

Gearing Up for the Olympics in English Classes

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Reference Data:

Lange, E. J., Gorshkov, V., & Flanagan, B. (2017). Gearing up for the Olympics in English classes. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Transformation in language education*. Tokyo: JALT.

This paper introduces an English course that, due to the simplicity and universality of its concepts, can be implemented in a variety of teaching contexts and environments. The course focuses on English learning through intercultural communication while addressing recent reforms in English education aims in Japan stipulated by MEXT in the lead-up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The course instructors created the backdrop of an international event in which Japanese L2 learners presented their knowledge of various Japanese localities to foreign visitors in English. The authors support the notion that international events attracting a large number of foreign visitors to a host country provide an abundance of opportunities for the facilitation of international communication and cultural exchange through English.

2020年の東京オリンピックを間近に控え、文部科学省では「グローバル化に対応した英語教育改革実施計画」を推進している。本稿は、異文化コミュニケーションを通じた英語学習に焦点を当てながら、この「実施計画」の更なる促進をはかる英語学習法を提案するものである。本学習法では、多くの外国人を招来する国際的なイベントが、英語による異文化コミュニケーションと国際交流の機会を増やすという前提のもと、教師が日本を舞台として開催される国際的イベントを設定する。そして、そのイベントの一環として、日本人の英語学習者が自国の様々な地域や文化について調べ、外国からの旅行者に英語で紹介する。

In recent years Japan has witnessed a steady annual increase in the number of foreign visitors to its shores. Already it has served as a host for the World Exposition and both the winter and summer Olympic Games on multiple occasions. Amidst busy preparations for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, Osaka City has now placed a bid to host its second World Exposition, vying with Paris for Expo 2025. There are boundless opportunities for intercultural communication and cultural exchange now in Japan and the English language remains at the forefront of the Japanese government's plans for Japan to compete in the global economy and strengthen and promote its national identity to the international community.

This paper introduces an English course implemented by the authors in a specific and nonmainstream educational setting. The course was formulated on the notion that large-scale international events can be utilized as a powerful motivating factor in developing language competence and enhancing the reciprocal nature of cultural exchange. By linking regular classroom activities with the real-life backdrop of the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the authors show how they were able to generate enthusiasm in this English course with increased stimuli and more genuine motivation for participants to apply themselves to their English language acquisition.

The course was entitled *Promoting Global Communication Through English* and was taught by the authors in November 2015 under the umbrella of public lectures conducted at the authors' university. It consisted of three 90-minute sessions in which participants practiced simple conversation strategies and presentation skills on how to introduce themselves and their local culture to foreign visitors from various cultures (for details see Lange & Gorshkov, 2016). The course was university based but was open to members of the public and consequently all students were mature-age participants from the local community. The aim of the course was to simulate a real-life context in the classroom in order to improve linguistic and intercultural communication skills and to observe if this would have a positive impact on the participants' L2 motivation. The

authors intended to teach a specific set of linguistic skills while simultaneously providing a simulated context and setting for the application of those skills.

The original inspiration for this course was the President of Kaichi International University, Professor Hideko Kitagaki, who served as an interpreter at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics for the Bulgarian men's and women's volleyball teams and had many chances to introduce Japanese culture to visiting athletes, many of whom enjoyed learning about Japan (Ariyoshi, 2016, p. 10.). In a separate interview conducted in November 2016 by the authors of this paper, Professor Kitagaki suggested,

As part of the process of developing confidence to communicate in a foreign language it is important to discuss topics that we are familiar with, in particular topics that we want to share or certain aspects about ourselves or our culture that we may wish that foreigners understood. Successfully communicating these topics to another person is very gratifying and helps bolster our linguistic confidence and increases our motivation to study further. (Appendix)

The authors of this paper support her suggestion that having language students discuss a topic they are already familiar with is empowering and builds learning competence.

Another motivation in conducting the course was the recent policy updates by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). For many years now Japan has notoriously ranked far behind other Asian countries in TOEFL score tables. According to Brown (2004), the L2 motivation for Japanese university students is mostly of instrumental orientation (i.e., passing exams). Therefore the task of successfully incorporating authentic settings into the L2 process remains the priority of English education policy goals. Evidence for this observation can be seen in the *English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization*, a long-term vision statement for English education in Japan disseminated in December 2013 by MEXT (MEXT, 2013). The plan has seen partial implementation since 2014 and is expected to be fully integrated from 2020. The primary goal of the plan is to foster English communication skills by establishing study goals (CAN DO lists) at all school levels, and the importance of the formation of Japanese national identity with a special focus on culture, traditions, and history is also highlighted (Gorshkov & Lange, 2015).

