

The Support System to Encourage the Students to Grow as English Learners and The Original Evaluation System of English Communicative Abilities : Part 2

英語学習者としての成長を促す支援体制と 独自の「英語スピーキング能力評価基準」の構築< 2 >

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1. Introduction

This paper is about a special plan to encourage the students to learn more positively and autonomously.

As described in Nagakura and Hunt (2015), there are a lot of classes taught by English native speakers in the curriculum of The English Language and Literature Department. The students are encouraged to express their own feelings and thoughts freely. To help the students try to use English positively, the native speakers endeavor to create a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere and give the students abundant opportunities to feel ready to speak English positively.

There are, nevertheless, some frustrations which remain. These phenomena do not occur as a consequence of the students' idleness or apathy but rather, result from cultural differences in the styles of communication and the intrinsically instilled attitudes towards learning methods.

The current authors thought it necessary to try to conduct a new trial based on personality trait, which is characteristic of Japanese people and a lack of self-confidence, through clarification of the evaluation system. Besides, there are great possibilities for their development towards the students becoming more autonomous and positive learners.

2. The Present Conditions

As was stated in a previous report (Nagakura et al.,2014), the English Department

has been aiming for two main goals; to help the students improve their English communicative ability and mature into competent 'human resources' who can get suitable jobs or fulfill other appropriate roles in society after graduation.

These two goals may seem to be different, but they are relevant to each other. According to Nagakura (2009), the students really want to improve their own abilities to think deeply, to have their own opinions and to express them clearly. Their goal that they can communicate with others in English with a smile might be a kind of symbolic and idealistic aim but they seriously expect to achieve the personalities and talents necessary.

In the curriculum, the students can take a lot of English communication classes taught by English native speakers, and a number of innovative classes to support their growth as individuals with a pleasant personality and a good grasp of common sense.

Although the curriculum has been working reasonably well, some other steps are deemed appropriate to make the effects more successful.

As was stated in the research of Nagakura and Hunt (2015), many of the students really want to study and improve their English skills, but very few can put their ideas into practice. They like a friendly atmosphere with nice teachers and classmates. Some of them would like to try to act positively, but they are not outgoing enough to speak out.

They want to brush up their abilities to communicate with foreign people in English and also to learn the cultures of English-speaking countries. Although the Japanese government recommends learning English to further participation in economic or political circles or to take a more active part in academic fields, they think little of such kinds of goals.

Their favorite learning strategies differ according to the individual students. Generally speaking, most of them like music and songs, but are not good at logical thinking. They prefer activities and performance to theories and teachers' explanations.

3. How Can the Curriculum Work More Effectively?

The students look very happy especially at the beginning of the first grade. They concentrate on listening to native teachers. It means they are learning very positively.

As was stated in Nagakura (2010), a positive attitude lets the students feel satisfied enough with the class. To be sure, although their listening abilities are growing better and better, few of them can grow enough to challenge themselves to use English as actively as the writers expected.

The main reasons are believed to comprise the following three points: (1) the students' attitudes which are reserved like typical Japanese ones, (2) their previous learning ways in which they were required to memorize many things, and (3) the lack of autonomy to control the various aspects of learning English to encourage them to

learn for themselves.

Therefore another innovative plan should be executed to help the students improve their use of skills in English and also to make them more autonomous.

The plan has been created with reference to a kind of strategy training (Nagakura, 2013) and with continual discussion between the writers.

4. The Innovative Plans

In brief, the goals of the innovative plan are to help the students to become more autonomous by making them aware of various aspects related to learning English and try to use the strategies, some of which are effective to improve learning methods and some of which are helpful to observe the process of their own learning for themselves.

The details are as follows. The writers, an English native teacher and a Japanese teacher discussed the plans again and again, and carried them out, modifying some parts as necessary during the implementation process.

4.1. Awareness of Cultural and Individual Characteristics

At the beginning of the first term in 2016, the students were required to answer questionnaire about their favorite learning strategies (Table 3 in Nagakura and Hunt, 2015) and about why they don't speak English well (Figure 4, in Nagakura and Hunt, 2015).

