An Effective Use of Online Task in Face-to-face Teaching of English

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Abstract

This paper is based on a presentation I gave at the 2023 JACET International Conference. Highlighting the social importance of fostering IT literacy and English communicative competence, the study explores a hybrid teaching model in first-year university English classes. Central to the research is the integration of online tasks during face-to-face sessions. This hybrid approach actively engages students, allowing tailored instruction to individual needs. The study examines the potential of finely tuned face-to-face teaching.

The paper also reflects on the JACET conference, gathering valuable advice I received from the participants. Positive feedback on the presentation I received suggests the feasibility of creating a class that gives individual attention to students and uses online tasks effectively. Furthermore, the classroom tasks I implemented reflect a trend observed at the conference, where publishers develop similar online tasks as supplementary materials.

The paper details an innovative approach in English language education, a hybrid class that incorporates online tasks. Insights from JACET underscore the potential and hint at promising future possibilities in shaping English language education during the post–COVID era.

Keyword: hybrid class, online task, CALL, remedial education

Introduction

This paper summarizes the contents of a poster presentation given at the 2023 JACET International Conference. The presentation received feedback and advice from various educators, and their input has been incorporated in this paper to further enhance the discussion.

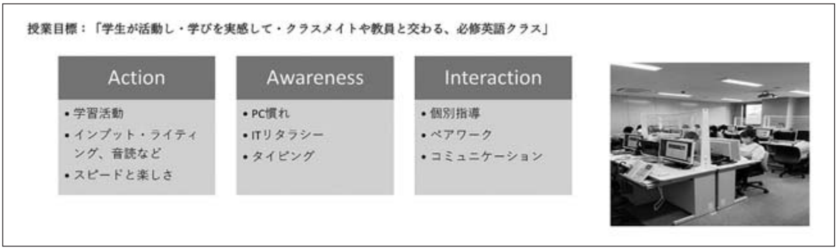
In a post-COVID educational environment, the development of students' information technology (IT) literacy and English communicative competence is necessary for society (Hayashi, 2023a). This paper reports on a practical study of hybrid style first-year compulsory English language classes at Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University, a private university in southern Japan, using online tasks during face-to-face classes. Drawing on the experience of online teaching during COVID, it explores a style of delivery in which students are actively involved and teachers attend closely to each individual student. To state differently, this study examines face-to-face teaching that is more attuned to the learning of individual students.

Subjects

Different online platforms are used by different schools, but this study used Google Classroom, which has been used at Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University since the outbreak of COVID. The target students were approximately 160 students belonging to the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Human Relations. The students were non-English majors and the study was conducted during the academic year in 2023.

Classes of about 20 students were organized into five levels according to the results of a pre-sessional proficiency test. I taught the elementary and intermediate levels in each department. This study is currently in its second year. According to my previous research (Hayashi, 2019), the subject students are quiet, slow in ability, and lack confidence in learning English. Based on these learner characteristics, the study established some concrete learning objectives. The following is an excerpt from the poster presentation (see Appendix A), showing and explaining the teacher's challenges.

Objectives



授業目標：「学生が活動し・学びを実感して・クラスメイトや教員と交わる、必修英語クラス」

Action

- 学習活動
- インプット・ライティング、音読など
- スピードと楽しさ

Awareness

- PC慣れ
- ITリタラシー
- タイピング

Interaction

- 個別指導
- ペアワーク
- コミュニケーション

Excerpt 1. Class Objectives

The slogan of the class is “Action, Awareness & Interaction,” where students can focus on their work, as well as experience the joy of communicating and interacting amongst themselves. Therefore, the following three specific goals, Action, Awareness, and Interaction, for the class were set (see Excerpt 1). The following explains each goal.

1. Action:

Action means learner participation. According to a Quick Task case study I did (2019), when engaging in activities, those requiring speed lessen learner anxiety and create the joy of using English. The study verified the effect of using speedy exercises, where students engage in short writing fluency tasks without worrying much about accuracy. I, therefore, assumed that this hybrid style classroom must include tasks that vary in speed, and by doing so, enable students to be more active in learning.

Based on a case study done by Hayashi (2023a), it was found that some students mentioned that they are motivated when they sense they are learning from the evaluation and feedback they get. Google classroom displays the percentage of work completed on the learner’s screen. By making some of these assessments explicit, students can monitor their progress in learning and get a sense of how they are responding to learning.

