Putting Personal Learning and Interpersonal Communication at the Core of an EFL Course:
A Description of an Elective Speaking Course in the Liberal Arts Curriculum at Kanazawa Seiryo University

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Abstract

This paper describes the ongoing development of a student-centered EFL course that prioritizes the formation of autonomous learners as well as the building of confidence and competence in interpersonal communication. It presents a rationale for the use of this approach for Japanese, first-year university students enrolled in small-size, elective speaking classes in the general "liberal arts" curriculum. In addition to describing the pedagogical objectives and structure of the course, it presents the methods and tools used, both instructional and logistical, to carry out lessons that prioritize authentic communication during verbal/written interaction.

The results of a post-course questionnaire measuring students' as well as teachers' perceptions of improvement were positive in the five categories: 1) confidence, 2) attitude, 3) autonomy, 4) ability, and 5) authenticity. However, low enrollment in 2021 due to the pandemic resulted in a very small sample of students; hence, the results are not statistically significant and the study merely preliminary.

Keywords

language learning, personal learning, student-centered education, interpersonal communication, learner autonomy, motivation, reflective practice, Dogme, competency-based education, authentic language

1. Introduction

"Knowledge of languages is a doorway to wisdom." – Roger Bacon

"Learning another language is like becoming another person." – Haruki Murakami

"The limits of my language are the limits of my world." – Ludwig Wittgenstein

"To have another language is to possess a second soul." – Charlemagne

The Internet is replete with quotes meant to

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inspire the learning of foreign languages, and many of them, if not most, have a theme of personal transformation or liberation—of passing through a door into greater understanding, or of going beyond the accidental confines of one's existence. To wit, a foreign language offers not merely an opportunity to learn a new skill but also the prospect of an inspired voyage of self-discovery—to possess another voice, to perceive the world anew, to think in a different way, and to be changed profoundly by the experience. Of course, not every monolingual starts the voyage towards his or her second language with the goal of Maslowian self-actualization. Gardner and Lambert, early pioneers of motivational research in foreign language learning, distinguished between *instrumental* and *integrative* motivation, i.e. pragmatic reasons, such as acquiring a job skill versus a desire to be close to a culture through its language (1959). While the exact role of intrinsic motivation in learning is an evolving field of research and one that is becoming increasingly multidisciplinary (Murayama, 2018), there is no doubt that self-motivated language learners are more likely to succeed when the going gets tough. Every first-time traveler to the distant and alluring isle of fluency in a foreign language quickly learns that the journey there is a very personal one, even if conducted in the company of others. It is a passage requiring not only a strong sense of purpose but also self-discipline, persistence, focus, cleverness, and even courage, especially in overcoming one's fear or inhibitions of interacting with others. Learning a new language and breaking through the barrier of social interaction require more than just hopping on the shuttle bus of education and riding it mindlessly wherever it goes—it takes the ability to take charge of one's own learning as well as to make significant behavioral and attitudinal changes at the personal and the interpersonal level.

2. Rationale

Personal learning and interpersonal communication are elements found in any course, to some degree. However, the course described in this paper puts them at the core of the learning experience for several reasons.

First, personal learning puts the learner back at the center of their own learning process and trains them to assume or reassume ownership and control of that process. As one progressive school succinctly puts it (Werrimull P-12 School, n.d.):

Learners are most successful when they are mindful of themselves as learners and thinkers within a learning community. Personal learning focuses on providing students with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be successful, positive learners both at school and throughout their lives. They are supported to develop the confidence and ability to be adaptive and take an active role in shaping their own futures in a world of constant change.

Secondly, an emphasis on interpersonal communication returns the learner to the original purpose of human language: to speak to one another, often about trivial as well as non-trivial matters: the latest news, a friend's troubles, or that constant of small talk—the weather. The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (U.S.) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages distinguish interpersonal communication from two other kinds of communication (interpretive and presentational) and define it as follows: "Learners interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions (2015)." An emphasis on interpersonal communication integrates common everyday

sociability into lessons and makes interaction more authentic and participants more relatable. As one researcher has put it, "Authenticity, autonomy and motivation form a dynamic triad" (Pinner, 2017).

Thirdly, in the coming decade, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, machine translation, speech recognition, and other language technology will change the relative value of the different language skills, rendering some skills almost obsolete. Textual translation, for instance, may very well go the way of handwriting, becoming more of an optional artistic skill than a fundamental necessity of education. However, in this environment, the value of other skills, such as interpersonal communication, will likely increase. Interpersonal communication concerns the building of trust in human relationships, and AI-mediated interpersonal communication will likely detract from the sincerity needed for human bonding.

Lastly, the continued advancement of technology will only increase the ease with which one can study a language autonomously. An autonomous learner will be able to access this world of learning more easily than one dependent of structured learning. It is important to understand, though, that "autonomous" does not necessarily imply "alone" —being part of a learning community will remain an important element of a good education. Nonetheless, schools and teachers will need to adapt to this rapidly changing educational landscape and help students acquire the skills needed to learn independently.

3. Overview

This paper begins with a simple observation based on 28 years of personal experience teaching in Japanese universities, i.e. that the majority of new admissions to Japanese universities, especially non-English majors, arrive in their first-year English classes with two obvious deficiencies: learner

autonomy and speaking ability.

