Prefecture, and one of them is the school where this survey was carried out. When a Brazilian school is licensed, it means that the school is "recognized by the Ministry of Education in Brazil (MEC) and all the graduation certificates are valid in Brazil" (Feijo, 2016, pp. 7–8).

English education in the Brazilian school

Since the Ministry of Education in Brazil licensed the Ibaraki Prefecture Brazilian school in this study, the English curriculum in the school is the same as that in the formal Brazilian education system. According to the principal, the school has just modified its policy regarding English education to encourage the students to study English more. The school promotes English learning in a variety of ways, including (a) English classes using the communicative approach, (b) special English conversation classes taught by an invited English native speaker, and (c) English lessons after school as an extracurricular activity open to students who wish to participate. The English extracurricular lessons are the most recent and innovative addition to the English language program of the school. Since it is extracurricular, only those who wish to join the lessons after school take part in the classes. At the time of the survey, 18 out of a total of roughly 90 students were taking the English lessons. The lessons take place once a week at each of two different locations: the Brazilian school and a classroom located two train stations away from the school. Students choose the most convenient location for them. The lessons started in September 2015 at the school and in February 2016 at the off-site location. The teachers are native English speakers who teach English professionally at other language schools. Offering the extracurricular English lessons is an innovative move that is not widely adopted by other Brazilian schools.

The principal also shared the reasons the school started to put more emphasis on English education. The first is that it seems more reasonable to encourage the students to learn English rather than Japanese. The school had been putting a great deal of effort into having students pass the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). However, there were few students that successfully passed the higher levels of the test. So the school reconsidered and decided to have the students attain a high proficiency in English instead. English was chosen not only because it is a common L2 taught in Brazil and Japan, but also because the students were more motivated to learn English than Japanese, and English may be easier to learn because of its linguistic similarity to Portuguese, the students' L1.

The school also believes it is important for students to be proficient in English as English abilities will help them get a better job after graduation from the school. If they keep on living in Japan, the students need to be fluent in a language other than Portuguese in order to communicate with others, and if the additional language is not Japanese, it should be English. Moreover, if they decide to leave Japan in the future, English is even more important. Many students indeed want to leave Japan, but if they go to Brazil, chances to get a good job there are not high because of the economic recession in Brazil. Therefore, if they want to live somewhere else, English will be important for them. For these reasons, the school is trying to offer better quality English classes and more chances to learn English outside of school.

There is a good reason for the school to believe that English abilities will help its students to find a successful path in the future. According to Ishikawa (2014), all of her young Brazilian interviewees who successfully advanced to a Japanese university showed a high level of English. Those Brazilians who enter a Japanese university are considered to be exceptionally successful because the majority does not even go to high school (Ishikawa, 2014). If students graduate from a university, they have a greater range of choices for what they will do in the future. Among the Brazilians living in Japan, those successful cases are viewed as role models, and the Brazilian school in Ibaraki Prefecture also wants its students to follow the example of those successful

young Brazilians.

Research Method

This survey was conducted in a Brazilian school in Ibaraki Prefecture between December 2016 and February 2017. The author was not familiar with the community, but the informants participated in the survey in a relatively relaxed manner, thanks to assistance from a coordinator who has been working with the school for a number of years. The survey was conducted face-toface with the informants using a questionnaire. The informants are Brazilian students who attend a Brazilian senior or junior high school. In total, 21 students participated in the survey (see Table 1 for details). Along with the questionnaire survey for the students, an interview was conducted with the principal of the Brazilian school in order to understand how the school provides the students with English education. In addition to the students of the Brazilian school, five Brazilian students who attend Japanese senior or junior high schools also participated in this survey1 and their responses will also be considered in the discussion.

Table 1. The number of respondents according to sex and school (senior or junior high school)

		Female	Male	Total
Brazilian school	SHS	6	2	21
	JHS	5	8	21
Japanese school	SHS	2	1	
	JHS	1	1	5

There are some advantages to using a questionnaire for a survey, despite the shortcomings of the research tool. One of the shortcomings is that the answers do not necessarily reflect respondents' actual language abilities or behavior, but rather self-reported abilities claimed by the respondents. For this survey, however, this disadvantage was compensated for in some degree by going through the questionnaire survey face-to-face with the informants. Furthermore, the reliability of the data from a face-to-face survey is higher than that from questionnaire surveys distributed via mail or over the internet, since the infor-

mants feel that they need to answer more responsibly, and they may care more about the researcher. Another advantage of conducting the survey face-to-face is that the risk of non-responses was considerably reduced. The respondents could always ask the researcher (and the interpreter in this case) if they had questions, the researcher could check to insure that all the questions had been answered immediately following the completion of the questionnaire (or even while the informants were filling in the answers), and the researcher could ask the respondents questions on the spot if answers needed to be clarified.

