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A Study of Ability Grouping Practice in an EFL Context: Perspectives of Junior College Nursing Students
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Bioprofile
Hsiu-chuan Chen is an associate professor of English at Kang Ning Junior College of Medical Care and Management in Taipei. Her main research interests are in second language reading, cooperative learning, and children’s literature.

Abstract
This study investigated nursing students’ learning experiences of ability grouping in English class. A total of 193 freshman students, placed into three different ability levels, used different sets of textbooks and took midterm and final exams with different contents. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed to find out students’ perceptions of learning English through ability grouping practice over one-academic-school-year time frame. Questionnaire data were put into factor analysis. MANOVA and Scheffé test were further employed to examine level differences. Interview data were analyzed, following the content analysis procedure. The questionnaire results indicated that the low-ability group had a significantly higher degree of satisfaction with teachers’ instruction and learning outcomes, followed by the middle-ability and high-ability groups. The interview findings showed that despite the benefits of the homogenous grouping arrangement enjoyed by students, high-grouped and intermediated-grouped EFL learners complained about differentiated exams which resulted in unfair grading. Possible alternatives to ensure fairness in grading are discussed in the study.

Key Words: Ability Grouping, Placement Practice, Homogeneous Class, EFL Learners, Nursing Students.

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Introduction

As English continues to prevail as the global language, proficiency in this language is especially important both as a convenient communication tool and as a prerequisite in the pursuit of higher academic goals (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). However, wide discrepancies in students’ linguistic levels makes it a great challenge for teachers to effectively improve students’ learning. In numerous mixed-ability EFL classes, many strong students are indifferent to teachers’ lectures and take little interest in classroom activities, whereas weaker students totally get lost in learning and thereby give up on English (Cheng & Shih, 2007; Liu, 2008).

Ability grouping practice is recognized as one of the effective ways to deal with the problem of a wide discrepancy in EFL learners’ linguistic levels, since it allows teachers to provide students with instruction and materials that suit the ability levels of their students (Lee & Lin, 2013; Walqui, 2000). The Ministry of Education in Taiwan has encouraged college-level schools to implement ability grouping in English classes since 2001. In addition, due to the unsatisfactory performances of Taiwanese college students on TOFEL tests compared to those of students in other Asian countries from 2002 to 2004, more tertiary institutions have followed an educational policy in which different levels of English classes are offered to effectively increase students’ English proficiency, an essential aspect of global competitiveness (Sheu & Wang, 2006).

The junior college\(^\text{1}\) where students study nursing in this inquiry has followed the university English teaching trend and experimented with a homogeneous grouping arrangement in Freshman English for several years. However, the benefits of the educational language policy are mainly felt from policy makers’ and school authorities’ points of view. It is students who live their experiences of ability grouping in English classes. In other words, as students’ viewpoints are the ultimate reality in the classroom (Raines, 2007), the purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the language program from students’ perspectives. The study addresses two questions as follows:

1. What were nursing students’ perceptions of learning English in ability-grouped classes?
2. What were the things they liked and disliked about ability grouping practice?

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\(\text{1}\) Junior college in Taiwan with an emphasis on vocational education offers five-year programs and two-year programs. The level of achievement recognized by a student after either five or two years of study in a junior college in Taiwan is similar to that of after two years of study in a community college in the United States.
Literature Review

Ability Grouping Debate

Ability grouping has long been one of the most controversial educational policies over the past few decades (Loveless, 1998; Sheu & Wang, 2006). Among the vast international literature on ability grouping, the meta-analysis studies conducted by two American scholars, Slavin and Kulik, have formed the so called Slavin-Kulik debate. Slavin (1987; 1990) reviewed research on the effects of ability grouping on the achievement of elementary and secondary students and found that the overall achievement effects were essentially zero at all grade levels. On the other hand, Kulik and Kulik’s (1982) review research indicated that ability grouping has a small, yet significant effect on the achievement of secondary students. Compared with average achievers and low achievers, high achievers made more significant progress largely due to enriched curriculums. As ability grouping benefits high achievers and harms no one in terms of achievement, some researchers have endorsed Kulik’s position on homogeneous or between-class groupings (Rogers, 2002).

While acknowledging the positive effects of the enriched curriculum on high achievers’ learning, Slavin (1990) views ability grouping as anti-democratic. Being aware of the individual capabilities, teachers tend to have high expectations for high achievers and low expectations for low-achieving students. According to Hoffer and Gamoran (1993), teachers in high-track classes focus their instruction on higher-level thinking such as problem solving, whereas teachers in low-track classes, the learning of basic skills. Despite the enriched curriculum created for high achievers, Boaler, William, and Brown (2000) argued that ability grouping led to curriculum polarization which disadvantaged many students in high-set classes since they were required to learn at a fast pace incompatible with understanding, and limited the opportunities to learn for students in low-set classes since they were regarded as failures who could cope with low-level work only. That ability grouping caused unequal learning opportunities for students in low-set classes has been supported by Kim’s (2012) study, in which the sense of inequality was the problem that concerned students most, especially those in low-ability and middle-ability classes.

In addition to the dispute over the curriculum and equity, research conducted to examine the effects of ability grouping on students’ affective domain has also revealed mixed results. For example, some studies have found that ability grouping can enhance self-concept of low-achieving students since they don’t need to compete with their brighter peers, which prevents them from feeling frustration and a loss of self-esteem (Segro, 1995). In like manner, Liu,
Wang, and Parkins (2005) found that low-achieving students had a more positive self-concept than their high-achieving counterparts 3 years after being ability-grouped. This might be attributable to the given opportunities for low achievers to experience success, in line with the big-fish-little-pond effect. On the other hand, Gamoran (1993) argued that the organizational features of ability grouping negatively affect the psychological domain of low-ability students such as lower self-esteem and negative attitudes toward learning. The argument has been confirmed in Cheng and Shih (2007), who claimed that other than causing psychological problems to low achievers, ability grouping also brought about problems to low-performing learners in the high-level group in junior high English class. Low achievers faced stigma attachment and had resentment against high achievers, whereas low-performing students in the high-level group were under pressure and felt frustrated, revealing the negative big-fish-little-pond effect.

As the past research evidence regarding ability grouping is inconclusive, instead of having students taught in the same class for all subjects, a growing number of schools have had their students taught in certain subjects such as reading and math in homogenous classes. In countries where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL), English is always used as an example for single-ability grouping (Joyce & McMillan, 2010; Kim, 2012; Shih, 2006). Kim (2012) investigated Korean middle school teachers’ and students’ perceptions of an ability grouping policy in which EFL learners remained in the mixed-ability classes most of the day but regrouped to different English classes based on their linguistic proficiency levels. Kim claimed that the homogeneous grouping arrangement didn’t seem to result in expected positive outcomes. Virtually none of the students clearly showed their positive attitudes toward such an arrangement. The problems identified by the EFL learners included feeling embarrassed by exposing their ability, changing classrooms, using limited information to group students, and feeling awkward learning English with students from different classes. Kim further concluded that the benefits of ability grouping could be maximized by providing systematic support in curriculum design, materials development, and teacher training. What is noteworthy is that studies situated in different EFL contexts will yield different results in terms of the implementation of ability grouping. As the nursing students in the present study are junior college level students, the next section will center on the context of higher education in Taiwan.

Research on Ability Grouping in Taiwanese Tertiary Education

Unlike the mixed results of studies conducted with elementary and high school students
mentioned previously, most of the studies reporting on the implementation of ability grouping in the Taiwanese EFL classroom at college level have shown positive achievement (Chien, Ching, & Kao, 2002; Lee & Lin, 2013; Su & Lin, 2006) and affective effects in certain aspects such as positive attitudes toward placement practice (Yu, 1994) and academic confidence (Liu, 2009). Regarding the achievement gains, research has revealed divergent results for students placed in different ability-level groups. In Chien et al.’s, (2002) study, university freshman students in ability-grouped classes outperformed those in mixed-ability classes on TOEFL tests after one-year of placement. Students in the low-ability group made greater improvement than those in the high-ability and the middle-ability groups. The low-grouped students also perceived the connection of their English improvement to the ability grouping policy more than the high-grouped and intermediate-grouped students. However, in Wen’s (2011) study, students in the low-ability group didn’t make significant progress on listening or reading subtests of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT). Instead, students in the middle-ability group achieved significantly higher scores on listening and reading; students in the high-ability group, listening.

Research exploring the affective domain has demonstrated that most students hold positive attitudes toward ability grouping (Li, 2011; Liu, 2008; Sheu & Wang, 2006) and that lower-grouped students seemed to benefit from placement practice most (Lee & Lin, 2013; Liu, 2009; Su, 2010; Yu, 1994). Yu’s (1994) large-scale investigation in which a 17-question survey was administered to 2,448 sophomores provided the evidence of students’ support for the placement of an English lab program. Additionally, students placed in the basic level favored ability grouping more than those placed in the intermediate and high levels. Such results are in accordance with those of Liu’s (2008) and Su’s (2010) studies, where a majority of college students, low-achieving EFL learners in particular, responded positively to the single-ability classes. They believed that they benefitted from the grouping arrangement in some areas such as English learning, comprehensible teachers’ instruction, and the boosting up of confidence. It is noteworthy that these college students expressed that placement practice wasn’t closely related to their improvement. One interesting result from Su’s study was that there was a higher percentage of approval (34.6%) than disapproval (26.5%) in the assessment system with the top-ceiling score for each level, since the restriction of grades remains a controversial issue when adopting an ability grouping policy.

GEPT is a test of English language proficiency commissioned by Taiwan's Ministry of Education in 1999. It consists of 4 components: reading, listening, writing, and speaking.
According to Lee and Lin (2013), low-proficiency learners’ stronger instructional preference for and greater satisfaction with single-ability language classes might result from their having less anxiety and apprehension when learning English with the absence of high-proficiency learners. This result is consistent with Liu (2009), who reported that the low-proficiency students improved in their academic confidence and overall English self-concept most as compared with their average and above-average counterparts over one-academic-school-year time frame. Despite the lower anxiety level and higher English self-concept of the EFL learners in the lower-level group, some studies have indicated that students don’t perceive the relevance of placement practice on their motivation, interest, or attitude towards English learning (Liu, 2008; Sheu & Wang, 2006; Su, 2010). This foregrounds the importance of a detailed look into the affective effects of ability grouping by exploring the things students like and dislike about such a practice. Moreover, the junior college where nursing students in this inquiry were had adopted a homogeneous grouping arrangement in Freshman English classes for a couple of years. It is vital to examine the effectiveness of this English placement program. In other words, this study hopes to shed light on the implementation of the educational language policy by examining learners’ learning experiences of ability grouping in the real world of the classroom.

Methodology

Context

This study took place in a three-credit-hour, required Freshman English course that met for two hours one time and one hour another time each week for one school year. A total of 193 freshman students (179 females and 14 males) majoring in nursing from a five-year program at a junior college in Taipei participated in the study. These students were placed into three different ability levels according to their scores of an English placement test on their orientation day. The placement test constructed by the researcher consisted of simulation questions of a reading subtest of the GEPT at the elementary level, equivalent to CEFR-A2 level. Level A had one class which was composed of the top 27% of students; Level C also had one class which was composed of the bottom 21% of students. The rest of the students were placed into Level B which had two classes. The four classes were named Class A, B, C, and D, with Class A for high proficiency students and Class D for low proficiency ones. The EFL learners’ ages ranged from 15-17 years old. Before entering junior college, these students had received five years of formal education in English in elementary school and
junior high school. But some of them had started learning English a couple of years prior to formal education.

Four EFL teachers with more than 8 years of teaching experience taught the classes. Students in different ability levels used different sets of textbooks and took midterm and final exams with different contents. To ensure fairness in grading, a proficiency test accounting for 20% of the final score in the English course was given on the final exam day. The proficiency test in the first semester consisted of questions from an online learning website. In other words, students were required to study English by practicing online exercises during their free time. The proficiency test in the second semester was the same one administered on the orientation day.

Data Collection

This study employed two different data collection procedures: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Questionnaires

Prior to the study, a 23-item questionnaire adapted from Shih (2006) was pilot tested on a total of 198 freshman nursing students in the previous academic year. The items aimed to explore the effects of the ability grouping practice in the four areas most frequently addressed in the related literature, namely, (1) stigmatization, (2) teachers’ instruction and attitudes, (3) students’ learning outcomes and attitudes, and (4) classroom atmosphere and interaction. All variables were assessed using a four-point Likert scale (with 1 “strongly disagree” and 4 “strongly agree”). The questionnaire data were put into factor analysis, using SPSS. After the analysis, items with a factor loading bigger than .50 were qualified for the questionnaire. The revised questionnaire had 17 items. The 17-item questionnaire was administered to all students to understand their perceptions of learning English in ability-grouped classes at the end of the study. The results of factor analysis and a reliability test identified four factors with a Cronbach coefficient $\alpha$ of .88 acquired for internal consistency. Additionally, the factor loading of each item was bigger than .50 with an explained variance up to 64.94%, which meant that the construct validity of the questionnaire was high.

Factor 1, Stigmatization, accounted for 35.59% of the total variance and included 4 items. This factor investigated whether students felt a stigma placed upon them since stigmatization is negatively related to learning. Factor 2, Teacher’s Instruction and Attitudes, accounted for 13.75% of the total variance and had 4 items. This factor aimed to determine
whether teachers’ instruction was appropriate for students with a similar ability. It also aimed to find out teachers’ attitudes toward teaching since they might have an influence on the quality of instruction. Factor 3, Students’ Learning Outcomes and Attitudes, accounted for 8.02% of the total variance and included 5 items. This factor attempted to scrutinize the impact of ability grouping on student learning. The last factor, Classroom Atmosphere, accounted for 6.58% of the total variance and included 4 items. It focused on the learning environment and peer culture which encourages learning and helps maintain on-task behaviors. After computing descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations, inferential statistics (i.e., MANOVA and Scheffé test) were employed to examine level differences.

**Interviews**

In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of students’ perspectives about their ability-grouped English program, 18 students from three different ability groups were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews. 6 interviewees were selected from Level A, Level B, and Level C respectively. The interviews asked both general questions and a specific question. The general questions aimed at probing students’ views on what they liked and disliked about their grouped English classes. The specific question asked students’ preferences of grouped, homogeneous classes or ungrouped, heterogeneous classes. Two experienced EFL teachers conducted the interviews. Interview data were analyzed to identify codes and categorize the recurrent patterns, following the content analysis procedure (Patton, 2002). The interview excerpts were translated from Chinese (i.e., students’ first language) into English by the researcher.

**Results and Discussion**

The goal of this paper was to address the issues of what nursing students perceived their English learning through ability grouping and what they liked and disliked about the practice. The former issue will be explicated with the questionnaire data and the latter, the interview data.

