

Name: Chris Bradford (Chikusadai Junior High School)

Introduction to Task-based Learning

Subject: 3rd year English

Textbook: New Horizons 3

Students: Class 3A (37), Class 3C (37)

Context: 45 minute classes held usually held 1 time a week.

Problems:

As an AET I was unable to have complete control over the curriculum for the year and as such some of my lessons had to be redesigned to meet the biases of the main teacher based on the beliefs of what they thought the students could do. I also did not have knowledge of the methods that the previous AET had used so that I could get a framework for how to introduce task-based learning to the students. Due to these issues there were times that I was unable to fully integrate true task-based lessons and communicative evaluations into the curriculum. Finally, since I am new to the concept of task-based learning I needed to monitor myself at times when I would try to resort back to previous methods of teaching that may not have been as effective as the new methods that I was trying to implement.

Goals:

- To collect background information to be able to find an approach that will enhance student motivation to task-base learning.
- To introduce task-based learning activities into the current junior high school curriculum and to motivate students through these activities.

What I did:

From September to December I focused on 3 main lesson objectives which involved various tasks to be completed in each lesson.

September's Objective - Writing a letter to a celebrity

October's Objective – Giving directions using a train/subway map

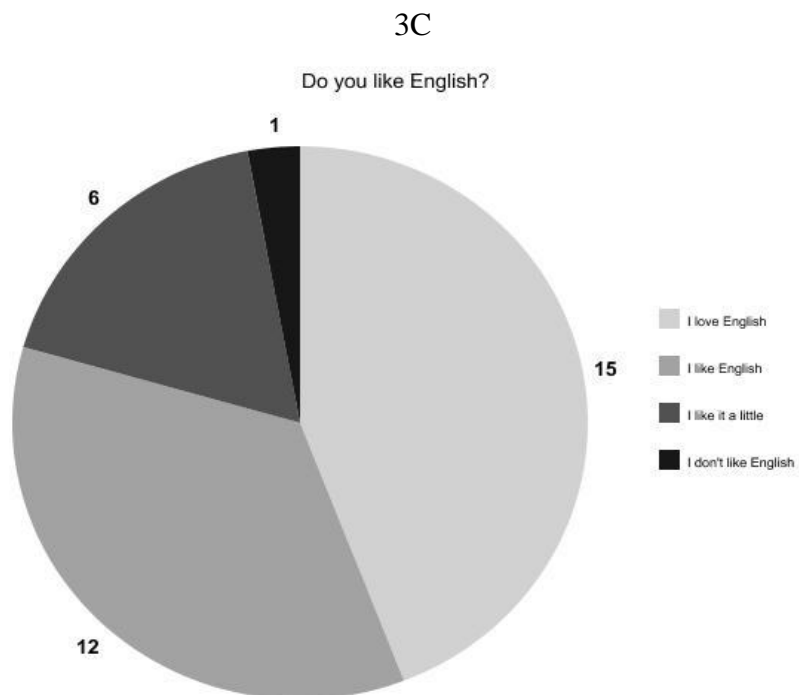
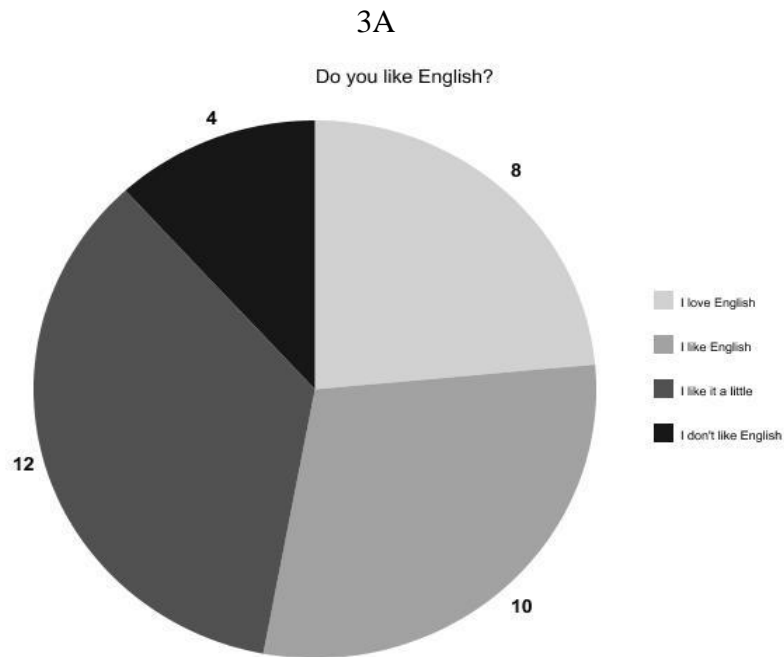
November/December's Objective – Being able to give one's opinion

Each of these lessons were derived from the main objective of the textbook and were created to reinforce what the students had learned in the main English teacher's lessons and to give them additional opportunities to communicate in English. I did a couple of graded evaluations during this time, but I am unsure if any of them actually affected students overall grades.

