

Final Report

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1. Title: Improving students' English ability through communicative language teaching

2. Context:

- (1) Information about the class: 1-1 Class (5 boys and 14 girls)
- (2) Subject: English (4 lessons a week, 50 minutes for each class)
- (3) Textbook: New Horizon English Course 1 (TOKYO SHOSEKI)
- (4) Level of the students: Elementary
- (5) Problem:

The student had different levels of exposure to English when they were in elementary schools. Although only a few students learned to write alphabets before junior high school, many of them already know some simple English words and can listen to them well. However, they are not yet use to speaking, reading or writing English as much.

3. Goal: The goal of the class is to help students improve their English ability through communicative language teaching.

4. What I did:

To achieve the goal, I did five things.

1) Instead of directly going to the textbook, I provided the students with structured input and output activities. I tried to make input comprehensible for the students, mainly by using familiar topics and visuals. I tried to place equal emphasis on listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities.

2) Only after input and output activities, I moved onto the textbook. I usually asked the students to read a page in the textbook at home. They then copied the page onto their pink notebooks and wrote translations as much as they could. During a lesson, I spent only a few minutes to check translations. When time allows, I spent a few more minutes to do "repeat, look up, write down."

3) The students spent first five minutes of lessons on timed-conversations. They each picked up two question cards and talked in pairs for a minute. They usually rotated a few times changing their partners.

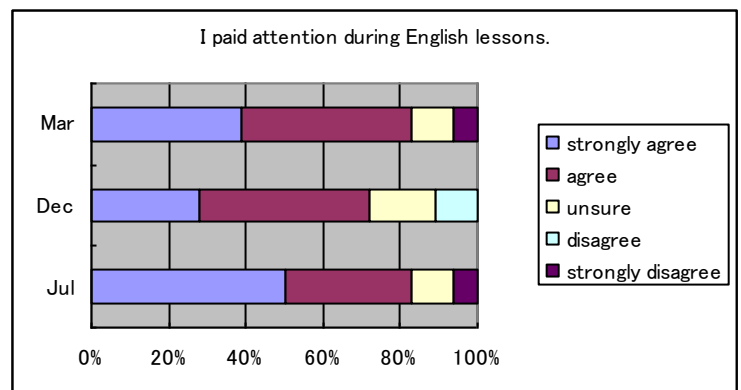
4) I have also worked on changing assessment. I gave the students

speaking tests and included the results into their grades. Since they did many speaking activities in class, it is neither fair nor motivating to assess them only on written term tests. I made rubrics for speaking tests and gave them to the students beforehand. They and I evaluated their performance based on the same rubric. They listened to IC recorders, and I watched their videos.

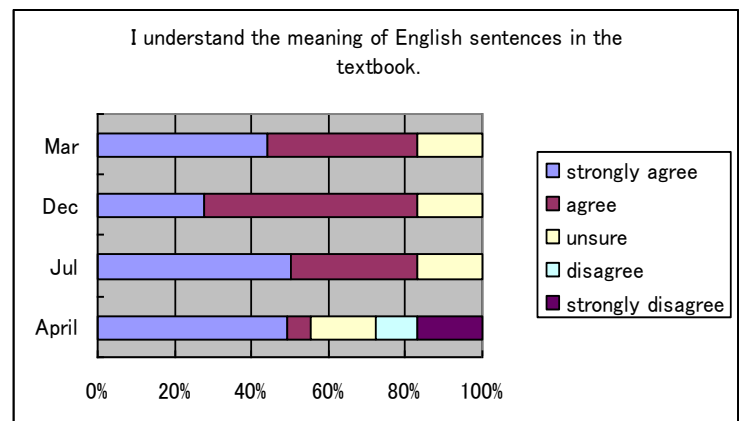
5) As part of changing assessment, I decided to include their writing works into their grades, too. After they wrote drafts, they did peer-editing. When they find mistakes, they underline them. The students and I evaluated their writing based on the same rubric.