**Learning English through Ability Grouping**

The results from the questionnaire which probed the four frequently-discussed areas concerning ability grouping indicated that most students perceived a stigmatizing effect in between-class learning situations, since they scored higher than the median value of 2.5
((1+2+3+4)/4) (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree), as summarized in Table 1. However, the respondents had different reactions to the other 3 dimensions: “teachers’ instruction and attitudes,” “students’ learning outcomes and attitudes,” and “classroom atmosphere,” as the mean scores of the three ability groups fluctuated between 2.32 and 3.01. Further analysis of MANOVA and Scheffé test demonstrated that there were significant differences on the perceptions of all three groups, which mainly fell on Teachers’ Instruction and Attitudes, and Students’ Learning Outcomes and Attitudes. The low-ability group had a significantly higher degree of satisfaction with these two dimensions, followed by the middle-ability and high-ability groups, with significant levels of p<.001 (F= 15.310) and p < .05 (F= 3.422) respectively. Table 2 delineates the results of MANOVA and Scheffé for students’ perceptions on the four areas investigated.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Students’ Perceptions on Four Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Level A (N=53)</th>
<th>Level B (N=100)</th>
<th>Level C (N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigmatization</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Atmosphere</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: MANOVA and Scheffé Test for Students’ Perceptions on Four Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Scheffé Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stigmatization</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.032n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>10.911</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.456</td>
<td>15.310***</td>
<td>3&gt;2; 3&gt;1; 2&gt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>2.189</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.095</td>
<td>3.442*</td>
<td>3 &gt;2; 3&gt;1; 2&gt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>1.730</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.865</td>
<td>2.932n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stigmatization</th>
<th>82.444</th>
<th>190</th>
<th>.434</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>67.706</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>.356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>60.411</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>56.063</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>.295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1** = Level A; **2** = Level B; **3** = Level C

*** = p<.001; *p<.05  n.s. = no significance
Stigmatization didn’t reach a significant level of $p < .05$ among the ability groups in which more than 65% of the group members agreed on all items in this dimension (Table 3). The finding suggested that students were unanimous in their perceptions to stigma attachment. Stigmatization in the current study primarily examined students’ perceptions about the labeling effect, of superiority and inferiority complexes and of their assigned groups. It seemed clear that ability grouping caused strong feelings about a stigmatizing effect on the EFL learners. Such phenomenon might be largely due to the differentiation of textbooks and of midterm and final exams, and the naming of various linguistic proficiency levels, with Class A for stronger students and Class D for weaker ones. As one of the major arguments against a homogeneous arrangement is that students placed in the lower-ability level may develop a sense of inferiority (Joyce and McMillan, 2010), how to alleviate stigma attachment on lower-proficiency learners seems essential for reducing the detrimental effects on students’ affect when adopting this educational language policy.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Students’ Perceptions on Stigmatization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Level A (N=53)</th>
<th>Level B (N=100)</th>
<th>Level C (N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Easily labeled as good or bad students</td>
<td>M (%) SD M (%) SD M (%)</td>
<td>M (%) SD M (%) SD M (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2.7 .80</td>
<td>2.9 .81</td>
<td>2.8 .94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>9.4% 5%</td>
<td>22.6% 23%</td>
<td>10% 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>56.6% 49%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>11.3% 23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Level A students showing superiority</td>
<td>3.08 .85</td>
<td>2.61 .82</td>
<td>3.05 .75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>5.7% 7%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.1% 26%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>45.3% 49%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>34% 18%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Level C students showing inferiority</td>
<td>3 .83</td>
<td>2.84 .85</td>
<td>3 .85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3.8% 6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers’ Instruction and Attitudes, and Students’ Learning Outcomes and Attitudes were found to be significantly different among the subgroups. Simply put, more low-grouped students believed that placement practice positively affected teaching and learning than intermediate-grouped and high-grouped students. In the category of teachers’ instruction and attitudes, low-proficiency learners had confidence in English learning (Item 5), found English classes interesting (Item 6) and teachers’ instruction easy to understand (Item 7), and received teachers’ encouragement the most (Item 8), in the second place were middle-proficiency learners, followed by high-proficiency learners. Among these four items, Item 7 got the highest student endorsement of 95%, 75%, and 54.7% from the low, intermediate, and high language groups, as displayed in Table 4. Advocates of ability grouping claim that teachers can meet the needs of each group by adjusting their instruction (Ansalone, 2003). The EFL learners’ perceptions about the comprehensible teaching content illustrated this concept nicely. When the instructional content is specifically relevant to each group’s needs, students are more likely to enjoy their English classes, thereby becoming more confident in learning. It was evident from Item 8 that the low-level group who reported receiving their teacher’s encouragement outnumbered the middle-level and high-level groups. This result implied that placement practice didn’t negatively influence teachers’ attitudes toward weaker students, which contradicted the argument made by French and Rothman (1990, [cited in Shih, 2006]).

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Students’ Perceptions on Teachers’ Instruction and Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Level A (N=53)</th>
<th>Level B (N=100)</th>
<th>Level C (N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M (% )</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M (%)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M (%)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar to Teachers’ Instruction and Attitudes, the low group students acknowledged the beneficial effects of the ability-grouped English program on their learning outcomes and attitudes the most; the high group students acknowledged such benefits the least. According to Table 5, except the last two items (Items 12-13), the low-ability group almost overwhelmingly agreed with the other three items, with a large percentage of over 75%. In other words, low-achieving students felt that they made progress in English (Item 9) and that they as well as their peers concentrated in class (Items 10-11) the most. On the contrary, high achievers approved the three items the least, with a percentage of agreement lower than 50%. It is worth mentioning that less than half of the participants in all three groups reported a
devotion of English learning out of class (Item 12), which lent support to some researchers such as Liu (2008), and Sheu and Wang (2006), who declared that Taiwanese college students don’t perceive grouping arrangements as facilitative to learning motivation. The result also highlights the importance of how to motivate students to study English more intensively.

With regard to Item 13, over half of the respondents among the subgroups reached a consensus on the statement of classroom activities going smoothly. Such a finding appeared to be consistent with the contention that through instructional adjustment, ability grouping can be a practical alternative to deal with the big gaps in EFL learners’ proficiency levels. The smooth flow of in-class activities makes both learning and teaching easier (Lee & Lin, 2013; Walqui, 2000; Yu, 1994).

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of Students’ Perceptions on Students’ Learning Outcomes and Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Level A (N=53)</th>
<th>Level B (N=100)</th>
<th>Level C (N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Making greater progress in English</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Concentrating in class</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Peers concentrating in class</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Devotion to English learning</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, although the three groups didn’t respond significantly different to Classroom Atmosphere, the low-proficiency group had higher percentages of approval for most items than the other two groups, as shown in Table 6. Compared with the other two levels of students, low-proficiency students agreed that their peers were more willing to help (Item 14), and that it was easier to find more able peers (Item 16) and familiar peers for consultation (Item 17). As for Item 15, it was important to note that there was a higher percentage of disagreement than agreement from students in the subgroups. In other words, when asked whether they could find models of English learning in grouped classes, all subgroups disagreed. The low degree of accessibility to role models might be due in no small part to the similar linguistic ability of students in a homogeneous placement language program.

To sum up, the questionnaire data revealed that students with various linguistic abilities were aware of a stigmatizing effect when learning English through ability grouping. The low-ability group considered teaching and learning more significantly effective in between-class learning situations than the medium-ability group, whereas the middle-ability group felt significantly more positive toward these two areas than the high-ability group. Low group students also perceived a more satisfying learning environment and peer culture than mid group and high group students despite the fact that the difference didn’t reach a significant level. To shed further light into the effects of ability grouping policy in language education, data gathered through interviews were analyzed.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Students’ Perceptions on Class Atmosphere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Level A</th>
<th>Level B</th>
<th>Level C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>out of class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Activities and dialogue practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>going smoothly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14. Peers willing to help each other</th>
<th>(N=53)</th>
<th>(N=100)</th>
<th>(N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15. Unable to find models of English learning</th>
<th>(N=53)</th>
<th>(N=100)</th>
<th>(N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>16. Easy to find more able peers to consult</th>
<th>(N=53)</th>
<th>(N=100)</th>
<th>(N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>17. Easy to find familiar peers to consult</th>
<th>(N=53)</th>
<th>(N=100)</th>
<th>(N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Things Liked and Disliked about Ability Grouping**

The interview data showed that the EFL learners perceived both advantages and disadvantages of learning English through ability grouping. What students liked about their ability-grouped English program included (1) receiving instruction and materials appropriate to their levels, (2) meeting new friends, (3) making progress in English, (4) building up confidence, and (5) promoting a quieter learning environment. The perceptions of the first
three benefits were reiterated by learners in all language groups, whereas the last two advantages were identified by students in different ability groups.

A majority of participants liked being taught according to their linguistic competence, meeting new friends, and improving English proficiency. One high achiever made a clear description of why she liked placement practice.

Excerpt 1: S3 in the high-level group
I don’t need to learn English that I had learned during my preschool days with peers who don’t have any idea about basic English. Learning English with peers who have the relatively equivalent level allowed us to learn from each other. Teachers could also provide more supplementary materials and diverse activities, which helped foster my English learning…I made friends from other homeroom classes with whom I could have a heart-to-heart talk.

The problem of mixed abilities in the same classroom has existed almost as long as the history of language teaching. It is common for EFL practitioners to see students suffering from this problem with stronger students yawning in class and weaker students getting lost in their learning. The above excerpt indicates that the high achiever didn’t suffer from the problem, since she didn’t need to relearn basic English she had long been familiar with in the single-ability classroom. Such a classroom allowed teachers to easily design activities and materials to satisfy their students’ needs. The differentiated instruction also helped prevent weaker students from falling behind in the class, thereby developing their confidence. One low achiever who couldn’t catch up with the teaching pace in heterogeneous classes prior to her junior-college days remarked that,

Excerpt 2: S1 in the low-level group
I never passed English courses before entering junior college. But now, I don’t worry about falling behind. With the teacher’s comprehensible lectures and manageable textbook, I think I am more confident in passing this subject. If I were in mixed-ability classes, I would fail again.

Other than low-achieving students, average achievers also believe that they have more academic confidence in grouped classes than in ungrouped classes. The finding was not surprising because high-proficiency students were placed into the advanced language group.
Through the eyes of high achievers, arranging students who had better English proficiency in the same class created a quieter learning environment, since these students were more attentive to instructors’ lectures and rarely exhibited off-task behaviors such as chatting with fellow classmates. One high-proficiency student said, “I liked the quieter classroom. I can’t concentrate with noisy classmates chatting around me” (S6 in the high-level group). Despite the benefits enjoyed by the interviewees, different materials had different midterm and final exam questions and unfair grading ensued. What follows are the problems the EFL learners encountered.

Things students disliked about grouping practice were (1) differentiated exams, (2) studying with other homeroom peers, (3) changing classrooms, (4) study pressure, and (5) a lack of model students. Differentiated exams was the problem complained about by the participants most, specifically by high-grouped and intermediate-grouped students. Simply put, they high group students considered it unfair to take midterm and final exams different from those taken by low-grouped students. As the content of these exams in the low-level group were much easier than those in the high and intermediate-level groups, low achievers often gained higher scores than high and medium achievers. Students with better linguistic proficiency ended up having lower scores than those with weak abilities. Lower English scores would adversely affect their class ranking, thereby limiting their opportunities to apply for scholarships. One high achiever exclaimed:

Excerpt 4: S6 in the high-level group
The English score is included in our class ranking. Different exams resulted in unfair grading and class ranking. This might affect some students’ opportunities to get scholarships.

The potential drawback of losing scholarship opportunities can be also evidenced in one medium achiever’s elaboration on the issue of grading.

Excerpt 5: S3 in the intermediate-level group
A couple of senior fellow students told us not to do well on the placement test. Being placed into the lower-level group can allow someone to take easier exams and therefore they are likely to get a higher English score.

Excerpt 5 reveals that students might intentionally demote themselves to a lower group
in order to get a better score and class ranking. Every semester, the top three students in every class are awarded a scholarship. A good grade in English also increases the opportunity to receive scholarships sponsored by other institutes and non-profitable organizations. As there is a shortage of nurses in Taiwan, nursing students get employed easily right after graduation. Some students from vulnerable families in this study sacrificed their qualifications to attend senior high schools which had higher academic levels than the junior college. With their good academic abilities, they are always qualified for application for scholarships for students from vulnerable families as well as scholarships for nursing students granted by hospitals, nursing associations, and health institutes, etc. It is quite understandable that students in the high level and intermediate language groups complained about the unfair grading caused by the differentiated exams.

Studying with students from other classes and changing classrooms were the next two frequently-addressed problems. These two problems were intertwined in terms of discussing about assignments and class business with peers from other homeroom classes. A few EFL learners responded that they discussed with their homeroom peers during the breaks whenever they were confused about assignments and that they easily reached a consensus about class business. However, discussing these issues was a serious inconvenience in ability-grouped classes. One student in the middle group reported,

Excerpt 6: S5 in the intermediate-level group
I feel embarrassed to ask unfamiliar peers about class assignments…It’s hard for students from 4 different homeroom classes to reach a consensus about whether to turn on air-conditioning since we have to pay for it. If two classes turn on the A/C, the other two don’t. Would that be unfair?

Unlike the problems about studying with students from different classes and studying in a different classroom unanimously raised by students at all levels, the last two problems, study pressure and a lack of model students, were identified by students in the high and mid groups respectively. One high group student contended that she was under stress simply because she had been misplaced. She stated, “I felt that I’ve come to the wrong classroom. I cannot do well in quizzes and exams as my fellow students even though I work hard, which quite discourages me” (S4 in the high-level group). As for a lack of language learning models, the problem pinpointed by medium-proficiency learners was within expectations, since those who are more competent in English were placed into the high-level group. One pointed out,
“We have comparable English levels in ability-grouped class, so there aren’t any role models” (S2 in the intermediate-level group).

The interview data clearly showed the consistency among interviewees with different proficiency levels in regard to certain aspects. They all mentioned that they liked ability grouping mainly because of the instruction and materials corresponding to their linguistic competence, meeting new friends and making progress in English. Meanwhile, they explained that they disliked the practice largely due to the problems related to studying with students from other classes and to changing classrooms. Such findings are quite similar to the case in Kim’s (2012), in which Korean students viewed these two problems as against the efficacy of ability grouping.

The interview findings demonstrated that students in the three ability groups varied in their reactions toward placement learning situations. High-ability students favored the quieter class atmosphere but were extremely dissatisfied with the more difficult exams and the unfair grading that ensued. The complaint was also a common phenomenon found in the interview with middle-ability students. Different from unequal learning opportunities for low-grouped students which had been highlighted by some researchers like Slavin (1990), the unfair grading brought about by more advanced textbooks and complicated exams became the issue which concerned the EFL learners in the present study most. Despite the unsatisfactory feelings, average-achieving students boosted their confidence in English learning, as did the low achievers. Low-proficiency students firmly believed that the appropriate pace of lessons and suitable instructional materials enhanced their academic confidence. That students reacted differently toward ability grouping can be seen in their instructional preferences, as listed in Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level A (N=6)</th>
<th>Level B (N=6)</th>
<th>Level C (N=6)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among 18 students with three levels of proficiency selected as the participants in the interview, 9 (50%) preferred grouped, homogeneous classes; 7 (39%) had preferences for ungrouped, heterogeneous classes; 2 (11%) remained neutral. The low group students were
overwhelmingly in favor of the homogeneous grouping arrangement. This seemed to illustrate why low-ability students expressed their dislike of their English program least compared with their high-ability and middle-ability counterparts. Such findings, taken in accord with the questionnaire results in which the low group agreed significantly more than the mid and high group in Teachers’ Instruction and Attitudes, and Students Learning Outcomes and Attitudes, confirm Liu (2008), Su (2010) and Yu’s (1994) research, which contends that low-proficiency EFL learners respond positively to the influences of ability grouping most.

**Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

This study has shown that the low-grouped nursing students had the most positive reactions toward placement policy in terms of instruction and learning outcomes, followed by intermediated-grouped and high-grouped students. While acknowledging benefitting from appropriate instruction and materials and making improvements in English through the homogenous arrangement, middle and high-proficiency learners complained about more difficult midterm and final exam questions which resulted in unfair grading. Two possible alternatives can be implemented to ensure fairness in grading.

First, instead of adopting different materials, the same set of English textbooks should be used in all different ability classes. However, the high-level group are instructed with more content; the low-level group, less content. All language groups take the same midterm and final questions based on the content covered in the low-level class. The use of the same set of learning materials can also help low-ability students feel less inferior to their peers (Shih, 2006). The other alternative is inclusion of the placement test score in the semester score and restriction of grades for each ability level, for example, 100 for Level A, 85 for Level B, and 75 for Level C. This might diminish the possibility of students who intentionally demote themselves to lower-level groups. By adopting such policies, school authorities and teachers would clearly convey to students that they learn better by being taught according to their proficiency levels.

Finally, a significant number of interview participants felt uncomfortable when having to ask their peers questions about assignments or discussing class business. This points to a lack of class identity and mutual support among fellow students. Teachers should incorporate more in-class activities to help students become familiar with peers from different homeroom classes. And schools should play a role in providing systematic support of activity designs, as suggested by Kim (2012). This would be more conducive to teachers’ instruction and
students’ learning in ability-grouped English classes.
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Using Task Portfolios for Assessment in Oral Communication Courses  
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**Bioprofile**  
Martin Hawkes has taught English as a foreign language for over ten years. He is an Associate Professor at The University of Shiga Prefecture in Japan. He holds an MSc in TESOL from Aston University, and is presently a PhD candidate at the same institution. His research interests include form-focused instruction in task-based language teaching.

**Abstract**  
Despite the growing acceptance of task-based language teaching around the world, there have been some questions raised regarding its suitability for Asian contexts. Concerns include the use of L1 during tasks and problems with keeping less motivated learners on task. Another issue is the question of how teachers should assess students following a task-based syllabus. This paper will describe an approach to assessment where learners make recordings of the tasks they perform in classes, which are collected over the semester to create portfolios for grading by their teacher. 39 first-year Japanese university students participated in this study. Over a 15-week English oral communication course, a portion of the students' grade was determined from a portfolio consisting of six collaborative speaking tasks. To evaluate the task portfolio system, the researcher employed three data collection methods: questionnaires, samples of task recordings, and a research journal. The questionnaire data indicated that the participants responded positively to the portfolio assessment, and they stated that the element of pressure involved helped them improve their task performances. These claims were supported by the recordings of task interaction and the research journal. Overall, the findings suggest that recording task performances for portfolio provides some degree of extrinsic motivation to encourage less motivated learners to stay on task, and could be a useful option for practitioners in similar contexts.

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Key words: Motivation, Task-based Teaching, Oral Communication

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe a small practitioner research project involving two intact EFL classes of university students in Japan. It outlines a change that was made to the assessment procedures for an oral communication course which contained elements of a task-based approach. In addition to the common assessment methods of end-of-course speaking and writing tests, an extra task portfolio strand was added where participants made recordings of themselves performing collaborative tasks. These served as samples of the participants’ class work, and were used for a portion of their course grade. In this paper, I will describe the participants' responses to the new evaluation method, its strengths, and some remaining issues that practitioners may need to consider before implementing a similar approach.

