Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads

CALL-effect on time outside class practicing English
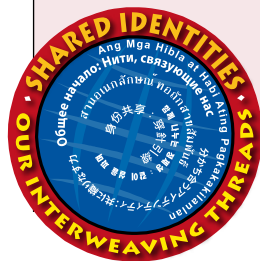
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In most Japanese universities, students' exposure to the English language is quite limited, especially for non-English majors. They must follow university curricula that do not place an emphasis on learning English. The majority of their classes are taught in Japanese by Japanese instructors about topics in their field of study and other courses. The reality is that their schedules do not allow a dedicated effort to learning English. It is understandable since they are, after all, non-English majors, and they should not be expected to dedicate themselves to learning English when they have chosen to specialize in another field. Most Japanese universities do, however, require them to take at least one English class a week. Since one class a week is generally not sufficient for significant improvement, and an increase in the number of English classes is not an option, both instructors and students in this situation can become understandably frustrated. In response to this situation, this pilot study examines the effects of introducing a CALL-based syllabus on the amount of time practicing English outside of class. The CALL materials came from *Longman English Interactive 1-4* (Rost, 2008) which is an Internet-based textbook and course management system. During one academic year without the CALL syllabus, first-year university students were asked about the time they spent outside of class practicing English. The results showed that they spent very little time on practicing English. The aim of this study is to investigate whether or not this amount of time increases in the next academic year with the CALL syllabus.

　日本では、ほとんどの大学生が、英語に接する機会が限られる状況に置かれている。特に、英語専攻以外の大学生の場合、英語教育が強調されていない履修課程にひたすら従わなければならない。彼らの履修科目の大多数は、専攻する分野に関する科目であるので、つまりそれらは英語には関連がなく、そして日本人講師により日本語で教えられている。履修スケジュールのために、英語学習に割く余裕がないのが現状なのだ。これはもちろん、英語を専攻していない大学生にとっては当り前の話だ。違う学部や専攻を選んでいるのだから、英語学習に全力を尽くすことは期待されていない。しかしながら、日本の大学では英語専攻以外の学生にも英語の習得を基礎教育として掲げ、学生の大多数に少なくとも週一コマの英語科目履修を必須としている。週一コマ程度で英語が十分に上達できないことは言うまでもないが、かといって、授業のコマ数を増やせるわけでもない。よって、教員と大学生両方がいら立つことになるのだ。この状態に対応するため、本研究（パイロット・スタディ）ではCALLのシラバスを導入すると授業外の英語学習時間にどんな影響するかということを調べた。使用したCALL教材は「Longman English Interactive 1-4」(Rost, 2008) というインターネット上の教科書かつcourse management systemである。まず、CALL教材を使用していないある一学年に授業外での英語学習時間を調査した。結果は、英語学習時間が極めて少ないと出た。翌年、同学年にCALLシラバスを導入すると、彼らの学習時間が増加するのではないかというのが本研究の望みと動機である。

I n most Japanese universities, students' exposure to the English language is quite limited, especially for non-English majors. They must follow university curricula that do not place an emphasis on learning English. The majority of their classes are taught in Japanese by Japanese instructors about topics in their field of study and other courses. The reality is that their schedules do not allow a dedicated effort to learn English. It is understandable since they are, after all, non-English majors, and they should not be expected to dedicate themselves to learning English when they have chosen to specialize in another field. Most Japanese universities do, however, require them to take at least one English class a week. Since one class a week is generally not sufficient for significant improvement, and an increase in the number of classes is not an option, both instructors and students in this situation can become understandably frustrated.

In response to this situation, this hypothesis-forming pilot research study examines the effects of introducing a CALL-based (computer assisted language learning) syllabus on the time outside class practicing English (hereafter TOCPE). The following research questions were posed:

- How much TOCPE do students spend on TOCPE?

- Does the introduction of a CALL-based textbook increase TOCPE?

The CALL materials came from *Longman English Interactive 1-4* (Rost, 2008) which is an Internet-based textbook and course management system (CMS). During one academic year without the CALL syllabus, first-year students were asked about their TOCPE. The results showed that they spent very little time practicing English. In the next academic year and in the same first-year classes, the traditional printed textbook was replaced by the CALL materials, and the students were asked about their TOCPE in the same fashion as the previous year. The results showed that the total TOCPE increased for most groups providing motivation to continue this study for a third year.