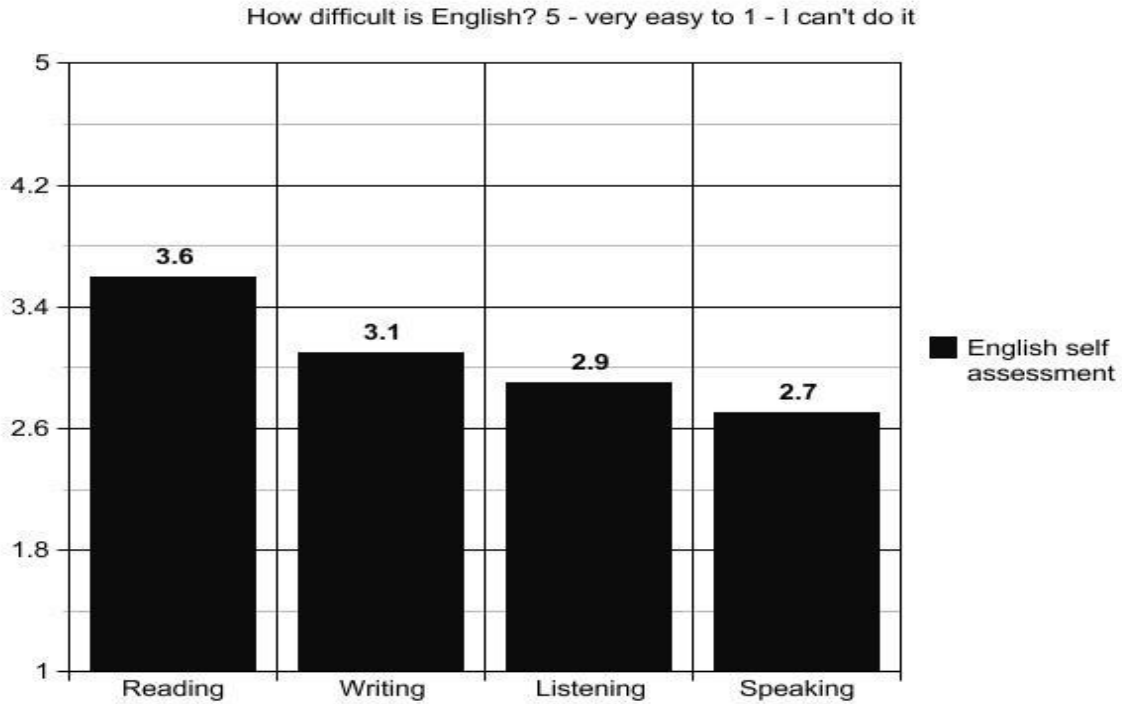
From January to February my lessons were asked to be more relaxed due to the pressures the students were facing from high school exams and because occasionally students would not be present for class.

Results:

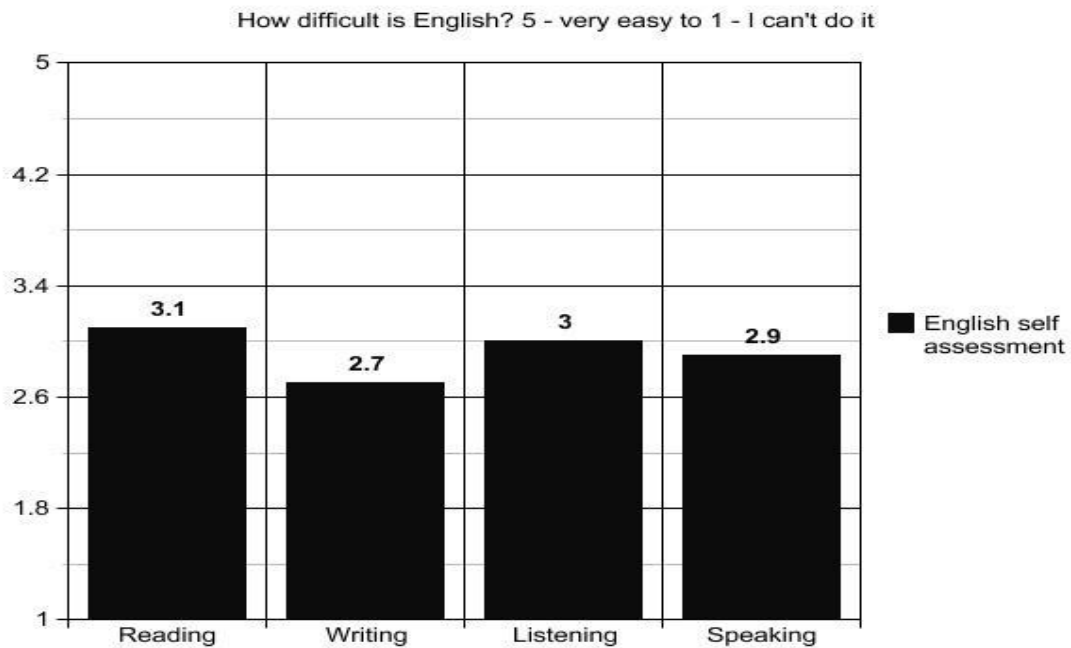
In order to also find out about the student's personal evaluations of their English skills and backgrounds I gave them a background survey. This also helped me to find out more about their motivation or lack of motivation for learning English.