The results depended on each student, but as a whole, they showed that students would like to learn in a peaceful and relaxing environment. They like rhythmical and physical activities, games and group-work, while they don't like to memorize words or phrases, logical thinking or solving problems by themselves. Many of them often say that that they are very poor at grammar. Very few of them are good at making plans or monitoring themselves, which are very important on the road to becoming autonomous learners.

Most of the students believe they can't speak English well because they can't put their ideas into English owing to the lack of vocabulary and grammar and also because they are too nervous.

The students discovered their own of learning styles preferences, and then exchanged their own ideas with others. They seemed to perceive their own characteristics of learning styles and the classroom atmosphere and conditions mainly formed by themselves.

4.2. The Clear Statement About What is Required in Class

One of the biggest roles of the native teachers is to provide the students with a pleasant and exciting atmosphere for real communication in English. Generally speaking, they will never strictly enforce rules for the students with regard to what to

say or how to use some particular expressions. It means the students have to activate their own expressive linguistic functions.

The students considered what they would need to do to communicate in English. They have to listen carefully and understand, decide what to say, put it into English and continue to listen and talk, using communicative strategies.

Then the writers suggested that they should prepare for the Oral classes to improve their expressive functions of language in another class taught by the Japanese teacher.

4.2.1. Real Communication Among the Students

Generally speaking, tasks are very effective to improve the use of English abilities. Tasks are activities which are carried out by using English to solve certain kinds of problems, that is, real communication. That is why the curriculum has a lot of subjects taught by native teachers.

Real communication is also important not only between teachers and students but also between students, for the students should learn how to maintain real communication by using various strategies. For example, the class begins with icebreaking similar to 'Who am I?'. It is introduced to let the students experience how happy they feel that they can communicate with each other freely.

4.2.2. Shadowing

The students perform shadowing activities based on the model dialogues in the textbook. They come to be able to speak as fast as the CD, and learn about speaking discourse, too.

4.2.3. Scrapbook

The students make their own scrapbook about some typical topics. They spend some time mapping their ideas, write them in English and sometimes add some pictures.

4.2.4. Communicative Strategies

The writers let the students know several effective strategies, expecting that they would understand their effectiveness and like to try to use them. For example, the attitude including facial expression, a clear and loud voice, fillers, useful phrases to reduce the friction in communication, and so forth were not only introduced by the teacher but also practiced again and again with a loud voice and actions in rhythm.

Table 1 Useful Link Words/Expressions (partial table)

1	Probably ...	たぶん、そうね。
2	I see.	なるほどね。
3	Me, too!	私もよ。
4	Me, neither!	私もよ。
5	That's right.	その通りね。
6	Sure!	もちろん！
7	Cool!	いいね！
8	Really?	ホント？
9	Are you sure?	マジ？ 本気？
10	Pardon?	もう一度言ってもらえますか？
11	It depends.	場合によるね。
12	How can I say?	なんて言うかあ～？
13	So ...	じゃあ、
14	Well ...	ええと・・・
15	Uh-huh	ふ～ん。
16	Hmh-hmm	ふ～ん。

4.2.5. 1-minute Monologue & 2-minute Dialogue

The students talk freely for one minute just after they are asked to talk about something, sometimes glancing at the scrapbooks. This activity is tried in pairs. A speaker talks, and a listener counts how many words the speaker utters, nods and adds fillers. They sometimes record it by using cell phones and they listen to it later. The audio files are sent to the teacher, too.

4.2.6. Word Order

Many of the students are poor at making English sentences, so an original method is introduced to encourage a more thorough understanding of basic, correct word order.

4.2.7. Evaluation System

A valid, reliable and practical evaluation system of interview testing is designed as below (Nagakura and Hunt, 2015).

Table 2 Tokotan Communicative Evaluation Scale

評価項目	評価基準			
①内容 Content	質問を正しく聴き取り、的確に答えている Understanding the questions correctly and answering appropriately	1	2	3
②表現力 Expression	適切な語彙と表現を用いて答えている Constructing responses with appropriate vocabulary and expressions.	1	2	3
③発音 Pronunciation	正しい発音で答えている Using correct pronunciation	1	2	3
④流暢さ Fluency	流暢に答えている Speaking fluently, including use of appropriate verbal and non-verbal communicative techniques.	1	2	3

3=satisfactorily achieved, 2=partly achieved, 1=not satisfactorily achieved

4.2.8. Learning Journal

The students need to pay attention to their own learning, and write down comments about each class. Learning Journals are read by the teacher and some response provided. It is also very important for teachers to keep on communicating with the students and accepting their thoughts and feelings as often as possible.

