

# Exploring Synchronous Computer-Mediated Instruction in a Japanese University EFL Classroom

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## Introduction

Two persistent issues to be addressed in any freshman General Education (GenEd) EFL curriculum are insufficient contact time with English and low student motivation. These are particularly problematic at Japanese universities due to lack of exposure to and perceived need for English, compounded by residual fatigue from entrance exam cramming. In this day and age of university branding, the image presented by the curriculum also becomes an issue at all levels of the university. At the national level, the move towards academic English and the globalization of Japanese education by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) also comes to the fore. This paper describes an attempt to address these issues through an innovative pilot course incorporating video chat into the curriculum proper.

The university's current GenEd EFL curriculum was designed in the early 2000s to combine an enjoyable, non-threatening environment to practice English with a wealth of audio materials to further students' development within a sustainable program standardized across different academic departments. Oracy was consciously given a central position. (For details in Japanese see Shimada 2004, Ishiwata 2004, and Takakuwa 2004; in English see the introduction to Varden 2004.) The curriculum's focus on oracy has not been without controversy, especially in light of the current national movement toward academic English.

The five proposals for the globalization of Japan's English education made by MEXT (2011) are given below:

1. Assessment and verification of students' English level
2. Promoting global English and stimulating motivation
3. Increasing opportunities to use English, including the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
4. Faculty and curriculum development
5. Reforming university entrance exams with an eye toward a global society

Specifically, "In order to cultivate such [global] communication skills, classes must be shifted

from lecture style toward student-centered language activities by employing such educational forms as speeches, presentations, debates and discussions” (MEXT 2011: 3). For all academic subjects the move from a lecture classroom to small-group discussions and individual research projects and presentations will certainly go far in increasing student motivation; likewise an increase in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) use will enable classrooms to compete with the other audio-visual sources in today’s media-saturated society.

Also relevant is the current Japanese administration’s proposal to use the TOEFL for both university entrance exams and graduation (Yoshida 2013). It seems safe to say that the current trend toward academic English is not a passing fad. The pilot course under discussion, then, can be seen to be an extension of this drive to create EFL classes that can balance concerns of globalization and university academics with the needs of the students.

## **General Overview of the Pilot Course**

Under the auspices of the university’s Office of the President, an English Education Reform Working Group was tasked with investigating an alternative model which might serve as the university standard for foreign language learning. Relatedly, the Faculty of International Studies investigated bringing video chat into the classroom proper; the pilot course under discussion in this paper was added to that project as an initial test of its efficacy within the GenEd EFL curriculum.

## **Focus & Aims**

Like the current GenEd EFL first-year classes, the pilot curriculum was composed of two semesters with two co-requisite English Communication courses each semester. The overall curriculum focused on four skills—reading, writing, listening and speaking—with emphasis on developing students’ academic literacy in English. A special feature of the curriculum was the use of Synchronous Computer-Mediated Instruction (SCMI) in the form of Skype lessons that allowed for small group (4–5 students) English lessons twice a week.

The aims of the curriculum were three-fold: to foster students’ critical thinking, and academic reading and writing skills; to develop their abilities to interact with and respond to texts; and to improve their ability to discuss social, political, economic, and cultural issues. These goals were developed based on faculty consideration of the English skills needed by contemporary university students to participate successfully in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. Moreover, an overarching curricular goal was to support and enhance student motivation toward English language learning.

## **Brief Background of Student Participants**

Eighteen freshman students, nine women and nine men, majoring in International Business participated in the pilot course during the 2013 academic year. It was decided that self-selected

students would likely be more motivated to learn English and would therefore make the results less generalizable (\*Interim report, p. 1). Therefore students with TOEFL ITP scores in the range of 430-440 were selected for participation in the project. At the beginning of the spring semester, students were introduced to the experimental curriculum and all students consented to participation in the courses.

A survey conducted at the outset of curriculum implementation provided a snapshot of the English educational background of students and their attitudes and motivation toward learning English. The vast majority of students had no experience living in an English-speaking country, and only two students had experienced short-term homestays for a period between two and four weeks in an English-speaking country. Five of the eighteen students had attended an English conversation school in Japan mostly during the time when they were elementary school students for about five years on average. Based on these results, student participants were not at all exceptional in their exposure to English-language learning opportunities.

