

The use of Online English lessons to practice students of different levels – a case practice report

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ABSTRACT

This is a case study on the use of 'on-line English language learning' for an elective class of students studying in different fields and with different interests. English is an essential study for schooling in Japan and the history goes back over a century. However even after the history and hardships of EFL discussion, many EFL students are still not able to communicate in English and have wide difference of abilities. Japanese is in fact, the only language necessary to survive in Japan, and this non-English language speaking environment is one of the good reasons why Japanese teachers have a hard time motivating students to study English.

The ideal method to have students use English in class may vary among practitioners, but as a university teacher responsible for a group of motivated students in an elective class which is open to the whole university, is to have the students discuss, debate and present. There was a belief that students' discussion would be very difficult to practice, which partially comes from a cultural background, but the different levels of English was the key issue. An online English service was introduced to class and as a result, all students became active users of English and were dignified in their presentations.

Key words: online English lessons, different levels, Japanese University

INTRODUCTION

The history of English Language teaching in Japan goes back to 1954. The trigger of this was 'Convention of Peace and Amity between the United States of America and the Empire of Japan (aka: convention of Kanagawa)' between Japan and U.S.A. This treaty was necessary to open the gates of isolated Japan for trading, and brought in many different cultures from all over the world. Among these things were English written newspaper and books which were full of unknown culture and information thus English to Japanese translation became very important. The government aimed to reform the country by catching up and overtaking other countries and EFL teaching was taught from primary schools. [田畑きよみ, 2012].

However, EFL education was put to an end very soon but has at last restarted after a century, as a compulsory subject since 2011. [Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology]. The Tokyo Olympics in year 2020 has influenced the government policy too, as to promote globalization to school education more than ever. And to allow full scale improvement, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology decided to promote the sequential reform of English education from year 2014. So, is Japan facing a bilingual environment in the near future? After all this, the author would like to state that many government EFL debates are still in the clouds, and many University students do not enjoy EFL learning but need to earn an English subject credit to graduate whatever field of study they are in. It is not rare to find a class of students with a wide gap in their academic achievement difference of English and makes it hard to teach, and boring to learn in some cases. Thus, in order to manage this problem, an online English lesson has been introduced to a class of students with different levels of English for equal language learning environment and motivation maintenance.

AIM AND ENVIRONMENT

The aim of this study is to practice an English class at a University which is fit for multi-level of students majoring in different fields of study. The study is placed with a University class 'English III', which is an elective class for students of different majors.

The class is placed for intermediate level or above and aims to have students use English as a communication tool. It is announced that a certain level of English ability will be necessary to keep up with class activities, together with high motivation and time. As a result, students that select 'English III' are willing to use their time to study English. However, the students do not have a placement test prior to class selection, therefore there tends to be a wide difference with the students' English level. An online English communication service is used in class to support a one on one discussion and debate. The class aim for 'English III' is to have students raise English communication and discussion ability, and to present their thoughts and ideas on certain topics.

English proficiency level can be assumed by the word level of students, therefore a test [望月正道, 1998] to compute the word levels of students from all departments in the University was placed. The test was placed in a small portion of students, those who take class 'English I' basic level, under the same tutor as 'English III' in year 2016. The results are as follows.

Table 1: The average word levels according to different departments (2016)

Department	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	total
# students	2	16	7	4	8	12	5	9	63
score	2083±24	2269±275	2062±328	1767±433	1892±503	1903±232	1673±317	2089±24	2021±36

Department H achieved the highest score and had significant difference from department D by $0.000627 < 0.05$, which reveals the fact in different levels of English word recognition within the university.

Among many word tests such as Vocabulary Levels test [Nation I. a., 2007] and EFL Vocabulary Tests [Meara, 2010], the test by Mochizuki [望月正道, 1998] was placed because it is a test made focused to EFL Japanese learners. The word size can test compute as small as 0 ~ 1000, and levels up by 1000 words. The test for 'English I' was placed to aim up to a number of 3000 words, which is the level of words hoped to be achieved by EFL learning at Japanese high schools. [文部科学省, 2016] It is a simple and fast but not precise, however "despite the fact that the size tests may seem superficial, they can give a more representative picture of the overall state of the learner's vocabulary" [Read, 2000], and in this study, the word levels are just a mere ruler to seek the level of learners in class for effective teaching.