The Japanese Ministry of Education, touching on the importance of learner autonomy in its "Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education," expounds on the ideals of the individual that will be universally important in the year 2030 and beyond: "For individuals, it is important to foster human resources who make judgments independently as independent human beings, work together with diversified people, and create new values" (MEXT, n.d.). This emphasis on the importance of independent thinking is not new; however, the Japanese education system continues to fail at fostering independent learners. Native English teachers in Japan may feel this failure more acutely than others, working as they do at the "border" between Japanese and Anglophone cultures. The cultural differences around student dependence or independence are often explained with references to Confucian influence or framed using dichotomies such as social hierarchy versus egalitarianism, collectivism versus individualism, or high context versus low context cultures (Kubota, 2001, pp. 22-23). However, the lack of learner autonomy is very often simply the result of learned dependencies acquired during many years of institutionalized education (Bracey, 1997).

Low speaking ability, on the other hand, can be the result of a complex of personal, cultural, social, and educational factors. Regardless of the causes, the result is clear: the English ability of the average Japanese university student remains low. According to the EF English Proficiency Index, a ranking of English proficiency in 100 countries created by a Swiss international education company (EF Education First, 2020), it has even been declining in recent years, with the country dropping from 14th place in 2011 to 55th place in 2020. While there are few studies that focus on the interactive speaking

ability of non-English majors in college, one study indicates only moderate ability (Iwamoto, 2016).

To address these deficiencies in the personal and interpersonal aspects of language learning, a course was developed to facilitate students becoming independent language learners while they acquire communicative competence and confidence through immersion in authentic interaction. This paper will provide a profile of the students in their educational setting (population), a detailed description of the course (pedagogy), and the results of post-course surveys of both students and teachers (questionnaires).

4. Population

The population of students in this study are first-year non-English majors in Japan. The sample are students taking three sections of an elective English speaking course in the general "liberal arts" curriculum at Kanazawa Seiryo University.

4.1 Educational setting

Every effort was made in the design of this course to have it embody the principles expressed in the university mission statement and the educational philosophy of its liberal arts curriculum.

4.1.1 University

Kanazawa Seiryo University is a small private university with about 2,700 students. It offers general education courses as well as degrees from three faculties: Business Management & Economics, Human Sciences, and the Humanities. The mission statement of the university continues to reflect the message of its founder (Student Handbook, 2021a):

Our mission is to contribute to the development of the industry and culture of the Hokuriku Region as well as to the nation at large, with the aim of realizing the founding spirit of the university: to nurture sincere human beings in

becoming useful members of society.

The mission statement leans heavily on the word *shinjitsu* (sincerity), which in English could also include the meanings of "honesty" and "reliability," and perhaps even "authenticity." In the context of higher education, it could be interpreted as "acting ethically," as in following the school's code of ethics. More broadly, it could be understood to mean "acting in good faith" in all matters.

The statement elaborates further on the importance of a sincere attitude in becoming a useful member of society (Student Handbook, 2021a):

In accordance with the spirit of the school's founding, students should be sincere in everything they do, feel, investigate, think, judge, and act. Students who understand these behaviours and practice them in concert and in harmony are the kind of people who will eventually become useful members of society.

The statement goes on to detail eight qualities it expects teachers to possess. Here are four that relate directly to this project (Student Handbook, 2021a):

- Teachers who strive for communication between students and faculty and seek to deepen their overall understanding
- Teachers who try to inspire students' curiosity and show them the way to the future
- Teachers who are sincerely willing to be a sounding board for the concerns and needs of students
- Teachers who can recognize that a university is a place where students learn independently

4.1.2 Department

The Department of Liberal Arts & Sciences

is home to the general education curriculum for all students, offering a mixture of core courses, required electives, and optional electives intended to provide students with a broad education. The newly revised educational philosophy of the department asserts two feature of the university's liberal arts education: enrichment and empowerment (Student Handbook, 2021b):

Enrichment. The distinctive feature of the university's liberal arts education is its "wedge-shape" that allows students to learn in a variety of ways throughout their four years of study, not only by acquiring basic academic skills, but also by taking courses in a variety of fields to enrich their education. This enables students to cultivate their own liberal education in accordance with their expanding interests. Students are able to develop the flexible mindset needed to adapt to changes in modern society as well as to broaden their thinking while searching for their own path of growth.

Empowerment. In a liberal arts education, we do not merely study academic subjects as a set of facts to remember, rather we learn how to connect the dots and to actively question not only how we live but also how we should live within society and nature, which form the foundation of our existence. At Kanazawa Seiryo University, let us learn together, as fellow members of humanity and society, to empower our learning through the liberal arts and to carve out purposeful lives for ourselves, continuously learning and acquiring new perspectives and approaches. Through the power of questioning, let us transform ourselves from passive learners into active students of the world around us, and to become seekers of diverse learning.

The official statement of philosophy goes on to specify three areas of empowerment:

Using your body senses to acquire skills. It is important to be aware of your body senses in order to acquire practical skills like language skills and information processing. Particularly in language courses such as English and information courses that deal with computers, consciously reviewing body sensations, repeating them over and over and paying attention to body movements is an essential process in acquiring skills.