With respect to their English language education in high school, students reported what might be considered a fairly traditional and typical slate of courses concentrating on grammar, reading, and vocabulary. A much smaller number of students reported studying oral communication, writing, and listening. As might be expected, students were not particularly motivated to develop their English skills. "I learned 'reading,' 'writing,' 'listening' and 'oral communication' in my school. Its were boring because our teachers couldn't give us attracting classes and I didn't have the high motivation [sic]," commented one student. Likewise, another student stated, "my teacher did not effort to make us interested in studying English [sic]." Despite traditional and sometimes uninspiring experiences, in response to the question "How motivated are you in studying English?" two-thirds of students reported to be highly motivated with the remaining students reporting neither high or low motivation.

## Course Design & Implementation

The most unique feature of the pilot curriculum is the inclusion of SCMI. Using video chat in language teaching is nothing new; it was introduced in the early 1990s by the conversational school NOVA and continues to be used by several schools, and is the foundation of Rosetta Stone 4th edition. Early pioneers testing its use in the academic context include Wang & Sun (2001); Wang (2004) and Levy & Kennedy (2004) both examined video chat using the now defunct *netMeeting* (see also Blake 2008: 70ff), and Eröz-Tuğ̃a & Sadler (2009) compared six SCMI systems. One only need access the latest WorldCALL or GloCALL conference proceedings to find a healthy exchange underway. In Japanese universities in particular, Ryobe (2008, 2009) detailed the use of Skype for supplemental oral communication. The current pilot curriculum extends Ryobe (2008) by bringing Skype into the EFL classroom proper.

The pilot curriculum described here was comprised of two 90-minute class meetings per week. Skype lessons took place both days, for 45 minutes of each class. Reading and writing were taught once per week each during the other 45 minutes of each class. Each component of

the course had its own textbooks and materials. Likewise, each section was taught independently. Two faculty members from the Center of Liberal Arts (CLA) taught the reading and writing components of the curriculum, and four Philippine instructors provided by Waku Work Online Teaching Services taught computer-mediated lessons. Below are further details about each component of the curriculum.

### **Reading**

The reading component of the course was centered around the textbook *Reading Matters 1: An Interactive Approach to Reading* by Mary Lee Wholey (Heinle, Cengage Learning, 2007). Each unit of the text is fairly typically structured: Pre-reading exercises, one or more thematic reading passages, and follow-up questions and exercises to check student understanding. The pair work and group work activities in the text were attempted and then abandoned due to time constraints imposed by the class structure. In addition, the overall level of the class prevented free discussion in English.

During Spring semester weekly written homework was assigned as preparation for class discussion, as was suggested by the original organization of the class. However, due to pervasive lack of homework preparation by most students, this was abandoned in favor of quizzes based on the assigned material. This arrangement, though, necessitated policing students during the Skype lessons to prevent cramming for reading selection quizzes. Lack of preparation is, of course, encountered in any university EFL class, and again, we return to the need to improve student motivation and desire to study English.

### **Writing**

The focus of the writing component of the curriculum was to develop students' academic literacy in English. In the contemporary globalized world, students need to hone research skills so that they can find, analyze and critically evaluate information, particularly information that comes through the internet. Subsequently, students need to develop their ability to synthesize their findings and communicate complex ideas in writing. To develop these capacities, the writing component used the textbook, *Academic Writing Skills 1* by Chin et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

During the spring semester, the course focused on paragraph development. Initially, students learned to generate ideas for writing through various brainstorming activities, and then they learned to write topic sentences, develop supporting ideas, write outlines, and full paragraphs with concluding statements. Toward the end of the semester, students practiced editing their own work and compiled a learning portfolio that included samples of their work from all curriculum components. During the fall semester, students moved from paragraph writing to essay writing, and learned paraphrasing and summarizing skills. The final writing assignment was a five-paragraph research essay that included a thesis statement and citations. This assignment was added to their learning portfolio at the end of the course.

Similar to the reading component of the curriculum, writing was allocated one 45-minute

period of instruction per week. This was generally sufficient for the aim of paragraph writing during the first semester. However, the cognitive leap from paragraph writing to five-paragraph essay writing was a substantial one for students during the second semester and one 45-minute period of instruction per week was insufficient. Many students seemed overwhelmed with expectations to write a lengthy essay in English. Though some students inconsistently completed homework assignments, which added to the challenges, other students who demonstrated commitment to the task still struggled with expanding their writing. Further, basic grammatical mistakes and sentence-level errors were still frequent in student writing at the end of the course. These observations suggest re-thinking the content and implementation of the writing component. While it is unlikely that class instructional time can be increased, one strategy may be to develop an external support structure such as a Writing Center where students could bring drafts of their work for additional feedback in the time between class meetings. Such support could make a substantial difference not only in students' academic writing development, but also in supporting and sustaining their motivation, and helping them to develop as autonomous learners of English.