Literature review

While there is a considerable body of knowledge regarding the fields of CALL and independent learning, no studies were found that were directly related to this study's research questions. Wallis (2005) presents a small-scale study investigating students' use of a university self-access center (SAC) and their perceptions about independent learning. Students were surveyed in this study about their TOCPE, but the focus was on the types of activities they did and the role of the SAC. For an introduction to CALL, see Warschauer (1996). Stepp-Greany (2002) presents a descriptive study illustrating "... the perceptions of one group of university students about language learning in a technology environment." Survey results showed that:

> ...almost 71% of the students felt that they invested more time on the technology-enhanced course than they would have in a regular Spanish class... Time on task may be considered to be a learning benefit, since it is frequently cited as a factor in achievement, and was found to be important in this respect in Glisan, Dudt, and Howe's study (1998).

Motivation and research questions

During the 2007-2008 academic year, one 90-minute class was held once a week for six groups of students. The year was divided into two 14-week semesters, not including the exam weeks. The textbook that was used in class was called *Top Notch 1* (Saslow, 2006). It was chosen because of its emphasis on communicative, practical English. The structure and content of the textbook seemed well-suited to the English abilities of the targeted first-year Japanese university students. The textbook was divided into 10 units. By spending two to three classes on each unit, we could proceed through half of the textbook in the first semester and the second half through the second semester.

As the year progressed, it was observed by this instructor that while the students did assigned homework for the most part (71% submission rate), they only showed minimal effort in completion of assignments. When asked about their usage of the attached CD-ROM, they said that they did not use it on a regular basis for their own practice. (This is based on informal talks with students. It is also supported by the results of the study journals.) Several students lost their CD-ROM or would leave them at home making in-class usage impossible. The CD-ROM can certainly be classified as an example of CALL material, but its usage was not emphasized by this instructor as a requirement for the course.

The textbook provided ample materials and activities such as conversation models, listening activities, focus on grammar and pronunciation, vocabulary, role-playing tasks, reading, discussion, writing, surveys, and pair/group work. "Each level of Top Notch is designed for 60 to 90 instructional hours..." (Saslow, 2006). Unfortunately, one 90-minute class per week amounts to only 21 hours of class time per semester. The content of the textbook was quite satisfactory for in-class communicative activities as it was easy to use in class and contained a good balance and variety of tasks to maintain interest and participation in class by the students (based only on this instructor's observations and teaching experience). However, it did not seem to motivate students to practice outside of class assuming that a textbook can have an effect. This led to the first research question of this study:

- How much TOCPE do students spend on TOCPE?

The question is raised because it is assumed that the more time spent practicing a language the more improvement that can be gained. The total time in class is set by the university curriculum, and it cannot be changed. TOCPE is variable and depends on individual students' motivation and teachers' willingness to assign homework or projects. This leads to the second research question of this study:

- Does the introduction of a CALL-based textbook increase TOCPE?

In order to help answer this question, in the following academic year, *Longman English Interactive 1-4* was chosen to replace *Top Notch 1*. It is an Internet-based textbook and course management system (CMS). All of the grammar, listening, vocabulary, reading, speaking, and writing activities are done online by the students. Except for the writing sections, all of the exercises and tests are graded automatically for instant feedback. Another benefit is that there is no CD-ROM to misplace. However, usage of the materials requires a PC and Internet connection.

Methodology

Participants

The data was collected in 2007 from six first-year oral communication classes from six different majors at Kitakyushu University: Economics, Human Relations, Law, International Relations, Business Administration, and English (The school is a public university run by the city of Kitakyushu in Fukuoka Prefecture, and it is located in the southern Japanese island, Kyushu). The total number of students was 192. Each class met once a week for 90 minutes and had an average size of 32 students. The textbook that was used in class was *Top Notch 1* (Saslow, 2006). In the following year 2008, the teacher received the same schedule of classes with the same six first-year oral communication classes and six majors. The total number of students was 179, and the class size averaged 30 students. The textbook used in the previous year was replaced by *Longman English Interactive 1-4* (LEI) (Rost, 2008). It is an Internet-based CALL textbook and course management system (CMS).