The actual questions asked in the questionnaire are as follows: The first part of the questionnaire, Section I, asked the respondents about background information, such as their name, age, sex, the school they attend, their grade, how long they have been living in Japan, and their most and second-most competent languages. In Sections II and III, their opinions about English and English learning were asked: What languages are used, and how much are those languages used, by their teachers in English classes (Question 1)? How good do they think their English ability is in speaking, listening, writing and reading, respectively (Question 2)? How much do they like speaking, listening, writing and reading in English (Question 3)? How important do they think English learning is (Question 4)? Which of the two languages, Japanese or English, do they think it is more important to be fluent in (Question 5)? In the final section, Section IV, questions were asked about their opportunities to learn or use English outside of school: Question 6 asked about their English learning outside school; Question 7 asked about their English speaking, listening, writing and reading outside of school. Their experience living in an English-speaking country was queried in Question 8, Question 9 asked if they have family or friends living in an English-speaking country, and Question 10 asked how they communicate with such persons. See the appendix for examples of the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

L1, L2 and the age of arrival

First, the respondents' age at the time they started living in

Japan and the acquisition of their first language (L1) and their second language (L2) are closely related. As Table 2 shows, the majority of the Brazilian school students were born in Japan or moved to Japan before they started attending elementary school: 16 out of 21, or 76% of students, were born in Japan or came to Japan when they were younger than 5 years old.

Table 2. Age of arrival in Japan

	Born in Japan/ Younger than 1	1–2	3–5	6–12	Older than 13	Total
Brazilian school	7	5	4	4	1	21
Japanese school	1	3	0	0	0	42

Next, which language the students consider as their L1 and L2 was examined. Their L1 was here regarded to be the language(s) that they claimed to be most competent in. The same applies to L2, which was defined here as their second-most competent language(s). As Table 3 shows, all students in the Brazilian school responded that their L1 is Portuguese, except for one student who responded that both Portuguese and Japanese are her L1. This result is clearly different from that of the Brazilian students who attend Japanese schools. Three of them responded that their L1 is Japanese, and the other two responded that both Portuguese and Japanese are their L1. There was more variation in the responses given for the students' L2 than for their L1 (see Table 4). Among the 21 Brazilian school students, nine responded that their L2 is English, followed by six whose L2 is Japanese and two whose L2 is both Portuguese and Japanese. There was also one response each for Japanese and English, Portuguese, Spanish, and none at all. When comparing this result to that of the students in the Japanese schools, the most remarkable difference is that many more students in the Brazilian school consider English, which is not widely used as a daily language in Japan, as their L2. Moreover, this tendency was not dependent on their age of arrival; the ages of arrival range from 1 to 16 among the nine students whose L2 is English.

Table 3. The number of respondents according to selected L1

	Portuguese	Portuguese & Japanese	Japanese	Total
Brazilian school	20 (95.2%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	21 (100%)
Japanese school ³	0	2	3	5

Table 4. The number of respondents according to selected L2

	English	Japanese	Portuguese & Japanese	Japanese & English	Portuguese	Spanish	None	Total
Brazilian		6	2	1	1	1	1	21
school	(42.9%)	(28.6%)	(9.5%)	(4.8%)	(4.8%)	(4.8%)	(4.8%)	(100%)
Japanese school ⁴	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	5

English used by teachers in classes

In Brazilian schools, classes are taught in accordance with the curriculum of the Brazilian education system. The English teacher in this senior and junior high school is a Brazilian who is fluent both in Portuguese and English. According to the responses to Q1 ("In English classes at school, how much do your teachers use each of the following languages to teach?"), the classes are taught using both English and Portuguese (13 students) or only English (5 students), and Japanese and Spanish are also used in class in addition to Portuguese and English (2 students). Moreover, when they responded that English is used along with other languages, such as Portuguese, Japanese and Spanish, eight responded that English is used more than any other language(s), six responded that English and Portuguese are equally used, and only one responded that English is used less than other languages. This contrasts with the responses from Brazilian students in Japanese schools, who all responded that both English and Japanese are used in class, but with English always used less than Japanese. The results can be interpreted as reflecting the tendency for teachers in Brazilian schools to try to use the target language, English, more than the students' L1, Portuguese.