### **Skype**

Skype lessons were a special feature of the curriculum included to maximize student opportunity to practice English through small group instruction. Though the overall enrollment was eighteen, these small group lessons were comprised of four-to-five students each and allowed for substantial interaction between the instructor and students and among peers. The textbook selected for Skype lessons was *English in Common 3* by Saumell and Birchley (Pearson Education ESL, 2011), and corresponds to the A 2 to B 1 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001). Through the use of Skype, students worked intensively on their communication skills and further developed their communication strategies with instructors based in the Philippines.

Students were especially enthusiastic about Skype lessons. Observations confirm positive learning exchanges with the instructor and peers, and students appeared to genuinely enjoy communicating in English. In addition, some group members acted cooperatively in sharing ideas and in helping one another keep conversations going. With the Skype platform, it was also possible for the instructor to type on the chat board which helped students' comprehension and identified their grammatical mistakes. This appears to be a valuable aspect of using this technology. Further details from a feedback survey will be discussed below, but this general finding, that Skype lessons promote student motivation, corresponds with broader research on SCMI.

At the same time, while SCMI and more generally CMC has the potential to motivate student learning, its effectiveness in improving students' communication skills is debated by some researchers. Yang and Chang (2008) studied college students in Taiwan who used Skype to interact with peers. In their study, they created two groups: one group used structured CMC language activities, and the other group communicated with peers without particular language focus. At the end of the semester, the researchers found no significant difference in the oral skills between

the groups despite one group's focus on language use. Similarly, in another study with vocational high school students in Taiwan, Young (2003) did not find any linguistic improvement in students' skills after the implementation of technology into the language learning curriculum. Since there is a significant financial cost to incorporating Skype lessons into the GenEd curriculum, further consideration of the benefits and expectations of this component is needed.

## **Student feedback & assessment**

### **Mid-Spring Survey Results**

In May of the spring semester, ten weeks into the implementation of the pilot curriculum, a "face-to-face group interview" was conducted with students by the English Education Reform Working Group to gauge student satisfaction. During this exchange, the following four questions were asked:

1. How satisfied are you with this English class?
2. What are your thoughts about the small group SKYPE lessons?
3. What are your thoughts about the English academic literacy classes?
4. Would you like to take more English classes beyond English Communication?

(Interim Report, pp. 2-4)

In all instances, the findings suggested overwhelming positive and enthusiastic uptake of the pilot curriculum. Students were satisfied with the curriculum, and enjoying the Skype lessons. Moreover, the majority noted that the English academic literacy classes were "good for learning," and all students except one expressed desire to continue with English classes beyond the pilot curriculum. In this regard, the interim report noted seven students who commented on an even longer commitment: "I would like to be given an opportunity at the university to continue improving my English until I graduate" (p. 5). Finally, about half of the students also commented that they would like to expand their circle of interlocutors beyond peers from their own department: "I would like to be able to take courses together with students outside my own department because that would be more stimulating" (p. 5).

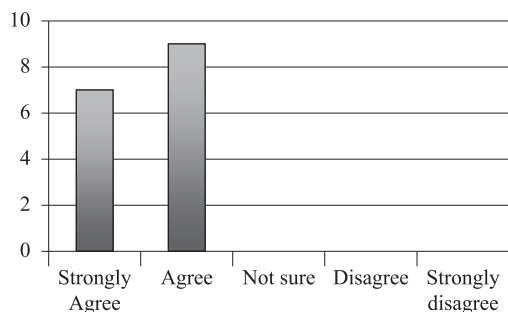
While the findings suggest that students were motivated by the pilot curriculum, particularly the Skype lessons, the nature of the data collection – face-to-face questioning of students by an authority figure – calls into question the amount of weight we can give to the results, particularly in light of the post-spring survey results. Further investigation of student motivation using more neutral research methods is warranted.