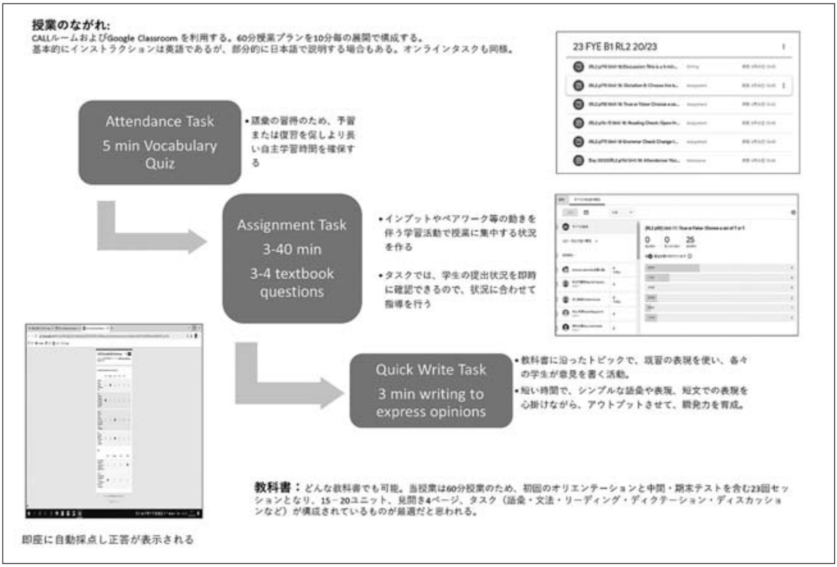
2. Awareness:

To familiarize students with PCs and to introduce them to IT literacy, I used a CALL room. To manage the classes quickly and efficiently, the ability to use Wi-Fi and operate PCs with ease is important. When evaluating classes, many students stated that using PC in the classroom is enjoyable, and expressed the need to practice typing as they found it more difficult than expected (Hayashi, 2023a). Furthermore, the university where the study was conducted encourages individual students to have a PC at their disposal, however at present not all students in all faculties have their own computer. Using a CALL classroom can meet these practical needs.

3. Interaction:

I considered the value behind a teaching style where teachers circulate around the class, talk to students, and read aloud together. For students in lower proficiency classes, there are situations where they write incorrect answers in their textbooks, even though teachers give the answers orally or even write them on the board. Online tasks help reduce such problems. Teachers can check students' answers and send back the correct answers. In addition, while students are doing the online task, teachers can circulate around the class, offering desk-to-desk supervisions to point out mistakes and offer explanations. Similarly, online tasks enable a variety of other exercises. The practice of reading English aloud is another activity necessary for students at this level.

Teaching design



授業のながれ:
CALLルームおよびGoogle Classroom を利用する。60分授業プランを10分毎の展開で構成する。
基本的にインストラクションは英語であるが、部分的に日本語で説明する場合もある。オンラインタスクも同様。

Attendance Task
5 min Vocabulary Quiz

- 語彙の習得のため、予習または復習を促しより長い自主学習時間を確保する

Assignment Task
3-40 min
3-4 textbook questions

- インプットやペアワーク等の動きを伴う学習活動で授業に集中する状況を作る
- タスクでは、学生の提出状況を即時に確認できるので、状況に合わせて指導を行う

Quick Write Task
3 min writing to express opinions

- 教科書に沿ったトピックで、既習の表現を使い、各々の学生が意見を書く活動。
- 短い時間で、シンプルな語彙や表現、短文での表現を心掛けながら、アウトプットさせて、瞬発力を育成。

教科書：どんな教科書でも可能。当授業は60分授業のため、初回のオリエンテーションと中間・期末テストを含む23回セッションとなり、15－20ユニット、見開き4ページ、タスク（語彙・文法・リーディング・ディクテーション・ディスカッションなど）が構成されているものが最適だと思われる。

即座に自動採点し正答が表示される

Excerpt 2. Flow of lessons

Basically, the instruction should be given in English, but some parts may be explained in Japanese. The same applies to online tasks. A 60-minute lesson plan was divided into three parts, namely Attendance Task, Assignment Task, and Quick Write Task. As the snapshot of the PC screen on the upper right hand corner of the poster shows (see Excerpt 2), approximately every 10 minute an online task is sent to students using Google Classroom. The title of each online task includes textbook information such as the unit number and the page from the book. The six separate tasks that are sent to each student convey the learning objective of the class. The information conveyed bridges the online tasks and the textbook, and it also allows students to review course material efficiently and prepare for classes.