Self-rated English abilities and attitudes toward English

This section will report the responses to Q2 ("How good do you think your English abilities in speaking, listening, writing and reading are, respectively?") and Q3 ("How much do you like speaking, listening, writing and reading in English?"). Note that all the following figures and tables are based on the responses of the Brazilian school students, unless it is clearly stated that the results are drawn from the students attending Japanese schools for the sake of comparison. Figures 1 and 2 show the number of respondents for each point on a five-point scale for the four language abilities.

When you compare the distribution of respondents' ratings across the four abilities, speaking ability stands out from the other three abilities—listening, writing and reading (see Figure 1). These three abilities have a peak at values "3" or "4," indicating that the students consider their abilities to be neither very bad nor very good, but somewhere in between. On the other hand, 62% of the students (13 out of 21) regarded their speaking ability as below a "2," indicating that they are less confident in speaking than in other abilities.

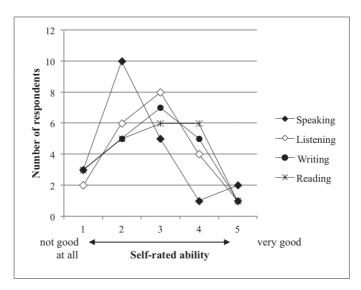


Figure 1. Self-rated ability of students in the Brazilian school

Next, Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses, on a five-point scale, to the question of how much the students like English. Writing and reading show a similar pattern, which is also similar to the pattern showed by the self-rating of listening, writing, and reading abilities. However, the distributions of listening and speaking show patterns considerably different from the results of self-rated ability. Although the students tend to consider their listening ability somewhat in the middle and speaking ability lower than other abilities, 62% of the students responded with a "5," meaning that they like listening and speaking English much more than reading and writing the language.

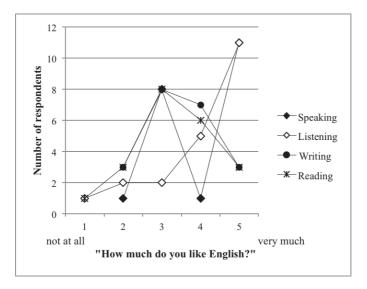


Figure 2. How much the students in the Brazilian school like English

The fourth question (Q4) asked the students how important they think English learning is, on a five-point scale, and the results showed that 76% responded with a "5" and 19% responded with a "4," indicating that most of them think it is very important (see Table 5). The major reasons they think English learning is important are as follows (with the number of students giving the reason in parenthesis): English is important because it is used all over the world (10); because they want to study/live abroad in the future (6); and because it is important

for communicating with people from other countries (6). It is worth mentioning that six students in the Brazilian school already envision themselves living abroad and using English, as opposed to the Brazilian students attending Japanese schools, none of which commented about studying or living abroad in the future.

Lastly, Q5 asked the students which of the two languages, Japanese or English, they think it is more important for them to be fluent in (see Table 5). The result shows that 85% of the students in the Brazilian school think that English fluency is more important. The major reasons for choosing English over Japanese are as follows: because English is used all over the world (9), and because Japanese is used only in Japan (5). The three students who thought Japanese fluency was more important gave reasons such as wanting to be able to use Japanese since they live in Japan. From the results, it is inferred that many of the students in the Brazilian school wish to be fluent in English because they expect to be a part of the international community, rather than just the domestic Japanese community, despite the fact that many of them have lived in Japan since birth or early childhood.

Table 5. The number of Brazilian school respondents by value point for Q4 and Q5

Q 4: How important is English learning?					Q5: Which l	anguage is it
not at all ←very important						ortant to be
					fluent in?	
1	2	3	4	5	Japanese	English
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (19%)	16 (76.2%)	3 (14.3%)	18 (85.7%)

English learning and contact with English outside of class

As stated in the background section, the Brazilian school where this survey was conducted encourages the students to join English lessons after school. Among the 21 students who participated in the survey, 11 responded that they study English outside of school and nine of them attend the afterschool English lessons, according to the responses to Q6 ("Do you study English outside of class?").