3A

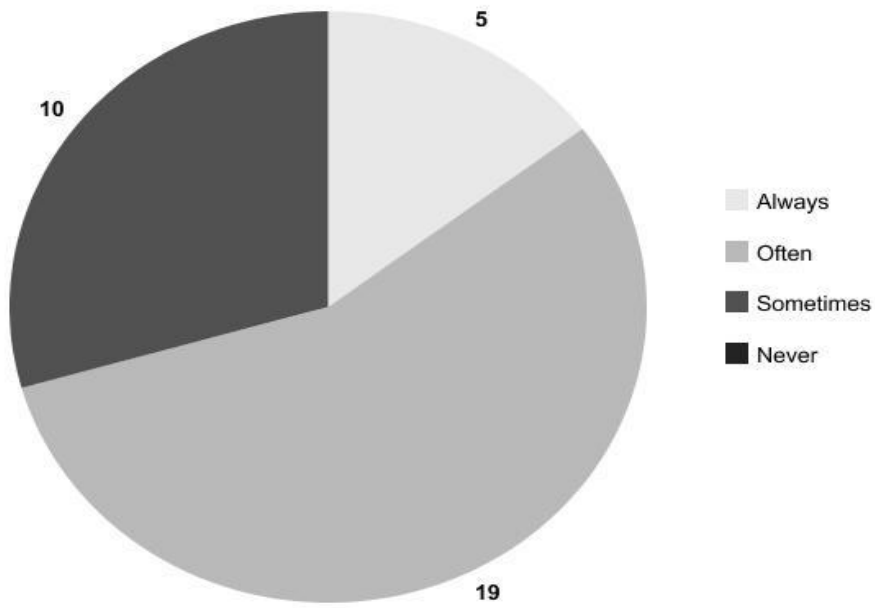


3C



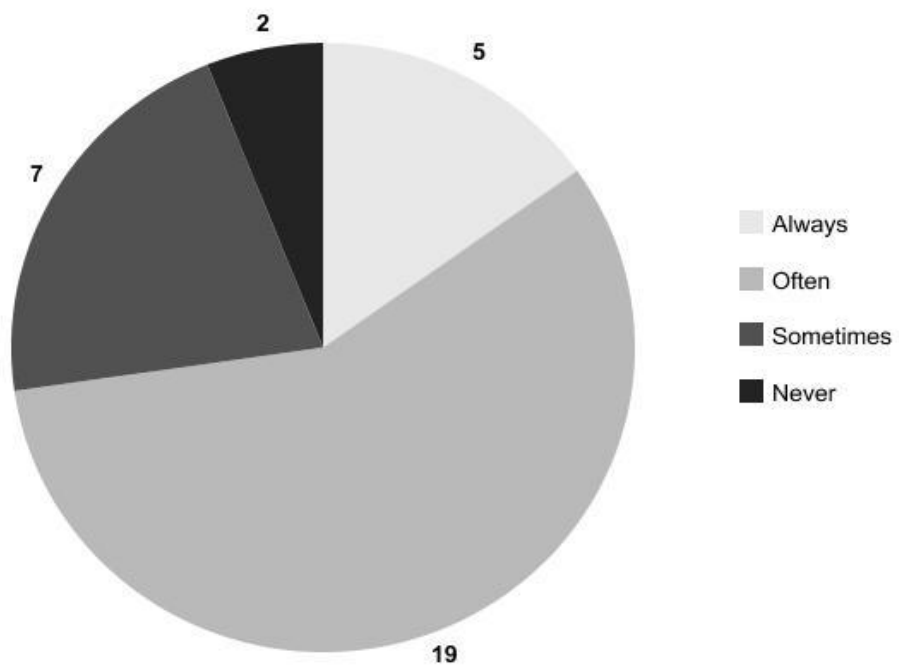
As can be seen in these graphs the students in 3A have a more positive outlook on English to start out with and tended to assess their skills in English at a slightly higher level than those in 3C. What was interesting to note is that students in 3C rated their listening and speaking skills higher than those of 3A. From what I observed of 3C they tended to be more involved with pop culture and foreign music and also wanted to talk in English more often in class and outside of class which may have led them to rate their listening and speaking skills as slightly better than the students of 3A.

How often do you want to communicate in English class during the AET's lesson?



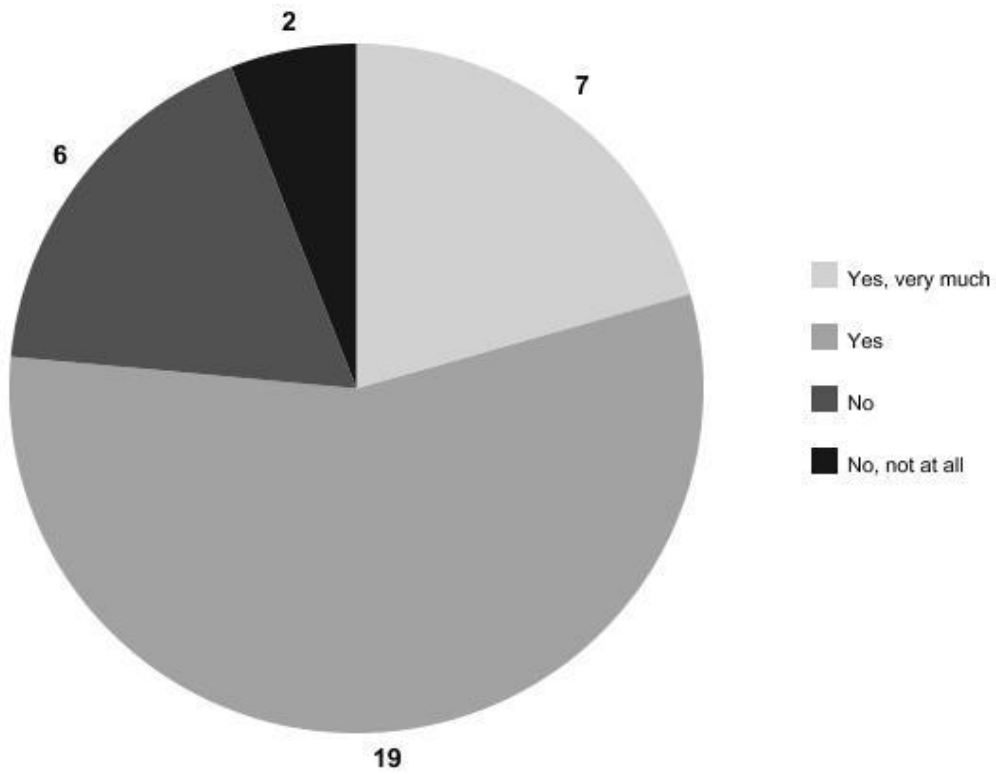
3C

How often do you want to communicate in English class during the AET's lesson?