The plan clearly highlights the Japanese government's aim to foster students capable of communicating the curious intricacies of Japanese culture in English and also its desire to reinforce opportunities for volunteer activities and international exchange in the lead-up to hosting the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. The Tokyo Metropolitan Gov-

ernment plans to establish an English village for primary and secondary school students near the Olympic Village and boost the number of language volunteers to 35,000 by 2019 (Ong, 2016). Here political, economic and education policies figuratively merge in a nationwide scenario highlighting the usefulness of an authentic learning environment and real-life motivation for L2 learners.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The first section provides a brief description of the English course by introducing specific details such as the course topic, participants, materials, and procedure, as well as language learned and generated. Feedback from the course participants is then presented regarding their classroom experience obtained from a survey designed by the instructors for the purpose of course evaluation. The final section is a summary of the instructors' reflections and observations including discussion on why this type of activity is beneficial for L2 acquisition.

English Course Description

Topic and Participants

The course was entitled Promoting Global Communication Through English and the participants consisted of 15 intermediate to advanced level adult students from the local community. These adult participants had specifically chosen to attend and so were presumably more motivated to study than typical high school and university students.

The topic of the course (introducing local culture, famous places in Japan, and hometowns in the context of preparing for the Olympics) was chosen for two main reasons. First, due to the simplicity of the theme, it is relatively easy to replicate it in other English classes. Second, it allows host-country residents to activate their pre-existing cultural knowledge and personal experiences (i.e., talking about their own hometowns or interesting places in Japan). Naturally if the topic is far removed from everyday reality or is knowledge based, then building L2 linguistic competence and motivation may be more challenging. International events, such as the Olympics, can be utilized as a powerful motivating factor in developing language competence and enhancing the reciprocal nature of cultural exchange. Authentic materials, settings, and real-life purpose are thus employed and local stories and experiences can be shared with English-speaking foreign visitors for the purpose of promoting intercultural communication in English. For this English course, the roles of English-speaking foreign visitors were played by the course instructors of various nationalities and a current Kaichi International University student from Vietnam.

Materials and Procedure

The course outline is presented in Table 1. Each session featured examples of active learning and authentic learning and the contents of each session in detail are as follows.

Table 1. Course Schedule

Session	Program	Assignment
1	a. Introductions. Brief explanation about the course program. b. Getting to know each other. Common topics to talk about. c. Introducing your local area to foreign visitors. What might be interesting to see in the place you live? d. TOP 10 things to do in Kashiwa City. e. Video. Informative Speech. f. Rotating pair interviews.	Think of a place or area in your city or in Japan that you would like to introduce to foreign visitors. Do some preliminary research on that place or area. Make a short draft of your speech. Look over the list of questions.
2	a. Strategies on making short presentations. b. Practice presenting in rotating small groups with feedback sessions. c. Video. d. Follow-up questions.	Prepare a short presentation (up to 3 minutes) to introduce your hometown (local area, famous place in Japan). You can bring photos, pictures, and other necessary materials for your presentation.
3	a. Short presentations to promote a local area to foreign visitors.	Put into actual practice when opportunity arises.

The first session began with an overview of the course. To aid students' sense of integral motivation toward the final assignment and for them to acquire the appropriate English skills to perform that assignment, the overall course goal was clearly defined, namely for students to promote various local areas in Japan to foreign visitors by making a short English presentation during the final session. This presentation would utilize

their own background knowledge and experience as well as their own research regarding the area's history, customs, culture, traditions, and sightseeing spots.

An emphasis was made here that students' firsthand stories, experiences, and personal insights are just as valuable, if not more valuable, than rehashed historic or researched information. The steps to successfully complete this task were discussed with students including the necessary at-home preparation such as brainstorming, research, drafting, and practice of presentation skills, as well as in-class pair and group practice in preparation for presenting to the whole class in the final session.

After this, short icebreaking warm-up activities were conducted with students introducing themselves to unknown pair or group partners for about 5 minutes. This was followed by each student taking turns standing and briefly talking about something different and memorable about themselves to the whole group. This helped students gain some confidence in self-expression and in speaking in English in front of a group. The student and teacher audience enjoyed listening to the creative and interesting ways different students presented themselves and were encouraged to make their own comments and ask clarification and follow-up questions to the presenters. The affective atmosphere in the class, important for fostering effective communication, thus grew as students began to learn more about their classmates' characters and backgrounds.