1. Attendance Task:

The first online task delivers a small vocabulary quiz, which usually includes 5 questions. A matching style question is used and it usually takes 5 minutes to complete. This task promotes understanding of the vocabulary that appears during the class following the quiz. In addition, for students, this simple task is easy to get full marks. Therefore, students who want to score well will always come prepared. The more often they prepare, the longer their own study time outside classroom hours is going to be.

2. Assignment Task:

The assignment task, which is the second major task in the lesson, consists of several different activities based on textbook questions. I varied the delivery speed, question patterns and exercise formats, such as pair work, to make the tasks both tense and fun. Pair work should always give students time to think for themselves first. If the time given is too short, students may copy the answers from those who are better at English. I need to adjust the length according to how students are doing and gradually shorten the time over sessions to help develop their ability to think more independently and intuitively.

An example of a tension-building exercise is one where they have to work on their own and commit sentences into their short-term memory. During shorter conversation practice in pairs, they need to remember the target dialogue in a minute and say their part without looking at the textbook. Some may be appointed to present it to the entire class.

3. Quick Write Task:

Writing tasks can be more effective if there's a time limit. Depending on the amount of time left, students spend 3-5 minutes writing about the lesson's topic towards the end of class. They need to write 3-5 sentences. The more sentences they can write the more points they can get. They cannot use a dictionary, review the textbook, or simply copy what they have prepared. Students who have prepared can type their works, submit them, and leave the class. Some students who need time should stay longer. Slower students are advised to prepare and remember what they want to write beforehand.

To run classes quickly and efficiently, methods for swift grading are used. Spelling errors or minor grammatical mistakes are generally not penalized as long as what they write is intelligible. Students are encouraged to make sentences with words they know. They can use vocabularies they used and learned during class that day.

Variety of Online Tasks and Textbook

Multiple Choice task:

Multiple choice questions are primarily used for grammar and reading comprehension questions. When setting tasks, instructors need to consider how detailed the feedback should be, such as whether to include translations, or whether to explain orally. For text-based questions, instructors should use simple expressions wherever possible. I explained complex contents verbally. The students' answers are immediately and automatically graded and, if there are any errors, correct answers are displayed along with prepared feedback or explanations.

Matching task:

This is mainly used for vocabulary, grammar, and conversation questions. A matching style vocabulary question varies according to the level of students. For example, in lower level classes, students match English words with their meanings in Japanese. In upper levels, they match English words with their meanings in English or complete an English sentence with a blank space. This single blank English text is also used for learning parts of speech, prepositions and other grammatical structures. When learning communication patterns such as giving directions, students need to put individual sentences in order and form a coherent dialogue, or rearrange sentences to create a story or cooking recipe. The questions are automatically and immediately graded when students complete the submission. This is an effective format to save classroom time.

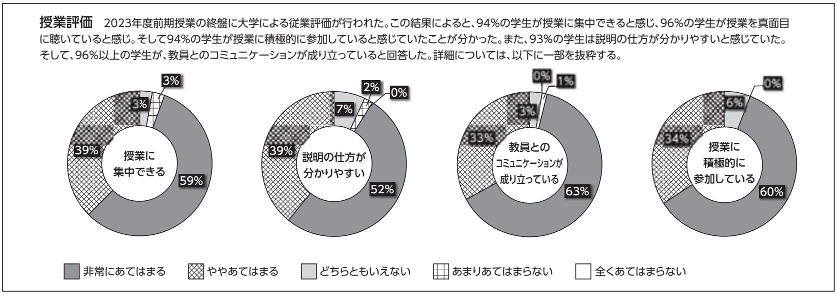
Input task:

This format is used not only for English compositions but also for dictations, which involves responses using alphabets, numbers, vocabularies, or sentences, also with time limits up to 3-5 minutes. As mentioned earlier, lower proficiency students sometimes write incorrect answers in their textbooks despite receiving oral or written guidance from the teacher. Online tasks, which make students input their answers, help minimize these errors by allowing teachers to review and provide correct answers directly. This helps students to go through those submitted tasks online when they need to prepare for the term tests. According to the class evaluation, students commented about this advantage of using online tasks.