METHOD

The research was placed with 15 students majoring in 6 departments, ages 18-21 years old. An online English communication service that connects to teachers in the Republic of the Philippines with Skype was used. Within the course of study, 6 lessons were prepared for each student. (one lesson used for level check) The online service has 8 courses in their curriculum of which are; everyday conversation, business communication, travel English conversation, pronunciation, discussion, grammar, TOEIC and TOEFL. The students chose a news topic from the course 'discussion' of their interest and studied it with the service and compiled the information from the news and online teacher, to do a presentation on this topic. During the presentation, the students discussed about the news topic by the presenter lead.

STUDENT TASK IN CLASS

The students were told to study a news topic (see attachment 1) of their choice, which come in different areas of interest and English language levels. They would follow by a one on one study about this topic with their teachers on-line with the whole class. Many students are embarrassed and also hesitate talking in English, however being able to do this as a solo activity all together with other students seem to distress them in that sense.

After the on-line discussion, students are told to prepare a presentation in the following order: 1) introduce the news topic, 2) explain the high-light words, 3) read a portion of the studied material, 4) follow up the news content with related Japanese news articles, 5) introduce the discussed topics (see attachment 2), 6) discuss with the students in class, and then wrap up. Every presentation is placed according to the students' choice of topic, volume

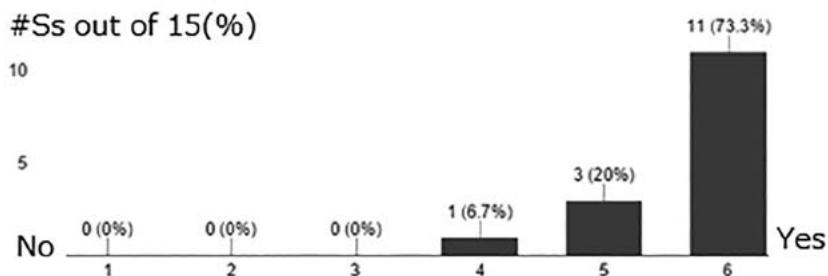
and discussion, but they are all placed based on a presentation template (see attachment 3). Thus, every student is able to do the basic level performance and it is up to their choice to level up. Every presentation is also evaluated by all students online by use of google form. The data is collected to make a graph, printed and handed to each individual as feedback. (see attachment 4). The criteria on a 6 point likert scale are as follows:

1. The presenter spoke clearly.
2. The presenter spoke at a good volume.
3. The presenter spoke at a good pace.
4. The presenter faced the audience.
5. The presenter appeared relaxed.
6. The presenter stood up straight and made use of the floor.
7. The presenter used effective hand gestures.
8. The presenter made eye contact with me.
9. The introduction caught my attention.
10. I found this topic interesting.

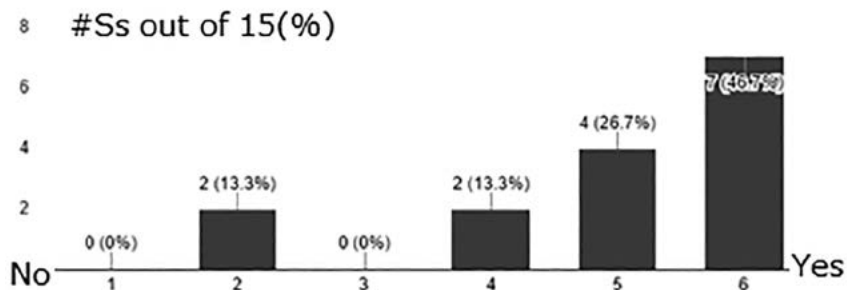
QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

At the end of every term, a questionnaire concerning the online activity in class was placed based on a 6 point likert scale. This survey started from 2015 fall semester until the end of 2016 fall semester while three classes and 15 students completed the course of study. The feedback results are as follows:

Q1. Did you enjoy English III class?

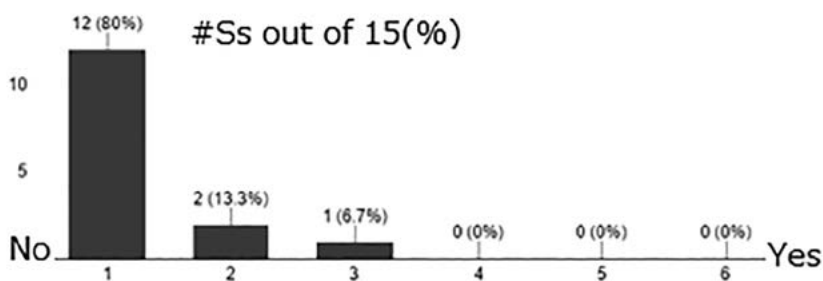


Q2. Did the On-line activity motivate you?



