Step 8
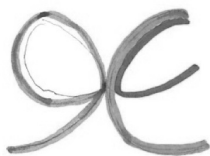
Two student examples of 'Life Logos' are shown below.

My life logo combines "E", "R", and "C". "E" refers to "Sleep early and get up early", "R" refers to "Always be ready", and "C" refers to "Do not be afraid of changes."

My Rules of Life "Believe in myself", "Always do my best", and "Take a good rest."

Step 9

The format and length of the presentations will depend on your students' age and English level. Example instructions for lower-intermediate first-year university students are suggested below.

• *Make a presentation to the other members of your group.*

• *Your presentation should be 1-2 minutes long.*

• *Show one of your logos and explain the rule.*

• *Repeat for your other logos.*

• *Show your "Life Logo" and explain how it includes all the rules."*

[RESOURCES] *TLT* WIRED

Edo Forsythe

English Central: Wire Students' Motivation from Inside to Outside the Classroom

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CALL and MALL have been adopted in more and more universities and one of the advantages of CALL and MALL is that online programs can help students to become autonomous learners, because students can access their course content anytime and anywhere. The authors of this article adopted an online English language learning program, English Central (EC) <https://englishcentral.com>, for use in an Intensive Practical English (IPE) course in 2016. This article covers the outcomes of the adoption of EC including: how EC was integrated in the curriculum, the benefits of EC based on the students' survey results, and suggestions on how to integrate EC in an effective, blended language learning environment.

Adoption of EC in the IPE Course

The Course and Students

Beginner-level, non-English-major university students (N=111) purchased a 3-month subscription to EC (¥1,500) and used the content as a part of their assignments outside of class every day for three weeks during the course. The students were expected to complete at least three sets of EC assignments per day outside of class. The students had to complete at least 21 sets each week in order to earn 8% of their overall grade. The students took a survey to share their thoughts on the effectiveness of integrating EC into their English course at the end of the summer semester.

EC Assignment

One set of the EC assignments consisted of 3 steps: watching a video clip, dictating various words from the video while listening, and practicing sen-

tence-level pronunciation. Each video's level was labeled—beginner, intermediate, and advanced—and the students self-selected which to watch. The video length varied from 1 to 5 minutes depending on the level and topic. EC's videos have been adapted from videos produced for native English speakers and include advertisements, interviews, news, and other real-life scenarios. In addition, EC uses authentic videos from different English-speaking countries so that students are exposed to various accents and cultures. The students' progress was checked by the teacher daily by viewing online data; if the students did not complete their assignments, they were verbally encouraged to finish them before the weekly deadline. As Snow (2007) mentions, teachers play an important role in motivating students in the classroom. Providing regular feedback in class seemed to be an effective way to boost the students' motivation throughout the IPE course, because almost all students successfully completed 21 sets of EC videos before the weekly deadline.

Benefits of EC Based on the Students' Feedback Survey

Accessibility

Accessibility from either PCs or portable devices is key in motivating students to complete tasks online. Nearly all functions of EC can be accessed on mobile devices, and according to the survey, over 65% of the students accessed EC from their mobile phones rather than via PCs. Most students pointed out how easy it was to access the program from their phones instead of PCs, so they were willing to do their assignments at home.

Motivational Factors

Ushioda (2017) claimed that in order to motivate students it is crucial for teachers to provide language learners with opportunities to select topics or activities that they are interested in. Because EC has over 10,000 videos students can find something of interest so that they can stay motivated during the IPE course. Another motivational factor is that EC has a reward system. Whenever users complete their tasks they gain digital coins. The bulletin board, which each student and teacher can view and share comments on, displays students' total earned points and which students have completed the most videos. This further encourages students to stay motivated through competition. In the classroom, it is hard to know who is trying the hardest, but EC can display students' efforts clearly with charts. The authors believe that one of the most useful functions of EC for teachers is the ability to check which

videos the students have watched so that they can know their students' interests.

Opportunity for Pronunciation Practice

An additional useful feature of EC is that students can practice their pronunciation (see Figure 1). EC is one of only a few online programs that provides pronunciation feedback. If there are some specific sounds that learners have difficulty pronouncing, they can access courses that focus on pronunciation in order to overcome these difficulties. From the survey, a lot of students indicated that the pronunciation practice on EC was a good chance to review their own pronunciation as they had had limited opportunities to practice pronunciation in junior high or high school. The adoption of EC gave students chances to review phonetic rules that they learned in the IPE course. This benefited the students because their pronunciation was tested throughout the course. However, one minor technical drawback of EC that some students mentioned on the survey was that the pronunciation-check function was not always reliable because some students were not quite sure what the criteria for the pronunciation judgment was based on.

Figure 1. Screenshot of English Central pronunciation practice section.

User-Friendliness

At the beginning of the course, the teacher explained and demonstrated how to access the program from both a PC and a mobile phone app. On the survey, although some students had technical issues (some words could not be typed and a few smartphones did not sync with PCs, so students' progress differed between their PCs and smartphones), over 95% of the students rated EC's user-friendliness positively. Also, it was easy for the teacher to check students' progress online because the students' progress was updated immediately on the teacher's account.

Conclusion and Further Suggestions

Although it has not been common to integrate an online program as a part of an English course in a Japanese university, the students' survey responses indicated that they seemed to enjoy this new way to learn English. The survey results revealed that about 70% of the students believed EC should be adopted in other English classes in the university because of the benefits of incorporating easy access, interesting videos, pronunciation practice, and user-friendliness. An additional advantage of the integration of EC from the teacher's perspective was that it seemed to motivate the students not only inside the classroom, but outside of it as well. This was demonstrated by the fact that students completed more tasks than were required. However, a few students procrastinated on their EC assignments during the course even though the teacher encouraged them in class. In hindsight, therefore, the authors believe that the deadlines for the EC assignments should have been shorter and set more often during the course.

Based on the survey results, some students believed that their skills had improved from using these EC activities. For instance, about 42% of the students answered that their listening skills improved and about 38% claimed that their pronunciation improved. In their daily lives the students do not have many opportunities to immerse themselves in English, but using EC provided them with a chance to listen to English anytime outside of the classroom.

Overall, EC was positively evaluated by most of the students in the survey. One improvement that could have been made would have been the ability to share videos during the class period. Because there was not enough time to share videos in class the EC program was fairly isolated from the course content. The authors believe that it would have been better for students to discuss or explain at least one video in class and share some ideas about the topic. This would have allowed for more connection between EC and the classroom content. Also, during the IPE course there were a few students who procrastinated on their EC assignments until right before the weekly deadline because of the self-selected pace which the program allows. As mentioned above, it is crucial for teachers to check students' progress daily and to continue to provide feedback to motivate them.
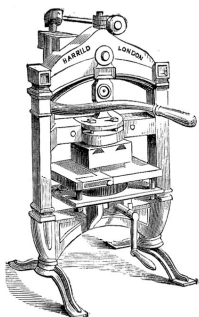
Finally, we authors hope that more teachers try to integrate an interesting online program such as EC into their courses. CALL/ MALL activities provide teachers with great tools to wire their students' motivation from inside to outside of the classroom, and this aids them in becoming autonomous learners.

References

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Editor's Note: *As we conclude summer vacations and plan our lessons for the coming semester, this column provides an interesting and engaging way of incorporating an online component into our EFL classes to keep our students motivated and Wired!*