Using language to learn diversity of thought. Supporting the network of knowledge is language and its power. Words can create a variety of concepts and give names to concepts and phenomena that were previously unknown to us. In addition, the ability to think is enhanced by constantly asking questions and expressing oneself through words. Particularly in the humanities and sciences, students will harness the power of words and learn about the diversity of ways of thinking.

Understanding the workings of the mind to deepen connections with people. We cultivate the ability to build bonds between people by envisioning the situations surrounding people and the workings of their minds, understanding them from diverse angles and tackling issues. As we go about our daily lives, encountering a variety of situations, issues and events, we need to be able to formulate the right questions in order to come up with the right responses. The liberal arts have the power to deepen our questions as well as our answers to those questions. They empower us to broaden our perspectives while enriching our connections and communication

with others.

Note. For comparison with the previous version of this statement of philosophy, refer to translation (Broadaway, 2020).

4.1.3 English Curriculum

The English curriculum is part of the general liberal arts curriculum for all students, but in fact classes are attended only by non-English majors in the Faculties of Economics and Human Sciences since students studying in the Intercultural Studies Department (i.e. English majors) take courses in a dedicated English curriculum in the Humanities Faculty. First-year courses are divided into two types: 1) required courses, with relatively large class sizes and a lecture-style format and 2) elective courses, with small class sizes, a communicative format and native English-speaking teachers.

4.2 Students

4.2.1 Generalizations

The university serves students from the Hokuriku region, a culturally conservative area of Japan. Most students fit the profile of a "traditional" student: single, aged 18-20, and of Japanese nationality. Most have at least six years of formal education in English; however, very few have much experience actually using English in authentic interactions. Most come from an educational culture that is heavily teacher-centered, with a bias towards passive learning, translation, rote memorization, and test taking.

4.2.2 Assumptions

There are several assumptions that can be safely made about the majority of students. First, they have a sufficient knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary to engage in simple conversations. Second, they have had little experience using the English they learned in school in actual real-world communication, so they lack the confidence that

comes from such experience. Third, they have relied heavily on the school system to guide their English education and therefore are unaccustomed to learning a language outside of an instructional setting. And fourth, they are eager to use English for real, especially to speak with peers and—like most young people—to make friends.

5. Pedagogy

The method described here, although addressing a very particular set of students in a very particular educational environment, has much in common with discovery learning in general, with its emphasis on minimal teacher guidance, active student involvement, problem-solving, learner self-management, integrating new and prior knowledge, and the importance of transitioning from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. As Jerome Bruner famously said, "Practice in discovering for oneself teaches one to acquire information in a way that makes that information more readily viable in problem solving" (Bruner, p. 26). However, the method described here eschews pure *unassisted* discovery learning in favor of a blended approach, mixing direct instruction with *assisted* discovery learning.

This method also has much in common with older forms of humanistic foreign language education, especially the Silent Way (Gattengo, 1963), but it has found its greatest affinity (quite unintentionally) with the Dogme movement, initiated in 2000 with the publication of a short article by Scott Thornbury in IATEFL (2000). The basic principles of Dogme were later clarified as follows (Thornbury, 2005):

- Interactivity: the most direct route to learning is to be found in the interactivity between teachers and students and amongst the students themselves.
- Engagement: students are most engaged by content they have created themselves.

- Dialogic processes: learning is social and dialogic, where knowledge is co-constructed.
- Scaffolded conversations: learning takes place through conversations, where the learner and teacher co-construct the knowledge and skills.
- Emergence: language and grammar emerge from the learning process. This is seen as distinct from the acquisition of language.
- Affordances: the teacher's role is to optimize language learning affordances through directing attention to emergent language.
- Voice: the learner's voice is given recognition along with the learner's beliefs and knowledge.
- Empowerment: students and teachers are empowered by freeing the classroom of published materials and textbooks.
- Relevance: materials (e.g. texts, audios and videos) should have relevance for the learners.
- Critical use: teachers and students should use published materials and textbooks in a critical way that recognizes their cultural and ideological biases.

The Dogme movement in language teaching got its inspiration from the Dogme 95 movement in film-making, which aims to protect authenticity in films by removing unnecessary artifice from the film-making process. However, in the post-Covid world, the intentional avoidance of technology in language education seems counter-productive.

5.1　Course

The main features of this course are: 1) class sizes are less than 12 students, 2) there is a content theme for the course as well as a launch question for the discussion topic for each lesson, 3) students' authentic interactions are at the center of each lesson and drive the discussion while the teacher facilitates the interaction and takes advantage of emergent language and teaching moments, 4) class time is devoted predominately to verbal interpersonal interaction, 5) class discussions continue after class as written interaction in online forums or task feeds, 6) students reflect in writing on their in-class speaking performance and then write peer reviews of their classmates' reflections, 7) students perform a weekly self-evaluation of teacher-defined competencies, and 8) students are evaluated on their interpersonal communication output (speaking and writing).