Tasks and Language Learning

The use of communicative tasks in language teaching and research has become widespread in many parts of the world. Over the past two decades in Asia, communicative language teaching (CLT) has even become the recommended approach by some governmental education departments (Hu, 2002; Birch, 2012). Task-based language teaching (TBLT), which has developed as a distinct branch of CLT, has been described as "a new orthodoxy" (Littlewood, 2004) in language pedagogy, having a number of high-profile supporters in the TESOL community (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007), and being the topic of numerous articles, books and conference presentations.

Advocates of tasks in language learning have theorized their ability to foster second language development. In his (1983; 1996) interaction hypothesis (Long, 1983; 1996), which built on Krashen's (1982) hugely influential input hypothesis, Long argued that the negotiation and repair sequences that occur in the kind of interaction found in tasks can lead to acquisition. Moves such as recasts, comprehension checks and clarification requests lead to reformulations that convert previously incomprehensible language into comprehensible input, which might facilitate acquisition. Feedback from negotiation also provides negative evidence to the learners that all was not well with their utterance, and may help them notice a gap between the target language and their own emerging interlanguage (Schmidt, 1990;
Additionally, tasks provide an opportunity for output, which is claimed to be a necessary component for interlanguage development (Swain, 2005).

Throughout the development of TBLT there has been some debate as to what actually constitutes a task (see Ellis, 2003, pp. 2-10; Nunan, 2007; Willis & Willis, 2007, pp. 12-13; Samuda & Bygate, 2008, pp. 62-70). While some differences in interpretation exist, the following five-point description of task by Skehan's (1998) seems to cover the fundamental characteristics that are relevant to the current study:

1. Meaning is primary
2. Learners are not given other people's meanings to regurgitate
3. There is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities
4. Task completion has some priority
5. The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome. (p. 95)

Tasks and East Asian Language Learning Contexts

Much has been written about the difficulties of using communicative tasks in East Asian classrooms. Carless, researching Hong Kong school contexts, reported primary school teachers' concerns of noise and indiscipline, use of the L1, and lack of participation on the part of some students (2002; 2004). In Carless (2008), he described the problems that teachers have in getting monolingual classes of Chinese-speaking learners to use the target language, English, during task performances.

In the Japanese context, Burrows (2008) has argued that learning styles may not be compatible with a task-based approach as Japanese language learners are not accustomed to the inherent autonomy allowed by communicative tasks. Goto Butler (2011) discussed similar themes, arguing that the tenets of CLT and TBLT are ethnocentric and based on Western ideas of education; therefore, some may resist its implementation. The consequences of this are arguably very visible in the ubiquitous compulsory oral communication classes that first year university students must take. Talandis and Stout (2014) report that students in these classes are often reluctant to speak and actively participate in classroom activities. Indeed, the phenomenon of silence in language classrooms in Japan has been described in detail (King, 2013), as has the lack of communicative competence among Japanese learners leaving high school. Negishi, Takada, and Tono (2013) report that despite having studied English since the age of twelve, by the age of 17 (one year before entry to university) 50% of
students have yet to reach the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and a further 33% are still at A1. Teachers have no doubt tackled this issue in a variety of ways in language classrooms around Japan. However, one approach that seems to have proved popular with some is the *immediate method* (Azra, Ikezawa, Rowlett, & Vannieuwenhuyse, 2004). This technique involves regular assessment where learners are required to give a performance of the day’s target language or task. Approaches like this rely on the threat of an assessed performance providing an element of extra motivation to help focus the learners on tasks, a point that is relevant to this paper.

**Assessment in oral communication courses**

Despite the focus of oral communication courses in Japanese universities being ostensibly on the development of speaking and active listening skills, the assessment procedures that are used are not always consistent with these goals. Institutions often require a written form of assessment. For example, students may receive test items which require them to complete missing sections of conversations representative of those that appeared during the course. However, it is probably more desirable to employ a test format that directly attempts to assess speaking proficiency such as an oral proficiency test. These may come in the form of traditional interview tests between teacher and student. However, due to the unavoidable power imbalance in such situations (Hughes, 2003), the use of pairs testing might be more effective in producing more authentic exchanges (Egyud & Glover, 2001; Taylor, 2001; Yamada, 2006. Although see Foot, 1999; O’Sullivan, 2002; and Norton, 2005 for arguments against pairs testing). A context-dependent issue with such oral proficiency tests is related to the time available for testing. With large class sizes being the norm in many institutions, the actual time that can be allocated to each individual (or pair of individuals) may be limited. This raises the question of whether a student can be reliably assessed over a speaking test that may not last much more than a couple of minutes.

One possible alternative assessment method for these courses is the use of a kind of portfolio. There is an extensive body of research into the use of portfolios in education generally, and more specifically in foreign language teaching and learning. Hedge (2000) detailed a number of potential advantages of portfolio assessment, mostly related to involving students in the learning process. Indeed, there is a good deal of research in this specific area. Nunes (2004) found portfolios to be a useful means of promoting learner reflection of their written work. In the East Asian context, there have been several studies that reported positive
responses from students towards portfolio assessment (Apple & Shimo, 2004; Sharifi & Hassaskhah, 2011). Further, Huang and Hung (2010) found that learners who shared speaking samples using an online portfolio, and received feedback from peers, showed evidence of enhanced performance. Hung (2009) found that electronic portfolios of writing promoted self-directed learning, and Chen (2006) concurred, reporting that portfolios might be useful for learners to record their development. However, Chen had reservations about their use as an assessment tool, arguing that there would be resistance from advocates of traditional assessment methods. Chen and Squires (2010) suggested otherwise, proposing that classroom-based assessment methods such as portfolio assessment could be more motivating and preferable to standardized testing.

Indeed, the main potential benefit of portfolio assessment relevant to the current discussion is that it allows learners to be evaluated over a period of time and on a number of pieces of work, rather than grades being weighted towards a single final exam (Dornyei, 2001). They may also provide the kind of motivational push that approaches such as the immediate method hope to achieve.

While considering the above issues regarding difficulties of implementing TBLT in Asian contexts, motivational issues more generally, and portfolio assessment, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How did the participants respond to the task portfolio system of assessment?
2. How did the use of task portfolios affect the participants’ performance on tasks?
3. How did the use of task portfolios affect the participants’ use of L1 during tasks?

Methodology

Participants

This study was conducted at a private university in Japan. The participants came from two intact classes of 1st year students aged 18 to 19 years old. They were largely homogenous in that they had all received six years of standardized English education at the junior and senior high school, which mainly focused on grammar translation, reading practice, and the learning of vocabulary from word lists. The result of this was that, like many school leavers in Japan, the participants had relatively strong explicit grammatical knowledge; however, their speaking skills were rather limited, and their confidence in
communicating in English was low. Although the two classes were made up of business and law majors, the university requires them to take a compulsory English Communication course in the first semester of university. Of the 42 students that had registered in the two classes, 39 agreed to participate in the study and were present for the data collection sessions. 24 of the respondents were male, and 15 were female.

**Procedures**

The study covered one 15-week semester oral communication course (see Figure 1). In week 1, the researcher gave an explanation of the task recordings and portfolio assessment system, and conducted a brief training session using the voice recorders. At this stage the research project was also explained, and those students who wished to participate were asked to read and sign consent forms, and complete a pre-course questionnaire.

During the course there were six topic areas covered that loosely followed a prescribed textbook *Interchange 1A* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2012). At the end of each unit of study, the learners performed a collaborative communicative task which was recorded. These tasks were labelled ‘portfolio tasks’ (see Table 1 for details), and the learners were told that they would be used for assessment purposes. During these sessions the researcher took notes on proceedings to produce a research journal. Finally, in the penultimate class, participants were asked to complete the post-course questionnaire.

![Figure 1. An overview of the 15-week course plan](image-url)
Table 1
The six tasks used in the study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timed conversation</td>
<td>In this icebreaking task, learners imagined they were meeting for the first time and had four minutes to become acquainted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema trip</td>
<td>For this decision-making task, triads received the current schedule for a local cinema. The group had to plan a trip to the cinema and decide which film they would see together; the showing; a place to eat, and whether they will dine before or after the movie; and an appropriate meeting time and place. Groups completed the task in between five and eight minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find the differences</td>
<td>Used widely in teaching (Ur, 2014) and research (Mackey &amp; Gass, 2005), this jigsaw task had pairs receive pictures with a park scene with ten differences. They needed to find ten differences between the pictures. Pairs completed the task in between nine and seventeen minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>For this jigsaw task (Pica, Kanagy, &amp; Falodun, 1993), pairs received a schedule for the next week. They were asked to find a mutually convenient time to meet and do a homework assignment. This task is similar to scheduling tasks commonly found in published materials (e.g. Barnard, Cady, Duckworth, &amp; Trew, 2009). Pairs completed the task in between four and five minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health discussion</td>
<td>In groups of four, learners had to discuss their lifestyle habits and decide which group member was the healthiest. Groups completed the task in between six and ten minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My best vacation</td>
<td>Learners worked in pairs to tell their partner about their best holiday experience with details of where they went to, what they did, whom they were with, and any other points of interest. During each narration, the listener was required to ask questions to elicit further details. Pairs had to perform the task for ten minutes (five minutes each).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre-course questionnaire
After giving an explanation of the study, the participants completed a short written questionnaire (see Appendix A) which took around five minutes. The questionnaire contained nine items using different rating scales and one checklist item. It was written in English and Japanese, and each item was explained in plenary. The aim was to better understand the participants’ English learning backgrounds and attitudes to studying English. For the purpose of the study, it was particularly important to determine the participants’ feelings about
speaking English in class with their peers. Their responses could then be compared to similar items in the post-course questionnaire to try to evaluate any impact from the portfolio tasks.

**Task Interaction Recordings**

The portfolio tasks were audio recorded using digital IC recorders, and saved as MP3 files. The researcher followed a *stations approach* (Markee, 2000), in which each group had their own device and was responsible for making the recording. Therefore, in the first lesson, the participants practiced how to use the recorders to minimize the potential for lost or corrupted data.

Participants submitted the recorders after the task had been completed, and the data were transferred to computer to be organized into folders for each learner. After each successive task, another sample of interaction was added to each folder creating a portfolio of each participant’s performances. Samples of the data contained on these audio files were then transcribed, organized and analyzed using the software *Transana* (Woods & Fassnacht, 2012). To protect the anonymity of the participants, the samples of task interaction shown in this paper have had any identifying features removed, and pseudonyms have been used.

**Post-course Questionnaire**

In the final class, a second written L1 questionnaire (see Appendix B) was administered, which took around ten minutes to complete. First, it contained five rating scale items designed to determine how the participants responded to the tasks and being recorded. Some of these items were followed by a guided clarification question (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010), where further details could be provided in Japanese or English. For the purpose of this paper, the open responses were translated into English by the author. Finally, there were six statements related to how participants thought the recording process had affected their task performances. The participants were asked to state the extent to which they agreed with these statements using a five-point Likert scale.

**Research Journal**

During each class in which portfolio tasks were recorded, the researcher took notes about several potential areas of interest. These included the ease of use of the recorders, the apparent comparative use of L1 and L2 during task time, and participants’ responses to the tasks.
Findings

Over the six portfolio tasks, a number of surface observations were made. Overall, the participants appeared engaged by the tasks, and the chance to work collaboratively with many different members of the class. During other classroom activities, some participants did not interact (in either L1 or L2) a great deal with the others around them, but, when it was required by the portfolio tasks, they seemed to seize the opportunity with enthusiasm. Participants also appeared to be using English exclusively when working on the portfolio tasks.

As we might expect, the participants took the portfolio tasks seriously. They often seemed a little apprehensive at the beginning, and were perhaps nervous of the prospect of their spoken English being recorded.

The recording process itself was relatively trouble free. Although there were a couple of isolated cases where a group lost their data, the vast majority of task performances were safely recorded and could be transferred to the researcher’s computer filing system.

Previous Learning Experiences

As discussed above, the pre-course questionnaire asked about the participants’ previous English learning experiences. The first item asked what proportion of their high school classes were used for speaking activities. Figure 2 shows that most participants reported only a small amount of class time devoted to speaking activities (Mean = 25.4%, SD = 16.0) with 41% of participants responding that 20% or less of class time was devoted to speaking activities.

![Proportion of class time (%)](image)
Figure 2. The proportion of time allocated to speaking activities in the participants’ high school classes

Figure 3 shows the kind of speaking activities the participants had experienced in their high school classes, although this rather crude measurement can only give us a very rough idea of the learners’ backgrounds. By far the most common activities appear to have been repetition drills led either by the teacher or recordings (for some teachers that may be not be confident in providing a pronunciation model). It is striking that a few students reported that they never did any of these speaking activities, especially those which require a little more genuine communication such as structured question and answer activities and communicative tasks. Finally, the number indicating that they sometimes did communicative tasks was higher than expected. It is likely, although this is only conjecture, these were highly structured “tasks” such as survey activities where the questions are already decided and minimal follow up is required.

Figure 3. The frequency of different speaking activities done in the participants’ high school classes

General Responses to Task Portfolios

Figure 4 shows comparative data from the pre- and post-course questionnaires. It illustrates how much the participants reported enjoying English speaking activities with their
classmates in their previous learning experiences (pre-course questionnaire) and following the course under investigation (post-course questionnaire).

As Figure 4 illustrates, only 37% of participants responded positively towards speaking tasks they had done in the past. The most common response (56%) was one of indifference, while a small minority actively disliked them. Following the course involving the portfolio tasks, the responses were much more positive. There were no negative responses, a small minority answered so-so, and the vast majority (86%) responded favorably, with the most common choice being that they really enjoyed the speaking tasks.

In the first open response items that followed in the post-course questionnaire, many participants reported that they had enjoyed the opportunity to use English with their classmates, which they had not been given previously. Several participants also commented on a spirit of collaboration that existed during speaking activities. Responses such as the following were typical (NB: the original Japanese comments have been translated into English):

- “I haven’t had a chance to speak much English before so this was fun.”
- “It was fun to speak to classmates that I don’t usually speak to. Also, for somebody like me who is weak at English, my classmates helped me and speaking English was more fun than it had been before.”

![Figure 4. Participants’ feelings regarding English speaking activities in class](image-url)
The second item of the post-course questionnaire asked the participants how they felt about being recorded. One might expect language learners to feel uncomfortable with having their L2 conversations recorded. If this were to raise anxiety levels to above what might be considered acceptable, it may have had a detrimental effect on their learning. Figure 5 shows the results obtained. It can be seen that rather than a negative response, the results show 73% of participants responding positively.

![Figure 5. Participants' responses to having their tasks recorded](image)

Again, an open response section followed this item. One theme that ran through the responses was that being recorded gave the participants a heightened level of anxiety, but that it appeared to be of a healthy amount. Examples of this included the following:

- “I had a nervous feeling.”
- “With some anxiety I can learn.”
- “At first I didn’t see why we were being recorded, but I think its gives us a ‘sense of tension’ and a feeling that we want to do our best. So, it’s good!”

It seems that the process of being recorded for the purpose of assessment may have facilitated motivation in this group of learners. Another theme that was evident in the open responses was the use of English during the recorded tasks. Some participants claimed that they not only used English more, but that they also paid more attention to accuracy, as shown in the following responses:

- “Compared to normal (activities) I used English more.”
- “I was careful to use good English.”
Indeed, the use of L1 and L2 during task time was one of the main focuses of this investigation, and it is towards this that we now turn.

**L1 Use during Task Performances**

The next item of interest asked participants to report how much they thought they used English (as opposed to slipping into their L1) during their speaking tasks (see Figure 6). The pre-course responses resulted in a mean of 46.9% (SD = 17.5), while the post-course responses gave an increased mean of 78.1% (SD = 15.8). A matched t-test was conducted which showed this increase to be significant ($t = 2.02$, $df = 38$, $p < .05$), and that the participants judged themselves to have used more English during the portfolio tasks on this course than they had in their previous learning experiences.

![Figure 6. Participants’ perceptions of the proportion of task-time spent in L2](image)

The use of L1 and L2 during tasks was further investigated through analysis of the recorded task interaction. Even a cursory listening to samples of the participants’ conversations revealed that most participants used English almost all of the time. In fact, many were being rather modest in their responses to the questionnaire item, and more could have safely answered that they used English more than 81% of the time. Most participants seemed to use English almost exclusively for on-task talk, that is, utterances that moved the
task forward towards its goal. However, there were many instances of L1 that occurred in the data set, and it is worth exploring the reasons why it was employed. The L1 usage examples were coded for their purpose and divided into the following five broad categories:

1. Task transitions

Participants sometimes used their L1 to organize the various stages of the tasks. This was done at transitional stages such as at the beginning and end of sub-sections of a task. Excerpt 1 shows a participant using the Japanese loanword version of ‘start’ to signal that they should now begin the task. It seems highly unlikely that even novice learners do not know these words in English, but still some in the current group of participants chose to employ their L1 in these “off-task” situations.