5. What happened:

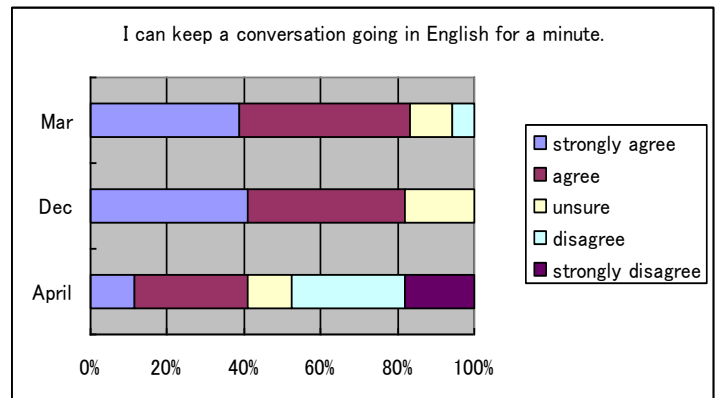
1) Most of the students paid good attention during lessons. A few students participated better or worse depending on the types of activities. The students often helped each other, since many of the activities were done in pairs or groups.



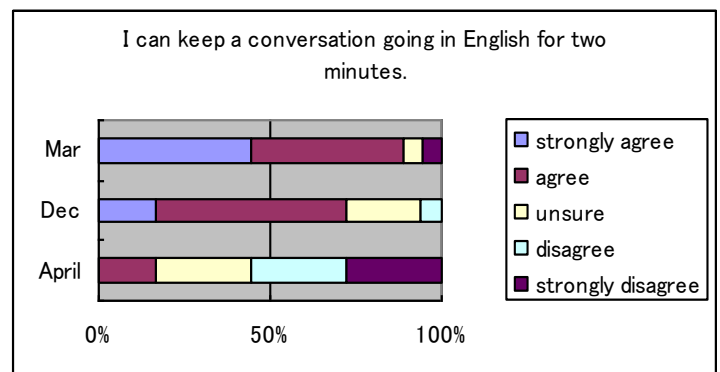
2) Most of the students could successfully write down translations in their pink notebooks as homework. They did not have much difficulty reading and understanding the textbook since new words and a grammar point had been covered in class by then. Even though I spent only a few minutes to go over the textbook, no student ever asked me in person or in questioners to spend more time on it.



3) Timed-conversations at the beginning of every class worked well as warm-up. It generated a friendly and lively atmosphere in the classroom. As the time passed, more students became able to keep a conversation going for a minute. I encouraged them to use expressions such as “How about you?” “Really?” “I see” “Right” “Nice talking with you.” I assumed that helped them get used to the style of the speaking tests.



4) The students have improved their speaking ability. According to the surveys, in April only 17 % of the students could keep a conversation going in English for two minutes. 88 % of them can now.

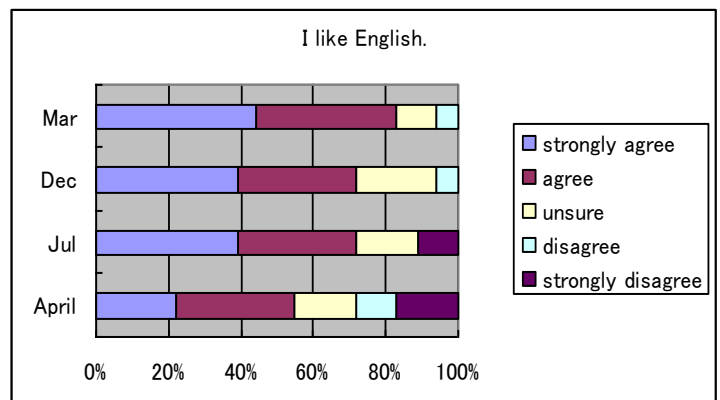


5) According to what they talked in the interviews, most of them thought that peer-editing was useful. Underlines guided the students where to focus, and most of them were able to self-correct their mistakes. They also said that after they had found mistakes in their classmates’ writings, they double-checked their own writings to make sure that they didn’t leave the same mistakes.

6. What I learned:

The most surprising result I have found adapting the communicative language teaching was a change in students’ perceptions of English.

From the result of the surveys, I have noticed that the number of students who like



English has increased and the number of students who do not like English has decreased over the year.

I also interviewed 16 students, and I found that many of them came to like English more, compared with when they were in elementary school. 12 students said that they came to like English more, and 2 students said that they came to like it a lot more. Unfortunately, 1 student said that he came to like English a little less. 1 student said that she had liked English very much and still liked it as much.

In the interviews, the students told me the reasons why they had come to like English more or less. It seems that there are two important factors: 1) They need to see their improvements to like English. 2) They need to enjoy the process of learning to like English. These factors are really the two sides of the same coin.