Textbooks:

Online tasks can be devised for any textbook. Given the requirements I need to meet at where I work, there are a number of restrictions I need to bear in mind when selecting the textbook. First, each class lasts 60 minutes. Next, the same class meets 23 times, which includes the time allocated for a few orientation sessions, the mid-term and final test. Therefore, ideally the textbook should consist of 15 units (4 pages per unit), and 5 different kinds of learning tasks (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, reading, dictation, discussion). Based on those textbook exercises, different types of online tasks are set in light of class hours, target topic and contents (grammar or vocabularies). The balance of those task types is also one of the issues to consider when grading. I allocate different points according to the tasks. For example, students get more points when completing writing tasks.

Classroom Evaluation

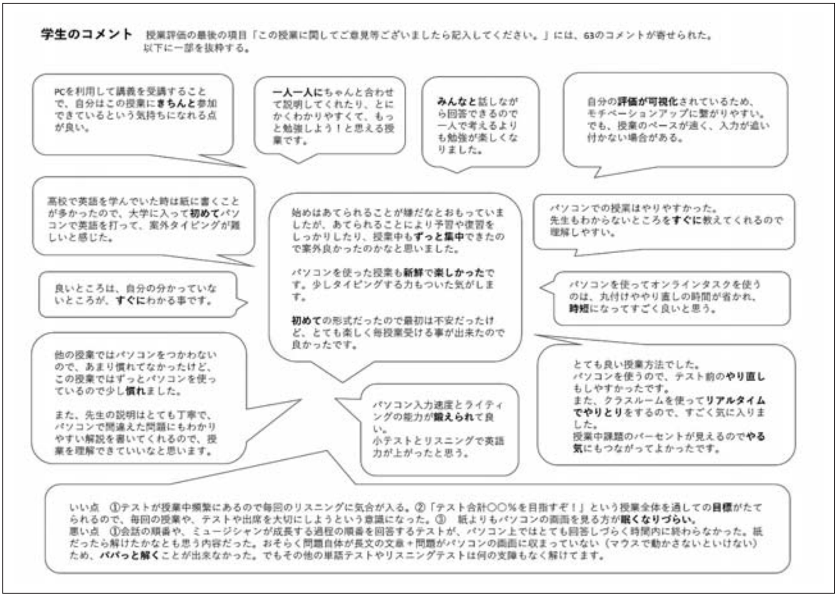


授業評価　2023年度前期授業の終盤に大学による従業評価が行われた。この結果によると、94%の学生が授業に集中できると感じ、96%の学生が授業を真面目に聴いていると感じ。そして94%の学生が授業に積極的に参加していると感じていたことが分かった。また、93%の学生は説明の仕方が分かりやすいと感じていた。そして、96%以上の学生が、教員とのコミュニケーションが成り立っていると回答した。詳細については、以下に一部を抜粋する。

Excerpt 3. Classroom Evaluation

The 2023 first semester classroom evaluations were mandated by the university to classrooms including more than 10 students. All of the eight classes I taught met this requirement. Based on the results (see Excerpt 3), it was evident that students generally focused on and actively engaged in the classes, demonstrating a positive attitude towards learning. The analysis of a portion of the results was displayed below. According to this analysis, it was found that 94% of students felt they could concentrate in class, 96% of students felt they were attentively listening in class, and 94% of students felt they actively participated in the class. In addition, 93% of students found the explanations to be clear. Furthermore, over 96% of students responded that communication with the instructors was effective.