5. Reflection

How well the innovative plans have worked are discussed in three ways: the students' comments on the Learning Journals, the native teachers' comments, and the results of the questionnaire about this plan.

5.1. The Students' Comments on Learning Journal

The writers asked the students to write down their comments and opinions freely in their Learning Journal, and the comments and opinions would be made good use of to improve English education here in these situations.

The writers have introduced what the students and the teachers wrote down with their approval.

5.1.1. Who am I

- I like games and quizzes, but they are not easy. I think it is necessary to get over the difficulties of explaining in English rapidly. I'd like to try more quizzes.
- It's a kind of game, but I need to try to clear my head and activate my knowledge instantly. I think it is a good way to practice talking.

5.1.2. Shadowing

- I didn't do well today. I think I should practice again and again to be able to move my mouth to speak more quickly and correctly.
- I've become interested in the teacher's explanation on shadowing. I've got some effective points. If I can pronounce the text quickly and efficiently enough, I will come to understand it. I should pay attention to 'liaison' and 'omission' of sounds.
- It is a good way to read aloud.
- Shadowing is very helpful. At the beginning it was very difficult for me, but I got used to it little by little.
- I'm very happy today, because I did shadowing perfectly after I practiced a lot.
- I found that shadowing helps me speak English with correct pronunciation and intonation. It is a good way to learn. (2 months later) I used shadowing when I prepared for the listening test of EIKEN. It worked! I passed EIKEN.

5.1.3. Scrapbook

- Thank you, David. I made a lot of mistakes. I often miss prepositions. I am very happy that David said my scrapbook was interesting.
- At the second interview, I could speak more than in the first one thanks to my scrapbook and talking practice with it.
- I wonder if I talked too much depending on my scrapbook, but I was happy that the native teacher listened to me, nodding a lot.
- I found it important to make sentences once and use them sometime.
- I made a lot of sentences and asked the teacher some questions. It was fun.
- I like making a scrapbook. I would like to write a lot.
- I failed. When the native teacher asked some questions which I hadn't prepared in my scrapbook, I got terribly nervous and couldn't say anything. I can't use a scrapbook effectively at all. I don't think I should depend on a scrapbook too much. I should learn speaking discourse and guess the teachers' next questions.
- I should always think about many kinds of topics and try to put them into English promptly. The teacher let us think about how to use English in communication. As she said, we should seek more effective learning methods to use English.
- I made a lot of mistakes, but I like David's comments. I'm happy. (a month later) I talked much more than at the first interview thanks to the scrapbook. I got relaxed and kept smiling. The pictures on the scrapbook helped me explain. I should have practiced talking without looking at the scrapbook.
- David praised me for my scrapbook. I'm happy. When I asked Ms. Nagakura for help, she helped me a lot. I'm very poor at English, but I'd like to make a good scrapbook.
- I am very poor at English composition, because I had never written English freely when I was a high school student. To be sure, my small vocabulary prevents me from making a scrapbook, but I was told it is also important to make sentences in easy and

simple words I know.

If I can do that, I think I will be able to speak more when I talk with the native teachers.

- Today I took the second interview. I believe I did a little better than before. I think it is important to think about various things in my mind and make a scrapbook. Some students added some pictures. It is a good idea. I'd like to add visual aids and some decoration.
- I like to make a scrapbook. But I can hardly say the things I wrote at the interview. What should I do? (three weeks later) I understood one technique. I should use easy words. I would rather use them than make use of a dictionary.
- These days I tried to write interesting things for my partners.
- The scrapbook didn't work at all at the second interview. I don't know why. I like to make a scrapbook. David praised mine. I also practiced a lot before the interview. I could say what I wrote without looking at the scrapbook. At the interview, too many things occurred to me, so I might have panicked a little. I should have tried to be more relaxed.

5.1.4. Communicative Strategies

- I've recognized how important communicative strategies are, such as fillers and adding questions.
- I like the rhythmical practice of useful expressions. It is a lot of fun.
- I found it difficult to make brief responses while listening to the native teachers. I'd like to do that naturally enough to communicate smoothly.
- I could use some of the brief responses at the second interview. It helped me get relaxed and enjoy the interview.