Q3. Have you taken any other similar class? What class was it?

*Communication skills (selective subject)



Q4. What activities did you enjoy?

*Pre-study (reading the news etc.)

*The online activity.

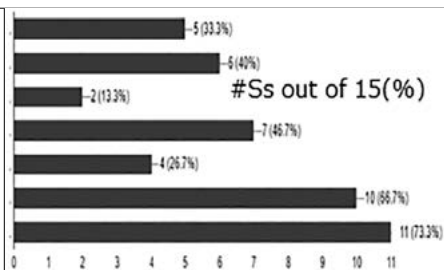
*The study review.

*English presentation preparation.

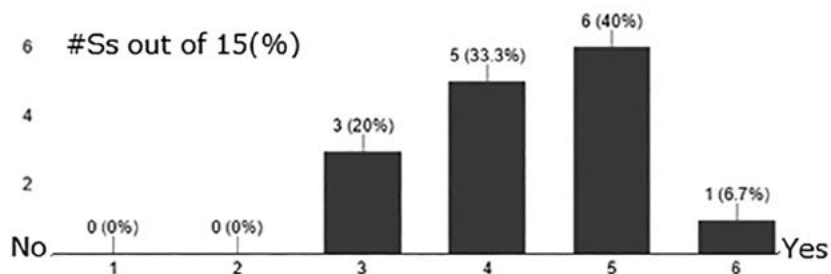
*English presentation practice.

*Doing the English presentation.

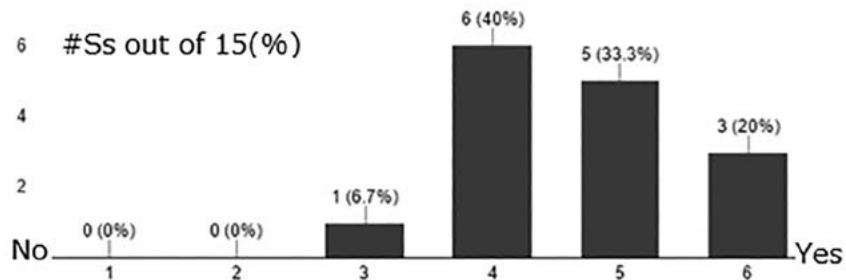
*Watching other English presentations.



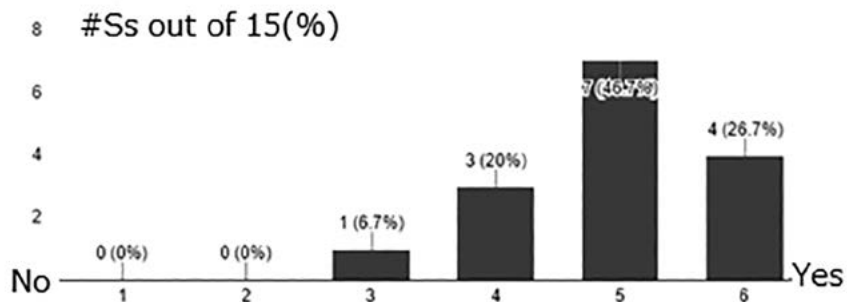
Q5. Has your English use ability improved than before?



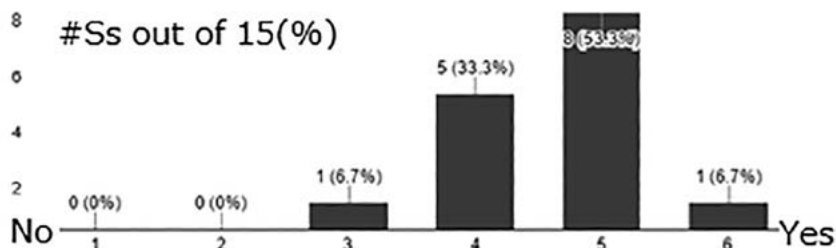
Q6. Has your English understanding improved than before?