Excerpt 1
A: my name is Miki Kogawa
B: my name is Hiro Tanaka (2.5) jaa staato (T: let’s begin)

2. Clarification of task procedures

Some participants used the L1 to check how they should perform the task and also to teach their partner(s) the correct way to proceed. Excerpt 2 shows an example of this during the first exchange of the find the differences task. Here, participant F at first acknowledges that her picture is the same (itself a rare on-task use of L1) as participant E’s. Next, participant F uses Japanese to ask his partner how he ought to respond.

Excerpt 2
E: she is sitting near dog
F: un. (2.0) nani wo yuttara ii no? (T: yes. what should I say?)

3. Intrapersonal talk

In the data set, there were several instances where the L1 was used for intrapersonal talk, that is, when the participants were not directing their talk at their interlocutor but towards themselves as part of their thinking process. Excerpt 3 illustrates this, again taken from the find the differences task, where participant G doubts her description of a girl’s clothes.

Excerpt 3
42

G: her skirt is denim kana::: (T: isn’t it?)

Excerpt 4 shows participant H having some trouble retrieving the correct comparative adjective to describe the food he ate on holiday in Hawaii. He uses his L1 during a short piece of intrapersonal talk before correctly applying the rule for making comparatives with short adjectives. As with excerpt 3 and many other examples in the data set, this kind of L1 off-task talk seems to be part of the production process for many of the participants.

Excerpt 4
H: this place eh: eat a big hamburger
I: oh:
H: ah so er: ha- hamburger is er: very er: very er: nan to iu kana? (T: what should I say?) bi- bigger!
I: hm hm

4. Hesitation Devices
As we might expect, rather than using the kind of fillers that native speakers would use (um, er, em etc.), the data set shows that the participants tended to stick with those typically found in Japanese speech. Excerpt 5 exemplifies this with participant H using a common L1 filler, while giving himself some time to think how to describe the reason for Daiba’s fame.

Excerpt 5
J: Fujiterebi is a famous place in Daiba e::to:: there have many talents

5. Enquiries about L2
As the tasks were being recorded for assessment, many participants seemingly did not want to openly use their L1. Therefore, there were many cases in the data set of off-task whispering. In these cases, although it was often impossible to tell what they were saying, the results of their whispered exchanges can clearly be heard. Many of these seemed to be discussions about language form — usually a vocabulary item, or sometimes a grammatical point. Excerpt 6 illustrates a typical example from the my best vacation task. Here, participant K is describing the long flight involved on his trip, but he does not seem able to recall the
word *flight*. After a whispered exchange in their L1, participant L provides the sought for lexical item, and participant K can then complete his turn.

**Excerpt 6**

K: this trip is very lon- long time eh::

((whispering in L1))

L: flight!

K: very long flight!

**Aspects of Task Performance**

Finally, in the post-course questionnaire, participants rated, using a five-point Likert scale, how they thought being recorded affected six aspects of their performances on the tasks, compared with occasions when their tasks were not recorded. The responses in Figure 7 show that the participants generally felt that being recorded pushed them to be more successful in task completion, and encouraged them to speak less Japanese and avoid making mistakes. However, most participants did not feel that they produced more difficult language. Perhaps the threat of the recording made them cautious, and encouraged them to rely on language forms and structures with which they were comfortable. Responses to the final two items indicate that the participants also felt they had asked more questions and given expanded answers (probably most relevant to less structured discussion-style tasks).

![Figure 7. Participants responses to how being recorded affected their task performances](image-url)
Discussion and Classroom Implications

In this section, I will consider the three research questions in turn.

1. How did the participants respond to the implementation of a task portfolio system?

   Overall, the results suggest that this group of learners accepted the use of the portfolio task system well. The questionnaire data shows positive responses towards doing the tasks on this course as well as being recorded itself. Like many groups of university students in Japan, before the course the participants indicated that they did not enjoy speaking English. The fact that they have reported that they not only enjoyed doing the tasks, but also that they found being recorded pushed them to apply themselves, is an indication that using a portfolio task system could be a useful option in contexts where motivation and enthusiasm for communication in English is low. From only the simple rating scale items of the questionnaire, it is possible that the positive responses could simply be a reflection of the participants enjoying the course materials, the teaching, or the company of their new classmates. If they have had rather negative high school experiences of learning English, perhaps the fresh approach using collaborative tasks would be the cause of them responding to a questionnaire so positively. However, the open response sections of the post-course questionnaire were illuminating, and there were some interesting and insightful explanations to support their rating scale choices, including the comments about recordings providing a push to perform at their full potential.

2. How did the use of task portfolios affect the participants’ use of L1 during tasks?

   To investigate the second research question, both participants’ opinions and samples of the task interaction were used. In the questionnaire, the participants’ responses show that they certainly felt they were using more English in their task performances compared to their prior learning experiences. Entries in the teacher journal indicate that learners appeared to be engaging in the tasks exclusively in English. This was partly corroborated by an analysis of the task interaction, which shows that the vast majority of talk was indeed done in English. The exceptions to this were of interest too, and they raise some issues about the continued L1 usage during tasks, including how these uses of L1 can be reduced, and whether it is efficacious to do so. Some L1 uses, such as the use of English transition words that were surely known to the users, pose the question why they used Japanese on these occasions. However, it is likely that some L1 uses could be minimized. For example, to counter the use of Japanese fillers, the teaching of English hesitation devices may be effective. Further, the
practice of circumlocution skills might help learners deal with gaps in vocabulary. This area might be an interesting avenue for further research, possibly using more data collection methods including participant interviews to try and better understand the reasons why learners employ the L1.

3. **How did the use of task portfolios affect the participants’ use of L1 during tasks?**

The results from the questionnaire items that targeted this research question showed that the majority of participants generally felt that being recorded had a positive effect on various elements of task performance. The responses suggested learners felt more successful in meeting the task goals, and they corroborated the findings about L1/L2 use. Most participants reported being careful to not make mistakes, suggesting a focus on accuracy. There has been some discussion in the field of TBLT regarding how learners can be directed towards attending to accuracy (Hawkes, 2012; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2007), and the findings of the current study suggest that the recording of tasks could encourage learners to focus on form. The results also show that the majority of this group of participants did not try to use difficult language forms. This might suggest less risk taking, and possibly less of a focus on complexity. Future CAF studies (Housen & Kuiken, 2009), which look at the effect of task variables on the three task performance factors of complexity, fluency and accuracy, might consider the impact of “performance threats” such as assessed recordings.

Many of the findings described and discussed above appear to be the result of some motivational effect from being recorded for assessment. This is undoubtedly a form of extrinsic motivation. It has been argued by scholars who specialize in motivation that extrinsic motivational factors are not effective over the long term, and may even be damaging (Dornyei, 2001). However, it is common for practitioners to mix both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors in their teaching and assessment approaches. Also, if testing is required by institutions, perhaps it is better to strive for assessment tools that are closely linked to the goals of the course (in this case oral communication in English), and improve performance on language learning tasks.

**Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

To summarize, this paper investigated the use of task portfolios, that is, the learners in an EFL English communication class had their task performances recorded to make a collection of samples of their classroom work. Questionnaire results indicate a largely positive response, with participants apparently finding that having their tasks recorded provided an
extra motivational push to do their best work and improve their performance. It also seemed to limit the use of L1 during tasks, a perennial problem for teachers in monolingual EFL contexts like Japan. These results suggest that task portfolios may be a useful way for teacher to add an extra component to their assessment schemes for oral communication classes. Not only does it provide a testing approach that directly assesses what happens in class (as opposed to a heavily weighted final interview test), it might also help to improve task performances and even classroom management for learners with lower motivation.

Despite the potential of this approach, there are undeniably some areas that need to be addressed. Drawbacks include the initial cost of recording devices and batteries, the additional task of making sure the batteries are charged, and the inconvenience of carrying the equipment to class. These issues will of course be exacerbated in teaching contexts where class sizes are large. However, over the past few years more and more learners have smartphones with perfectly reasonable audio recording hardware and software. Learners can be made responsible for making recordings and then submitting them to an online storage service such as Dropbox. Indeed, Hawking (2015) described the step-by-step process to achieve this. While this may not be an option for some teachers — in contexts where students do not have the necessary devices — for those who can, it may simplify the process of collecting samples of task interaction. The use of smartphone technology in portfolio creation is certainly one potential avenue for further investigation. It opens up the possibility of creating communities for giving and receiving feedback from teachers and peers of the kind reported by Huang and Hung (2010).

Another issue for busy teachers is the sheer amount of time it may take to process the collected samples and allocate grades. Again, the burden will increase with the number of students. This is certainly a valid concern although it may not necessarily take more time than grading written work. For those who consider it too much, they could devise a system where perhaps only two or three samples are selected for assessment. Students can be made aware that not all of their portfolio tasks will actually be assessed, but they will not know which ones will be chosen. This is similar to an approach to alleviate the burden of grading for busy teachers advocated by Folse (2013). Again, devising methods and techniques to help overworked teachers is certainly a fertile area for further research.

A third challenge is with the practical issue of distinguishing between voices while listening to the samples of task interaction. Certainly, if there are three or more learners participating in a task, it can become very difficult to discriminate between different voices. One solution would be to use video recordings, but this may add to the equipment problems...
discussed above. Again, if it is possible, having students make their own videos with their smartphones might be the best option. If this is not possible, it may be better to keep portfolio tasks limited to those performed in pairs or perhaps triads. Finally, it will be easier to distinguish voices if there is a balance of male and female learners in each task group.

Whenever any new intervention to a teaching course is introduced, especially an assessment method, individual practitioners need to balance the potential benefits against some of the problems they may face. Despite the pitfalls outlined above, the paper demonstrates a potentially useful assessment option for teachers of monolingual EFL classes across Asia and beyond.
References


False, K. (2013, November). If you are a teacher today, thank your teachers. Paper presented at JALT2013, Kobe, Japan.


APPENDIX A

Name: _______________________

**Pre-course Questionnaire**

1. What percentage of your English classes were used for speaking activities at high school?
   (高校の英語の授業のうちスピーキングの割合は何パーセントありましたか。)
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>0%-20%</th>
<th>21%-40%</th>
<th>41%-60%</th>
<th>61%-80%</th>
<th>81%-100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. What kind of speaking activities did you do?
   (授業内でどのようなスピーキングの練習をしましたか。)
   
   a. Repeating after the teacher (講師のあとに続いて話す)
      
      often     sometimes   never
   b. Repeating after a recording (録音の後に続いて話す)
      
      often     sometimes   never
   c. Q & A with teacher (講師と質疑応答)
      
      often     sometimes   never
   d. Q & A with other students (生徒同士で質疑応答)
      
      often     sometimes   never
   e. Communicative tasks in pairs or groups (ペアまたはグループでコミュニケーション演習)
      
      often     sometimes   never

3. Do you enjoy speaking English with your classmates?
   (他の生徒と英語を話すのは楽しかったですか。)
   
   Yes, I love it   I like it   It’s okay   Not really   No, I hate it

4. During English speaking activities with peers, what percentage of time do you use English?
   (他の生徒とスピーキングの演習をする際、あなたは何パーセント英語のみを話しましたか。)
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>0%-20%</th>
<th>21%-40%</th>
<th>41%-60%</th>
<th>61%-80%</th>
<th>81%-100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. During English tasks, what do you use Japanese for? (check as many boxes as you like)
   (スピーキングの演習中、日本語を使用したのはどのような時ですか。あてはまるものにいくつでもチェックを入れて下さい。)
   
   To discuss how to do the task □
   (演習のやり方について相談するため)
   To ask how to say something □
   (英語で何と言えばよいか聞くため)
   To talk about something else □
   (他のことについて話すため)

   Other:
   (その他)
**APPENDIX B**

---

### End-of-course questionnaire

This semester you used voice recorders to record your speaking tasks and make a task portfolio. I'd like to ask you some questions about this.

#### PART A

1. Which portfolio tasks were you present for? Check the boxes.
   (受講においてどの[portfolio tasks]を実施しましたか？チェックを入れて下さい。)

   - Making a schedule
   - A trip to the cinema
   - Spot the differences
   - My best vacation

2. During the portfolio tasks, what percentage of time did you use English?
   ([portfolio tasks]を実施するにあたって、英語をどのように頻度で使用しましたか？)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>0-20%</th>
<th>21-40%</th>
<th>41-60%</th>
<th>61-80%</th>
<th>81-100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Did you enjoy doing the portfolio tasks with your classmates?
   (あなたはクラスメイトと[portfolio tasks]を楽しんで行いましたか？)

   - loved it
   - liked it
   - was okay
   - did not like it
   - hated it

  とても楽しんだ  楽しんだ  まあまあ楽しんだ  あまり楽しまなかった  楽しまなかった

Please give details about your answer to Q3 in the box.

Q3に対する答えについて詳しく述べて下さい。

---

4. How did you feel about being recorded?
   (授業の様子を録音されることについてどのように感じましたか？)

   - loved it
   - liked it
   - was okay
   - did not like it
   - hated it

  とても良かった  良かった  普通  あまり良くなかった  良くなかった

Please give details about your answer to Q4 in the box.

Q4に対する答えについて詳しく述べて下さい。

---
**PART B**

*For the following questions, please indicate to what extent you agree with each statement.*  
(以下の質問について、自身の考えに最も近いものをマークして下さい。)

**Compared to other speaking activities (in this class and other English classes) when you are not recorded, how did being recorded affect your performance?**  
(録音をされない他のスピーキングのタスクと比べて、このクラスの中で、または他の英語のクラスの中で、録音をされることがあなたのスピーキングにどのような影響を与えたか？)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>not sure</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. I tried harder to complete the task well. タスクを完成させるため倍段よりも努力した。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I spoke less Japanese. 普段よりも日本語を使わなかった。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I tried harder not to make mistakes. 問題をしないよう倍段よりも気をつけた。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I tried to use more difficult language. より難しい言葉を使おうと努力した。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I tried to ask extra questions to my partner(s). 相手役の生徒に対し、より多くの質問をしようと試みた。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I tried to give longer answers to questions. 質問に対し、より長い答えを語そうと試みた。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I made more mistakes. 普段よりも多く間違えた。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Flipped Learning as a Strategy for an Effective EFL Classroom

Hambalee Jehma

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Bioprofile:
Hambalee Jehma graduated with a B.A. in the Department of English Language and Literature from Thammasat University, in 2010. Upon graduation from Thammasat University, he has pursued his Master’s Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Thammasat University. He is now working as an English lecturer at the Prince of Songkla University International College, Hatyai Campus, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. His interests are Second language Acquisition, Phonetics and Phonology, Sociolinguistics and CALL.

Abstract
Teaching and learning language is not an independent technology based method, yet it is needed to be integrated into different pedagogical approaches (Kern, 2006). Therefore, the Flipped Classroom teaching methodology pioneered by Bergmann and Sams (2012) has been employed in the compulsory course of the English language for freshmen students in the English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. The implementation of the Flipped Classroom approach aims to investigate if it is effective in mastering the EFL learners’ English skills with high satisfaction. Twenty students in this study were trained by a non-native English teacher. They were also asked to master their English skills by typically interacting with the English content in the video posted on the www.classstart.org prepared by the teacher before coming to the class. The questions were usually asked and discussed in the class before composing any writing tasks in the next class. The students were asked to finish a university course evaluation system at the end of the semester. The findings show that the students had some improvement in English writing skills according to the different scores of the first writing performance with the score of 113 or 56 % and the final writing performance with a
higher score of 134 or 67 % which were measured by using the rubric distributed to the students at the beginning of the course. Moreover, the statistic evaluation data confirmed that they were really satisfied with the course instructed by using Flipped learning strategy with a high score of 4.60 out of 5.00 or 92 percent. The results revealed that implementing Flipped learning in the EFL classroom is highly recommended.

**Key Words:** English Writing Skills, EFL, Flipped Classrooms, Teaching Methodology

**Introduction**

English is widely regarded as a global or international language, and this undoubtedly implies that there is a need for people to understand each other’s English (Jehma & Phoocharoensil, 2014). Therefore, there is no exception for Thailand. As Thai people are proud that they have never been colonized, they are proud of being Thai and using Thai as a mother tongue, Thais’ level of English proficiency is low compared with many countries in Asia (Wiriyachitra, 2002). Though a great change in the Thai curriculum concerning the English language learning was started at the upper elementary level in 1960 (Khamkhien, 2010), the Thai government has not pushed a substantial effort to promote any teaching methodology to improve Thai students’ level of English proficiency (Khamkhien, 2006), the failure of this effort was very obvious as mentioned in many studies by Bolton (2008) and Wiriyachitra (2001), based on the scores of two international standardized tests: TOEFL and TOEIC. Thai test takers’ scores have been significantly lower, compared to those of other Southeast Asian countries. As a result, this problematic phenomenon is central to language pedagogy (Khamkhien, 2010).

To explore the way of getting students mastered in English, educators around the world have been struggling to explore if there is any new pedagogies to help their students achieve in their subjects. Even in Thailand, the traditional pedagogy of solely giving a lecture has been changed to a newer strategy like integrated or communicative teaching in the classroom, especially for teaching language (Wiriyachitra, 2002). The effort, however, was worth less than expected.