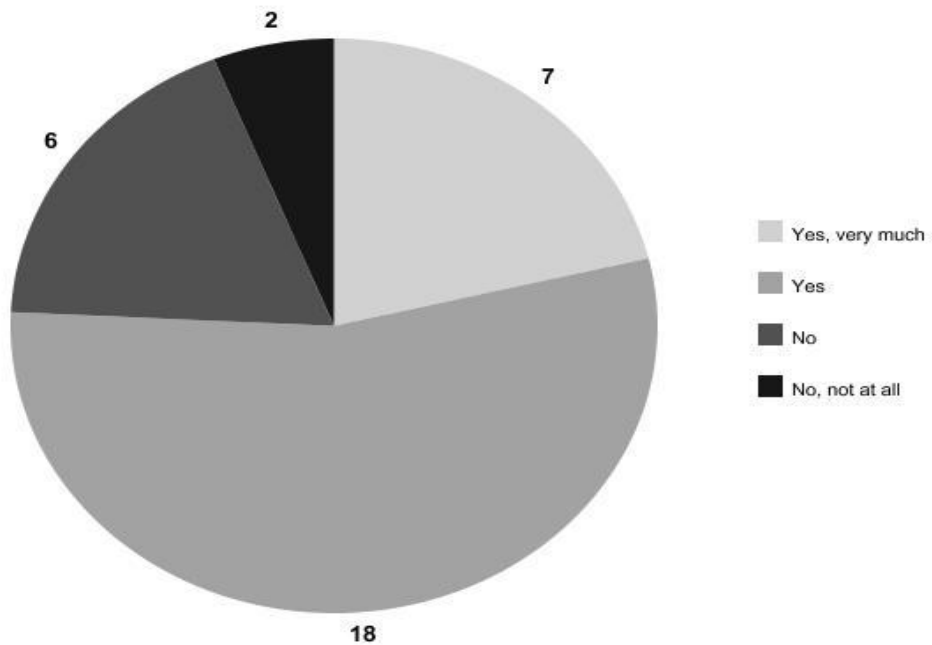
3A

Do you like activities that help you speak in English outside of class?



3C

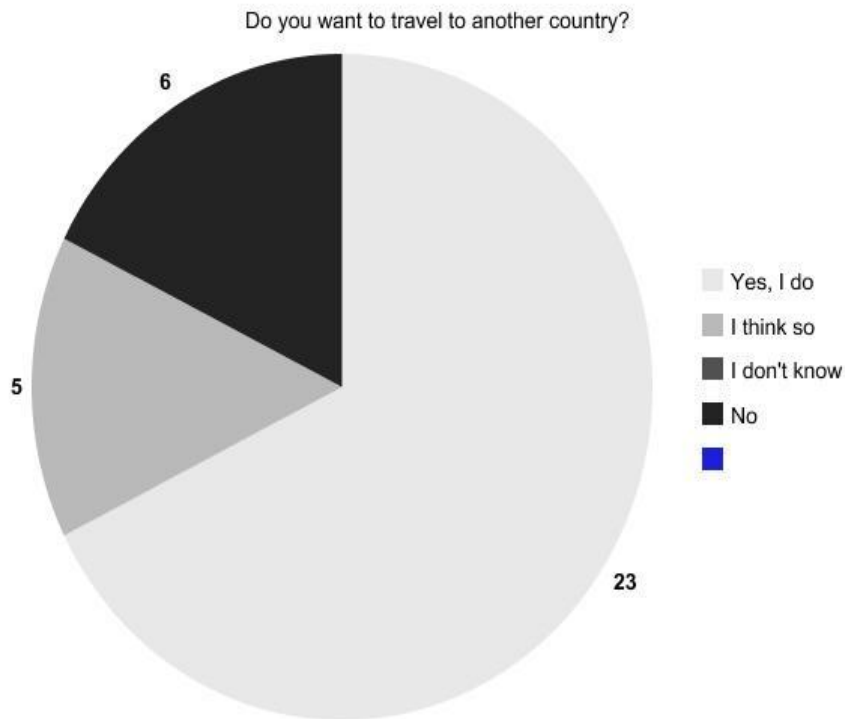
Do you like activities that help you speak in English outside of class?