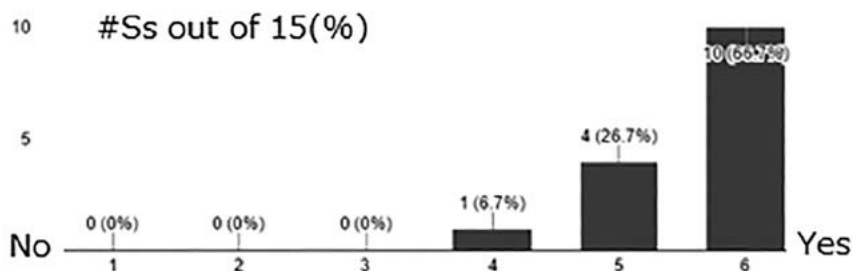
Q7. Were you able to study and prepare well for English III class?



Q8. Do you think your English understanding improved in English III class?



Q9. Are you satisfied with the English III class?



Q10. Please comment concerning English III class.

*I was satisfied with the online communication activity.

*It was useful for other classes, too.

*Doing the online activity in class was very good.

*Ms. Kamijo had a positive attitude so just being in class gave me active motivation.

*I didn't enjoy skype activity.

Q11. Do you think online communication is valid as class room activity? What good or bad elements do you think there is.

*We do not have the chance to have a one to one communication with foreigners in daily life so I think it's a good chance to communicate in class.

*Some people might lose motivation if the activity is forced.

*I wouldn't do this unless it was in class, so it's good.

*The news studied online didn't end there, but was put into practice with the following activity in class.

*The activity was not easy for me but doing it all together in class was good.

*The speaking environment was good but some people might learn better by writing activities.

*The network situation was not good.

RESULT

The students attending this class are basically willing to study English. As a result, 73.3% of the students enjoyed the class according to Q1. 86.7% of the students were motivated by on-line activities, however not all students enjoy on-line activities although they have motivations, as two students answer so in Q2, a student neglected the use of skype in Q10, and few minor comments in Q11 too. This presentation based class activity is nothing new, however most of the students noticed this class to be something different from what they have experienced in the past. One of the students claimed that a similar class may be 'Communication skills' which is a selective subject placed in their native language. According to the syllabus [Sagami Women's University, 2016] the class aim is 'to master basic skills as a University student' and 'to develop self-expression skills', which is very close to what is hoped to be achieved in English too. According to Q4, 73.3% enjoyed watching other presentations and 66.7% enjoyed doing their presentation themselves. The high evaluation for the high score for watching presentations may be due to the interactions the presenter practice in their presentations. As for English language ability, Q5 to Q8 suggest that the students' English language ability have gone up, and most important of all, most of the students are actually aware that they studied and prepared well, and that their English language usage has improved. As a result, all students were found to be satisfied with their study at English class III.

This study reports that on-line ELT programme was a suitable approach to raise English communication ability of students with different English levels in class. However, this approach has two major problems to practice. First of all, the on-line environment was an approach which was realised with a special programme provided by the on-line language school, thus is not an easy environment to create. Secondly, this approach involves budget which is not an easy task for all. Being on-line means being connected to the world and is an ideal approach to practice. Therefore further on-line study which is easier to place will be investigated in the future.

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Attachment 1: sample of a news article.

Beginner level

【Article】

ニュース記事

Read the text below.

World-famous fast food chain KFC introduces a chicken meal box that allows customers to charge their mobile phones.

The Watt A Box, a chicken meal combo launched in KFC branches in India, features a food storage box, USB cable, and a battery charger for iPhones and Android phones **integrated** in the box.

The promo runs exclusively in New Delhi and Mumbai outlets. Customers can participate by visiting the official KFC India Facebook page, where they will be asked to “tag,” or link a friend to their post, and tell something good about the Watt A Box.

KFC India Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Lluís Ruiz Ribot explains that they came up with the concept to **spare** customers the trouble of dealing with mobile phones that have run out of power while they are dining.

Meanwhile, the mobile phone industry in India continues to **thrive**. It reached a new **peak** earlier this year by hitting the one billion mark in its subscriber rate, ranking third after China and the United States in terms of mobile phone subscriber base. Findings of a 2015 study also revealed that Indians spend around 169 minutes daily on their mobile phones.

KFC's Watt A Box is not a fast food outlet's first attempt at incorporating technology in food items. Similar **marketing ploys** include Pizza Hut's movie projector boxes and McDonald's collaboration with well-known electronics brand Samsung that enabled customers to use Samsung Galaxy tablets in selected branches.