The next step included going over in detail how to present a local area to foreign visitors including brainstorming what might be interesting to see in that area, and how to present that information in an organized manner. An example was shown to students of an informative presentation that highlighted presentation skills such as body language and eye contact. This provided students with a basic presentation structure that they could prepare for themselves and practice ahead of time (see Harrington & LeBeau, 2009, pp. 16-17 and related video as a useful reference).

The next step was for students to choose one different local area each (ideally the area they have the most firsthand experience with) to present to foreigners visiting Japan. This might include physical locations and directions to get there, sightseeing spots of interest, worthwhile restaurants, and local dishes to experience.

After that, with a peer-interview worksheet on hometown and local information (Table 2), students interviewed each other in rotating pairs to practice vocabulary, fluency, and related follow-up questions. Students practiced skills essential for reciprocal communication in both verbal and nonverbal ways to show interest and keep conversations going.

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Table 2. Example Questions From the Peer-Interview Worksheet on Hometown and Local Information

Question	Partner 1	Partner 2
Where is your hometown?		
How long does it take to get from here to your hometown?		
What interesting city lies to the north, south, east, west of your hometown?		
What's there to do in your hometown?		
What are the main attractions in your hometown?		
What souvenirs do you suggest are good to buy?		
Does anyone famous come from your hometown?		
What are some things in your hometown that are part of history?		
Does your hometown have any festivals? What happens at that festival?		
Would you say your hometown is modern?		

Finally, homework was for students to prepare their presentations so they could be delivered to small groups in the next session.

The second session began with a review of effective communication and presentation strategies. Students were then organized into small groups to practice presenting to each other, which was followed by peer feedback before practicing again with the next group. This process was repeated for most of the session and the students gained confidence through repeating and refining their performances. For a break in the routine, a short video on a World Heritage Site in Japan was shown to students and relevant follow-up questions were practiced (see Someya & Ferrasci, 2010, Unit 11 “Shirakawa-go, Japan” and related video as a useful reference).

The third and last session, which was the highlight of the course, was devoted to students giving their final presentations to the whole class. Presentations featured locations in Japan such as Kashiwa City, the Keihanshin region, Osaka City, Sapporo City, Shiba Park, Ise, Oki Islands, Mount Tsukuba, the Jinbocho area of Tokyo, and Iwate Prefecture. The audience listened intently and took notes to help them also talk about these areas to

foreign visitors. In addition, the audience provided written feedback comments for the presenters.

After participating in the course aimed at setting a link between regular classroom activities and the Olympics, the participants were asked to share their experiences in a survey conducted in the last session of the English course for the purposes of course evaluation. The survey form consisted of three parts. Part 1 included questions to obtain qualitative feedback about their L2 motivation and participation experience in the course. Part 2 applied a Likert scale to obtain quantitative feedback with the following five options: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *agree* (4), and *strongly agree* (5). In Part 3, participants provided overall comments on their participation in the course.

Language Learned and Generated

The vocabulary and language learned and generated mainly included (a) how to describe local areas effectively and (b) the language of effective interactive communication. A list of useful vocabulary words and expressions was provided for students including those used to describe locality in terms of population, climate, economic or tourist activities, landscape, transportation means, as well as adjectives and expressions such as *peaceful*, *dull*, *hustle and bustle*, *out in the sticks*, and *big smoke*. Students were encouraged to add to the list and generate their own related example sentences in English to help them expand their vocabulary range for comprehension and production purposes. In preparation for describing local areas, students were reminded how important it is to use the language of sight, smell, sound, and touch sense descriptions so that the listeners could feel they were actually there at the place being described. The need to employ the use of transitional devices was also emphasized to make the description flow well.

Also practiced was the language of effective communication including how to keep a conversation going with clarification and follow-up questions, gap fillers (to avoid awkward silence), and giving rejoinders such as *Really?*, *I see*, and *Wow!*, along with facial expressions and other body language.

Participant Feedback

After the last session, nine participants (56%) provided quantitative and qualitative feedback in a voluntary course evaluation survey. The survey was conducted by the instructors for evaluation purposes of the English course. The course participants reported that their general motivations for studying English were self-growth, desire to know the

world through English, getting to know people and cultures, and using English for work (see Table 3). The participants showed great interest in learning the English language, although many admitted they had never had the experience of presenting their local culture to foreigners before.

