

Leveraging Technology in the General Education EFL Classroom (大学共通科目におけるEFL教育へのテクノロジーの応用)

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I. Introduction

From multi-media rich textbook web sites to e-Learning systems focusing on administrator needs, technological advancements over the last decade have provided both foreign language instructors and program administrators a wealth of opportunity for increasing the efficacy of their classes and programs. In particular, e-Learning systems allow centralized access to materials that facilitate blended learning: classroom activities supported and supplemented by online materials. In addition, video chat services such as Skype hold great promise for live conversation with native-language foreign language instructors or tutors. (Witness the development of “Skype in the classroom” service at <https://education.skype.com> and the recent explosion of Skype lessons advertised on the Internet.) These components can be combined to allow synchronous small-group instruction in class supported by media-rich online material, thereby increasing both language exposure time and student motivation.

To investigate the implementation of these technologies in the General Education EFL classroom, the Foreign Language Education Reform Working Group (WG) of the Meiji Gakuin’s General Planning and Development Office and the Center for Liberal Arts undertook a pilot course in Academic Year 2014, bringing Skype into the General Education EFL classroom proper. Students from seven academic departments and eleven instructors participated. Roughly half of each class was spent studying academic English Listening and Speaking with a Philippine instructor contracted by Waku Work English, and the other half spent with a Meiji Gakuin instructor studying academic Reading and Writing. In addition, the textbooks’ media-rich Online Workbooks were used to supplement class activities, and a Moodle was installed on a university server to facilitate communication within and between instructors and students.

2. Project Aim

The aim of this project was to support instructors during the implementation of this technologically-rich General Education EFL course at the university. To improve overall instructor and student satisfaction with the pilot course, training sessions and round-table workshops were held to prepare and support instructors during the implementation of the course, and to solicit their comments upon its completion.

3. Project Activities

3.1 Instructor training sessions

In preparation for Spring Semester, two training workshops were held for the pilot course instructors. The first was held on February 24, 2014. At this workshop pilot course instructors

were introduced to the pilot course textbook *Unlock*, a new academic English-focused series from Cambridge University Press. Effective text use and classroom management issues were then discussed. On March 20, 2014 a second day of workshops was held. First, representatives from Canon IT Solutions introduced the Moodle system to the instructors, and fielded questions on its use. Next, Gavin Dudeney, a teacher trainer affiliated with Cambridge University Press, gave a presentation covering both motivation for and methods of teaching academic English. Pilot course instructors then met for a one-hour workshop where details on the pilot curriculum and class management were discussed.

3.2 Spring Semester Round-table Workshop

At the beginning of July, pilot instructors were sent a questionnaire soliciting opinions about Spring Semester pilot classes. These were submitted to the program coordinator for compilation. On July 23, 2014, ten of the eleven pilot instructors gathered for a 3-hour round-table workshop to present their opinions and experiences and exchange views with the other instructors. Nine of the instructors then gathered at a local area restaurant for further comment and discussion. A compilation of the instructors' opinions and suggestions was forwarded to the WG.

3.3 Conference Presentations

On August 5, 2014 Professor Varden gave a presentation entitled "Leveraging Technology in the GenEd EFL Classroom" at the 54th Annual All-Japan Conference of the Japan Association for Language Education and Technology (外国語教育メディア学会の第54回全国研究大会). The presentation focused on the technology used in the program, introducing the Skype lesson component and the use of Moodle for communication between instructor and student groups. Approximately 15 members of the associations attended the presentation. In addition, on November 24, 2014 Professor Grimes-MacLellan gave a presentation entitled "Multiple Voices on Skype in the EFL Classroom" at the 40th Annual International Conference of the Japan Association For Language Teaching (第40回全国語学教育学会年次国際大会). The presentation discussed the implementation of a pilot project to enhance student opportunities for language learning through Skype video chat in a university EFL General Education Program. In particular, it explored the perceptions and attitudes toward Skype lessons of various project stakeholders including teachers, students and program administrators.

3.4 Fall semester Round-table Workshop

As a final wrap-up to the pilot program and the project's activities, pilot course instructors

gathered for a final Round-table workshop on January 30, 2015, to discuss Fall semester. The round table was followed by a presentation by Professor William Snyder of the Kanda University of International Studies Graduate TESOL MA program, who spoke on instructor-student interaction in the classroom. Following the presentation, workshop attendees retired to a local area restaurant for further discussion.

3.5 Project summary article

A summary of the pilot program will be published in the Institute for Liberal Arts' journal *Karuchuru*. The paper will include discussion of the reasons for the pilot program's initiation and preliminary results from Spring semester, as well as general comments on the efficacy of the mixed component course format. In addition, a fuller description of the pilot program experience was forwarded to the WG.