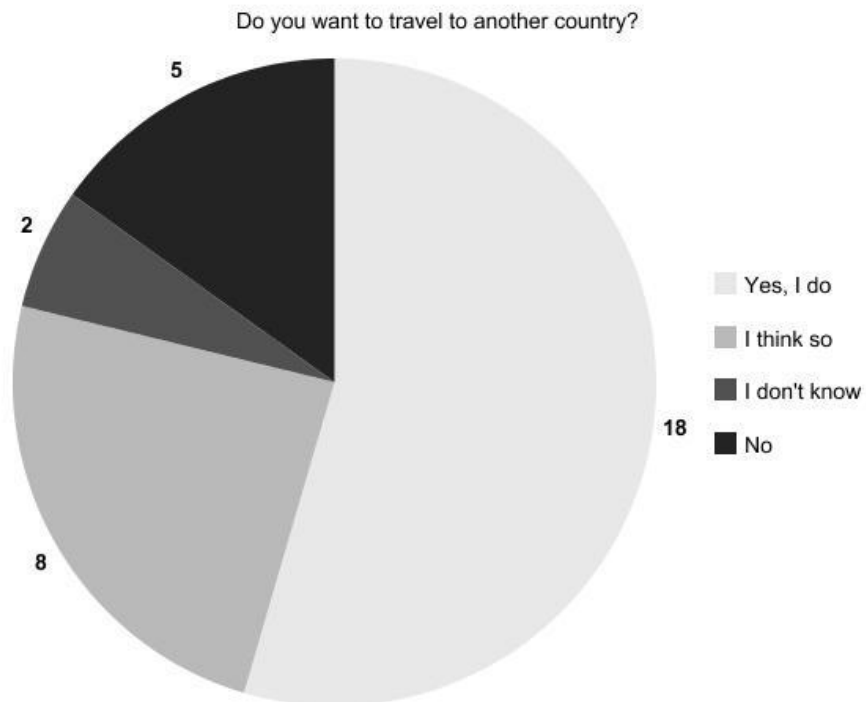
The results of this part of the survey shows that the majority of the students want to speak more in English class and wanted more activities that will help them to speak in English outside of

the classroom. This means that effective task-based lessons should mimic how they would use English outside of class while also being able to prepare them for the exams that are given in junior high school.

3A

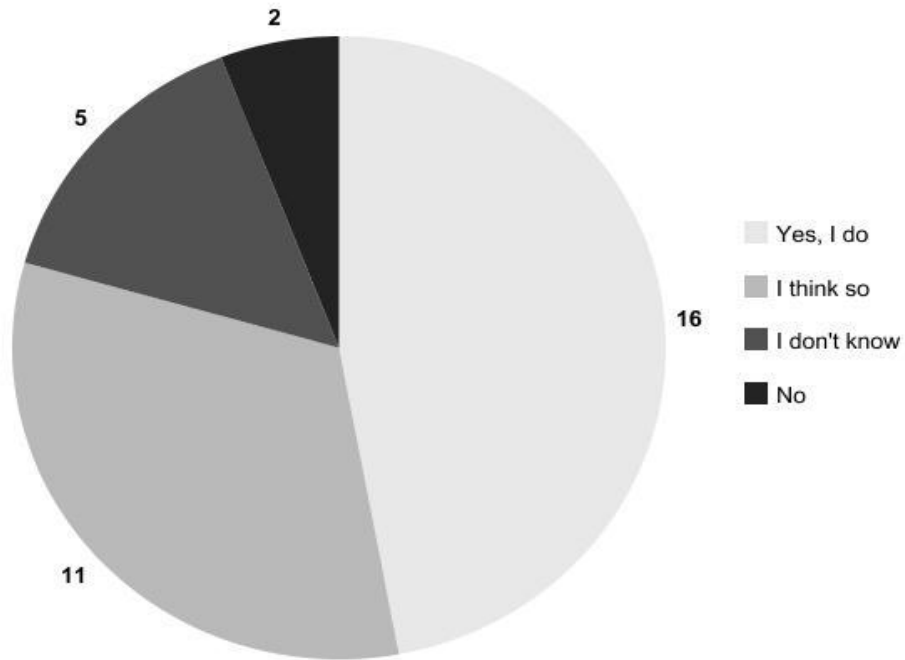


3C



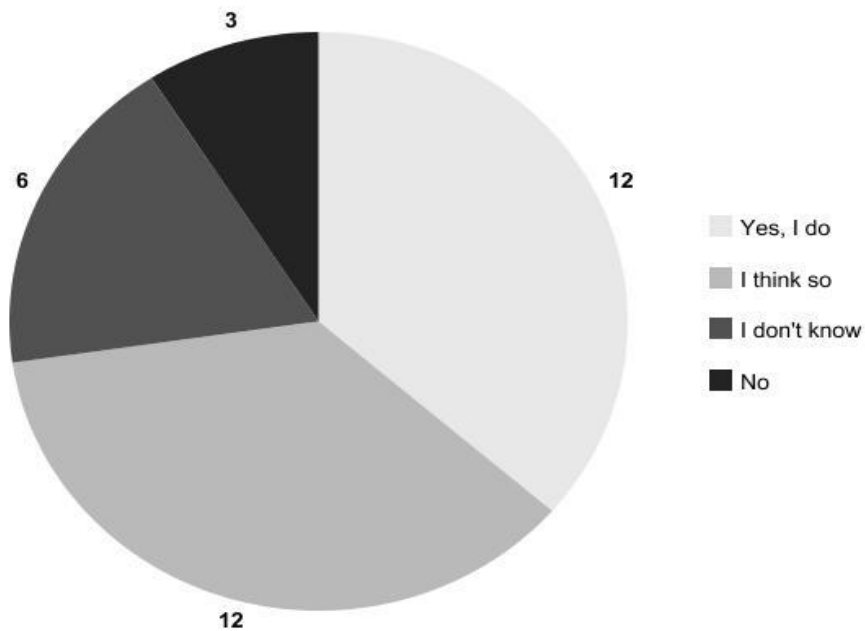
3A

Do you want to speak with more English speaking foreigners?