It was judged that the 2007 groups and 2008 groups were similar enough to be used in this study because they matriculated into the university under the same conditions for each department major they chose. Each department major administers an entrance exam and has its own entrance requirements for English ability. During the first semester of the first year, each student is required to take the TOEIC exam at least one time. The test results showed that for the six groups in 2007 and 2008 in this study, the average score differences ranged from -6.3% to 6.3%. The average scores decreased only 2.1% from 2007 to 2008 indicating that the English abilities of the six classes were similar in both years of this study (Table 1).

Table 1. Participants' TOEIC scores

	Average TOEIC scores (1st semester)	Difference	Percentage
2007 Economics	396		
2008 Economics	421		
		25	6.3%
2007 Human Relations	404		
2008 Human Relations	384		
		-20	-5.0%
2007 Law	396		
2008 Law	373		
		-23	-5.8%
2007 International Relations	543		
2008 International Relations	527		
		-16	-2.9%
2007 Business Administration	416		
2008 Business Administration	390		
		-26	-6.3%
2007 English	577		
2008 English	582		
		5	0.9%
2007 Overall average	455		
2008 Overall average	446		
		-9	-2.1%

Materials and procedures

Over a 3 week period, students were asked to describe and quantify their activities related to practicing English outside of class. A Microsoft Excel sheet was emailed to each student. It contained spaces for the students to fill in such as their name, student number, TOCPE for each day of the week, and a description of those activities for each day of the week. The total TOCPE was calculated automatically in the Excel sheet. The students did this short, weekly study journal three times during a three week period in June and July, 2007 (See Table 2 for an example). In other words, the study journals were collected for the 10th to 12th week of the 14-week first semester. This data gathering was then repeated the following year during the same time period with first-year students again.

Results

In 2007, the students reported an average of 1.18 hour of TOCPE each week. They reported many activities such as listening to music, watching movies, writing reports, reading books, or doing homework for other English classes. However, only activities directly related to the classes in this study were counted. This was determined by reading the

descriptions that the students gave such as the following:

1. "I did homework for Dan's class."

2. "I practiced English using *Longman English Interactive* (LEI)."

3. "I practiced English using *Top Notch*."

In 2008, the students reported an average of 1.39 hour of TOCPE each week. Overall, in comparison to 2007 (1.18 hour), the average TOCPE increased 0.21 hour, which is an 18% increase. Further analysis shows that of the six classes, four increased and two decreased. Both the Economics and Human Relations groups' TOCPE decreased while the Law, International Relations, Business Administration, and English majors' increased (Table 3).

Student comments

At the end of each semester, there was a multiple choice survey conducted by the university concerning students' level of satisfaction with classes. In the survey, there was space at the end for making general comments. Below is a listing of the comments that related to the CALL-based materials and the traditional printed textbook.

Table 2. Example of the study journal data

Week 3							Jun 27 Fri	Jun 28 Sat	Total
		Jun 29 Sun	Jun 30 Mon	Jul 1 Tue	Jul 2 Wed	Jul 3 Thu			
Student number	Name	0	0	0	1	0.5	0	0	1.5
2008123123	Joe Tanaka				I practiced English using LEI.	I did homework for Dan's class.			

Table 3: Students' reported TOCPE

	Average weekly TOCPE (hours)	Difference	Percentage
2007 Economics	1.60		
2008 Economics	1.26		
		-0.34	-21%
2007 Human Relations	1.43		
2008 Human Relations	1.22		
		-0.21	-15%
2007 Law	1.17		
2008 Law	1.42		
		0.25	21%
2007 International Relations	1.27		
2008 International Relations	1.54		
		0.27	22%
2007 Business Administration	0.84		
2008 Business Administration	1.48		
		0.64	76%
2007 English	0.76		
2008 English	1.42		
		0.66	87%
2007 Overall average	1.18		
2008 Overall average	1.39		
		0.21	18%

Positive comments about LEI

- "I was able to practice using my PC, and I could correct myself at home."