5.1.1　Objectives

The goals of this course reflect the mission of the university and its liberal arts educational philosophy as well as address the critical imbalance of abilities described in the introduction. Whereas a traditional course might state objectives consisting of pre-determined knowledge and skill components, this course uses a transformative pedagogy that aims primarily to make changes of heart and habit in freshman students, changes that will hopefully have long-term positive effects not only on their English ability but also on the course of their four years of university education. The knowledge components of the course (vocabulary, expressions, grammar, etc.) are discovered in-situ during interactions, usually in direct response to the questions or needs of students.

Gain basic fluency through self-expression. Being able to speak about oneself and to explain one's circumstances is an essential part of interpersonal communication. Students need time to find their voice in English and incorporate it into their identity.

Overcome hesitancy to interact in English and to build confidence. A degree of anxiety about speaking in class is normal, regardless of the language. The goal is to help students overcome this anxiety through gradual exposure and experience. This can be achieved by simultaneously increasing positive emotions (higher levels of dopamine) associated with interpersonal communication

and decreasing negative emotions (lower levels of stress hormones). In addition, writing regular self-reflections on communicative performance also helps students to formulate their own improvement goals and to monitor progress. Positive emotions (and raised dopamine levels) are also correlated with progress towards a valued goal.

Become autonomous language learner. The goal is for students to replace their learned dependencies with language learner competencies and achieve a fundamental change in orientation towards their own language learning process from outer-directed to inner-directed.

The two greatest enablers of learner dependency in the classroom are the textbook and the teacher.

Textbook dependency. The practical usefulness of textbooks is undeniable; however, their use is not without drawbacks, both for students and teachers. First, the most obvious disadvantage is that there is not one textbook, no matter how good, that can respond to every student's interests or needs; prepackaged solutions are especially ill-suited for a student-centered course such as this one. Second, the very aspects of a textbook that make it useful (structure, layout, regularity) also tend to make it boring. Authentic interactions, on the other hand, have an impromptu quality and an unpredictability that make them engaging and intrinsically interesting. Third, a textbook undermines the creativity and resourcefulness of the teacher, and thus the originality and spontaneity of lessons. In short, a textbook detracts from autonomy by creating a mindset in all participants that there is a predetermined process or system to which one must surrender control and initiative. It "de-skills teachers" (Richards, 1993) and turns students into "captive learners" (Allwright, 1981). Structure, layout, and regularity can be achieved by other means, such as the use of a process-oriented

structured syllabus and a learning management system (LMS) combined with freely available online content. An out-of-box solution provided by the publisher-institutional complex should in no way be considered an absolute necessity.

Teacher dependency. Students are generally accustomed to waiting for direction from the teacher; however, teacher-led discussions can short-circuit the initiative to speak and set students up in a passive posture from the start of a discussion. If the directions and expectations are incorporated into the process syllabus, then students can begin discussions in an active frame of mind, understanding that they have a responsibility to initiate topics and engage with others.

5.1.2 Competencies

Students are unlikely to transition from being passive participants and dependent learners to being active and independent without a map to guide them. The competency map for this course is made up of two types of competencies: language learner competencies and participation competencies:

Language learner competencies. Similar to language competencies, which identify certain communicative acts (telling time, giving directions, etc.), language learner competencies identify certain learner actions (vocabulary building, shadowing, finding conversation partners, etc.) and define the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to perform each, enabling them to become independent learners. Students receive direct instruction on these competencies and perform weekly self-assessments of their competence level.

Participation competencies. Students also track competencies related to their verbal and written interaction during class sessions as well as online discussions. These competencies include items such as the ability to engage in small talk at the start of class, the ability to ask a clarifying question, or the

ability to use interlanguage appropriately.

Students perform a self-assessment of their performance on these competencies as part of their weekly reflections.

5.1.3 Pedagogical structure

As can be seen in Figure 1, the student's public and private self are at the center of the course, with interpersonal communication (both in-class verbal and out-of-class written interaction) forming the principal activity in the public hemisphere. In the private hemisphere, the student devotes their time to self-reflection on their performance/learning and to self-assessment of their competencies. The course entails the use of all four skills but leans heavily towards the right hemisphere, emphasizing the active skills of speaking and writing.
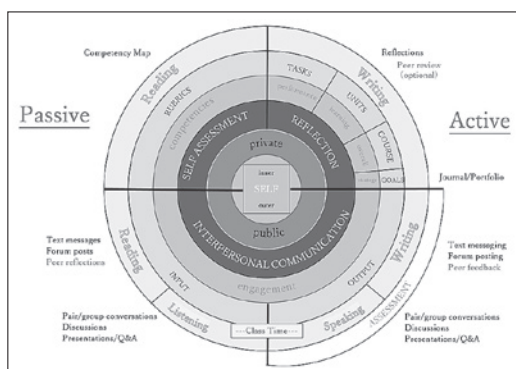

Figure 1: Overview of Pedagogical Structure.

5.1.4 Assessment

Assessment by the teacher focuses on the student's speaking and writing output. It is accomplished by a combination of the teacher's observation of active participation, teacher-student interviews about self-assessment, and rubric-graded assignments.