7. Future issues:

There are three issues to be considered for better achieving the goal.

1) To further provide the students with effective instructions, I must clarify a final lesson proficiency goal and carefully create subgoals and classhour goals. And then, I need to prepare small, incremental step activities for students to go through before they arrive at the final information-exchange task. I would like students to be able to talk and write about familiar topics, such as their families, friends, school life, food, and sports, in simple English.

2) In order to provide the students with sufficient communicative activities, I need to work on better time management. Toward the end of the year, I run out of time and could not give them enough opportunities for input and output. I must have a well-planned year schedule.

3) Finally, to see the effect of these innovations on the students' outcomes, I need to have objective measurements. I made the rubric for each speaking test and writing, but I do not have a means to scale their improvements over the year. The surveys and the interviews enabled me to see how much they thought they had improved their English. However, I am not sure if they could be the evidence of their improvements.

42. What activities do you like in English class?

December

- [7] sugoroku (I can enjoy with other people in the same group. / I enjoyed using dice and coins.)
- [4] group work
- [2] repeat, look up, write down (I can remember spellings and word orders. / I like writing English.)

March

- [4] sugoroku
- [3] small talk
- [3] communicative activities
- [2] writing about friends
- [2] repeat, look up, write down
- [2] speaking test (I can tell my opinion.)

43. What activities do you not like in English class?

December

- [2] speaking test with video (I can't keep a conversation. / I don't like a speaking test with a teacher.)

March

- [3] Repeat, look up, write down (I don't have enough time to write before the teacher goes to the next sentence.)
- [2] term tests
- [2] speaking tests

44. What kind of changes have you experienced learning English since April?

July

comments that show the students' improvements

- I came to be able to write longer sentences. I can read words or sentences and quickly understand their meanings.
- I came to be able to speak in English. I can spell words.
- I came to understand English.
- I study, I came to be able to read faster a little by little.
- I came to be able to answer more questions in term tests.
- I came to be able to speak English better than before. I can also write and listen better.
- In April, I was not interested in English at all. But now I enjoy learning it very much because I can write and read in English.
- In April I couldn't write anything in English, but now I can a little.
- I have started to read English books. I became a better speaker of English.

comments that show their growing interests in English

- [4] I came to like English (more).

- [3] I came to be interested in English (more).
- [3] I came to want to speak English.
- [2] I came to be interested in English songs.
- [2] I came to be interested in English movies.

December

comments that show the students' improvements

- I came to be able to read, write, listen to, and speak English to one extent or another.
- I can speak English more.
- I can understand movies in English a little.
- I came to be able to write more in English.
- I can listen to and understand lines in Harry Potter.
- I came to be able to speak English fluently. I can write my name and sentences using cursive.
- I can now understand short conversations.
- I have liked English songs for a while and now I understand what some lyrics means.
- I came to be able to spell longer words such as junior high school and interesting. When I look at a sentence in English, I can quickly understand what it says a little.

comments that show their growing interests in English

- [3] I came to like English.
- [3] I came to want to speak in English.
- [2] I came to be interested in English.
- [2] I came to want to watch English movies.

March

comments that show the students' improvements

- [2] I came to be able to understand lyrics of English songs.
- I came to be able to spell difficult words.
- I have learned to write alphabets.
- I came to be able to spell faster than before.
- I came to be able to speak English fluently.
- I think I came to be able to sing English songs.
- I've improved my English.

comments that show their growing interests in English

- [2] I came to like English.
- [2] I came to like English very much.
- I became interested in English TV programs, and I can now understand them.
- I came to like songs and movies in English.
- I started to listen to English songs.
- I enjoy learning English. I want to speak with foreigners.
- I came to want to go abroad.
- I came to want to improve my pronunciation.

- I came to want to learn different English words.

other comment

- I have less time to sleep.

45. Do you have any requests for English class?

July

- [3] I want to watch DVDs in English.
- [2] I want to watch Harry Potter more.
- I want to write and learn more words. I want to write and read more English.
- I practiced to spell numbers, but there were only a few questions to ask me to write numbers in the term test. I want term tests to cover fewer pages.
- I want to play more games.

December

- [3] I want to watch movies in English.
- I want to do a longer self-introduction.
- I want to do more writing.
- sugoroku

March

- [2] I want Ms. Tsukimi to be my teacher again next year.
- I want to write more about myself and other people.
- I want to read longer stories.