5.1.5. 1-minute Monologue & 2-minute Dialogue

- I can't say what I want to say within one minute. The teacher advised me to map what idea occurs to me for a very short time and put it into English.
- I don't like 1-minute Monologues. I like 2-minute Dialogues better, because they are fun.
- Today I could talk a lot. When I can talk with my partner, I feel very happy.

5.1.6. Word Order

- I can't understand the structure of sentences, but I only distinguish subjects and verbs.
- I gradually come to understand word order and I often pay attention to it when I make scrapbook.
- Today I've understood complex sentences. I feel happy.
- I can't understand word order, but I don't give up completely. Can I go to your room

to ask some questions? (two weeks later) I've understood word order slightly more. It is helpful to make a scrapbook, isn't it? (a month later) I would like to carry on the word order textbook.

- Word order practice is working! I hated grammar before, but it helped me when I took EIKEN the other day.
- Today I've noticed that I just said a single word or very short phrases when I was talking with the native teachers. (two weeks later) I thought I should speak in sentences, but I couldn't say anything at all. (a month later) I've learned how to make sentences a little. I've found it necessary to have a lot of knowledge, to speak in a loud and clear voice and to check many different things at the same time when I speak English. It is very difficult, but I'd like to try harder.
- Word order practice helps me resolve the tenses and syntax. Today I understood the perfect sense at last!
- I thought the best way to learn English is to memorize anything. I hated grammar. Word order practice by underlining each part helps me understand the meanings. I've learned sentence structures little by little.

5.1.7. Evaluation System

- I thought I could talk with a little better content and expression than the first interview.
- I took the interview test for the first time. I knew what the native teachers evaluated and how well I used English with the evaluation sheet. I'd like to accept the result and try to study hard.
- I noticed a lot about my good and bad points and also my characteristics.
- I could only say two or three words at the first interview. I wish I could say a little more in sentences. I am very happy that Kathy was listening to me nodding smilingly.

5.1.8. Others Comments in Learning Journal

- I've recognized the differences in our characteristics of learning styles and our previous experiences of English learning.
- Today I understood how important it is to try to talk positively in the native teachers' classes. (five weeks later) I should learn many things to communicate with native teachers in the classes. Of course, vocabulary and grammar are important, but I should try to be aware of the importance of learning methods. I would like to think about what I want to tell someone and put those thoughts into English.
- I've noticed how important it is to have my own opinions in the interview test.
- I think I should talk to the native teachers even when I happen to meet them somewhere. I should have a positive attitude.
- I would like to know how I can increase my vocabulary.

- I seldom studied at home. Today I couldn't shadow well, either. I don't know what to do. (two weeks later) The teacher's advice helped me practice shadowing. I would like to practice shadowing many times at home. I'll get full marks in the shadowing quiz next week. (a week later) Today I got full marks in the shadowing quiz. I did it! (another week later) Almost! I couldn't say numbers fast enough! (another week later) I happened to get up earlier than usual, so I practiced shadowing five times. I did a good job today (^).
- I couldn't follow the native teachers. I couldn't say anything at the interview. I am very poor at speaking even Japanese. I have a lot of troubles.
- Ms. Nagakura respected my feelings and opinions, and discussed how to prepare for communicating with the native teachers. I have never thought about how to learn English, but I tried to some new ways and noticed various things.

5.2. The Native Teachers' Comments

- The Scrapbook was not helpful. Because they had the answers already written, they were robotic in their responses, so they were not able to converse freely.
- Having the scrap book gave them higher scores? Pictures help? Unnatural, in the sense that they were still relying on a book.
- Could you please explain clearer what you are trying to achieve. The students need more practice initiating conversations. Without the book they seem a bit lost. The pictures helped I think?? Bad timing on the day of the test?
- The talk was OK, but very unnatural.
- The pictures made it easy for lower lever students to talk, but almost impossible for them to extend the conversation beyond that.
- High level students were able to have a more natural conversation after they finished giving their talk and after they got their eyes off the scrapbook.
- Maybe having an object or only a picture (one or two) when talking would free them up to talk more freely.