5.2 Lesson structure

Individual lessons follow a simple, mostly repetitive pattern to allow students to focus on immediate participation rather than waiting for the teacher's direction. Having a well-defined process of lesson participation also removes the perception in the students' eyes of the teacher as the driver of the lesson. This can be critical in a culture where students have an engrained expectation of the teacher to "take charge." While each lesson is organized around a topic-based discussion, all lessons begin with social interaction on any topic; this social interaction time is allowed to continue as long as students are able. For interpersonal communication to succeed, it is essential that students get to know one another and become comfortable speaking personally.

5.2.1 Preparation.

Each lesson has a single topic with an associated "launch question." The topic is determined in advance by the teacher and chosen based on the two criteria: 1) the topic relates to the overall theme of the course, and 2) the topic is as close as possible to the students' common world of experience. For example, an appropriate topic for a course on the theme of travel would be "Nice places to visit locally." To prepare for participation in this discussion, students practice responding to the launch question. The launch question is chosen based on two criteria: 1) it relates to the topic of discussion, and 2) it is answerable from each student's personal world of experience. For example: What is the best day-trip you have ever taken in the local area?

5.2.2 Lesson

The lesson begins with a text-based discussion for warm-up and then switches to verbal social interaction. This is followed by a review of the previous lesson, and then the main discussion. The class ends with students taking a flash survey of their performance during the lesson and leaving a farewell text message.

Warm-up. Each lesson begins with ten minutes of text-based interaction with students using their

devices in class. It is a time for small talk and recent news. Students are encouraged to make posts that attract responses, as longer threads will be assessed as being more interactive. When time is up, the threads can be displayed in class and serve as a transition to verbal social interaction.

Ice-breaking/socializing. In the first several class sessions, ice-breaking activities serve an essential role in allowing students to get to know each other before engaging in interpersonal communication. Later, this time is open for students to engage in authentic interpersonal communication on any topic. The teacher should play an increasingly minor role in this activity as the course progresses; however, the teacher should monitor the discussion to determine student knowledge or skill gaps to be filled in later, either immediately after the socializing time or in a mini-lesson prepared for the next lesson. Prior to the lesson, students receive tips on sustaining a discussion (asking clarifying questions, adding personal anecdotes, etc.), and during the discussion the teacher facilitates in a variety of ways, including providing real-time captions of problematic expressions. There is no designated time limit, and the discussion comes to an end when students no longer have anything to say.

Review of online interaction. After socializing, the class reviews the topic from the previous lesson by looking at the online discussions in the public forums as well as any task-related discussion threads. The teacher praises the discussions that were the most interactive, asks for clarification from the posters, uses the content of discussions for teaching opportunities (impromptu mini-lesson), and facilitates a deeper discussion either verbally at the moment or later online.

Discussion/Mini-lessons/Presentations. The main activity is the discussion on the assigned topic of the day, which should be sustained as long as possible. However, it can be augmented with (or even replaced by) other teacher-prepared activities or mini-lessons as needed in addressing the perceived needs of the students. Student presentations, although not an instance of interpersonal communication in themselves, can also be very effective in generating follow-up interaction.

Flash survey and farewell message. The final five minutes of the lesson are reserved for each student to write a farewell message on the lesson feed and take a flash survey on their performance during the lesson. The anonymous results for the overall class performance are visible at the very end of the lesson. The flash survey questions cover five categories that focus the students' attention on the learning objectives of the course. Individual questions are adapted to suit each lesson. Here are some example questions:

1. *Confidence.* Did you feel less shy than the previous lesson?
2. *Autonomy.* Did you help sustain the discussion more often than the previous lesson?
3. *Attitude*: Has your enjoyment of the lesson increased since the previous lesson?
4. *Authenticity.* Could you express your identity more easily than the previous lesson?
5. *Ability.* Did you initiate a verbal interaction more often than the previous lesson?

5.2.3 Homework

These are some tasks that students must perform before the start of the next class session.

Review vocabulary. New vocabulary is "captured" by the teacher during the socializing and discussion phases of the lesson and becomes part of the knowledge component of the course, and it should be reviewed frequently. Direct instruction is provided on memorization techniques and tools as

well as vocabulary building strategies.

Participate in online discussions. One forum discussion for each lesson is provided as a place for students to continue in-class discussions online. Students are assessed on the quantity and quality of their posts as well as on the amount of interaction their posts generate.

Complete assignments. The teacher may give a variety of assignments to encourage interpersonal communication, practice English skills (shadowing, dramatic reading, presentations, etc.), or to support the topic discussions in class.

Reflect and self-assess / Peer review. Every other class session, students write a short reflection about their thoughts, feelings, or opinions regarding the class. At the same time they also assess themselves on language learner competencies and participation competencies. On alternating sessions, students review the reflections of their peers and write a comment.

5.3 CALL Applications

A long-standing problem of implementing a student-centered course has been that it requires a lot of time on the part of the teacher. However, the proliferation of English language content on the Internet, advancements in learning management systems, and the availability of user-friendly educational tools has made the problem more manageable. This course was designed with a mind to minimizing the amount of time spent by the teacher in managing the course.

5.3.1 Learning management system (LMS)

DotCampus is the institutional LMS used by the university and serves as the main platform for organization and management of the course. In addition to the usual LMS functions, it has several functions that are particularly helpful in this style of education.

Competency map. A competency map consists of individual competencies grouped into domains that can be assigned to tasks or units of study for the purpose of guiding student self-assessment.