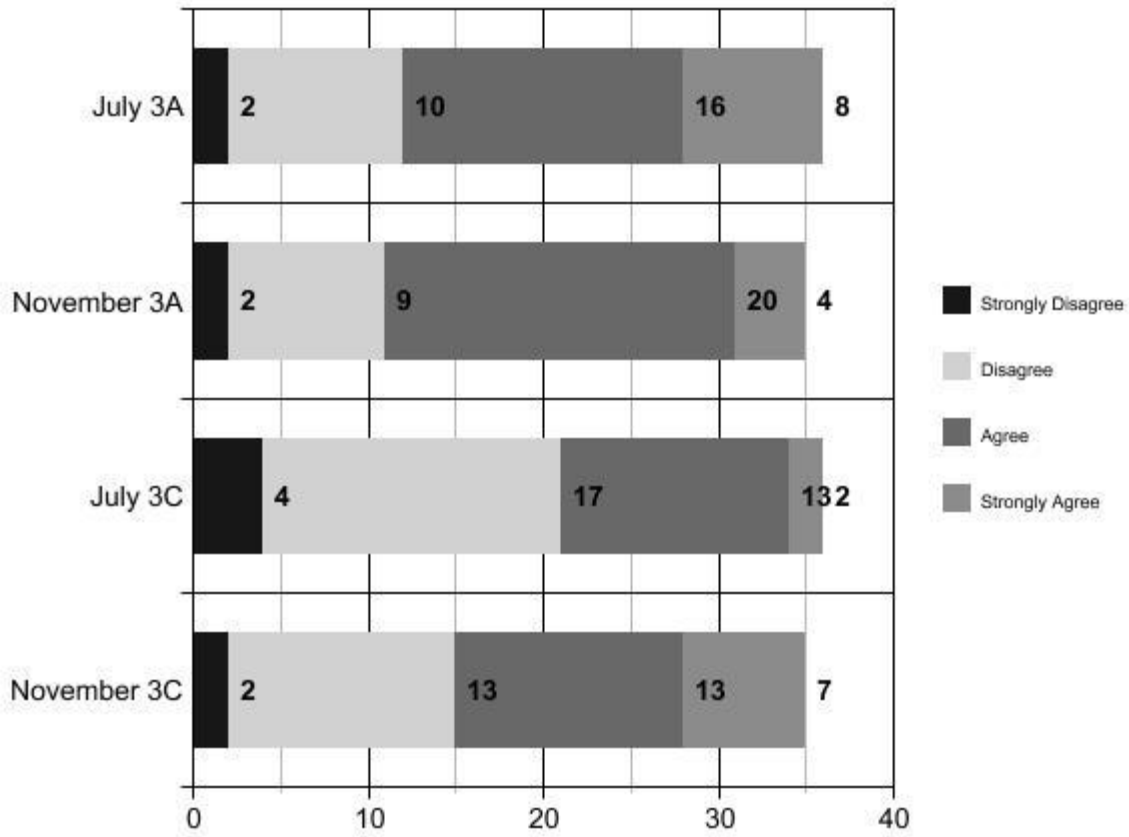
3C

Do you want to speak with more English speaking foreigners?