Table 3. Survey Questions, Qualitative Feedback (N = 9)

Survey question	Participant responses
1. What is your motivation to study English?	Self-growth; to improve my English ability; desire to get familiar with other people's points of view and express myself; love of English as my major is English literature; desire to go to the UK again or to be a volunteer guide during the Tokyo Olympics; to use English for work; to improve my English and communicate with people from all over the world; desire to know the world through English; to get to know people and cultures.
2. Why did you decide to join this class?	Affordable; to improve my speaking ability; invited by a friend; not much time to speak English in my daily life and desire to know how to introduce Japan to foreigners; to improve English skills; plan to have a party in December, so I want to be able to communicate with the guests from the US; I like to discuss in English; to know people who study English.
3. What did you like about the class?	Presentation; two teachers are very nice and kind; was able to have much time to speak and do a presentation in the end; good curriculum and great topics; speeches; I realized that many people can speak English very well; enjoyed the class and made a lot of friends.
4. What did you enjoy the most?	Presentations; everything; listening to speeches; giving speeches; talking with other participants in English.
5. Do you have any suggestions for future classes?	Nothing special (speaking slowly I hope); wish to have more topics interesting to me; hope this class will continue on regularly.
6. Do you have a better understanding now of how to make a short presentation in English?	Sure; I hope so; I had a great experience.

As Figure 1 shows, most of the respondents enjoyed participating in the course (Question 1), found course materials to be effective (Question 2), and the structure of the course to be interesting (Question 3). The topic chosen for the English course (i.e., introducing your local area to foreign visitors within the pretext of Japan hosting the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games), received positive appreciation (Question 4). The majority of the respondents indicated that the course helped them to improve their English language abilities (Question 8) and helped them to gain confidence in introducing their country and culture to foreigners in English (Question 9). Many respondents answered that they would like to participate in similar courses in the future (Question 7). Although the average score for students' self-evaluation of their own final presentation was 3.7, it was apparent that participants had successfully learned how to make a short presentation in English and initiate follow-up questions to facilitate a conversation.

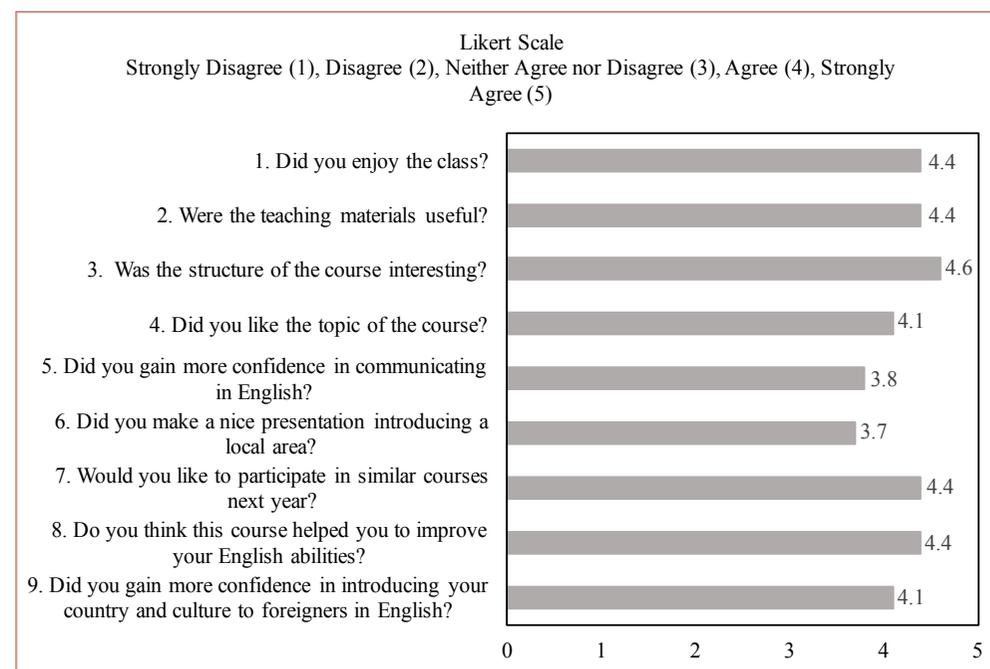


Figure 1. Participant feedback (Part 2. Quantitative feedback), N = 9.

Generally, affirmative feedback from Part 1 and Part 2 of the survey, together with the overall extended-answer comments shown in Figure 2, allowed us to conclude that participants found the course relevant and engaging. From the respondents' feedback, we learned that some of the participants in this course volunteer their services as staff and interpreters in their local communities and at international events. It should be noted, however, that it is hard to evaluate whether the participants' L2 motivations were actually enhanced by the English course as the participants voluntarily decided to take the course and were already self-motivated.