As the failure has happened in every single level of education, the new term of ‘flipped classroom’ has been promoted. This approach has become popular as the availability of the internet supports the media implemented in this approach, with videos and audios more easily
accessible which suits the current generation (Herreid & Schiller, 2013). As the two significant pioneers of this approach, Bergmann and Sams (2012) realized the effectiveness of chemistry class content posted online for the students (Tucker, 2012), the strategy has attracted much interest around the world since most of teachers have been applying this pedagogy into their classroom (Stuntz, 2013). The idea of the ‘flipped classroom’ is very common: teachers create video lessons or any interactive lesson to be used in the class as a lecture available and accessible at home (Tucker, 2012). In other words, it is a busy, collaborative, and social place where extroversion, collaboration, and teamwork are highly valued (Honeycutt, 2014). The term has also been defined in another educational way. The flipped classroom can be defined as an educational technique that consists of two main parts: interactive group learning activities in the classroom, and direct computer-based individual instruction outside the classroom (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). In addition, the flipped classroom is also defined as a teaching methodology that allows educators to have more chances to engage with the students actively. Therefore, instructors in the classroom assign recorded video lectures as homework, and the time for active learning exercises and direct engagement with students happens in the classroom (2013). The model of this approach can be, therefore, clearly explained in the Figure 1.

![Figure 1 Flipped class model (adapted from Bishop, 2013)](image)

To be more specific, in Troy Faulkner’s Calculus class (Fulton, 2012), for example, the flipped classroom strategy was applied. IPads, laptops, and smartphones were brought into the classroom in order to be useful tools for learning. The teacher raised questions which ensured students understood about the video posted the previous time before coming to class. Students were assigned to work on the problems and explore how to solve them properly. The students, thereby, discussed at their own pace and in their own style. Some of them sat in a group and discussed, but some preferred to think and learn on their own while their friends
were around them. Faulkner worked at home to put the videos for his students at night or the day before the class had begun, so that his students could review the video at home before joining the discussion in the following class at school. He also monitored the students during the discussion to ensure that if there were some who needed his help, he could immediately give them the information needed. If there was a quiz or the test on some specific topic, he always gave the students results promptly (2012).

A Basic Algebra, Algebra II/Trig, and Senior Math class taught by Darren Nelson can illustrate how another flipped classroom looks like (Fulton, 2012). The class shows that flipped classroom strategy is an amazing technique in saving time. The conceptual idea can be explained with a ten minute video while students normally spend a whole period in class as the methodology have been promoted in various classes at different levels of education. Papadopoulos, Santiago-Román, and Portela (2010), for instance, implemented this approach in an electrical engineering class. They found the students progressed faster to catch up with more material at a greater depth. In addition, the approach has also been applied in a biology class by Moravec et al. (2010). This led to a performance increase of 21% on exam questions.

In the English classroom, a flipped pedagogy has been implemented in classrooms around the world. That is to say, college students in Dubai have been taught by this approach. Fallow (2013) found that some teachers flipped his/her traditional class by solely giving a lecture in the class and asking students to do homework at their home to be done in reverse. The teacher in the study mentioned that students in general felt very happy and positively toward this approach used in the class. They could develop their vocabulary by selecting more proper words for different specific situations or contexts.

In terms of writing, the digital tools used in the class such as blogs and wikis have approved students’ achievement by sharing their ideas to others (Beach, 2012). Felix (2008) also revealed that 168 teachers from his study portrayed that they were satisfied with their students’ writing performance. 89% of them confirmed that the methodology has changed their teaching method, resulting in an increase of students’ collaboration in sharing their ideas amongst students and between students and teachers especially while giving feedback. The students themselves also reported that writing on the wiki could help them improve to use engagements markers (Kuteeva, 2010). Moreover, some research also shows that employing digital tools in teaching and learning can improve students writing skill according to the writing scores assessed over five years (Silvernail & Gritter, 2007). To be more specific, there was a significant increase in the students’ writing scores with the ones who frequently
used or interacted and practiced writing via their laptop. Other students, who rarely practiced or interacted with digital tools, however, had lower scores.

The pedagogy implemented has not only influenced students’ writing performance, but the reading skill has been affected. Warschauer (2008) reveals that there has been an increase in the students writing performance as well as the reading skill when students learnt by interacting with the media posted by the teacher. They shared and cooperated their ideas amongst themselves via blogs. Yi (2008) mentioned that students also improved their reading skills after they read and interacted with the digital texts posted. It resulted in a high level of student engagement. Students also analyzed the fictional components such as characters, settings, and so on by a collaborative exchange of critical responses and wrote a creative writing (Black, 2009).

There appears to be a gap in the literature since the research which has been done does not cover teaching and learning English by implementing a flipped learning strategy in a Thai EFL context and also lacks any experimental studies concerning the satisfaction of the EFL learners toward this strategy. Such an absence of empirical studies can lead to these following research questions.

**Research Questions and Objectives**

There are two main research questions in this study:

1. To what extent does a flipped classroom learning pedagogy influence Thai EFL learners’ beliefs?

2. To what extent does a flipped classroom learning pedagogy influence Thai EFL learners in developing their English writing skills?

**Methodology**

20 Thai EFL learners were selected to be participants in the study. They were freshmen studying English II, a compulsory subject in the university. They were majoring in multimedia at the International College, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. They had studied English I in the previous semester. They, thereby, had quite the same level of English language background.

During the course, students participated in the class two times a week for three hours a period. They have always been asked to interact with the materials or videos posted via the active learning assistant website, www.classstarts.org. The website was designed by the Faculty of Management, at Prince of Songkla University.
The students were divided into groups by the teacher using this class management program website. This was done in order for students to be assigned any exercises more easily. Students were also asked to write a paragraph without any materials taught at the beginning of the course concerning the topic assigned to learn at home. The first assigned work was collected and measured. Their work was given comments and corrected individually and turned back in the next period. The course required continuous practicing and learning throughout the semester. The teacher kept monitoring, measuring, and assisting students to master all English skills, especially their writing skills. The writing assignments were scored using a rubric created by the teacher via the website program, http://rubistar.4teachers.org/. There were four categories considered in the rubric; organization, accuracy of facts, spelling and punctuation, and focus on assigned topic. At the end of the course, students were asked to finish the course evaluation concerning their satisfaction online provided by the university. They also had a final exam, which included writing an essay. Both of these assessments were considered and compared to evaluate if the flipped class pedagogy implemented in the class had worked.

Results and Discussion

The data were collected from both students’ satisfaction toward the course through the online evaluation systems and the performance of students in writing, the results are shown in the following charts:

Table 1 Course Evaluation by the Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Scores(5)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teaching techniques</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Being professional</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Listening to students’ comments</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Supporting students to think reasonably</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Giving enough information for searching</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Creating lessons and activities due to learners’ interest</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Warm and happy learning Environment</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Implementing a proper media</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Distributing various media for an effective learning</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Over all</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data shown in table 1 displays the satisfaction of the students towards the course with a flipped class learning pedagogy. The results obviously show that the learners are very satisfied towards the course with the high overall score of 4.6 out of 5 or 92%. The result confirms a similar satisfaction as the study done by Fallows (2013). He found that this approach applied by the English teacher in teaching English vocabulary for the college students in Dubai was very satisfying. Students were happy and increased their English vocabulary. To be more specific, the teaching techniques and the creation of lessons and activities due to learners’ interests in items were ranked the highest with a score of 4.8 out of 5 or 96%. Moreover, the data shows that the students were happy with the course with the score of 4.65 or 93%. The items of being professional and distributing various media for an effective learning environment were ranked third with the score of 4.6 or 92%. In addition, students also thought that the teacher supported them to think reasonably and implemented a proper media for them in the class with the score of 4.55 or 91%. The last two items whether the teacher gives enough information for searching and listens to their comments were also ranked with high scores of 4.5 and 4.45 or 90% and 89% respectively. The results from this evaluation confirm that learners were satisfied and happy with the course implemented with a flipped class learning strategy as well as other studies that had been evaluated with a high score of satisfaction by the students. For example, Zappe, Leiecht, Messner, Litzinger, and Lee (2009) found that students in the class where the approach was implemented this had a positive impact on student learning. Students stated that they were satisfied with the course promoting flipped teaching since they enjoyed watching the video at home compared to listening to the lecture in class.

Table 2 Students’ First Writing Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student No.</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Accuracy of facts</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Topic focus</th>
<th>Over all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>23.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>113.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 Students’ Final Writing Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student No.</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Accuracy of facts</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Topic focus</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>38.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>134.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 and Table 3 clearly show the improvement of the students in their English writing. That is to say, all of the measured categories developed. According to the scores, the overall score obviously states the students’ improvement which they got an overall score of 112 out of 200 or 56% in the first writing assignment, yet they received a higher score of 134 out of 200 or 67% in the second writing assignment.
or 67% in their last writing performance. In terms of organization, the final writing performance score was higher than that in the first writing at the beginning of the semester with a score of 36.5 or 73% compared to the lower score of the first writing, 30.5 or 61%. It means students had developed their writing skill in terms of organization 12%. In addition, students also improved their writing in terms of having an accuracy of facts. To illustrate, the students performed only 23 out of 100 or 46% at the beginning of the semester. They, however, had some development by the end of the semester according to the score of the final writing task, 26 or 52%, resulting in a 6% improvement in this category. The category of spelling was ranked as the highest improvement since the score of final writing task is higher than the first writing task. That is to say, students score in the final writing task in terms of spelling was 33.5 or 67%, yet at the beginning, students could only produce a score of 26.5 or 53% which is lower than the final one of 14%. In terms of the topic focus, there was a significant increase of students’ development. In other words, students started writing at the beginning of the semester with a score of 33 or 66% concerning the topic focus whereas the result of the final writing score was higher with a score of 38.5 or 77%. That means the students had a better skill by a percentage of 11%. In brief, students had improved in all categories which were scored in the writing assignment by the end of semester. The spelling correctness was ranked as the highest category which students had mastered. They improved from a score of 26.5 or 53% from the beginning of the semester to a score of 33.5 or 67% at the end of the course. They could also develop their skill of focusing on the topic assigned with a score of 33 or 66% to 38.5 or 77%. The other two categories, organization and accuracy of facts, have been mastered by the students. They could improve these two skills starting from a score of 30.5 or 61% in the aspect of organization to 36.5 or 73% and from 23 or 46% in the aspect of accuracy of facts to 26 or 52% by the end of semester.
Figure 2 Students’ writing performance development

The students’ English writing improvement can be clearly shown in Figure 2. Students had developed in all categories scored in writing assignments. In other words, the topic focus in writing had been ranked with the highest score which students mastered. The other skills required such as organization and spelling also improved. Even though the category of accuracy seems to be the least skill students developed, the final writing performance can confirm that they still have some development.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, this approach used in the English classroom, especially in for writing skill development has been done by the teacher and the results can confirm that the flipped classroom pedagogy is highly advised. It is not only the learners who have a really positive perspective toward the course implemented by this approach that can give them a hand to motivate the students to have a better feeling of willingness to develop and concentrate what they were acquiring, but the skills they were acquiring or learning had been mastered along the way due to the positive impact of the approach as many others have found that with a flipped classroom teaching method, the students were positive about receiving specific and personal help inside the classroom since the teacher can spend more time to help their students focusing on what they really need to be assisted in (Maher, Lipford & Singh, 2011). Though the approach done in this study is advised to EFL teachers, the way to manage the class and prepare the lessons should be very careful while choosing appropriate resources in the media to suit the uniqueness of the students at the different levels of language proficiency since some students prefer to enjoy their own teacher’s lesson video, but some love viewing other media prepared by the teacher from other resources (Fulton, 2012). Teachers and educators can apply any free online class management and assess websites suggested in the study for the students’ effective learning or any other websites provided while implementing this approach to engage the students in the learning process in order to include all traditional activities i.e. giving lectures, taking notes and questioning (Prince, 2004).
References


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Redesigning a Japanese Tertiary Communicative EFL syllabus: Integrating Multiple Intelligences
Darlene Yamauchi
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Bioprofile
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Abstract
As it is becoming increasingly recognized that students vary in their natural competences, the acquisition of English language competences can also be seen from various perspectives. To enhance this understanding, Gardner’s (1993) Multiple Intelligences (MI) research suggests that each person has a high probability of possessing different types of intelligences. Historically, linguistic intelligence has been closely associated with language acquisition, but other intelligences may be significant for language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes that are aimed at improving oral communication (Cameron, 2001). In order to explore this issue, the present study will focus on learners’ self-identification of MI in a compulsory first year General EFL cohort at a Japanese University (n=55). Using an MI Inventory as a method to ascertain learners’ perception of their prevalent intelligences, the researcher found through the preliminary results that interpersonal and bodily intelligences, not typically linked to language acquisition, were more predominant than the standard linguistic or mathematic-logical intelligences with this population. This study also examined how techniques and activities may be altered or shifted in order to accommodate students’ prevalent intelligences within the current syllabus for the intention of improving motivation, promoting learner autonomy as well as engaging students to participate in class. While the findings from this study add support to changing the delivery method of techniques and methods in a first year tertiary speaking class at a Japanese
Introduction

As is evident with the recent Japanese Government initiatives, the necessity for Japanese people to communicate in English cannot be overlooked, and Japanese universities are being called upon to produce graduates that are able to communicate in English in order to perform on the global stage (MEXT, 2011). Unfortunately, the reality is that many Japanese students either dislike English or feel it is too difficult and by the time they have reached university level have all but given up (Roesgard, 2006). The lack of interest or motivation to learn English may be linked to the EFL instruction these students have received and continue to receive (Taguchi, 2013). One barrier to effective learning often cited is the disparity between students’ needs and learning styles with regard to the methodology utilized in the classroom (Ogawa & Izumi, 2015). In an effort to address these discrepancies Howard Gardner’s (1985) theory of Multiple Intelligences with its focus on learner autonomy may offer an effective novel approach to educational advancement in tertiary learning environments (Yamauchi, 2014). This study discusses the preliminary results from an intrinsic, small-scale case study focusing on learners’ self-identification of Multiple Intelligences (MI) in a first year General EFL cohort at a Japanese University (n=55). The literature review will provide an overview of MI, highlighting its applicability to EFL instruction as well as a discussion of the concepts of learner motivation and willingness to communicate (WTC). Using an originally designed MI Inventory as a methodology to ascertain learners’ perception of their prevalent intelligences, preliminary results will be presented. This study will also examine how utilizing MI in the modification of classroom practices to adapt techniques which meet the needs of the students will benefit the further promotion of the students’ prevalent intelligences within the current syllabus. Practical interventions within the current syllabus will be proposed as a means of improving motivation, promoting learner autonomy as well as encouraging students to engage in class. Then, conclusions and implications for further research will be suggested.
Literature Review

Multiple Intelligences

Gardner (1983) introduced the Theory of Multiple Intelligences in 1983 as an alternative theory to the traditional notion of intelligence as a fixed entity based on IQ testing, as it may be considered restrictive in scope (Christison, 2005). According to Gardner’s theory, intelligence may be defined as the bio-psychological potential to process information in certain kinds of ways in order to solve problems or create products that are valued in one or more cultural settings (Gardner, 1999). One of the most unique features of MI theory is the concept that individuals can develop one or more talents or competences termed intelligences (Armstrong, 2009). He initially proposed seven intelligences later adding an eighth, a naturalist intelligence (Gardner, 2011). More recently other intelligences such an existential intelligence (Chen, Moran & Gardner, 2009) have been proposed, but as they have not been applied widely in EFL MI research, for the purpose of this research the following eight will be investigated:

1. **Linguistic intelligence** is viewed as encompassing sensitivity to spoken and written language, as well as the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use language to accomplish particular goals. This intelligence includes the ability to effectively use language for expression verbally or as a means to remember information (Christison, 2005).

2. **Logical-mathematical intelligence** involves the capability to analyze problems logically, or carry out mathematical operations utilizing deductive thinking, as well as the ability to conduct scientific investigations through logical reasoning (Gardner, 1999).

3. **Musical intelligence** is generally viewed as the skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns. It encompasses the capacity to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms. Musical intelligence is often viewed as structurally parallel and is often linked to linguistic intelligence (Armstrong, 2009).

4. **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** is largely concerned with the potential of using one's...
whole body or parts of the body to solve problems but it may also be associated closely with the ability to use mental abilities to coordinate bodily movements (Reid, 1998).

5. **Spatial intelligence** incorporates the potential to recognize and use the patterns of wide space and more confined areas (Christison, 2005).

6. **Interpersonal intelligence** is concerned with the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people. It allows people to work effectively with others (Armstrong, 2009).

7. **Intrapersonal intelligence** comprises the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations (Christison, 2005).

8. **Naturalist intelligence**: The naturalist intelligence is concerned with the ability to recognize, categorize or classify plants, and animals (Gardner, 1999).

These intelligences may be viewed as interrelated, as an individual may not know the strength or weakness of his or her particular intelligence, based on the strength or weakness of another intelligence (Gardner, 2011). These strengths and relative weaknesses may be based on a whole host of factors, including but not limited to: biological reasons, i.e. brain development or genetic composition; cultural biases, such as what is valued in particular settings; the amount of resources available to aid in the development of an intelligence, or motivational motives, namely how much an individual desires to develop an intelligence (Gardner, 1999).