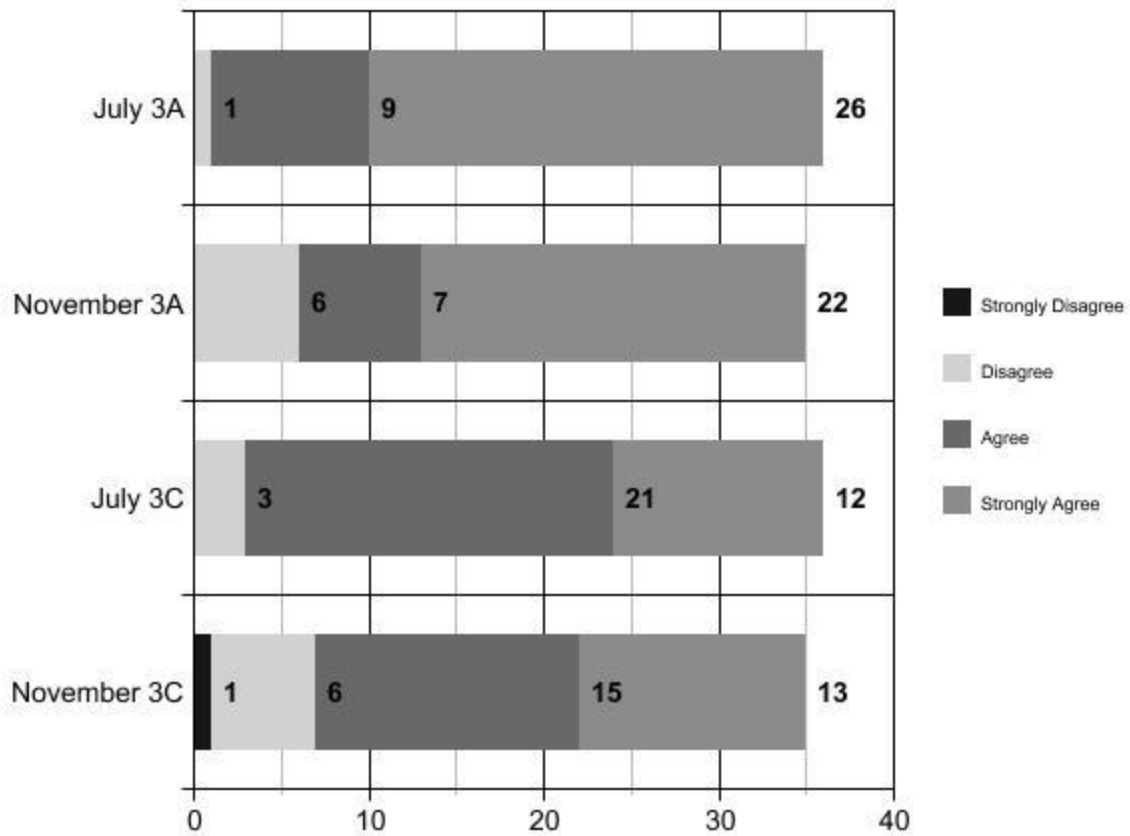


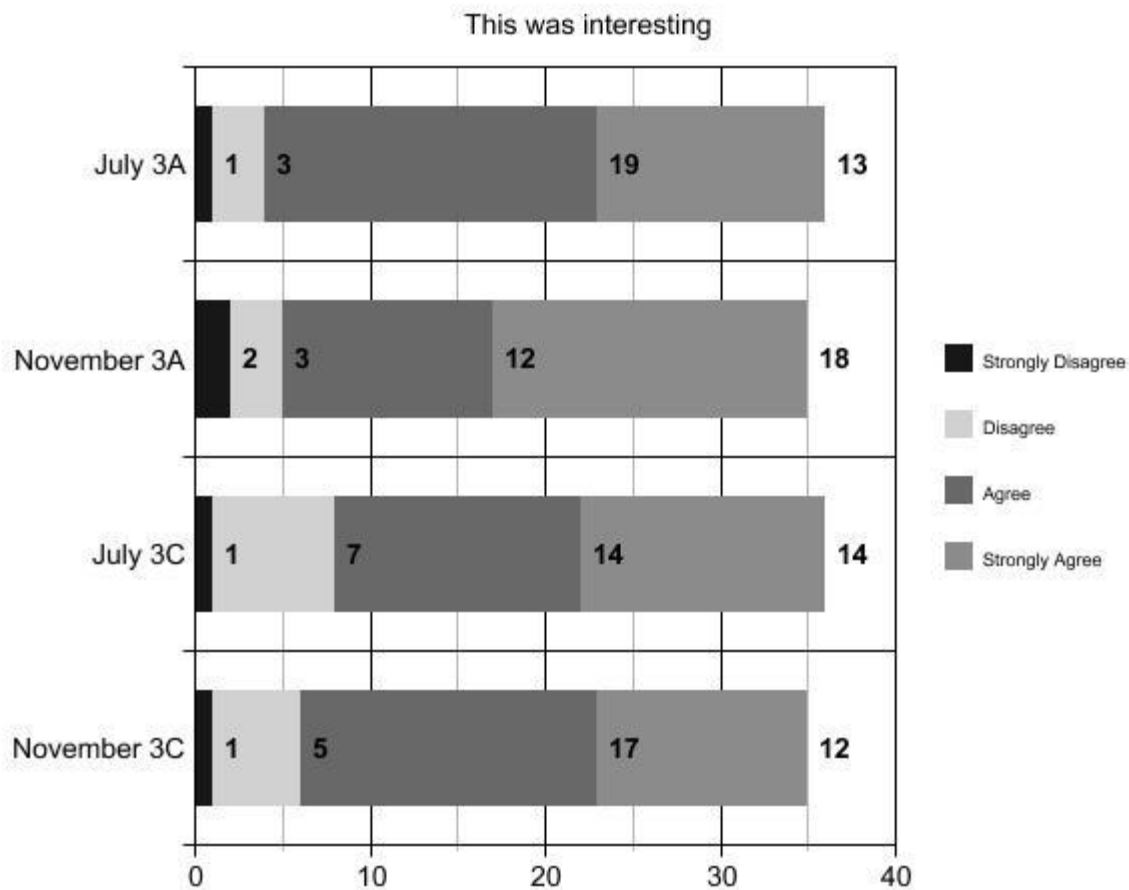
As can be seen the majority of the students think they would like to travel outside of the country someday and many of them think that they would like to speak to more English speaking foreigners. This leads me to conclude that there is plenty of motivation for the majority of my students to learn English and to see the subject as not just another subject for use only in school. This could also lead to more interesting lessons that could involve first practicing the English they would use in a role play setting and then trying to apply it with another speaker of English.

Speaking English was easy



This was useful for communicating in English





By comparing the results of the survey from the first half of the year and the second half of the year I was able to see if there was an increase in motivation in the students to learn or use English. What I noticed from these results is that as the year progressed they found that speaking English was more difficult and that the lessons became less useful as the difficulty increased. Even though the students found that speaking and usefulness was lower as the year progressed, they still maintained that the lessons were interesting. By looking at these results we can see that student motivation did not change much throughout the school year and actually slightly increased in the case of 3C.

What did I learn:

This year was a great learning experience as a teacher and I feel I learned much more than my students about teaching and learning English. At the beginning of the school year I was unsure of what activities were task-based activities until after presenting my mid-term report. I found that most of my activities lacked a key component, communication. With this knowledge I worked hard to add communicative activities to my lessons to help the students use the language they were learning in ways that could assist them outside of the classroom.

With the first lesson in September that made a letter writing activity more communicative I could immediately see a difference in the understanding of the students. By being able to talk with each other in English they were able to assist each other with the language and became more motivated to try speaking English. They were also able to assist each other with errors that they made and corrected their friend's and their own letters. All of this was possible because I gave clear objectives and stepped back to let the students put the work into learning instead of trying to force them to learn. I found that I spent more time observing and helping with problems than I spent talking and in turn this allowed my students to learn the material better. When it came time to grade their work 85% of the students received an A. Also the students were then encouraged to actually

send their letters out to the person that they wrote it to. Approximately 15% of the students did end up asking for the address of the person they wrote to and an envelope to send their letter in. This was my first step in getting out of the way of my student's learning.