### **Post-Spring Survey Results**

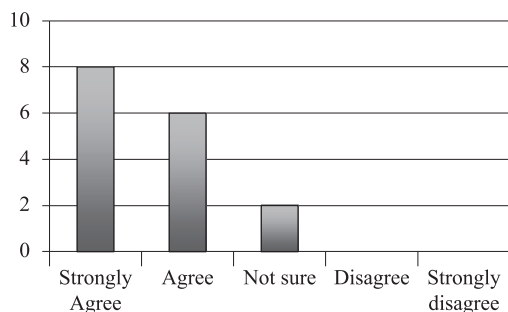
Student feedback was also collected during Fall semester. Seventeen students responded to open-ended questions regarding the class while sixteen students answered background information on both their Internet use, at home and in school, as well as their previous experience with

English, and scaled questions regarding their attitudes towards the classes.

First, student attitudes toward the Skype portion of the class were positive in terms of class efficacy (Q 1 and Q 4).<sup>1</sup>



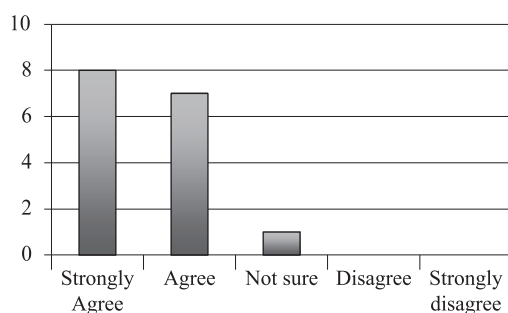
**Q 1 I think Skype is useful to my English learning.**



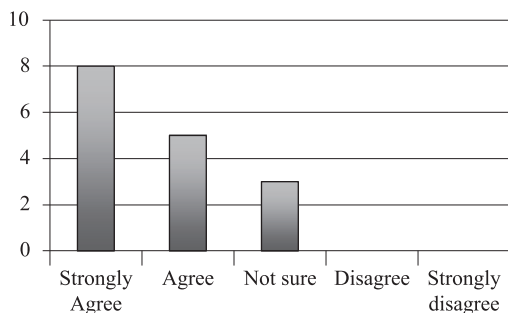
**Q 4 I spoke in English more during Skype lessons than regular lessons.**

Likewise to the open-ended question “Do you think online Skype lessons help you improve your spoken English? Why or why not?”, eight students answered positively; two others answered that time spent talking in English was very important for them. The remaining seven students responded somewhat ambiguously, ranging from “maybe yes,” “a little” to “I can’t say that exactly.” Reasons why included: class being the only time they could speak English, gaining experience discussing situations in English, being able to respond quickly in conversation, enjoying conversing in English, learning what to say in a given situation, and receiving grammar corrections from their instructor. The negative comments said the classes were not helpful because of an individual lack of effort on their own part, while another was of the opinion that one-on-one lessons were necessary for meaningful improvement.

Responses regarding class enjoyment were again very positive, both in terms of the small-group setup and conducting the classes online.



**Q 3 I like studying English in a small group (4~5 students).**

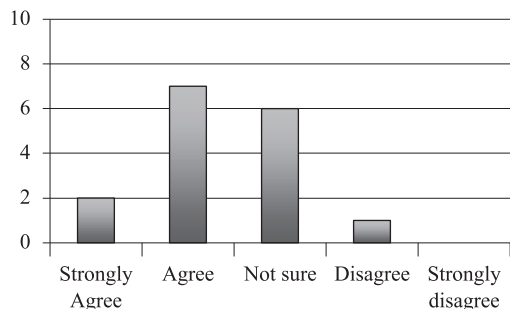


**Q 5 I enjoyed doing online Skype lessons more than regular lessons.**

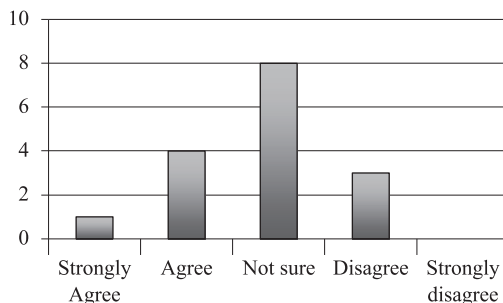
In response to “Do you enjoy using Skype in class? Why or why not?” all seventeen students responded positively and listed reasons. Reasons included being able to speak with a foreigner or native speaker, how nice and/or funny their instructor was, personalized chatting at the beginning of every lesson, how their instructor made the textbook interesting, students’ acknowledgement of their increasing ability to converse in English, and how few other chances

there are to speak with a native speaker. For the open-ended question “What do you think about talking to your teacher with Skype?” adjectives used included “nice,” “fun,” “good,” “wonderful” and “enjoying.” Another student noted that although they were nervous at the beginning, they could now have fun talking with the instructor.