- "I thought it was great to have an English class that used the Internet. But, it was hard because I couldn't use LEI at home."

- "It was fun to study using the Internet. Because of the homework, there were many chances to use English."

- "I think it's good to use PCs, but everyone faces the PCs in class, so it's hard to communicate with each other."

- "I thought it was good to have a class that uses PCs."

- "Because the materials were on a PC, the listening/video section was very good. The writing section was good because the teacher could look at it directly."

- "It was refreshing to have a class that uses PCs." (Two people had this comment.)

Negative comments about LEI

- "The class was hard because I didn't have Internet access at home, and there was a lot of homework requiring use of the Internet." (Three people had this comment.)

- "It was really difficult to get through the class using a PC."

- "LEI was not interesting."

- "I'd rather have homework on paper, not using a PC."

- "LEI is difficult because even the explanations in LEI are in English."

- "It was a bother having to use the Internet."

Positive comments about Top Notch 1

- "The listening section of the CD-ROM was good."

- "The sitcoms in the Top Notch DVD were very funny. I wanted to watch more of them."

- "I wanted to use the CD-ROM in class more to practice pronunciation."

- "The textbook was easy to understand."

- "It was interesting because it was the first time for me to use a textbook that was written totally in English."

- "It was fun to use the CD-ROM and PCs in class."

- "I didn't use a headphone and microphone to do reading and speaking in high school, so it was fun, and I'd like to continue."

Negative comments about Top Notch 1

- "I thought the textbook was too basic for a college level class".

- "I did not think it was meaningful to record our voices and compare them to the CD-ROM."

Discussion

The survey asked for general comments about the class and suggestions for improvement. There were about 370 total students surveyed in the six classes in 2007 and 2008. They were not prompted to make comments about the textbook materials, so the 25 comments above were totally voluntary. From the comments, we can conclude that at least a few students probably enjoyed using PCs and CD-ROMs for practicing English because of novelty or interactive features. On the other hand, there were some respondents who said that they did not have Internet access at home. This would certainly hinder their ability to do homework on *LEI* or to practice English using the *Top Notch 1* CD-ROM. The paucity of comments may indicate students' lack of motivation in contributing to the improvement of classes, or their tendency to avoid open-response questions (Brown, 2001). An area of further research should include a closed-response survey about students' attitudes towards CALL materials and printed textbooks.

This study tried to answer the question, "How much TOCPE do students spend on TOCPE?" According to the students in this study, one group said that they studied about 1.18 hour or 1 hour and 11 minutes per week. The following year with the CALL materials, that number increased to 1.39 or 1 hour and 23 minutes for a 12-minute increase (18%). From the experience of this teacher, the results were not surprising. It seemed reasonable that students said that they studied English for my class for about one hour a week. A simple survey asking students how much time they spend practicing English, and what kind of related activities they do did not seem to produce overly exaggerated claims. They

were assured that answering zero would not jeopardize their grades in the course and many did answer zero. The answer to the second question, "Does the introduction of a CALL-based textbook increase TOCPE?" was inconclusive. The answer was "yes" for four out of the six groups, so the results were encouraging. It is difficult to speculate reasons for the Economics and Human Relations groups' TOCPE decreasing. Some possible factors could be that more students in these two groups did not own PCs, lacked Internet access, or simply lacked the motivation or desire to practice English. These possible factors can be explored in a future study.

The reality is that most Japanese university students do not receive enough exposure to improve their English speaking abilities. Class sizes are too large, and class meetings are too infrequent (For an analysis of the deficiencies in Japanese universities, see McVeigh, 2002). As a teacher in this situation, one can only hope to somehow motivate students to do more independent learning. Introducing CALL-based educational materials may be one way to do this. This study has shown that some groups do practice English more with CALL materials compared to traditional printed textbooks. However, because of the variability in groups, the results were inconclusive. This study could be improved by limiting the comparison to classes from one year. It may prove to be more conclusive if classes use the printed textbook one semester, and the CALL textbook in the other semester. Then the students' TOCPE within one year could be measured. It is hoped that this can be carried out in the next academic year to complete an expanded study. In this future study, we can test the hypothesis that was formed here that the introduction of CALL materials does increase students' TOCPE.

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