

Effectiveness of Email Exchange in EFL Classroom

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The purpose of this classroom research was to find the answers to a number of research questions concerning communication by email exchange. Students sent emails to keypals and wrote back, sometimes sending copies to another keypal or the teacher. They had to hand in ten printed out mails to the teacher's folder, which had a bag with a nametag for each student.

The collected data from the two questionnaires was analyzed quantitatively from the point of effectiveness of email exchanges. Students' excitement, involvement, and autonomy might be induced through the limited period of time spent using the computer laboratory.

このクラスルームリサーチの目的はイーメール交換によるコミュニケーションに関する後述のリサーチクエスチョンの解明を試みたものである。手順は、学生がキーパルと英語でイーメールの送受信をし、時々もう一人のキーパルや教師にそのコピーを送信する。学生たちはプリントアウトした交換メールを十通（１学期間に）を、教師のホルダーの中にそれぞれの名前のレッテルのついた袋の中に、各自で毎回入れていきます。

２回のアンケートから集計したデータはイーメール交換の英語学習における有効性という見地から数量的分析を行います。結果として、コンピューター室の使用が時間制限を受けても、学生たちの英語学習に対する熱中ぶり、没頭ぶり、自主的態度を、引き出すことができたように思います。

Research Questions

The purpose of this classroom research was to find answers to the following questions concerning communication by email exchange in the target language:

Question 1: What perception about email and the Internet will they gain?

Question 2: Will they develop autonomy in learning English by using email exchange and the Internet?

Question 3: Is email an effective tool in the classroom where they take English as one of the Liberal Arts subjects in a Japanese college?

Question 4: What problems are found in the process of exchanging emails?

Related Literature

According to Allen (1995, p.2) “using an on-campus email system as an extension of the writing class can create interest, not only in writing, but also in communicating with other classmates.” In traditional EFL classrooms, teachers have made efforts to provide simulations, virtual situations, role-playing, skits, dramas, videos, and films, which are close to real communication but still unreal. Teachers who wanted

to offer some real communication into classrooms have tried dialogue journal writings between teacher and student (Matsuo, 1996. p.33). However it took more time to receive a reply than by using email.

Warschauer (1995. p.2) also states, “email provides students an excellent opportunity for real, natural communication. Email empowers students for independent learning.” He points out two rewards of emailing; one is real communication, and the other is the empowering of autonomous learning.

Sperling (1997. p.24) refers to the suitability of email for Internet beginners:

Email, or Electronic Mail, is the most popular way to communication on the Internet and usually the first Internet application new users learn.

He encourages teachers of English language to use emails and the Internet (1999, p.x) as follows:

I often meet teachers who are still afraid of computers and the Internet, so I'd like to share a secret with you. The Internet is a fun, exciting and extremely powerful learning tool for you and your students, and you'll find that it's easy to use! I made this discovery back in 1995 when I introduced my ESL students to the Internet. There, I taught them the basics of using email. What were the results?

- My students found the Internet fun and “cool.”

- My students increased their reading and vocabulary in English because they were exploring the World Wide Web and discovering material that interested them.
- My students were meeting and communicating with other students.
- My students were becoming more motivated and excited about learning English.
- My students were actually coming to class early!

The results were amazing. I was hooked, my students were hooked, and I think you and your students will be too.

Reading the above related literature the presenter hypothesized that email exchanges between keypals in the classroom might reduce students' anxiety in SLA because, as Krashen and Terrel (1983. p.38) state, "the best situations for language acquisition seem to be those which encourage lower anxiety levels."

Data Collection

The number of subjects was 26. All of them are music majors. They are taking this *Intermediate English Course* as one of the liberal arts at a Japanese college. Each student has been assigned to submit 10 exchanged emails with the keypals among the classmates during the first semester of 2000. They were permitted to use the computer laboratory as a class nine times, while students

could use the computers in the laboratory and the library in their free time.

Questionnaires were provided at the beginning and at the end of the semester. Open-ended questionnaire was also provided at the end of the semester.