Despite the overall enjoyment, confidence in studying with a Skype instructor was not particularly high, most likely due to lack of confidence in their English ability as reflected in responses to question 2. Relatedly, perceived difficulty learning English via Skype was, over the whole class, fairly neutral, as can be seen in the responses to question 7.



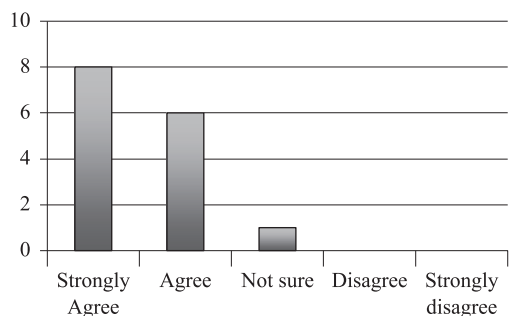
**Q 2 I feel confident communicating with my English teacher on Skype.**



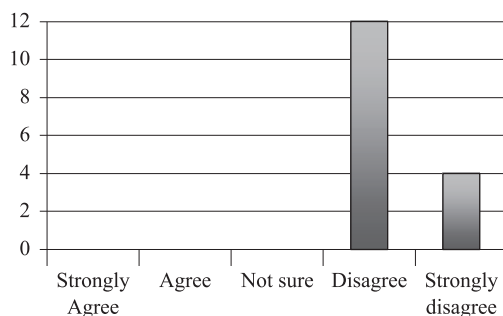
**Q 7 It is difficult for me to learn English via Skype.**

To the question “Is using Skype difficult for you? Why or why not?” ten students answered it was. Open-ended comments included confusion caused by not being able to hear the instructor’s voice well due to poor sound quality, not being able to understand what the instructor said, not being able to answer a question, not being able to keep up with the instructor’s rate of speech, having difficulty forming thoughts in English, and translating from Japanese into English during the lesson. One student wrote that the class became increasingly easier thanks to the instructor. Other students wrote that the class was not difficult due to previous extensive use of Skype outside of class, instructors using slow and easy to understand English, and instructor kindness. Finally, one student remarked using Skype lessons was not difficult but the homework for all three components of the course required a significant time investment.

The overall positive trend towards the Skype portion of the classes carried through to future possible use (questions 6 & 8).



**Q 6 I want to continue learning English with Skype lessons in the future.**

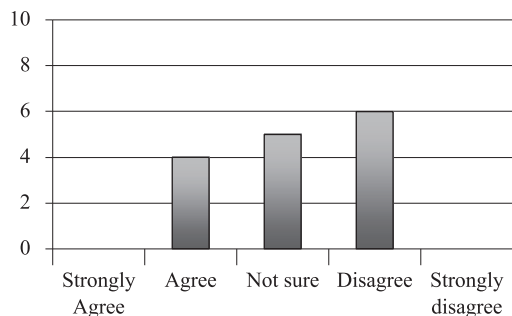


**Q 8 We should not learn English via Skype in university classes.**



In response to “Would you like to continue using online Skype lessons in English classes?” all students replied affirmatively, with one “Yes. Of course!” Reasons given included steady improvement of their English ability, Skype lessons being very fun, and having time to speak English with their instructor.

Interestingly, the same did not extend to other foreign language classes (question 9).



**Q 9 We should learn all languages via Skype in university classes.**

Since we did not ask students why this was, nor did any of them mention it on the questionnaires, one can only wonder if it reflects a lack of perceived need to be proficient in other foreign languages.

Finally, responses to “What suggestions do you have to improve online Skype lessons in the future?” included, predictably, improving the Internet connection and decreasing the number of students in each group. Other suggestions included increasing the Skype lesson time, having lessons with students from other departments, and studying vocabulary in the Skype lesson. And while the response was given to a different question, two students would prefer more time talking.

### Student Evaluation

The above survey results paint a very positive picture of the semester’s experience. However, student evaluations are telling in a different way.