Figure 2: DotCampus Course Page with Competency Map

Journal. The journal holds a record of all of a student's written reflections and self-assessments as well as their peers' reviews of reflections. The journal is consulted during one-on-one interviews between teacher and student.

Figure 3: Journal Management Page
Note. Shows weekly reflections and assigned competencies (center)

Feeds. An individual feed can be assigned to any task (lesson, assignment, quiz, etc.) or resource (text, audio, video, embedded content from third-party apps, etc.) in DotCampus, allowing for text based, Twitter-like discussion on targeted content or activities related to lessons.
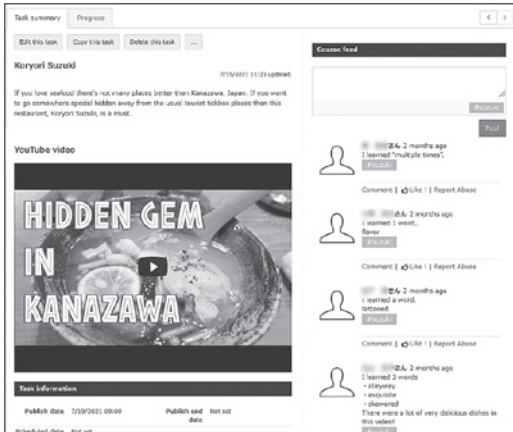
Figure 4: DotCampus with Embedded YouTube Video
Note. Dedicated feed (on the right) allows discussion about the video

Bonus points. Individual posts on the feeds and forums in DotCampus have a "like" button. Both students and the teacher can "like" a post; however, if the teacher "likes" a post, then it appears as a bonus point in that student's record. This provides a quick way for the teacher to recognize and reward a student's effort to engage in written interaction.

Comprehension survey. DotCampus has several means of surveying students, but the comprehension survey at the end of each lesson can also be used as a flash poll to measure student progress on a regular basis. It is integrated into the system to make it easy for students to indicate their comprehension or
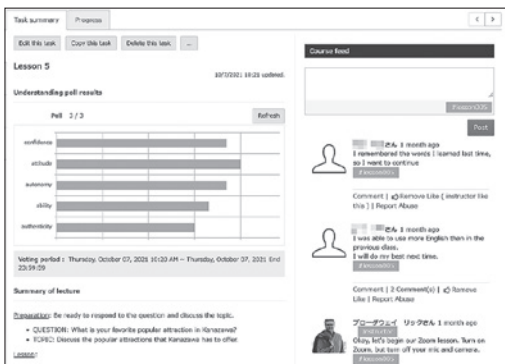
progress immediately after a lesson has finished and for all participants to see the overall results quickly.

5.3.2 Third-party educational apps

The language learning apps used in this course can be grouped into four types: content, flashcard, translation, and production. Experimentation with different apps is encouraged in this course as part of the goal of creating independent learners. Additionally, direct instruction is provided to inform students of the pros and cons of different apps.

Several apps are used systematically in the course to help enrich and enhance the lessons.

Content. YouTube is the primary app used to bring real-world English into the lessons. The ability to rewind, slow down playback speed, and activate captions makes YouTube one of the best tools there is for studying foreign languages. YouTube videos can be added directly into DotCampus for viewing, with an attached feed for text-based discussion.

Flashcard. Quizlet is used to consolidate all of the emergent vocabulary "captured" during lessons and create easy-to-use flashcard sets for memorization of words and phrases using spaced-repetition. Teachers using the app can create a Quizlet classroom and then add sets for each lesson. When creating flashcards the app has many time-saving features, such as automated generation of
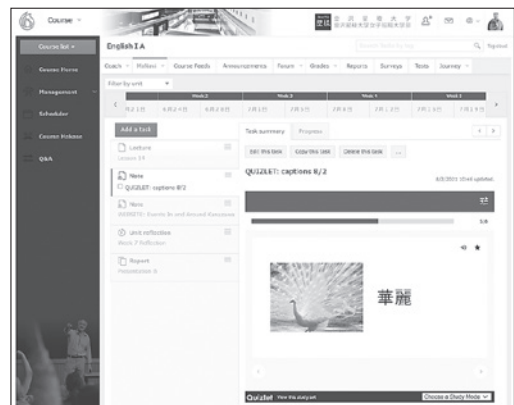

Figure 5: DotCampus Lesson Page with Flash Survey
Note. Dedicated feed (right) is for opening greetings/ small talk and farewell messages. Bar graph (left) shows results of flash survey

Figure 6: DotCampus with Embedded Quizlet Flashcard Set

translation, audio and pictures. Quizlet sets can also be embedded into DotCampus for better integration while retaining full functionality in different study modes: match, learn, flashcards, test, and spell.

Translation. In this course, the students' use of online translation services such as DeepL and Google Translate is accepted as an unavoidable reality. However, direct instruction is provided to teach students to use them properly, both as a communication aid and as a learning tool.