Attachment 2: A sample of students' discussions

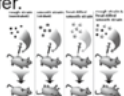
Sample 1

DISCUSSION



Fact: When I asked my RareJob teacher: Ms. Bily about shopping, she said "I like shopping but I have no money. Shopping cost me money, so I don't go shopping." I think so, too. However shopping is good way to exercise and it become a short rest. Old people can enjoy their shopping, as well as young people.

Sample 2

Discussion 1. Dogs can understand their owners' words and emotions. My opinion: I agree because some dogs can obey human instructions and I have looked at the sorrowful dog that it was scolded by human. Ms. Shannie. O: I agree because dogs physical condition. so, it's best partner. 	3. It's okay to use animals in experiments. My opinion: I disagree because both a human and an animal are the same creatures. So, we must not use even the animal for an experiments. Ms. Shannie. O: I disagree because I don't want to see the scene that animals suffer. 
2. Knowing how animals behave is important. My opinion: I disagree because I think that animals often does the action that we can't expect. So, it's difficult to know action of animals. Ms. Shannie. O: I agree because I can know whether animals are enjoying or afraid.	

Attachment 3: News Introduction template

1. Hello, everyone/ ladies. My name is _____. I am a ____year student at this University in the department of _____. Today I will introduce a news article on _____.

Do you know _____? Have you heard of _____?

2. OVERVIEW: Today I will start by presenting some keywords that I practiced with my teacher _____. Next, I will read the article per paragraph (an article / a couple of articles) and check everybody's understanding together. Finally, I will challenge you with some important issues (an important issue).

3. KEY WORDS: First of all, let me tell you the words for this news.

The first word is _____. It is a ____ (品詞) ____ and it means _____. It is translated to _____.

The second / third / forth / fifth and final word is _____.

4. Note: choose at least on article. Use a new slide for a paragraph.

The article part 1: type in the sentence and read aloud.

Question 1: _____? What do you think?

Here is another article in Japanese. The answer is _____.

(others: Yes, that's correct. Oh, maybe. You're close. Hmmm try again.)

The article part 2:Question 2: → The article part 3:Question 3:

5. DISCUSSION 1:

The news article was about _____.

Fact: 要約

Comments from online discussion and yourself.

Ask audience for comments: Please raise your hand if you agree to_____.

Continue DISCUSSION 2: DISCUSSION 3: if you wish

7. WRAP-UP: Now, let me wrap up.

Today's key words are _____.

The article was about _____ . + extra/

8. That's about it. Do you have any questions or comments?

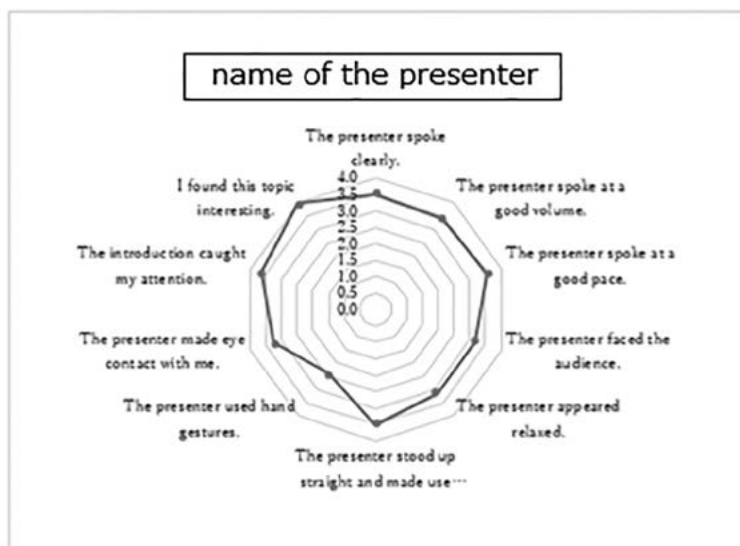
9. Thank you for your attention.

Attachment 4:

A sample of the feedback data the students receive after every presentation

First presentation : self introduction

October, 2016



I think you need more eye contact!

発音良すぎ

発音がきれい

英語の発音が上手です♪

英語が分かりやすく、英語が苦手な私でも大體理解できました。

発音がよいと思いました！

トップバッターお疲れ様でした。とてもわかりやすかったです。

Good work!

発音がうまくてとてもよかったです！

発音がとてもきれいで伝わりやすかった。

初めて聞いたけどすごい上手で感動した！笑 とてもわかりやすかった！！

英語の発音がとっても聞き取りやすかったです！