Results

Research Question 1:

What perception about email and the Internet did they gain?

- 77.3% of the students answered their perception about email has changed to be more positive.
- 81.8% of the students considered their perception of the Internet has changed to be more positive.

Research Question 2:

Did they develop autonomy in learning?

- 100% of the students in the second questionnaire answered 'yes' to the question: 'would you like to continue learning computer by yourself after this course?' It might be said that all of them became more motivated to learn, or, in other words, to have developed autonomy in learning.
- Autonomy for language learning might be found in the answers to the emailing experience. Though nobody had experienced emailing in English at the beginning of the semester, by the end of the

semester 77.3% of the students had sent over 11 mails in English, which were more than they had been assigned to do. It might indicate their autonomy in learning.

- 90.9% of the students answered, 'yes' to the question asking if using the Internet helped their language learning. In class the presenter provided some URLs to access. At first each student read the hompages they accessed. Later they accessed the sites they liked. Therefore this autonomous reading might have helped their language learning.

Research Question 3:

Is email an effective tool in the classroom where they take English as one of the Liberal Arts subjects in a Japanese college?

They have only one period of 90 minutes a week for this course. They could use the computer laboratory nine times as a class. For such a short period of time, could any effectiveness in emailing for English learning have been observed?

- It might be worth noting the students' replies for the question, 'do you feel that using email helped your language studies?' 95.5% of them answered 'yes.'
- Judging from the rates of the answers to the questions from 6 to 16 on Appendix 3 almost all of those in lower columns, which are of the second

questionnaire, might indicate effectiveness of using computers in English classroom even if the students meet only 90 minutes a week as one of the Liberal Arts subjects.

Research Question 4:

What problems were found in the process of exchanging emails?

In the open-ended questionnaire provided at the end of the semester the students stated the problems they had in the process of exchanging emails as follows.

- Writing sentences in English is difficult and takes much time 31.8%
- Poor typing ability 9.1%
- Manipulation of computer was complicated at first 13.6%
- Spelling 13.6%
- No replies from my keypals 4.5%
- I couldn't know if my mail had been successfully sent 4.5%
- I found my mail hadn't been sent 4.5%
- Nothing special 18.2%

Manipulation of computers seems more difficult at first for EFL students because they are not accustomed to typing. The main problem for EFL students, however, might be considered 'writing sentences in English, which takes much time.'

Conclusion

From the analysis of the collected data of the two questionnaires and the open-ended one, the presenter found the effectiveness of emailing in English teaching.

In spite of the limited teaching hours (namely, students met once a week, like other Liberal Arts courses in Japanese colleges), and the limited use of computer laboratory (namely, not exclusive use), students' autonomy in language learning seems to have been induced. Because email exchange is a real

communication, the learners might get interested and motivated much more than with other tools.

As a matter of fact, the students wouldn't leave the computer laboratory, even after class. In traditional classrooms, such phenomena might not be observed. It may indicate their excitement and involvement. They are 'hooked' like the students of Dave Sperling (1999). Such a change in attitude toward learning had not been expected at the beginning of the semester.

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Appendix 1: Number of e-mail submission

Number of submissions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	above 11
Number of students (%)	3 (11.4)	0	1 (3.8)	1 (3.8)	1 (3.8)	4 (15.4)	1 (3.8)	2 (7.6%)	0	1 (3.8)	8	4 (15.4)

Appendix 2: 1st questionnaire (1Q): qq 1-5, April, 2000: N=17

1	Computer experience?	yes		no		
		14(82.4%)		3(21.4%)		
2	How many times?	0	1-7	8-15	over 16	
		3(17.6%)	6(35.2%)	2(12.0%)	6(35.2%)	
3	How many years?	1 year	2-3 years	4-5 years	over 6 years	
		9(52.9%)	5(29.4%)	1(5.9%)	1(5.9%)	
4	Where did you learn?	high school	college	library	home	self taught
		4(23.5%)	4(23.4%)	3(17.6%)	3(17.6%)	2(11.7%)