The questionnaire included not only questions that asked students about their English learning outside of class, but also questions about their English use in daily life (Q7: "Do you speak, listen to, write or read English outside of school?"). Table 6 shows the responses to this question by the students of both the Brazilian and Japanese schools. The general finding is that there are more students in the Brazilian school who speak, listen to, and read English outside school than those who do not, and that there are fewer students who write English than those who do not. Comparing the four abilities, more students perceive English through listening and reading than produce it by speaking and writing. Students reported using English outside of school in several ways. Among students who responded that they listen to English, 17 said that they listen to music in English, seven responded that they watch movies, videos, or TV in English, and one each responded that he or she listens to English at work, when playing video games, and to get information. The students who read English outside school reported reading lyrics of English songs (8 students), books (4 students), and other materials such as blogs or posts on social media (3 students) and subtitles (2 students). There was also one student each who responded that he or she reads English with maps, news, magazines and games. As for speaking, five students talk to their friends in English, three students speak English with their parents, three students sing in English, three ask for information in English (instead of Japanese), and one talks to an English teacher in English. Among those who write English outside of school, three students write in English on social media, two use English for online searching. There are also one student each who responded that he or she writes song lyrics, plays online games, take notes in textbooks, and writes down her thoughts in English. It seems that many of the activities involving English outside of school are related to music and the internet. In addition, when comparing the frequency of the students' English use among the four practices of speaking, listening, writing and reading, their reported frequency of listening is remarkably higher than that reported for speaking, writing or reading: 17 out of 20 students actually report listening to English every day (see Figure 3).

Although the sample size is quite limited, the students attending the Japanese schools did not show similar tendencies at all, except for English listening. Four of the students responded that they also listen to music and watch TV or videos in English, and one responded that he reads movie subtitles in

English. However, unlike the students in the Brazilian school, none of them produce English by speaking or writing outside of school.

Table 6. The number of respondents who use / do not use English outside of school

	Speaking		Listening		Writing		Reading	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Brazilian school	15	6	20	1	14	7	19	2
Japanese school	0	5	4	1	0	5	1	4

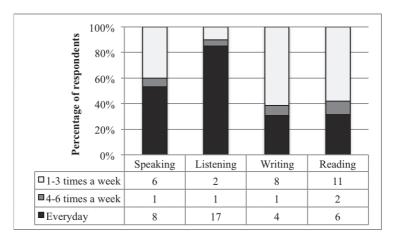


Figure 3. The frequency of the students' English speaking, listening, writing and reading⁵

The questionnaire also included questions on students' experience living in an English-speaking country and communicating in English with family and friends who live in an English-speaking country (Q8, Q9 and Q10). However, no student had lived in an English-speaking country or had frequent contact with family or friends living abroad. Therefore, these questions were omitted from the analysis.

Conclusion

This paper sought to show how English is taught in a Brazilian

school in Japan and to analyze students' attitudes toward English and English learning through empirical data collected using a questionnaire survey.

First, it is remarkable that so many students of the Brazilian school responded that English was their L2. Also, although the respondents' self-rated abilities for English speaking and listening were not especially high, they generally liked speaking and listening to English very much. This means that, overall, the students in the Brazilian school have positive attitudes toward using English, regardless of whether or not they are confident in their language ability. This could be related to the fact that almost half of the respondents study English outside of school, and most of them take the extracurricular English lessons in addition to the English classes offered at school. Moreover, many students have opportunities to speak, listen to, write or read English outside of school. The most common form of English use was listening: a majority listens to English via media such as music and videos quite frequently. Their level of contact with English was much higher than that of the Brazilian students attending Japanese schools. As one might guess from their frequent contact with English, along with the English education provided by the school, their motivation to study English was considerable. They also felt that learning English was important for their future, as many students imagined themselves communicating with other people using English. In light of the language practices and positive student attitudes found in this study, the Brazilian school's attempt to promote the English abilities of the students can be said to be effective. The school's administrators and the students themselves are confident that acquiring a high level of English proficiency will help the students achieve their life and career goals in the future. The analysis presented here was a case study with a small number of respondents. In future studies, the number of respondents needs to be increased in order to obtain more reliable and generalizable results. Also, further studies are needed in order to investigate when, to whom, and how the students speak English outside of school.⁶