In October I worked with the JT's to create a longer lesson cycle that involved giving directions in English that included a speaking test at the end of the cycle. The speaking test unfortunately was constantly modified until it no longer was a communicative test, so I made sure that the practice that I was doing in the lessons included communicative tasks. In this way I learned that even if I am unable to have control over the evaluations I can provide communicative activities for my students that will benefit them on their tests and allow them to excel. In each of the lessons I set aside 20-25 minutes for the students to choose their own routes and to even try different subway maps from around the world as a challenge. The students found these challenges highly motivating and while I was walking around observing I heard more English being spoken and students trying harder to figure out how to complete the activity successfully than I had in the past when students relied on memorization of a series of phrases. This showed me that challenging material can be motivating as long as the students are given the tools to complete the tasks presented to them. Also I learned during this lesson that giving students communication strategies greatly helps when they are stuck trying to think of what to say or when they want to prompt their partner to correct themselves. This leads me to believe that communication strategies should become a bigger part of English curriculum.

Finally in November I did a series of lessons that focused on giving ones opinion that ended in a debate between groups of students. For this cycle of lessons I focused on trying to follow things I had learned from Professor Sato and from Jane Willis' text. I started this lesson with an example of the task that I wanted the students to complete and had the students notice the language being used. I then had the students do the task. The students were able to successfully complete the task by noticing the grammar point that they should use and seemed highly motivated after starting the task. Students also were prompted to help each other out by being able to talk to the students near them. This showed me that I don't have to always explicitly break down the grammar and translate things for students to understand how to use the grammar. By allowing them to notice what is being said and then getting them to try and use it they will have a much better understanding in the long run. Again students seem more motivated as well because they are not being passive learners, but are much more active in the learning process.

Future Issues:

Being an AET at Chikusadai was a wonderful experience and I was very happy that the teachers at that school gave me the opportunities to try many different strategies to teach the material they wanted. Even though I had a lot of freedom to do things there were still many restrictions placed on me and I think this hampered what could be done in each class. I would like to see AET's be able to have more control over speaking evaluations and for them to be more communicative instead of based on a set dialog where students just fill in the blank. Also more lessons need to be made where students take an active roll in learning and in assisting each other. By providing worthwhile tasks teachers will find that students can still learn the material and increase their communication skills and in this regard we need to recognize our own biases on what students can do and allow them to try things that are challenging. If things are too challenging we as teachers can always make them easier, but if things are too easy then students will not find a sense of accomplishment and this could lower student motivation.

Lesson Plan: Giving your opinion

Day 1

- Prepare 6 topics prior to class. These are a few topics I used.
 - Toy pets are better than live pets.
 - There should be no tests to enter high school.
 - Students can bring their cellphones to school.
- At the start of the class students are introduced to a statement. The JT writes if they disagree or agree under the statement and gives a reason why. The AET then disagrees with the JT's statement and also gives a reason why.
- Students then are asked to notice the language that is used to express their opinion. Have them discuss in pairs for a minute and then come back as a class and inform the class what they noticed.
- Next introduce the topics that they will be agreeing or disagreeing with. Go over with the class to make sure they understand what each topic is. Explain that they need to use the English that they currently know and that they should try and use what they just learned to assist them. Also inform them that they shouldn't use dictionaries and should focus on using the English that they currently know.
- Hand out a different topic to each student in a row. Give them about 3-4 minutes to write their answer and allow them to ask their neighbor for help with English. Remind them that spelling doesn't count.
- After they have finished their section have everyone pass their paper to the person behind them and do the next section. Continue doing this until the worksheet is finished.
- After all sections are done have the students give their worksheet back to the student it originated from and have them read all of the replies. Check to see if any of the students would change their original reply based on what they read from the other students.

Day 2

- At the start of the lesson introduce to the students that you will be discussing a topic with the JT. Have the students listen to the debate. Have the students then decide which side had a better argument.
- Have the students listen to the debate one more time and this time have them try and notice the language being used. Some sample language that can be used other than 'I agree' or 'I disagree':
 - That's true, but...
 - I don't think so.
 - That's not true.
- Go over pronunciation of these new phrase and their meanings with the students. Let the students know they will be using these phrases in their debate and then introduce their debate topic. I used 'TV vs YouTube'.
- Split the class into groups and give them a stance on the topic. Have the students make mind maps where they write good things about their topic and negative things about the other side. Again no dictionaries because they will be trying to communicate with another group so they need to use English that can be understood at their level. Use the rest of the class to complete their mind maps.

Day 3

- Review the previous lessons debate language. Give them 5 minutes to practice and prepare.
- Have the groups pair off between the 2 stances on the topic and allow them 5 minutes to debate while giving each student 1 minute to discuss their stance or to refute the other student's stance.
- Finally come back as a class and have the students discuss what ideas were the best and which they think is actually better.

Agree or disagree?

Students can bring their cellphones to school.

1. Write your name. Do you agree or disagree. Why?
2. Write your name. You must disagree with 1. Why?
3. Write your name. Agree with 1 or disagree with 2. Why?
4. Write your name. Agree with 2 or disagree with 3. Why?
5. Write your name. Read 1, 2, 3, and 4. Who do you agree with? Why?

When you are finished. Give this back to the person who wrote their name in #1.