**MI and Second Language Learning**

MI theory in the language classroom may be considered as a context in which language teachers are able to offer acknowledgment to the holistic nature of learners as well as address student diversity (Christison, 2005). Utilizing MI theory allows teachers to organize learning situations that offer learners a variety of ways to engage meaning and strengthen memory pathways; as MI may be considered a readily used tool for lesson planning that can increase the appeal of language learning tasks, creating a positive motivational learning environment (Buchen, 2006, Reid, 1999).
Using MI generated teaching strategies that draw on a variety of intelligences allows students to better appreciate their strengths as well as expand interests leading to further development of perceived weaker MI; thus further assisting language learning (Puchta, Herbert and Mario Rinvolucr, 2005). The application of MI theory in the language classroom, enables teachers to recognize as well as differentiate students areas of interest in order to promote a more learner centered environment as Arnold and Fonseca (2004) state succeeding in: ‘putting individuals with their different ways of learning where they belong, back at the center of the learning process’ (p.125) The following are examples of practical applications for MI in the ESL classroom (Armstrong 2009, Buchen 2006, Puchta.et.al, 2005):

1. Linguistic Intelligence: reading a story, choosing suitable word to fill in a gap in a sentence, choosing an appropriate synonym or antonym for a given word, answering multiple questions related to a text.

2. Logical Mathematical Intelligence: sequencing events in a chronological order, finding logical errors, presenting timelines of events presented in a story or a text, word searches jigsaw puzzles and games, concept maps.

3. Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence: drawing, writing on the board, role plays, dramatization, making models of objects and using realia (real objects), games.

4. Visual Spatial Intelligence: drawing diagrams, working with maps, matching pictures with words, describing pictures or images.

5. Musical Intelligence: songs, tongue twisters, rhymes, playing songs in order to introduce a topic or analyze the lyrics, transforming lyrics into a text.

6. Interpersonal Intelligence: analyzing a character, reflections on characters and their actions or motivation, analyzing or retelling/rewriting a text from another’s character point of view, group work.

7. Intrapersonal Intelligence: journal keeping, activities in order to elicit personal experiences (reflections, discussions and sharing personal experiences).

8. Naturalistic Intelligence: comparisons between a novel and a film, news broadcasted by two different resources, categorizing, analyzing settings, field trips and projects.

**Motivation and Second Language Learning**
Motivation and second language learning is not a new concept. Gardner and Lambert (1959) may be considered the trailblazers as more than 50 years ago demonstrated in their groundbreaking study that language achievement is not only related to language aptitude, but to motivation as well. Later research has further supported Gardner and Lambert’s findings with regard to second language learning (Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001; Yashima, 2002).

Without motivation, learning a second language is exceedingly difficult, regardless of conditions, learning styles, teaching styles, therefore motivation may be considered the most significant factor influencing language learning (Thanasoulas, 2000). Although motivation has been well recognized as an instrumental factor in language learning, agreeing on a definition of motivation has been problematic as it is multi-dimensional and continuously evolving (Irie, 2003). Dornyei (2001) discusses motivation in the context of a constantly changing arousal where wants and desires are ranked, evaluated and acted on with some degree of success. There is little disagreement that fostering motivation is crucial to a language learner's success; therefore, the question then logically turns to how best to increase motivation. Looking to the socio-educational model of L2 acquisition may offer some insight. Gardner (1985) suggests that two fundamental attitudes; integrativeness and attitude towards the learning situation may contribute to the learners’ level of L2 learning motivation with the level of motivation considered as an influencing factor on the linguistic outcome such as achievement or proficiency (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Integrativeness is concerned with the desire to learn an L2 with the goal of communicating with members of the L2 community. It may predict that students with a higher level of integrativeness and stronger L2 learning motivation will be more willingly to interact with an L2 language group than those with a lower level of integrativeness and motivation. (Yashima, 2002). Learner motivation may be affected by many variables such as age, gender, subject major, stage of learning, classroom environment, and cultural expectations. Research into English language learners’ motivation has shown that factors for learner motivation, such as exam results or career targets may be viewed as important for Japanese university students (Irie, 2003). Other studies comment that there may be a relationship between the enjoyment of learning and motivation for Japanese learners (Ryan, 2009). Research into English language learners has shown that factors for learner motivation, such as exam results or career targets are also viewed as important for Japanese university students (Irie, 2003). Research into gender and motivation with Japanese learners, has demonstrated that girls consistently reported higher levels of motivation than boys with students seemingly positively motivated by native
speaker teachers as well as by direct experience overseas (Fukuchi & Sakamoto, 2005). Generally, students who are interested in the foreign community, international affairs, and have an interest in studying or living abroad will have more favorable attitudes toward what English symbolizes than other learners (Johnson, 2013). Yashima (2000) terms this concept as “international posture” and comments this factor may positively influence learner motivation (Yashima, 2000). Yashima (2002) identified a variable she called WTC (willingness to communicate) determining that this has a significant effect on motivation, further presenting the argument that as the study of general English has been considered a knowledge-based subject as opposed to a performance based subject with a clear aim, it will have a negative effect on students’ willingness to communicate (Taguchi, 2014)

Looking at the attitudes toward the International community of Japanese University students with regard to motivation research, the reality for most Japanese learners enrolled in Japanese universities is that, students do not have constant contact with native English speakers as they are removed from the L2 community. As a result, attitudes towards English-speaking cultures for this population are generally created through educational interventions and exposure to the media, with English seeming to represent something ambiguous to young Japanese learners as it symbolizes the world outside of Japan, or as something to connect them to foreign cultures if they choose. As Yashima’s (2000) study with Japanese university students majoring in information studies demonstrated, learners perceived instrumental and intercultural friendships as being the most important predictors of motivation and second language proficiency (Yashima, 2000). This reinforces other earlier studies that commented that although students recognized that English may be necessary in a globalized society, they are unclear as to the role it will play and how or if it will affect them; particularly as working in the international community was considered a less important motivator to learn English by most Japanese university students (Miyahara, Namoto, Yamanaka, Murakami, Kinoshita & Yamamoto, 1997).

**Methodology**

**Setting and Participants**

This study was conducted in a small private university in Northern Japan. The participants (n=55) consisted of the entire cohort of Information Science students enrolled in a first year compulsory General EFL course. The students were given a placement test upon entrance to the university and classes were formed based on the results. Therefore, the students may be considered at approximately the same lower English language level. The
sample for this study was chosen due to the fact that the researcher was teaching all of the students in this cohort, which offered the most convenient access. All participants consented in writing prior to start of this study and completed the MI inventories voluntarily.

**Instrument and Procedures**

There appears to be various MI inventories available internationally (see Armstrong, 2001 Shearer, 2002), but none culturally specific to EFL contexts or Japanese learners; therefore, in order for the inventory to be intellectually as well as culturally appropriate for this group of students, the instrument utilized was an MI inventory designed by the researcher, with alterations made in an effort to make questions understood more readily by the students. To offer a few examples, in question 17 the word cell phone was added, in question 26 the word audiotape was changed to iPod (Appendix 1). These changes in vocabulary were made to update the MI Inventory. Other examples of alterations were the deletion of Scrabble as most Japanese students are unaware of this game. The games such as Sudoku and Go in question 21 were added as well as using Japanese in place of English in question 29 as Japanese is the students’ native language (Appendix 1). The MI inventory contained five questions pertaining to each of the eight intelligences with students’ scores shown out of a possible 25 (see table 1). A letter code was given for each intelligence (Appendix1) with a total of 40 questions, the questions were presented randomly with a five-point Likert scale devised as follows 1 = statement does not describe me at all, 2 = statement describes me very little, 3 = statement describes me somewhat, 4=statement describes me pretty well and 5 = statement describes me exactly. The MI inventory was first designed in English (Appendix 1) and then translated into Japanese (Appendix 2). Although both inventories were available to the students, all students chose to complete the Japanese version. The inventories were administered in the second week of the school year. A general explanation of the MI inventory was provided as well as a reminder that the students’ answers would be completely anonymous in an effort to prevent anxiety or stress as well as to promote candid responses (Armstrong, 2009). There was no time limit for completion of the inventory, but all inventories were completed within 20 minutes.

**Preliminary Results and Discussion**

Looking at the graph of class averages solely (figure 1), the three most prevalent MI perceived by the students were Musical Intelligence with 75.2% followed by Interpersonal at 65.2% and Bodily-Kinesthetic with 62.5%. The three least prevalent intelligences perceived by this sample were Logical-mathematical Intelligence at 47.2%, Spatial at 55.5% and
Intrapersonal Intelligence with 57.6%. Interestingly, Linguistic (60.1%) and Logical-mathematical Intelligences (47.2%), the two intelligences most strongly associated with language learning, were found in this small study to be less prevalent than the intelligences typically associated with language learning; specifically Musical (75.2%) and Body-kinesthetic Intelligences (62.5%).

With respect to the results, it would seem that if Interpersonal, Musical, and Bodily-Kinesthetic were found to be more prevalent than Linguistic or Logical-Mathematical Intelligences within the sample, activities and techniques on the syllabus should be altered in an effort to satisfy the needs of these learners (Armstrong, 2009). One method of consideration is to strategically incorporate activities into the syllabus that will cater specifically to the prevalent MI. For example, if students possess a dominant interpersonal intelligence there is a strong possibility that they will enjoy participating in group work activities that may increase motivation as well as eventual language learning (Visser, Ashton, & Vernon, 2006). When utilizing MI in designing activities to satisfy learners’ needs, it soon becomes apparent that one MI does not exist in isolation; therefore, an activity designed for one MI may also cater to another MI (Armstrong, 2009).

Cooperative-learning (CL) has been suggested as an effective teaching strategy in lessons targeted at utilizing MI particularly as within the group structure there may be many opportunities afforded to activate various MI (Armstrong, 2009). In CL, students work together in small groups on a structured activity. The group members are individually accountable for their work, and the work of the group as a whole is also assessed (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Cooperative learning permits opportunities for language development by allowing students to use groups as a natural environment to learn English, hence increasing independence from the teacher as well as promoting learner autonomy. (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2002).

A very well established teaching approach to CL is the Jigsaw Approach (Jacobs, Power and Loh, 2002). In the jigsaw approach to instruction, the target material is divided, usually into four parts, and distributed to small groups to learn. In this activity a reading passage from the textbook divided into four sections, labeled A-D. The students read their portion of the passage silently, then all the students with the same lettered passage gather together. When these homogeneous groups have mastered their material, students regroup into heterogeneous groups to present material and complete a task, in this case putting 4 sections of a reading passage into order. All MI may be considered activated with this activity, but specifically as peer teaching and group problem solving are used to complete the jigsaw,
Interpersonal Intelligence and Linguistic Intelligence are definitely activated predominantly as the students are reading in groups.

Other practical examples for incorporating MI effectively into the syllabus would be the use of mind maps. As a vocabulary activity, it may cater to a student possessing a dominant linguistic intelligence as well as a learner with a predominant spatial intelligence (Appendix 3). This derivative effect is also observed with a listening activity that was originally designed for a learner with a dominant musical intelligence as it may also be found applicable for students with a predominant naturalist or logical intelligence (Appendix 4).

English proficiency tests such as TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) are an inescapable reality for most Japanese University students, particularly as recent government mandates have required that university graduates achieve scores that demonstrate the ability to communicate in English effectively in the workplace (MEXT, 2011). The students involved in the present study are no exception, as they must take this test at least once a year. The preparation for this test is done during regular class hours and casual observation has shown that the class participation for these classes is among the lowest for the year. With the goal of test preparation, MI based activities can aid in increasing motivation as well as class participation. Using music is popular in EFL classrooms. For example, cloze exercises where students listen to a song and fill in blanks with the lyrics they hear is an effective way to tap into students’ Musical Intelligence (Armstrong, 2009). An expansion of this cloze activity offers a successful example of using a Musical Intelligence based activity for TOEIC preparation. The students are given handouts and while working in pairs try to guess grammatical functions for each blank before they listen to the music—whether the missing words are adjectives, nouns, adverbs, verbs, etc. This activity coincides with the TOEIC test as in the sentence-completion section of the TOEIC, students must find the correct words or phrases to complete sentences focusing on grammatical forms and logically discover answers. After deciding upon the grammatical forms, students listen to the song and fill in the words or phrases they hear. Again, working in pairs, they check their answers. Many times the students’ knowledge of grammar helps them answer questions. For example, if the word preceding a blank is “have,” that often indicates that the missing word is a verb in the present perfect tense. In addition, by eliciting the answers, students’ problem solving skills are utilized. This music activity aids student’s development of linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. The feedback from this activity has been extremely positive and the students seem to enjoy this and many of the other new activities that have been added. There have
been many unsolicited positive comments from the students and in general the attitude, interest and the amount of time students stay on task appears to have increased.

Table 1: Class average of each intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intelligence Code</th>
<th>Intelligence</th>
<th>Average score</th>
<th>Average Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>15/25</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Logical-Mathematical</td>
<td>11.8/25</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Spatial</td>
<td>13.9/25</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Bodily-Kinesthetic</td>
<td>15.6/25</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Musical</td>
<td>18.8/25</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>16.3/25</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>14.4/25</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Naturalist</td>
<td>14.1/25</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions and Implications

This study discussed initial results from a small-scale case study focusing on learner self-identification of Multiple Intelligences (MI) in a first year General EFL class at a Japanese University. Results from an MI Inventory employed as a method to ascertain learners’ perception of their prevalent intelligences, indicated that interpersonal and bodily intelligences, not typically linked to language acquisition, were found to be more predominant than the standard linguistic or mathematic-logical intelligences with this first year class. This study also examined how techniques and activities may be altered or shifted utilizing activities generated from MI theory in order to accommodate students’ prevalent intelligences and perhaps stimulate dormant MI within the existing syllabus for the intention of improving motivation, promoting learner autonomy as well as engaging students to participate in class. Practical interventions, such as the incorporation of teaching strategies (i.e. cooperative learning) within the current syllabus were offered as a means to improve local practice, hence, illustrating how one activity or technique may cater to several intelligences simultaneously.

Although this research may be deemed valid, results are preliminary, the sample size was small and as with any self-reporting questionnaires, one serious drawback is the reliability of the results obtained. Additionally, although anonymity was guaranteed, students may have felt a degree of pressure to answer in one way or another. Looking to future studies, increasing the sample size or adding a quantitative research instrument, such as individual interviews, would be beneficial, as the addition of quantitative data may offer a more context-specific image of the benefits of implementing MI based activities into an existing ESP syllabus.
References


Appendix 1
MI Inventory (English Version)

Rate the following statements from 1-5 as indicated as below.
1 = Statement does not describe me at all
2 = Statement describes me very little
3 = Statement describes me somewhat
4 = Statement describes me pretty well
5 = Statement describes me exactly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Ans.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>I like making things with my hands and enjoy activities such as building models, making origami, cooking or sewing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Music is very important and without it something would be missing in my life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>At amusement parks my favorite place is roller coasters or similar attractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>I have a good sense of direction and I can generally find my way around new places.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>I keep a diary or journal and write in it at least once a week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>I like animals and they seem to like me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>I like outdoor activities like camping, hiking, and/or other outdoor sports.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>I often see clear visual images when I close my eyes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>I like plants and am a good gardener.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>I believe almost everything can be explained logically.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>I play a musical instrument.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>I can easily compute numbers in my head.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>I like singing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>I enjoy reading books.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>When I speak to people I talk about things that I have heard or read.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>I consider myself independent or strong willed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>When I want to remember something I often use cameras or my cell phone to record what I see around me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>I have a strong awareness of my strengths and weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>I find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>I would rather go to a party with my friends than stay home alone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Questions and Answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Ans.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>I enjoy playing games that require logical thinking such as crossword puzzles, Sudoku, Othello, Go, chess</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>I prefer to ask someone for advice or help when I have a problem, rather than solve it by myself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>When I talk or try to explain something I often use hand gestures or other forms of body language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>I have at least three close friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>I enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles, mazes, and other visual puzzles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>I frequently listen to music on the radio, cds, ipod or on my computer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>I have thought often about my goals and dreams for the future.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>I enjoy team sports for example softball or volleyball more than solo sports group sports like swimming and jogging.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Japanese, social studies, and history are easier subjects for me than math and science.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Without realizing it I sometimes find myself humming or singing with a television commercial or a popular song.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>My friends and family seem to ask for my advice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>I understand more from listening to the radio or a CD than I do from watching television or films.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>I like to draw or sketch.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>I recycle and separate garbage thoroughly at home or at school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Math and/or science are among my favorite subjects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>I like sports and regularly participate in at least one sport or physical activity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>When I am driving, I pay more attention to the words written on billboards than to the scenery.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>I enjoy watching movies or TV programs starring animals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>I'm interested in new advances or changes in science.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>If I had a choice I would rather spend my free time alone than with lots of people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key</td>
<td>質問</td>
<td>回答</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D 1</td>
<td>プラモデルの組み立て、折り紙、料理、手芸など、手を使ってものを作ることが好きです。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E 2</td>
<td>自分にとって音楽はとても大切で、人生に欠かせないものです。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D 3</td>
<td>遊園地では、ジェットコースターのような乗りものが好きです。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 4</td>
<td>方向感覚はいいので、初めての場所でも道に迷うことはありません。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G 5</td>
<td>少なくとも週に1回以上、日記のようなものを書いています。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 6</td>
<td>動物が好きだし、動物にも好かれる方だと思います。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 7</td>
<td>キャンプやハイキング、野外スポーツなど、アウトドアの活動が好きです。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 8</td>
<td>目をつむっていても、はっきりと目で見ているような映像を思い浮かべることができます。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 9</td>
<td>植物が好きで、ガーデニングが得意です。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 10</td>
<td>ほとんどすべてのことは、論理的に説明できるものだと思います。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E 11</td>
<td>楽器を演奏します。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 12</td>
<td>暗算が得意です。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E 13</td>
<td>歌うことが好きです。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 14</td>
<td>本を読むことが好きです。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 15</td>
<td>人と話をすることには、自分が読んだり聞いたりしたことについて話します。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2
MI インベントリー(Japanese version)
それぞれの項目について、自分に当てはまるものを、下の 1 − 5 の中から選び、「回答」欄に、その数字を記入してください。