The same evaluation formula was used for both classes: Reading component 20%, Writing component 20%, Skype component 20%, final in-class Writing examination 20%, and adjusted end-of-semester TOEFL ITP Total score 20%. The same grade was given for both classes due to the overlapping Skype and ITP components, with the exceptions discussed below. Figure 1 shows Spring semester scores for the class by grading component, in increasing order of the total score.

Students 1 and 2 received a failing grade for one of the pair of courses due to excessive absences during the Reading component (7 of 15 classes each) and failure to submit homework. However, as they attended most Skype and Writing sessions, they were given credit for the course containing the Writing component. Student 3 also received zero points for Reading for the same reason, but this student’s other section scores were high enough to reach the 60 points required for credit for both courses. Including those three cases, the grades for this group are

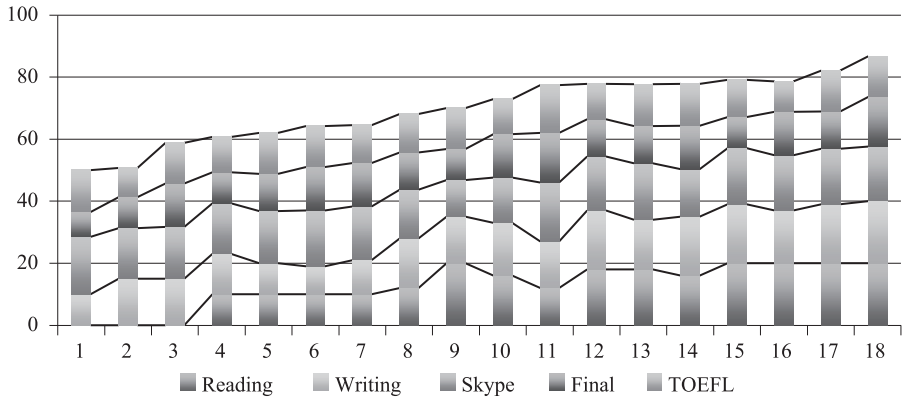


Figure 1 Student scores by component, in increasing order of total score.

fairly typical for GenEd EFL classes, with an average of a low “B”.

In addition to classroom evaluations, GenEd EFL classes at the university are given three TOEFL ITP tests a year: an initial streaming test and evaluations at the end of both semesters. Figures 2 and 3 show changes in students’ scores by section and total score, for the 16 students who took both the streaming and Spring semester ITP. The ordinal number of the students is the same for both figures, although different from the order in Figure 1.

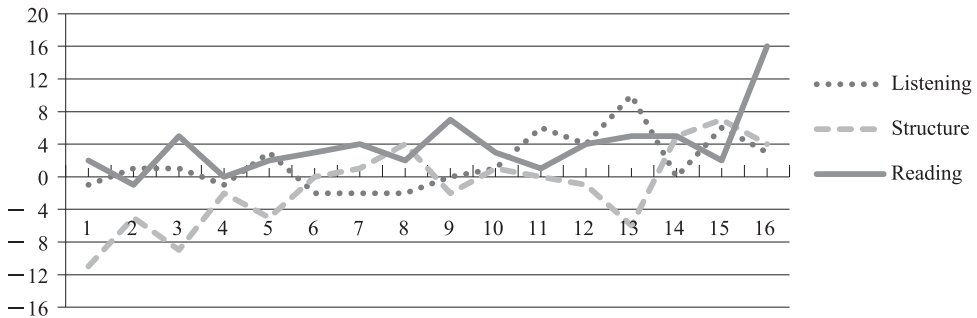


Figure 2 Student ITP score change over Spring semester, by test section

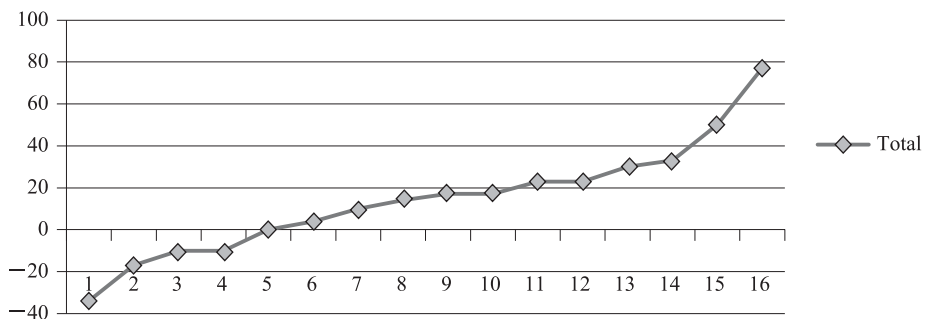


Figure 3 Student ITP Total score change over Spring semester

The average improvement in scores for this group of students is overall positive, as in Table 1. Averages are given for all 16 students and when discounting the highest and lowest changes in

Total score ( $N = 14$  students), for reasons discussed below. The Standard Error of Measurement (SEM)<sup>2</sup> for each section and the total score are given at the bottom of the table.