5.3. The Results of the Interview Tests

The average of the native teachers' evaluation of the three interview tests in April, June and July is shown below.

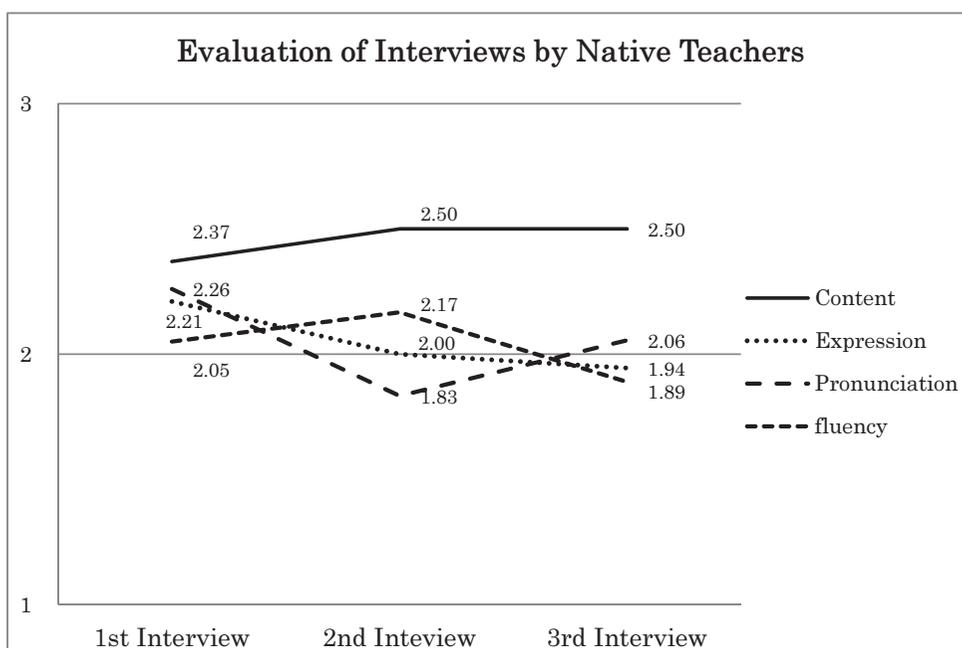


Figure 1 Evaluation of Interview Tests by Native Teachers

The content is getting a little better, probably because the students thought and make sentences when they make the scrapbooks. But expression seemed to be restricted. The students were advised not to read their scrapbooks at the interview, but some of them might think they have to memorize the sentences in the scrapbooks. Pronunciation and fluency don't seem to improve within a short period of time.

Most students appreciate scrapbooks and like to make them, but whether they can make good use of them will depend on various factors, such as personalities, past experiences, topics, and so forth. The first interview was conducted based on self-introductions, which the students might be used to. The second and third ones should be a little more difficult for the students.

The students' comments above, should be borne in mind when considering the interview results.

Student A was terribly nervous at the 2nd interview. “Suddenly my mind went blank as soon as I went into the interview room. I panicked when I was asked a question which was not prepared in my scrapbook,” she wrote.

Students B wrote: While I was making my scrapbook, I learned new words, how to make sentences and I wanted to talk much more. But I can’t always use it. I don’t know why. Probably I need to talk more often.

Students C wrote: I was very poor at English when I was a high school student. At the beginning I could not follow this class. The classmates are all kind, and the teachers are earnest, so I gradually came to know how to study more effectively.

Students D wrote: I like to make a scrapbook, and it worked well at the second interview. But it didn’t work well at all at the third interview. Why? Maybe I need to practice talking aloud again and again, assuming I am in front of a native teacher.

Table 3 Evaluation of Interviews (Student A)

Student A	1st Interview	2nd Interview	3rd Interview
Content	2	1	3
Expression	2	1	2
Pronunciation	2	1	2
Fluency	2	1	2

Table 4 Evaluation of Interviews (Student B)

Student B	1st Interview	2nd Interview	3rd Interview
Content	3	3	3
Expression	3	3	3
Pronunciation	2	2	3
Fluency	2	3	2

Table 5 Evaluation of Interviews (Student C)

Student C	1st Interview	2nd Interview	3rd Interview
Content	2	2	3
Expression	2	2	2
Pronunciation	1	1	2
Fluency	1	1	2

Table 6 Evaluation of Interviews (Student D)

Student D	1st Interview	2nd Interview	3rd Interview
Content	1	2	2
Expression	1	2	1
Pronunciation	1	3	1
Fluency	1	2	1

5.4. The Results of the Questionnaire

The writers asked the students about how helpful the activities in the innovative plans were. As a whole, the students seem to have accepted the plan and have tried the ideas pretty well. Especially, they appreciated scrapbooks and shadowing, probably because the former is a kind of really positive activity to express their own profiles and feelings and the latter helped them speak faster and more fluently.