"I enjoyed this course so much!"
 "It was fun!"
 "I'm very interested in social issues like politics and international relations. Therefore, to talk about a trip or introduce my hometown, it is not so good for me. But I had a very good time. Thank you very much to both teachers."
 "It was much fun. Teachers are really kind and nice. But I'm a bit sad because the lesson was so short. I want to join the class next time too."
 "I had a nice time here but I need more practice because I haven't spoken English for 20 years. Japanese are very shy; please ask us 'Can you follow me?' I feel happier."

Figure 2. Overall comments of the respondents to Part 3.

Observations and Implications

The final task was successfully achieved with three consecutive once-a-week class sessions. The first session was input focused, the second session focused on output practice and confidence building in small groups, and the third session was the culmination of those acquired, practiced, and refined skills. The final task assigned to these intermediate to advanced level adult students—to present localities in Japan to English-speaking foreign visitors—was extremely successful. It was a great delight for the instructors and audience to be able to discover these areas through the eyes, personal experiences, and anecdotes of the presenters. This personalized information was much more stimulating than the factual information often found in travel guidebooks.

When designing the course, the authors aimed to incorporate an authentic learning experience for students in which they would practice skills they will most likely have the chance to put into practice in the immediate future. Despite the course limitations, such as its nonmainstream nature and the limited number of participants, the feedback and

instructor reflections allowed us to draw some conclusions as to the potential relevance of this teaching practice for regular L2 learners.

Participant feedback indicates that, under the pretext of the upcoming Olympics, activating L2 learners' pre-existing cultural knowledge and personal experiences has the potential to become a powerful motivating factor toward L2 communicative competence. By something as simple as telling a foreign visitor about where you live, your hometown, or introducing the culture of your community or country, you can be linguistically assertive, remain an active participant in the conversation while imparting important knowledge to nonlocals, and contribute to the grassroots level of cultural exchange. This is particularly easy in Japan, where each locality has its own famous cuisine, popular souvenirs, festivals, and often a regional dialect. Therefore, the authors support the notion that international events provide an impetus to help students gain communicative competence.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the linguistic and sociolinguistic literature on L2 motivation is evolving and the discussions on what is effective for successful L2 acquisition are ongoing (Gorshkov & Lange, 2015, 2017). However, the authors believe that the effective incorporation of authentic settings in the process of L2 acquisition is beneficial for L2 learners. Incorporating the backdrop of international events into regular language classes can help create authentic learning experiences and potentially enhance student L2 motivation. It is the hope of the authors that other educators can conduct similar teaching projects in their own teaching contexts.

Bio Data

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Appendix Interview

On 22 November 2016, the authors conducted a 30-minute interview session with Professor Hideko Kitagaki, the President of Kaichi International University, who recounted her real-life experiences as an English student in Japan and also as an official interpreter for the Bulgarian men's and women's volleyball teams at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964.

As a student of Tsuda College, she underwent a 1-year intensive training course to serve as an interpreter for the Bulgarian men's and women's volleyball teams, accompanying them to their matches, in the Olympic Village, as well as shopping and dining with them in Tokyo.

The following is a summary of the relevant results of that interview.

- Q) Did you have opportunities to introduce Japanese culture, Tokyo culture, your hometown, or other local information to foreign athletes?
- A) When I participated as an Olympic interpreter, our organizing committee arranged events to introduce Japanese culture to visiting athletes, many of whom came along and enjoyed learning about Japan. Japanese food was available in the Olympic Village cafeteria and this provided many opportunities for me to discuss Japanese culture with the Bulgarian teams.
- Q) Part of our research project involves trying to better understand what can help the self-confidence and motivation of L2 learners of English. Do you have any suggestions?
- A) I feel that as part of the process of developing confidence to communicate in a foreign language, it is important to discuss topics that we are familiar with, in particular topics that we want to share or certain aspects about ourselves or our culture that we may wish foreigners understood. Successfully communicating these topics to another person is very gratifying and helps bolster our linguistic confidence and increases our motivation to study further.
- Q) Japan will once again serve as host of the Olympics and Paralympics in 2020. Do you have any advice for the people of Japan?
- A) We still have 4 years left; this is plenty of time for people to improve their English so they can enjoy the opportunities for authentic intercultural communication that the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics will provide.