Appendix 3: 1st questionnaire (1Q): qq 6-20=upper columns, April, 2000: N=17

2nd questionnaire (2Q): qq 6-20=lower columns, July, 2000: N=22

6	Comfortable?	very comfortable	comfortable	nervous	very nervous
		2(11.8%) 4(18.2%)	8(45.6%) 13(59.1%)	6(35.2%) 5(22.7%)	1(5.9%) 0(0%)
7	Proficiency?	very proficient	a little proficient	not proficient	
		0(0%) 3(13.6%)	7(47.0%) 18(82.8%)	10(58.9%) 1(4.5%)	
8	Using new computer program?	confident	nervous	helpless	
		0(0%) 4(18.2%)	15(88.2%) 17(77.3%)	0(0%) 1(4.5%)	
9	Typing ability?	good	average	poor	
		0(0%) 3(3.6%)	5(35.2%) 9(40.9%)	11(64.7%) 10(45.5%)	
10	Experience of access to WWW?	0	1-5 times	6-10 times	over 11 times
		8(46.9%) 0(0%)	2(11.8%) 8(36.4%)	2(11.8%) 6(22.7%)	5(29.4%) 8(36.4%)

11	Experience of e-mailing?	0	1-5 times	6-10 times	over 11 times
		0(0%) 0(0%)	6(35.2%) 0(0%)	3(17.6%) 5(22.7%)	7(41.1%) 17(77.3%)
12	Want to access Internet home pages?	yes		no	
		17(100%) 22(100%)		0(0%) 0(0%)	
13	Want to communicate via e-mailing?	yes		no	
		17(100%) 22(100%)		0(0%) 0(0%)	
14	Internet as research tool compared to other resources?	easier	same	more difficult	
		6(35.2%) 15(68.2%)	9(52.9%) 5(22.7%)	2(11.8%) 2(9.1%)	
15	Internet as current information resource compared to other tools?	more current	same	less current	
		13(76.5%) 15(68.2%)	4(23.5%) 7(31.8%)	0(0%) 0(0%)	
16	Reliability of information from Internet compared to other resources?	more reliable	same	less reliable	
		0(0%) 2(9.1%)	17(100%) 20(90.9%)	0(0%) 0(0%)	

Appendix 4: 2nd questionnaire (2Q): qq 1-5 N=22

1	Want to continue learning?	yes		no	
		22(100%)		0(0%)	
2	E-mail helped language studies?	yes		no	
		21(95.5%)		1(4.5%)	
3	Internet helped language studies?	yes		no	
		20(90.9%)		2(9.1%)	
4	E-mail communication with teacher?	more freely	comfortable	a little comfortable	not comfortable
		2(9.1%)	10(45.5%)	3(13.6%)	6(27.3%)
5	E-mail communication with pen pals?	more freely	comfortable	a little comfortable	not comfortable
		1(4.5%)	10(45.5%)	5(22.7%)	5(22.2%)

Appendix 5: 2Q: qq 21-27 N=22

21	Reasons to learn PC?	professional skill	academic skill	composing music	interesting	Required course
		1(4.5%)	1(4.5%)	2(9.1%)	15(68.2%)	3(13.6%)
22	Rewards of e-mailing?	quick exchange	cheaper	getting information fast	world wide communication	popular
		10(45.5%)	1(4.5%)	4(18.2%)	5(22.7%)	1(4.5%)
23	Problems with e-mailing?	no privacy		no audio		Not many people have e-mail account
		11(50.0%)		2(9.1%)		8(36.4%)
24	Intention to create own home page?	yes			no	
		15(68.2%)			7(31.8%)	
25	Experience of accessing Japanese home pages?	yes			no	
		20(90.9%)			2(9.1%)	
26	Change in perception of e-mail?	more positive		no change		more negative
		17(77.3%)		5(22.7%)		0
27	Change in perception of Internet?	more positive		no change		more negative
		18(81.8%)		4(18.2%)		0