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Notes

- 1. Among the students who attend Japanese schools, one student was interviewed face-to-face by the researcher, but as for the other four students, an NPO working with them kindly conducted and collected the questionnaires for the researcher.
- One non-response was excluded from the number of students attending Japanese schools.
- 3. The percentages for the Japanese school attendees are omitted because the sample size is too small.
- 4. The percentages for the Japanese school attendees are omitted because the sample size is too small.
- 5. There is one student who responded that she writes in English outside of school but did not know the frequency of writing so her response is not included in the number.
- Another area for future research would be a comparison of the results of this case study with the use of and attitudes toward English among Japanese students learning English in the Japanese educational system.

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Appendix

Questionnaire (translated in English)

Questionnaire on English Education

Section I. Personal Inform	ation			
Name:	Age	:	Sex: 🗆 ma	le □ female
School name:	Gra	de:		
How long have you been li		year(s)	month(<u>s)</u>
What is/are your most com	1 000			
☐ Portuguese ☐ Japane	se 🗆 Both Portuguese &	Japanese Ei	nglish Other	language(s)
What is/are your second m	ost competent language(s)?			
☐ Portuguese ☐ Japane	se 🗆 Both Portuguese &	Japanese Ei	nglish Other	language(s)
Section II. Studying Englis	h			
Q1. In English classes at sch		chers use each of	the following lan	guages to teach?
- 0	nglish 50%, Japanese 0%	oners ase each or	the following itm	gaages to teaen.
	1	English	h Others	s ()
Portuguese	Japanese	Englisi	n Others	
%	%		%	%
Q2. How good do you think Please circle a number b		eaking, listening,	writing and readi	ng are, respectively?
Not go	ood at all ◆	──	Very good	
Speaking:	1 2	3 4	5	
Listening:	1 2	3 4	5	
Writing:	1 2	3 4	5	
Reading:	1 2	3 4	5	
Section III. Opinions abou	t English			
Q3. How much do you like s		and reading in E	nglish? Please circ	le a number below.
•	ot at all	_	Very much	
Speaking:	1			
Listening:	1 2			
Writing:				
Reading:	1 2		5	
-				
Q4. How important do you t	hink it is for you to learn E	nglish? Please cir	cle a number belo	W.
Not important at a	ıll 🗢	—► Very imp	ortant	
1	2 3	4 5		
Why do you think it is o	or is not important to learn	English?		
e.g. (It's important) to ge		-		
(It's not important) be	ecause I don't think I will use	English in the futur	re	

Q5. Which of the	e following la	anguages do	you think is mor	re important	for you to be fluent in	1?
□ Japanese	□ Engli	ish				
Why?						
Section IV. Con	ntact with E	nglish outsic	le of school			
Q6. Do you stud	y English ou	tside school,	aside from doing	g your home	work? If "yes", how a	and how often?
e.g. How→ I	go to prep sch	iool; I study w	ith a book at hom	e/ How often	→ Once a week	
□ Yes → H	low:			How	often:	
□ No						
- • •			-		es", how and how oft	
e.g. How→ I	listen to US p	op music; I tal	k to a Filipino fri		en→ Every day; Twice a	
Speaking:	\square Yes \rightarrow	How:		I	How often:	
	□ No					
Listening:	□ Yes →	How:		I	How often:	
_	□ No					
Writing:	□ Yes →	How:		I	How often:	
	□ No					
Reading:	□ Yes →	How:		I	How often:	
	□ No					
Q8. Have you liv	ved in an Eng	lish-speakin	g county? If "ye	s", where an	d for how long?	
-						
□ No						
2110						
Q9. Do you have	e family men	bers, relative	es or friends who	o live in an I	English-speaking coun	nty? If "yes", who lives
-	-		ou contact them,			
□ Yes → V	Who:			Where:		
			Yes → Q10		□ No	
1	o you contact	mm/ner/: <u>u</u>	ies → Qiu		□ NO	
□ No						
-		u use when y	ou contact your	family men	ibers, relatives or frie	nds who live in an
English-speaking	-					
☐ Portugu	iese 🗆	Japanese	☐ English	☐ Other	language(s)	
TY	6 1		/10			
	ow often do y			Uom often	2 Once a mant1-	
					Once a month	
110W ·				110W OIL	en:	