Production. Flipgrid is used to make videos and share them easily. Students can make video presentations or performances quickly on their smartphones. The teacher can also use Flipgrid for the purpose of direct instruction to address learning gaps that were discovered during lessons. A Flipgrid video can be embedded in DotCampus to create a "mini-lesson" as shown in Figure 7. Captions are added to the video automatically and can be edited quickly and easily. The Flipgrid video player also as an immersive reader function that allows students to read along easily with the audio and even color code the different parts of speech.
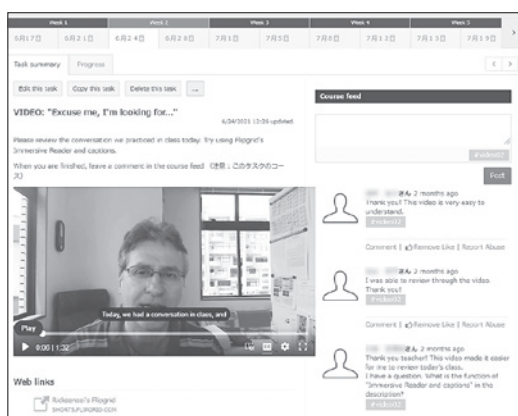

Figure 7: DotCampus with Embedded Flipgrid Video
Note. Effective and convenient for direct instruction outside of class time

6. Questionnaires

Post-course questionnaires were administered to 11 students across three sections of the course, each taught by a different teacher.

Likewise, two teachers, new to this style of teaching, were surveyed about their experiences in the course.

6.1 Students

6.1.1 Survey

An anonymous questionnaire, administered in Japanese, was used to rate students' responses on a Likert scale to measure their perceptions of their own progress as language learners on five items related to the objectives of the course: 1) confidence, 2) autonomy, 3) ability, 4) authenticity, and 5) attitude. (See Table A1.) Each item was measured with three questions: two direct questions about their progress at the end of the course and one predictive question about their behaviors going forward.
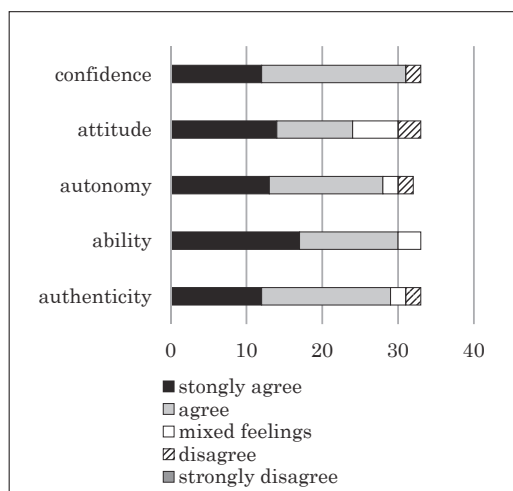

Figure 8: Students' Self-perception of Personal Progress
Note. Each horizontal bar indicates the total number of responses for all 3 questions about that item.

6.1.2 Results

The responses were predominately positive,

either "agree" or "strongly agree," which seems to indicate that students perceived improvement in the five areas being measured. The "disagree" responses were entirely from a single student. There were no "strongly disagree" responses.

6.2 Teachers

6.2.1 Survey

An anonymous questionnaire, administered in English, was used to rate teachers' responses on a Likert scale to measure their perceptions of their own progress as teachers on the same five items as the students: 1) confidence, 2) autonomy, 3) ability, 4) authenticity, and 5) attitude. (See Table A2.) Each item was measured with three questions: two direct questions about their progress at the end of the course and one predictive question about their behaviors going forward.
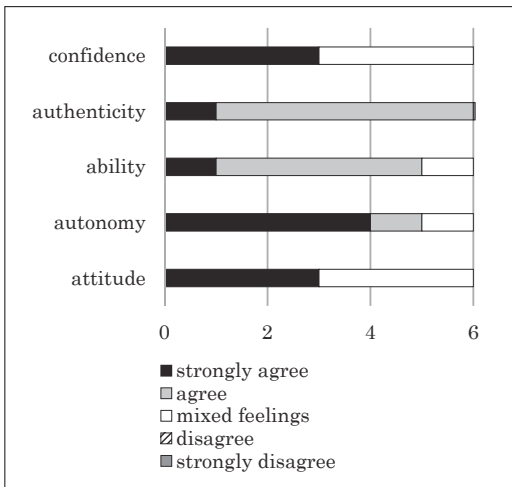
Figure 9: Teachers' Self-perception of Personal Progress

Note. Each horizontal bar indicates the total number of responses for all 3 questions about that item.

6.2.2 Results

The responses were predominately positive, either "agree" or "strongly agree," which seems to indicate that teachers perceived improvement in the five areas being measured. There were no "disagree"

or "strongly disagree" responses. However, a few responses did reveal some "mixed feelings." Also, there was some variation between the results of the two teachers.
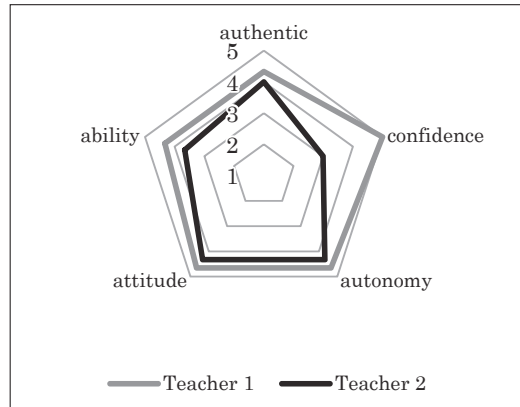
Figure 10: Variation of Results between Teachers
Note. Vertical axis corresponds to a Likert score of 5 (strongly agree) and 1 (strongly disagree). Values for each item represent the average score on 3 questions.