1 → まったくあてはまらない 3 → どちらかといえばあてはまる
2 → ほとんどあてはまらない 4 → かなりあてはまる
5 → ぴったりあてはまる
| G | 16 | 自分は、意思をしっかり持った、自立した人間だと思います。 |
| C | 17 | 自分が見たことを覚えておくために、よくカメラを使います。 |
| G | 18 | 自分の長所や短所をよく知っています。 |
| D | 19 | 長い時間じっと座っていることが苦手です。 |
| F | 20 | 一人で家にいるより、友達と遊びに行くほうが好きです。 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>質問</th>
<th>回答</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>クロスワードや数独、オセロ、囲碁、将棋のような、論理的な思考を求められるゲームが好きです。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>悩みがある時は、自分で解決するよりも、誰かにアドバイスや助けを求めたいです。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>話しをする時や何かを説明しようとする時に、よく身振り手振りを使います。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>少なくとも3人の親友がいます。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>ジグソーパズルや迷路など、視覚的なパズルが好きです。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>ラジオやCD、ipodでよく音楽を聞きます。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>自分の将来の夢や目標についてよく考えます。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>野球やバレーボールなどの団体競技の方が、水泳やジョギングなどの個人競技よりも好きです。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>自分にとっては、国語や社会、歴史の方が、数学や科学より簡単に感じられます。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>ふと気が付くと、無意識にCMソングや流行りの歌を口ずさんでいることがあります。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>友達や家族などから、相談されることがよくあります。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>ラジオなどで音声を聞く方が、テレビなどで映像を見るよりも、内容が理解しやすいです。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>スケッチなど、絵を描くことが好きです。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>家でも学校でも、ごみの分別はちゃんとします。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>数学や理科は好きな科目です。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>体を動かすことが好きで、すくなくとも1つは定期的に行っているスポーツがあります。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>ドライブしている時には、景色より看板の文字に目がいきます。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>動物に関する映画やテレビを見るのが好きです。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3
Example of a Vocabulary Activity utilizing Linguistic/Spatial/Interpersonal Intelligences

Appendix 4
Example of a Listening Activity utilizing Musical/ Naturalist /Logical Intelligences

"The 3 R's" by Jack Johnson
Three it's a magic number
Yes it is, it's a magic number
Because two times three is six
And three times six is eighteen
And the eighteenth letter in the alphabet is R
We've got three R's we're going to talk about today
We've got to learn to
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
If you're going to the market to buy some _____________
You've got to bring your own bags and you learn to reduce your waste
And if your brother or your sister's got some ________ clothes
You could try them on before you buy some more of those
Reuse, we've got to __________ to reuse
And if the first two R's don't work out
And if you've got to make some _____________
Don't throw it out
Recycle, we've got to learn to recycle,
We've got to learn to
__________, Reuse, Recycle
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle
Reduce, ____________, Recycle
Reduce, Reuse, ____________
Because three it's a ________ number
Yes it is, it's a magic number
3, 3, 3
3, 6, 9, 12, 15,______, 21, 24, 27, 30, ___, 36
33, 30, 27, 24, 21, 18, 15, 12, 9, 6, and
3, it's a magic number
Narrative Reflection on an Advanced English Course in Japan
Lindsay Mack
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

Bioprofile
Lindsay Mack is an Associate Professor of English at the Center for Language Education at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan. Her research interests include, writing centers, second language writing, critical pedagogy and EFL curriculum development.

Abstract
In this paper, the author’s main objective is to model how one can employ three curriculum models, curriculum as product, process and praxis, to critically analyze one’s curriculum, in her case, an Advanced English course, to discover if the course is in line with one’s educational philosophical beliefs. She begins with a detailed theoretical background of the three different curriculum models, curriculum as product, curriculum as process and curriculum as praxis. Next, she critically analyzes her own curriculum, through a narrative reflection, at the level of design and implementation to discover how her curriculum is informed by these models. Through analysis, she discovers that although in some respects her curriculum achieves the goals of a curriculum as praxis, it fails to achieve them in many other respects and instead contains many elements that fall under curriculum as process and curriculum as product.

Key words: Praxis, Critical Pedagogy

Introduction

“Thus as applied linguists and English language teachers we should become political actors engaged in a critical pedagogical project to use English to oppose dominant discourses of the West and to help articulation of counter discourses in English.” - Alastair Pennycook in “English in the World” in Power and Inequality in Language Education;

Lindsey Mack, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Center for Language Education, 1-1 Jumonijibaru, Beppu-shi, Oita-ken, Japan. Email: mackli@apu.ac.jp
I begin with this quote because I believe it represents my current curriculum and educational philosophy. I first read this quote four years ago. At that time I had just moved from America, where I was a high school history teacher, to Japan, to begin my new career as a University English Teacher. I remember worrying about how my new profession made me complicit in spreading English hegemony. Moreover, I was concerned that as a teacher from the center, (a native English speaking country where English is the primary language) teaching in a periphery country (countries that acknowledge the importance of English as an International language and teach English as a foreign language), I was producing and reproducing global inequalities perpetuated by the rise of English. Hence, I set out to use my power as a course designer of Advanced English to create a new forward curriculum that encouraged students’ voice and identity. It was my hope that my curriculum would promote a transformative pedagogy for all students to challenge the status quo and social inequalities, otherwise known as in curriculum as praxis. However, as time went by, I wondered if my curriculum actually fulfilled my original intentions.

Therefore, in this paper my main objective is to model how one can employ three curriculum models, curriculum as product, process and praxis, to critically analyze one’s curriculum, in my case, an Advanced English course, to discover if the course is in line with one’s educational philosophical beliefs. This paper is a narrative account of the critical reflection I conducted over one semester of teaching an Advanced English course. In the next section, I will provide a brief summary of these three philosophical models of curriculum that guided me in my curriculum’s analysis as well as some background research on narratives.

**Literature Review**

**Narrative**

Simply put, a narrative is a spoken or written account of something. Researchers employ narratives to make sense of the world as they perceive and experience it, and to report to other people what they have discovered and learned about their experience. In other words, narratives provide connections, links, understandings and coherence. Polkinghorne (1995), states that narrative accounts “exhibit human activity as a purposeful engagement in the world. Narrative is the type of discourse that draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives” (p.5).
Currently, narrative reflections are penetrating all areas of educational and social research. Denzin (2000) argues, “the study of narrative forces the social sciences to develop new theories, new methods and new ways of talking about self and society” (Denzin, as cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 16). Educational research stories are accounts that educators give of their work, usually presented in the form of a journal article. Narrative descriptions are different than positivist scientific research that stress objectivity, rationality and logical reasoning seeking to tell universal truths. In contrast, narrative research comes for the interpretivist paradigm and it emphasizes subjectivity and contextual circumstances and does not search for universal truths, rather casual links by re-telling stories that are contextual and spatially located. According to Sikes and Gale (2006), “researchers who choose to use the sorts of narratives that obviously and explicitly tell stories do so because they believe that this approach is most effective for communicating the ‘data’ they want to get across. These stories convey their own epistemological, ontological, ethical and political position.” (para. 26) I am one of those researchers who chose a narrative account to retell my story of reflective practice of examining my philosophical beliefs in education.

This paper is a narrative of my critical reflection. For this article, I employ Ajayi’s definition of critical reflection as “an educational imagination that allows candidates to look at themselves and their situations with new eyes, and in the process, become conscious of the multiple ways they can interpret critique, challenge, confront and reconstruct teaching” (p. 170). In other words, critical reflection requires us to step-back and examine our classrooms and curriculum. Thus, this paper provides a narrative account of the reflective process I underwent to investigate my curriculum. In this critical evaluative framework, my goal is to analyze specifically the type of curriculum (product, process, praxis) I had created. Therefore, I will first provide a brief explanation of these theoretical frameworks in the literature review.

**Curriculum as Product**

In educational practice, curriculum as product is the most dominant curriculum theory in today’s society. Most state-run curriculums are informed by this model. Here, the student is the learner and the teacher’s role is to implement the course so that the objectives of the curriculum are realized and the outcome (product) is measured. According to Grundy (1987) this model “ascribes meaning to outcome, that is the experience gains meaning through what it produces” (p. 102). Therefore, the desired outcomes and goals of the curriculum are the product. The product could be the test that is taken at the end of the course or the final research paper that is written by the students.
Curriculum as Process

Although curriculum as product is the prevailing model informing current curriculum practices, there are many criticisms of this model. The predominant criticism is that by focusing only on the product it “restrains the human imagination simply because it sets limits or boundaries to what is learned and tested” (McKernan, 2007, p. 19). From these criticisms, a new curriculum model was formed, curriculum as process, also sometimes referred to as curriculum as practice. In other words, curriculum is a proposal, a process rather than a product with measurable results and objectives. The students are not the consumers but active participants and the teacher is not the implementer but rather the designer. In addition, the teacher becomes a reflective practitioner who participates in various research projects such as needs based assessment or action research in order to develop his/her skills as a teacher.

Curriculum as Praxis

The final model, curriculum as praxis, is the most influential to my development as a teacher and the curriculum in Advanced English was initially designed to reflect this view of education. It is similar to the process model in that it rejects the objectives model and sees curriculum as a process meaning making experience. However, curriculum as praxis differs from the process model because it is meant to instill students with a critical consciousness to question and challenge injustices in society. Throughout my narrative account, I will refer to these curriculum models in relation to my own educational beliefs and my curriculum.

Institutional Context

I teach at International University (IU), a pseudonym, an international university in Japan hosting over 6,000 students, 3,000 of whom represent students from 92 countries. Students at IU come from various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, and are immersed in an academic English environment. High-level English language ability, usually over 550 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), is required for international students who must take academic content classes in English. While many students obtain this high level of English, they are still English language learners and wish to improve their English skills in academic writing, critical reading, and critical discussion.
**Classroom Context**

It was for these students that the course, Advanced English (AE), was originally designed for. This course is intended to help prepare international, English-based students (predominantly from Korea, China, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia) to take content lectures in English, and overall improve their English ability. Moreover, it was designed to develop students’ advanced writing, research, argumentation, analytical skills, and, finally, to apply the skills they have learned through debating. I designed the course in line with critical pedagogy and constructivist pedagogy. Following these pedagogies, the curriculum focuses on global issues and also draws on students’ lived experience to create a forum for their analysis of the world around them (Giroux, 1992). The course is intense; classes meet four days a week for 95 minutes, and discussion is an integral part of the class. Assessments are based on debate, multiple choice reading tests, and summaries.

**Methodology**

A key feature of the research involved an interrogation of my curriculum in regard to the three philosophical models, curriculum as product, curriculum as process and curriculum as praxis. My specific aims were to:

1. Reflect on my curriculum through teacher field notes and journals
2. Determine if the curriculum follows my own educational philosophical beliefs in line with curriculum of praxis

I employed two different methods in analyzing my curriculum, teacher field notes and journal.

**Teacher Field Notes**

Teacher field notes are written observations of what was observed in the classroom. Obviously, thick descriptions are difficult to record while teaching, therefore I would jot down quick notes on my lesson plan while I was teaching. Immediately after class I would systematically write down more detailed notes which included: recounts of the lesson’s objectives, what activities were conducted in class, my overall impression of the students’ reaction to the lesson and any other notes that I felt were significant. I tried to refrain from subjective details about how I felt about the lesson and instead only reported facts. Obviously, my impression of student’s reaction to the lesson plan bordered on subjective so I tried to report what students had said about the lesson rather than my own assumptions. The
reason being was that I wanted to employ the journal to reflect and analyze my curriculum while I wanted the teacher field notes to function like a log of activities I had conducted in class.

**Teacher Journal**

Teacher journals are often used for analysis and reflecting on one’s teaching. Journals are commonly employed in qualitative research because they can provide a data set that refines the understanding of the role of the researcher (Janesick, 1999, p. 506). For this research the journal was of primary importance because the goal of research was to reflect on my curriculum and what better way to reflect than through a journal. In line with Maclean’s and Mohr’s (1999) suggestions, I employed a journal to reflect on the events in the classroom, interactions in the classroom, quotations, readings, surprising events, thoughts about the research process, and ideas about teaching. The journal differed from my field notes, in that the journal included more than recounts of the activities but instead reflections on the curriculum as well as my thoughts and theorizing about my research agenda and my educational philosophies. Instead of writing directly after class, like the teacher field notes, I wrote in the journal every other day at night time in order to have more time away from the subject to deepen my reflection instead of recording my immediate reaction. Below is a narrative of my inquiry and reflection on my curriculum. It is divided into three parts, beginning of the reflection, during the reflection and finally, future directions.

**Narrative of My Inquiry**

**Beginning of the Reflection**

The decision to engage in reflective inquiry had always been a vision of mine since I entered the education field. When I was appointed Advanced English Level Coordinator I was given the opportunity to redesign the course with my vision and course objectives. As previously mentioned I was greatly influenced by critical pedagogy and curriculum as praxis so it was only natural that I decided to try to develop the course in line with a critical pedagogical curriculum.

Before I started my systematic reflection of the Advanced English curriculum I first analyzed my own vision for the class and its objectives. In order to do this, I researched the theoretical background of the three curriculum models and also researched more about the
philosophical beliefs I claimed to aspire to. I knew that I did not affirm the curriculum as product model. Curriculum as product has its origins in both the intellectual-rationalist ideology and the technical-behavioral ideology. The intellectual and rationalist ideology was one of the earliest views of education in which content should be knowledge driven by universal truths (McKernan, 2007). In light of this view, the curriculum’s goal is to enlighten and pass on these universal truths, such as math, science and history from generation to generation. The content in the class is viewed as a universal truth which one does not question. In other words, in math class there is one correct answer, in history there is one perspective that is correct. Teachers pass on this knowledge to the student (Young, 1998, p. 25).

This model, steeped in the scientific positivist view point, places a heavy emphasis on the accountability and measurability of a set curriculum (McKernan, 2007, p 19). Therefore, the teacher is the implementer not the designer and the students are the consumers and learners, never the negotiators. The teacher takes a passive role because the objectives for the course and the content are not decided by the teacher but rather from the top down, for example, in public education it is usually decided at the national level by policy makers (Young, 1998, p. 27). Instead, I believe that I am not the implementer of the curriculum as in the product model, nor am I only a reflective practitioner as in the process model. I strive to be a conscious agent of change in the curriculum as praxis model. This is the role I strive for through my daily teaching interactions.

The influence of critical theories (i.e., critical pedagogy and critical applied linguistics, CAL) has been central in my development as a teacher and course designer. As a TEFL teacher, I reject traditional applied linguistics which “views critical thinking as apolitical, classrooms as isolated and equitable, and that English teachers should not aim for change” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 11). I want to work to reconfigure the traditional student/teacher relationship, where the teacher is the active agent transmitting knowledge, and the students are the passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge. It is my intention that the classroom will become a site where new knowledge, grounded in the experiences of students and teachers alike, is produced through meaningful dialogue and activities (Stevens, 2009). To me, curriculum as praxis is a transformative pedagogy.

Before I started my critical reflection of the course I created, I wrote in my journal, “I firmly believe in curriculum of praxis and try to create activities in line with this curriculum. I want my curriculum to be a transformative process.” About a month into my reflection, I re-read what I had written. I noted, that I repeated the phrases “transformative process” and
“praxis” many times. I realized I needed to employ less nebulous terms and define these concepts but when I tried to define them I got stuck. Therefore, I did some research to investigate what these terms meant.