The students were urged to discuss how to prepare for shadowing and how to make their scrapbooks more interesting and attractive. Generally speaking, the more experience, the more satisfaction, but the plans could not work as well as hoped.

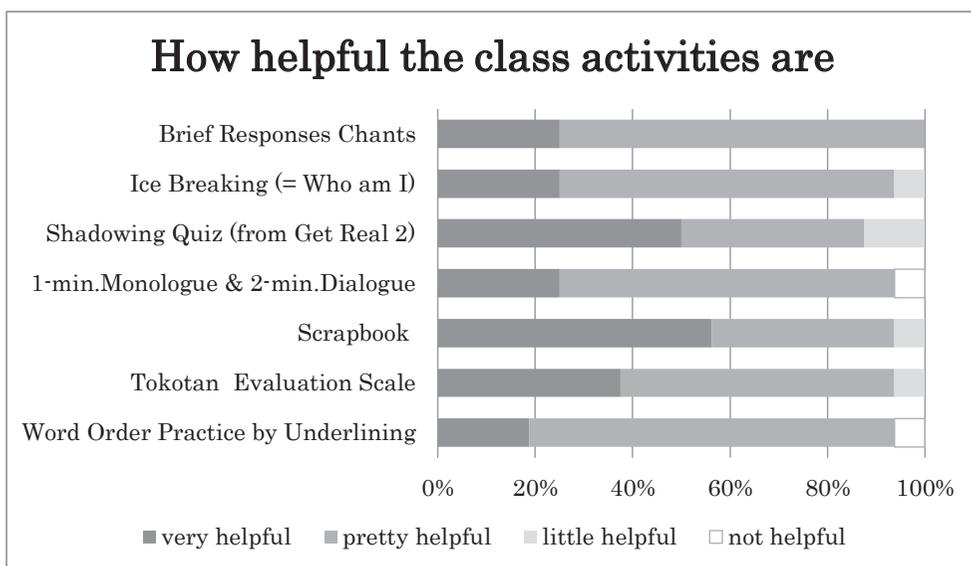


Figure 2 How helpful the class activities were

6. Discussion

The innovative plans were partially effective to some extent. The main good points were to encourage the students to become aware of, and pay attention to a lot of things. For example, what they would like to talk about, how to make sentences, how to try phonetic training, what type of learners they consider themselves to be, and so on.

Nevertheless they could make little practical use of those ideas. Even if these innovative plans are conducted successfully, the techniques and skills involved hardly seemed to work in real communicative conditions.

This subject is completely similar to the education reform which has been discussed for many years. Japanese English teachers are recommended to use English as often as possible. English is going to be taught as a subject in elementary schools. Education is

related to a lot of different factors, so collaborative and active learning among different subjects is vital.

The writers expect the education reform will work well, and the students will learn more positively and then achieve some power to collaborate with others and utilize various techniques and knowledge for the future.

On the other hand, there remains a fear that it may scarcely work. That is because various strategies are necessary, but what kind strategies will work how well is unclear. Besides, some strategies are about human cognition and some are about meta-cognition. Learning has a lot to do with various factors such as intelligence, emotion, relationships, circumstances, goals, and personalities.

The world is changing, and the young people are changing, too. It means that teachers should always continue considering better ways to support the student in front of them at any particular time. Unfortunately, a clear and outstanding result can't be expected in a certain period at school.

All we can do might be to coordinate the classes where the students are able to try out various potentially successful methods and learn from the experience. Also, to encourage them to consider and evaluate the strategies, the results and the possibilities.

The writers believe this innovative plan could be a good challenge in teachers' classroom practice by using qualitative methods to understand learners.

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