Students' Feedback



学生のコメント 授業評価の最後の項目「この授業に関してご意見等ございましたら記入してください。」には、63のコメントが寄せられた。以下に一部を抜粋する。

PCを利用して講義を受講することで、自分はこの授業に**きちんと**参加できているという気持ちになれる点が良い。

一人一人にちゃんと合わせて説明してくれたり、とにかくわかりやすくて、もっと勉強しよう！と思える授業です。

みんなと話しながら回答できるので一人で考えるよりも勉強が楽しくなりました。

自分の**評価が可視化**されているため、モチベーションアップに繋がりやすい。でも、授業のペースが速く、入力が追い付かない場合がある。

高校で英語を学んでいた時は紙に書くことが多かったので、大学に入って**初めて**パソコンで英語を打って、案外タイピングが難しいと感じた。

良いところは、自分の分かっていないところが、**すぐに**わかる事です。

始めはあてられることが嫌だなとおもっていましたが、あてられることにより予習や復習をしっかりしたり、授業中も**ずっと集中**できたので案外良かったのかなと思いました。

パソコンを使った授業も**新鮮**で**楽しかった**です。少しタイピングする力もついた気がします。

初めての形式だったので最初は不安だったけど、とても楽しく毎授業受ける事が出来たので良かったです。

パソコンでの授業はやりやすかった。
先生もわからないところを**すぐに**教えてくれるので理解しやすい。

パソコンを使ってオンラインタスクを使うのは、丸付けややり直しの時間が省かれ、**時短**になってすごく良いと思う。

他の授業ではパソコンをつかわないので、あまり慣れてなかったけど、この授業ではずっとパソコンを使っているので少し**慣れ**ました。

また、先生の説明はとても丁寧で、パソコンで間違えた問題にもわかりやすい解説を書いてくれるので、授業を理解できていいなと思います。

パソコン入力速度とライティングの能力が**鍛えられ**て良い。
小テストとリスニングで英語力が上がったと思う。

とても良い授業方法でした。
パソコンを使うので、テスト前の**やり直し**もしやすかったです。
また、クラスルームを使って**リアルタイムでやりとり**をするので、すごく気に入りました。
授業中課題のパーセントが見えるので**やる気**にもつながってよかったです。

いい点　①テストが授業中頻繁にあるので毎回のリスニングに気合が入る。②「テスト合計〇〇%を目指すぞ！」という授業全体を通しての**目標**がたてられるので、毎回の授業や、テストや出席を大切にしようという意識になった。③　紙よりもパソコンの画面を見る方が**眠くなりづらい。**
悪い点　①会話の順番や、ミュージシャンが成長する過程の順番を回答するテストが、パソコン上ではとても回答しづらく時間内に終わらなかった。紙だったら解けたかなとも思う内容だった。おそらく問題自体が長文の文章＋問題がパソコンの画面に収まっていない（マウスで動かさないといけない）ため、**パパっと解く**ことが出来なかった。でもその他の単語テストやリスニングテストは何の支障もなく解けてます。

Excerpt 4. Student Feedback

Overall, the students' comments could be grouped into five different categories. Those comments highlighted positive aspects of the class, including the engaging nature of PC usage, the effectiveness of random questioning, and the fun and flexibility brought by computer-assisted learning.

1) Benefits of PC Usage:

Using a PC allowed students to actively participate in the class, making them feel engaged. The usage of computers in class was refreshing and interesting, providing a different experience compared to other classes.

2) Student Engagement and Growth in Class:

Although there was initially a lack of motivation at the beginning of the class, students gradually understood the class structure, improved their performance, and found the classes enjoyable. The detailed explanations I gave and clear instructions on the computer helped enhance understanding.

3) Advantages of Learning with Computers:

Students appreciated that using PCs prevented drowsiness, and the rich and wide variety of tasks helped them stay focused during the class. The use of computers and collaborative activities accelerated understanding, making the classes enjoyable.

4) Challenges and Acquisition of New Skills:

Typing in English using a computer for the first time was unexpectedly challenging for some students. Initially apprehensive about being randomly called on, students found that it led to thorough preparation and review, improving concentration during class.

5) Flexibility and Enjoyment in Learning:

The ability to immediately see answers on the computer and reviewing materials with the smartphone provided flexibility in learning. Students found the corrections made on the spot for mistakes made during class beneficial for deepening their understanding.