Curriculum of praxis views education as a transformative and liberating process where the ultimate goal is emancipation. I wanted my curriculum to be a transformative process; however I was unsure if the goal should be emancipation. Therefore, I researched more the definition of emancipation. Grundy defines emancipation as “finding one’s own voice” (Grundy, 1987 p.107). In other words, emancipating yourself from the oppressive nature of the dominant power in society. The first step needed in this transformative process is raising one’s critical consciousness, sometimes referred to as “conscientization.” This refers to the process of developing a new critical awareness through recognizing social economic and political contradictions (Grundy, 1987, p.107). Once students have reached critical awareness then praxis can be initiated. Simply put, praxis is a cycle of action and reflection. This action “involves freely choosing to act in ways which are informed by critical social theorems” (Grundy, 1987, p.113). In other words, praxis is when a lesson and skill is enacted and practiced. Praxis leads to social transformation in the classroom and in the collective societal level (Stevens, 2009).

With a better understanding of transformative process and praxis, I realized I also needed better understanding of critical pedagogy, a term I employed heavily in my journal. Critical pedagogy requires students to examine their own society through the lenses of power in order to expose structural inequalities and marginalized groups. Critical pedagogy is not only about challenging dominant theories and status quo, but also functions as a way of raising a critical consciousness in students to question dominant cultural, political, and social domains (Freire, 1968; Giroux, 1992; Gore, 1992; Luke, 1992).

As I did more investigation, I began to discover a disconnect between critical pedagogy and my work at a private college in Japan. My main criticism of curriculum as praxis is the use of the vocabulary words such as emancipation, empowerment and praxis. Emancipation means to be freed from bondage, oppression and restraint (thefreedictionary.com). My students are private school students living a nice life in Japan, I wondered what bondage I was freeing them from. I realized that within curriculum as praxis, emancipation refers to freeing oneself from the oppressive nature of the dominant power in society, but I wonder if it is possible to ever really be free from it. I want to make students more critically aware, but I am not sure I want to “emancipate them.”
Although I began to have a more critical, skeptical view of curriculum of praxis, I still wanted to adhere to its main tenets. In order for praxis to be fulfilled the curriculum must embody these principles of critical pedagogy:

1. That learning should have a critical focus.
2. That the learners should be active participants in the learning program.
3. That the learning experience should be meaningful to the learner (Grundy, 1987, p. 100).

Before the reflection, I believed my curriculum fulfilled all three requirements. The topic for the course, was English as a global language. Frustrated with the original curriculum that focused on Western topics, such as homeschooling, I decided to change the content to a more culturally relative topic to create a more empowering curriculum: the spread of global English. I wanted to highlight both the negative and positive impact of the spread of English in the world, and the different dilemmas and paradoxes countries’ governments and people face as English continues to spread around the globe. I also wanted to explore historical motivators for the spread of English including: colonialism, imperialism, rise of America, and globalism. Other subjects I wanted to explore included linguistic imperialism, ecology of languages, language diffusions, world Englishes and Americanization. From my point of view, I had changed the topic to have a more relevant focus and to allow for more criticality.

Before I started teaching the curriculum, I reviewed my teacher journal where I focused heavily on critical theories in line with curriculum as praxis. I wrote that “in theory the design and implementation of Advanced English should be in line with curriculum as praxis, however, the reality might be different so I am interested to see what the outcome is after I systematically reflect on my curriculum.” Once the semester started I set to the task of analyzing the design and implementation of AE’s curriculum in light of these three models, reported earlier, to see if indeed my curriculum is one of praxis or if many elements are actually informed by the curriculum as product or process models.

**During the Reflection**

As mentioned above, there were three principles that I believed a curriculum, specifically my curriculum, should aspire for which was in line with curriculum as praxis:

1. That learning should have a critical focus.
2. That the learners should be active participants in the learning program.
3. That the learning experience should be meaningful to the learner (Grundy, 1987, p. 100).
Upon analysis of my daily implementation of AE’s curriculum I believe the lesson plans achieved number one and two, however, I reconsidered if it was meaningful to the learner. Many of the activities in class were designed to raise one’s critical consciousness. For me, the best way to promote a students’ critical awareness is to create student-centered lessons where I pose dilemmas, problems, cases, and projects for students to sort out for themselves what they need to do and know, hence promoting student ownership over what they learn and think. This is referred to as “problem posing.” According to Grundy (1987) “problem posing education allows, indeed encourages, students and teachers together to confront the real problems of their existence and relationships” (p.103).

Another way I encouraged students to become active participants was by always emphasizing that I am the facilitator, not the expert. I believe that teachers are responsible for giving students a voice, not for contributing to silencing them. By emphasizing that I am the facilitator I re-enforce a key principle of critical pedagogy, that teachers and students should participate in co-constructing their class through a process of negotiation (Auerbach, Brito, & Lima, 2004). In other words, all participants work towards a common goal and everyone’s knowledge counts (Auerbach et al. 2004). Students know that the teacher holds the power, therefore teachers should debunk the myth of teacher as expert right from the beginning of the course. I always stressed that I am the guide and not a teacher. In that sense, the four months is a journey that the teacher and all students participate in.

Besides creating lessons that are critical in nature, I also tried to create a curriculum in which the learners are active participants in the learning program. When designing the course, I was conscious of the need to create a curriculum that encouraged students to become co-creators of their own learning through debate, critical in-class discussion, online discussion, and other active-learning practices. I tried to make the learners active participants by creating student centered lesson plans. Some activities that I found successful were “Think Pair Shares,” “mini debates,” “research projects,” “conducting surveys,” “information gap,” “jigsaws,” and “writing workshops,” “online discussion” and “mindmapping” I found these activities as a way for students to interact with each other and as a way to encourage them to think through issues.( See appendix for brief descriptions of each of these activities.)

All of these activities were successful in promoting student engagement and to some level of criticality. But I did start to notice the students waning enthusiasm in the class as the semester went on. I wrote in my journal, “the students don’t seem excited today.” I started to investigate why that might be the reason. I believe the topic I chose is responsible for the students waning enthusiasm.

**Topic**

As mentioned earlier, during class I problem posed by choosing central thematic questions related to the course’s content to question, explore and re-visit throughout the semester. For this class the central theme was ‘English as a Global language’ and I related to following questions:

1. How does language connect to culture and identity?
2. Is the spread of English another form of colonialism?
3. Are all countries positive about incorporating English language education in schools?
4. Do native speakers of English have more power in the world? Is this fair?

As we read different literature we would revisit these questions. Not only did we discuss these topics but we also debated them. I tried to choose a topic that would allow them to critically look at a real issue involved in English hegemony. Hence, the first debate topic was, ‘Should English be the official language of instruction in Africa?’

As the semester continued I started to question this topic I chose. I wrote in my journal, “the students seem to be very lack luster about this topic.” Although I thought the spread of global English, was suitable for advanced learners, I became very aware that not all students are necessarily interested in this topic. I wrote in my journal about a student who talked to me after class concerning the topic of ‘English as a global language’. I wrote, “this student told me it was obvious that everyone is overwhelmed by the power of the English language. He said that the topic was interesting at first but soon became very repetitive he wished he could have spent more time discussing various topics not related to the spread of English.” I had a lot of empathy for students who wanted to improve their English but were not interested in this subject.

**Test Standardization**

Most Japanese universities, including IU, operate under a traditional model of education, which includes high stake tests, accountability, mandated objectives and final products. These are all characteristics of curriculum as product, which, as mentioned previously, philosophically I rejected. Despite my desire to create a curriculum in line with curriculum as praxis and reject curriculum as product I realized through my reflection that there are still many aspects of my curriculum that are characteristics of curriculum as product. This can be attributed to that fact that I work within a Japanese university, that is designed in a top down structure. I am one of five coordinators who create and manage the English curriculum. My
specific duty is to manage the Advanced English curriculum for six classes, with five different teachers.

As AE course coordinator I have to adhere to the university regulations and objectives. When designing the curriculum, I first worked together with the other English level coordinators to set the objectives for each course within the entire English curriculum. These objectives then had to be approved by the top of the Japanese bureaucracy I operate in. Therefore the specific objectives in writing, speaking, listening, grammar and reading for AE were decided and the curriculum adhered to these objectives. An example of one of the specific objectives for reading is, “Use a range of skills such as skimming, scanning and summarizing that they can use to extract meaning from academic texts.” Therefore I designed a lesson plan on skimming, scanning and summarizing. It was after the objectives were made that I designed the lesson plans and assessments.

Overall, these assessments focused on products and did not encourage students to be critical as in curriculum as praxis or to use their imagination as in curriculum as process. The assessments comprised of four multiple choice tests, four summaries of different readings and two research papers. The multiple choice tests and summary writing can be classified in the curriculum as product model. The multiple choice tests were computerized and were used because they are easy to grade and easy to standardize so that all teachers could use them. Although they were meant to test students on critical reading they still were mainly testing students on their ability to answer the questions and did not promote criticality or imagination. I questioned this in my journal writing, “How do these tests promote curriculum as praxis in anyway?”

The summary writing assessments also represents curriculum as product. I taught students how to summarize the readings I selected by providing a power point that highlighted the main points of the reading. When the students turned in their summaries I was surprised by their similarity in their structure and their restatement of the main ideas. When I expressed this sentiment to my students at the end of the semester, many admitted to relying heavily on the power points I used in class in order to understand the text. The irony of this was that I had tried to spend time making student-centered power points, only showing students the authors’ main claims after the students first discussed them. I hadn’t realized though that many students had never realized and negotiated the authors’ main ideas on their own; instead, they had just waited for my interpretation. This was frustrating to me, as I had originally envisioned a class where students negotiated their own meaning. Instead they relied on the teacher’s interpretation. Since the summaries were all copied from my power
point I felt that I transferred a body of knowledge to my students as in the product model (Young, 1998).

After the Reflection: Resolutions for the Future

Based on my reflection, I realized there were two areas I wanted to change in the AE course:
1. Student voice
2. Compromise between curriculum as product and curriculum as praxis

Enhancing Student Voices

I realized through my critical reflection that my need to control the classroom limited my ability to promote student voices. By choosing the topic beforehand I could lesson plan in advance and become an “expert” on that topic. However, being an expert and imparting teacher knowledge to the students is the curriculum as product model which I theoretically rejected. I need to abandon my need to control and instead co-create knowledge with the students. I realized my topic was not relevant for the students, especially because it was chosen by the teacher. For my future curriculum I want to let students choose the topic, instead of deciding for them. Therefore, in the future I will try to build in more opportunities for students to negotiate the content. We are using a textbook next semester and I plan on allowing students the opportunity to choose which subjects they would like to discuss. I also want them to create the central thematic questions. I hope this leads to me taking on more of a role as facilitator next semester. By infusing the course with more opportunities for student voice I believe the curriculum will become more meaningful to students.

Compromise between Curriculum as Product and Curriculum as Praxis

Through this critical reflection I became more discerning of curriculum as praxis and terms such as emancipation and transformative process. I realized that within curriculum as praxis emancipation refers to freeing oneself from the oppressive nature of the dominant power in society, but I wonder if it is possible to ever really be free from it. TOEFL tests and high stakes standardized tests certainly qualify as “dominant power” but like it or not, that is part of the educational system students operate in and by not preparing students for these tests I am not preparing them to succeed in world where English is used as a global language. I see my role as a language broker, helping students access the English language which will only
empower them. I want to make students more critically aware but I am not sure I want to “emancipate them.” Overall, it is hard to divorce a curriculum completely from the traditional product approach for curriculum because university education is still steeped in accountability and assessment. Designing a curriculum is not black and white, product or praxis. I realized when analyzing the curriculum there is a way to adhere to the constraints of curriculum as product but also add some elements of the other curriculum models.

One way I found a compromise between curriculum as product and curriculum as praxis was by keeping the multiple choice tests but adding a critical analysis section to it. I decided to keep the multiple choice tests because they help students prepare for other standardized tests such as TOEFL and IELTS, as mentioned before, which is part of the overall higher education and employment system, which ultimately the students are trying to join. Many of my students want to study abroad, or attend graduate school in the West and in order for those students to accomplish this, they need to score well on these tests and it is my responsibility to prepare them for that regardless of if I agree with these standardized tests. However, I was able to find a compromise to adhering to these tests and curriculum as praxis by adding a critical response to a reading where the student could critically analyze the text.

Conclusion

Overall, I have dissected my curriculum through the lens of three models, curriculum as praxis, curriculum as process and curriculum as product. Although the course was successful in terms of student praise and popularity, it is imperative to reflect on any course, especially when attempting to maintain more critical elements to a curriculum. Teacher reflection is one of the components of critical pedagogy. Billig, (2000, as cited in Starfield, 2004) states:

Those of us that see ourselves as operating within a critical paradigm have a responsibility to continually challenge received orthodoxies, be they in the so-called mainstream, uncritical paradigms or within research and teaching that situates itself within a critical frame. Therefore, teachers need a perpetual vigilance in our practices to guard against complacency (p. 138).

Exposing my inconsistencies in terms of curriculum creation encountered in my class is very humbling. Although I strived for a curriculum as praxis it was not always possible. Moreover, there are still aspects of my curriculum that are product and process. Currently, I do not think it will be possible to divorce my course completely from the product approach.
considering I work at a small Japanese private university. However, I will continue to strive to create a curriculum of praxis and promote criticality in my classroom.
References


Wisniewski, R. (Eds) *Life History and Narrative*, (pp. 5-23). Lewes, UK: Falmer.


accounts of research


Appendix

1. Think Pair Share

In this activity the teacher provokes the students’ thinking with a question/ prompt or observation. The students take a few minutes to “think” about the question. Then, the students form a “pair” and talk about their answer, comparing their answer and together identifying the best most convincing answer. After students talk in pairs, they then “share” their ideas with the rest of the class while the teacher records their answers on the board. This was a useful activity because students learn by talking about the content, in this case English as a global language. I found that students were reticent to share their ideas if I went directly to a whole class discussion. This activity provided structure to the discussion by allowing students to follow the prescribed process. By doing this it holds students accountable because they must report to their partner thus limiting off-task behavior.

2. Mini debates

As the title suggests, mini debates were shorter debates, often done with little preparation. I would choose some controversial topics related to the topic such for example, “The loss of national language and culture is inevitable with English as the global language.” Instead of having the students discuss the topic, I would structure it as a debate to force the students to understand the main ideas associated with the affirmative and negative side. First the students were divided into teams of two. I would divide the class into as many teams as possible so that there were multiple debates going on so that all students could participate. I would give the students ten minutes to prepare their arguments and then they would start an unstructured debate where the teams would express their arguments. I would try to push students to respond to other side’s argument. This activity, similar to other activities involved all the students and held them accountable so that they had to come up with arguments.

3. Information gaps

Another activity that promoted student engagement was the information gap. Gap activities force students to ask each other questions in order to finish filling out their sheet. Commonly used in lower level classes where students are practicing a particular target language, I modified the activity to make it suitable for advanced language learners by having them search for specific information that matched their paper. For example, in one activity I had students match the correct claim with their data. This forced them to contemplate the
criteria of a claim and data and forced them to find the best match. These activities were meaningful for the students because they were all involved in the process equally and working towards a specific goal.

4. Jigsaws

Another activity that promoted student involvement was the jigsaw. I found this activity particularly useful because although the class was advanced, in reality there were many different levels in the class. In the jigsaw lesson plan the teacher makes heterogeneous groups of students, then divides them into new groups to become an expert on a topic. They can become an expert by reading about the topic or researching it. Finally, they return to the heterogeneous group of students to report on their topic while the other group members take notes and ask questions. This activity created a positive interdependence in the classroom and helped students master difficult material in an exciting way.

5. Argument Mapping

One procedure that was very successful in getting students to logically put their arguments together was a mind map software called Rationale. Rationale was created by Austhink, 2004, and it is basically a tool for diagramming reasoning. Using this software in class, students made argument reasoning mind maps. The software is also used to structure student debates and their final research essay. I found that this really improved the student’s ability to organize their ideas, arguments and visually see the weaknesses in their arguments as well. We did many activities in groups where students looked at each other’s’ maps and gave each other feedback.

6. Online Discussions

Another activity I conducted that helped create a critically informed instruction was an online discussion for students to participate and for teachers to give feedback. The online discussion not only helps shy students participate more, but also encourages students to build on one another’s perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of the materials. This facilitated students in their examination of issues, such as culture, hegemony, Americanization, to become a dynamic process building overtime. The online discussion is also a great way to monitor the students’ learning and help teachers identify which areas need clarification. This forum became a great chance to play devil’s advocate, and force students to think more about
generalizations and question their original beliefs (see Americanization online discussion later).

7. Mini Research Projects

In order for students to take control over their own learning I created mini research projects once a week or every other week. For example, student conducted a project on ‘English in your country.’ Students would have to do research and share their research to their group which comprised of other students from other countries in order to compare and contrast the English in their country. They were told to focus on: the history of English in their country, general attitudes to the English language in their country, official policy with respect to English in their county, the history of their personal relationship with English and finally their own attitude towards English. Students enjoyed their own sharing of the research on English education in their country and discovering similarities between their respective country’s language policy and people’s attitudes towards English. I wrote in my journal, “Today’s lesson was so exciting. I didn’t know my students had so much they wanted to say about English in their country, and questions to ask their classmates. Even though class had finished students stayed behind to ask more questions and continue their conversations.”