**Table 1 Average ITP score change for the class, by section and Total score.**

<i>N</i>	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Total</b>
16	1.7	-1.2	3.8	14.2
14	1.8	-0.9	3.0	13.1
<b>SEM</b>	<i>2.04</i>	<i>2.51</i>	<i>2.28</i>	<i>13.0</i>

For the class as a whole, there was improvement in both Reading and Total above the SEM, although less so for the central 14 students. Neither the Listening or Structure averages were significant, although Listening increases trend positive and Structure negative.

A strong word of caution at interpreting the above changes is warranted. The largest gain by far among the 16 students was a 77-point increase in total ITP score for Student 16 (far right of figures 2 and 3). The student's Listening and Structure scores increased 3 and 4 points, respectively, both above the SEM range. However, the impressive increase in Total score was primarily due to an increase in the Reading section—from a very low 33 (2 points above minimum) to a very respectable 49 points. Armed with the knowledge that this student did not receive credit for the Reading component course due to excessive absences and lack of homework submission makes it much less so. Rather than a solid increase in reading ability, realization that credit would not be forthcoming for class performance prompted the student to do their best on the ITP component. There seems to have been only an increase in motivation to avoid a negative outcome.

Student 1 at the left of the figures also gives a misleading impression. This student also was not given credit for the Reading component class. While this student showed significant decreases in both Structure and Total score, the student's class work in Reading when in class was impressive—they were one of the first to finish quizzes and consistently scored well. The student's English reading ability is not at all reflected in the ITP scores.

Finally, two other students, both of whose Total scores coincidentally decreased 10 points (students 3 and 4 above), were among the better students in the Reading class. It is clear from classroom observation that the use of TOEFL on its own to judge students' abilities, progress, or motivation is not only not warranted, it would be misguided. Additional measures need to be found for judging both students' progress and the efficacy of the curriculum.

## Discussion

The aims of the pilot course are ambitious for general education. As noted above, the pilot course was modeled on the curriculum developed for the English Language Program in the Faculty of International Studies, and was not specially developed for the GenEd program. Though similar ranges of TOEFL scores were used in student selection for classes in both

programs, the populations differ in at least two significant ways related to motivation: students self-select in applying for the International Studies major and therefore it can be expected that they are already developing a “global imagination” (Rizvi 2000) to some extent upon enrollment, and the Faculty of International Studies has successfully cultivated an international-oriented culture of English which further nurtures and sustains students’ aspirations to be active participants in a global community. It could be hypothesized further that students in the Faculty of International Studies come to university with greater privilege regarding English-language learning and perhaps even international living or travel experience that contributes to their motivation for continued English-language study. This cannot be said of the general education population. Students in the GenEd curriculum come from diverse departments with diverse intentions, which may or may not include English-language study. As such, motivation is a substantially different project in general education English classes. Absences, lack of completed homework, and perhaps feelings of being overwhelmed by the curriculum itself slowed the pace and overall progress of both the reading and writing components. The Skype component was not immune to this either, and though students unanimously voiced enthusiasm to continue with the curriculum the following year as reported in the survey results above, Skype instructors noted toward the end of spring semester that student absences, lack of completed homework, and forgotten textbooks were problems. In addition, the general comments of Skype teachers remarked on student participation in the following way: “Some of our students attending the class are a bit tired because of their homework given by their professors, some also have club activities. Another reason is also their part-time jobs. Though tired in class, most of them are eager to participate.” Thus, even though students affirmed enthusiasm for continuation of Skype lessons, their behavior did not always demonstrate their commitment.