Summary of Classroom Evaluation and Feedback

From the results of the course evaluation, it could be said that the goal of this hybrid class, which was to "have students actively engage, experience learning, and interact with classmates and instructors in a mandatory English class," had been achieved. Many students expressed that using a PC in class was "fresh" and "enjoyable". Some comments highlighted that working on a computer prevented them from feeling sleepy during class. Regarding the pace of the class, it seemed that many students preferred being able to quickly understand the mistakes they made or receive direct instruction from the instructor in "real–time." There were also comments appreciating the "familiarity" with computers and speed, with students mentioning that they found the use of technology beneficial and that it made "preparation" and "review" easier.

Several students mentioned that being aware of the progress they were making with their assignments was a motivating factor. On the other hand, some students, possibly due to a difficulty in English, noted a lack of experience in being "called upon by the teacher" to answer questions in class. They mentioned that being prompted to provide answers by the instructor led them to prepare in advance, eliminating feelings of drowsiness and producing positive effects.

Comments related to "pair work" indicated that it helped increase the number of acquaintances and helped create the opportunity to make friends. In summary, this teaching style, combining in–person classes with online tasks, generally expanded the variety and possibilities of tasks within the class, and could lead to higher educational effectiveness by paying attention to individual students.

Educators' Feedback

As mentioned earlier, I presented a poster at the 2023 JACET International Conference as a member of the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) research group of Kyushu Okinawa. During the three days of exhibition and the individual presentation on the final day, I received valuable advice and opinions from many educators, gaining insights into the direction of future research.

One of the questions raised was how this content could be conceived as part of ESP research. One response would be to construe the ESP field broadly, including mandatory English courses targeting students who are not English majors or providing English remedial education. In fact, I received compliments from several teachers, saying it was the first time they had heard of such a thoughtful class. Some even expressed that the ability to pay individual attention to each student seems achievable through team teaching with online tasks.

The author received advice from Professor Tajibo, renowned for "*Imi-Jun* English Composition," who suggested that the teaching style of incorporating online tasks in face-to-face classes could be considered original. He recommended broadening the presentation scope, providing insightful and encouraging feedback. Additionally, I learned that his upcoming textbook, scheduled for release this year, will include Google Classroom online tasks as one of its supplementary materials. As a matter of fact, various publishers are developing online tasks as supplementary materials for textbooks. These tasks on the whole are extension materials to be used outside of class rather than for in−class instruction. However, it is interesting to study the functionalities of these online tasks developed in Japan and explore the potential ways to incorporate them into classroom instruction. These supplementary tasks are suggestive of the potential of online tasks and indicative of future possibilities.

Final thought

In this final section, I would like to reflect upon the challenges and issues this study raised. Several noteworthy comments were included in the feedback from this course evaluation. One concerned the issue of voice. Some students perceived the teacher's voice as "loud" and found it uncomfortable. On the other hand, I felt that students were not very enthusiastic in voicing out during reading aloud activities, and their voices were also perceived as very soft. While the impact of COVID might be a factor, the fundamental aspect of English communication lies in oral transmission. I felt that there might be a need for creative measures to facilitate clear and audible communication.

To help achieve this purpose, the selection of textbooks is crucial. With a focus on communicative materials covering a wide range of topics that are inherently interesting to students, I aim to research and identify the optimal materials for hybrid classes in general. One of the issues related to textbooks is the availability of books with answers written being sold at low prices on platforms like social media. In fact, I saw students with these textbooks in class this semester.

In various situations, teachers need to think flexibly and creatively to provide the best learning experience for their students. While there are numerous challenges, the goal is to diligently practice English education tailored to the students in front of us, supporting them and making English a more familiar and enjoyable learning experience.

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Appendix A. Poster

JACET九州・沖縄支部 ESP研究会
ESP Kyushu-Okinawa Chapter
SIG at JACET 62nd International Convention (Tokyo, 2023)

大学初年次必修英語のハイブリッド授業
動いて、実感して、交わる、必修英語クラスの実践研究
林　千晶　福岡女学院大学

はじめに

Action
学習活動
インプット・ライティング、音読など
スピードと楽しさ
Awareness
PC慣れ
タイピング
Interaction
個別指導
ペアワーク
コミュニケーション
授業のながれ
Attendance Task
5 min Vocabulary Quiz
Assignment Task
3-40 min
3-4 textbook questions
Quick Write Task
3 min writing to express opinions
教科書
授業評価
学生のコメント
まとめ
今後の課題