On a separate matter, the pilot curriculum lacked cohesion. Three components with separate textbooks taught by distinct instructors functioned as three separate courses. For students, this resulted in more homework than in non-pilot courses taken by peers. For instructors, especially in reading and writing where the curriculum was dense and demanding, it was challenging to adequately teach the material in one 45-minute meeting per week. And while the reading and writing instructors did reference the other component regularly, there was a lack of integration. One way to resolve this issue would be to select a single textbook for all three components of the curriculum. This would provide continuity and cohesion across the curriculum, and promote deeper learning for students who could develop the capacity to utilize similar content in a variety of ways from reading about a particular topic, discussing it in their Skype lessons, and subsequently summarizing or developing an extended essay about the topic. One textbook would also consolidate homework assignments and because students would be drawing on the same content in different ways, it is likely the homework would not seem as overwhelming. In addition to having a single textbook, consolidating the teaching faculty in the curriculum is desired. One instructor for the reading and writing components instead of two would allow the teacher to teach the curriculum with greater flexibility to spend added time on a difficult point or emphasizing particular tasks. Organizing the schedule of many part-time instructors in a large general

education program, who typically work one day each at several institutions, however, is very challenging. Even in cases where reading and writing components can be taught by a single instructor, it would be an added benefit to develop ways in which all instructors, including Skype instructors, can exchange information about the curriculum and student progress. Using a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Moodle could be one way of bridging the course components, instructors and students in a variety of ways.

In addition to consolidating the course materials and instructors, delivery of the curriculum across the three components needs to be explored. Skype lessons and the reading and writing components were conducted using very different instructional methods. Skype lessons were innovative and attractive to students in large part because of the use of technology. In contrast, reading and writing components were traditional in delivery with textbooks, paper, and chalkboard. The reading and writing components, however, could be easily enhanced by utilizing computer and web-based audio-visual materials to boost the appeal and motivation of students toward these components as well. Some possibilities could include using online lectures, reading newspapers online, developing research skills using electronic library and databases searching, and word processing for writing. There are even possibilities to bring synchronous methods into writing for example by doing synchronous editing using Google Docs, for example (Tucker n.d.). Balancing curriculum delivery across the components by drawing on SCMI may also boost student motivation overall.

Increasing overall motivation is an important consideration as we noted that motivation from Skype lessons did not carry over to either the reading or writing classes. This could be due to discrepancy between what Dornyei calls the “ideal L2 self” and the “ought-to L2 self.” In the case of the “ideal L2 self,” Dornyei (2009: 29) writes, “if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ‘ideal L2 self’ is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves.” Skype lessons were more in line with students’ “ideal L2 self” and hence, motivated students to engage in conversations with their instructors. The “ought-to L2 self,” on the other hand, “concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes” (Dornyei 2009: 29). Students were less likely to see themselves as readers and writers of English, and while many did the tasks required there was often a lack of motivation and enthusiasm and further, there were several who repeatedly underperformed. Further evidence of the presence of students’ “ideal L2 self, and “ought-to L2 self” can be drawn from free writing the students did on their expectations of using English in their future careers. With the exception of one student who did not think she would need to use English in a future career at all, other students noted either an expectation or desire to “speak English” or “communicate with foreigners in English.” Not one mentioned reading or writing skills as desirable or necessary.

## **Future Considerations / Directions**

In addition to the issues discussed above, there are other questions that emerged during pilot

curriculum implementation that need to be resolved.

First and foremost, any future courses involving academic English need to take into consideration the needs and abilities of the general student population. Departments place different emphasis on academic English. This extends to the amount of homework assigned, homework competing for time and energy with homework for courses given more weight such as those required for teaching and counseling licenses. The development of a university-wide academic EFL curriculum and the necessary accompanying culture of English will require communication between the department faculty and program administrators, and flexibility in implementing it across departments and faculties. In particular, if a Skype component is pursued, extending it to the general student population will necessitate a substantial commitment on the part of the university in terms of labor costs of instructors and assistants and equipment purchase and support.

Also to be considered are the level of students participating in an academically oriented curriculum and the method used to evaluate the curriculum itself. For example, higher-level students will gain the most benefit from directed essay writing, and so forth, so limiting the courses to those students will make the program appear effective. However, it is arguably the lower-level students—particularly those who have trouble communicating in their native language—who need the most help and so should be targeted. All of these issues will hopefully be addressed in pilot courses run during the 2014 academic year.

### Notes

- 1 Q1 etc. refer to scaled questions regarding Skype use in class. Open-ended question responses are reported after each scaled question. Not all students responded to all questions.
- 2 The SEM for each section is as follows: Listening 2.04, Structure and Written Expression, 2.51, Reading 2.28 (Tannenbaum & Baron 2011), Total 13.0.

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