6.3 Analysis

The small scale of this study precludes any conclusive results regarding the effectiveness of this method; however, the preliminary indicators are encouraging and further research is warranted.

7. Discussion

One of the unexpected discoveries of this project—a project which grew out of practical concerns regarding the particular needs of students at Kanazawa Seiryo University—was the resemblance of its stated objectives and general principles to those of the Dogme movement. Moving forward, it may be beneficial to align more closely with the movement and frame future research questions accordingly. However, this project differs in two significant ways from Dogme, which has a markedly *anti-establishment* tone and an avowedly *anti-technological* stance.

1) While this project does resist the influence

of mass textbook publishers and mainstream habits found in schools throughout Japan, it seeks to integrate itself into the liberal arts education at the university and reinforce liberal reforms there. To the degree possible, it wishes to become establishment. However, there are formidable institutional barriers to making this happen, primarily related to teacher training and maintaining sufficiently small classes.

2) While the Dogme movement's purist desire to remove all artifice from the communication act may have seemed laudable at one time, it seems totally inappropriate in a post-Covid world. This project embraces technology in a variety of roles while attempting to retain the authenticity of interpersonal communication as much as possible.

The larger question regarding the effect that this style of language class has on a student's intrinsic motivation remains unanswered. While many of the students' responses to the questions about their future language learning behaviors were positive, it is beyond the scope of this study to know if they carry through with those behaviors.

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Appendix A
Post-course Questionnaires

Table A1: *Student Questionnaire*

Items	Questions	質問	++	+	◎	−	−−
Confidence 自身	Since taking this course, I have more confidence speaking English with people?	このコースを受講して、英語を話す自信がつきました。	3	7		1	
	Since taking this course, I have more confidence corresponding in English with people?	このコースを受講して、英文でメッセージのやり取りをする自信がつきました。	3	7		1	
	In the future, I think I would have confidence to use English with a stranger?	この先、ネイティブと交流する機会があれば、英語を使ってみたいと思います。	6	5			
Attitude 態度	Since taking this course, I have a more positive attitude about English.	このコースを受講して、英語学習に対する関心が高まりました。	8	2		1	
	Since taking this course, I have more interest in traveling or studying abroad.	このコースを受講して、海外旅行や留学に対する興味が増しました。	4	3	3	1	
	In the future, I think I would like to use English in my life and work.	将来、生活や仕事の中で英語を使っていきたいと考えています。	2	5	3	1	
Autonomy 自律	Since taking this course, I understand better the importance of being an independent language learner.	このコースを受講してから、自律した言語学習者であることの重要性をより理解できるようになりました。	5	5		1	
	Since taking this course, I am better able to study and learn English on my own.	このコースを受講してから、自分で英語を学習することができるようになりました。	3	6	2		
	In the future, I intend to study English more on my own and manage my own progress.	今後は、もっと自分で英語を勉強して、自分で進捗を管理していこうと思っています。	6	4		1	
Ability 能力	Since taking this course, my ability to use English to communicate has improved.	このコースを受講してから、英語を使ってコミュニケーションをとる能力が向上しました。	6	3	2		
	Since taking this course, my ability to overcome communication breakdowns has improved.	このコースを受講してから、言い換えたり、もう一度言ってもらったり、必要に応じてインターランゲージを使ったりして、コミュニケーションの断絶を克服する能力が向上しました。	5	5	1		
	In the future, I intend to practice English more to improve my communication skills.	今後は、もっと英語を練習して、特に人と話すことで、コミュニケーション能力を高めていきたいと思っています。	6	5			
Authenticity 誠実	Since taking this course, I am better able to express my thoughts and feelings in English.	このコースを受講してから、自分の気持ちなどを英語でより素直に話せるようになりました。	6	3	1	1	
	Since taking this course, I am able to interact with others more sincerely in English.	このコースを受講してから、英語でのアイデンティティ、つまり英語を使う自分、が前より見えてきた。	3	7	1		
	In the future, I intend to continue practicing in order to develop my own voice in English.	今後は、もっと本格的に英語を使って、実社会でのコミュニケーションを図りたいと考えています。	6	3	1	1	

Note. Values represent the number of responses to each question by all students.

Table A2. *Teacher Questionnaire*

Items	Questions	++	+	◎	−	−−
Confidence	Since teaching this course, I have more confidence in allowing a lesson to be more spontaneous.	1		1		
	Since teaching this course, I have more confidence in facilitating impromptu discussions and interpersonal communication.	1		1		
	In the future, I would like to continue teaching using this method.	1		1		
Attitude	Since teaching this course, I have a more positive attitude about communication classes.	1	1			
	Since teaching this course, I have a more positive attitude about teaching in general.		2			
	In the future, I would be genuinely interested in knowing how my students continue to progress in English.	2				
Autonomy	Since teaching this course, I better understand the pros and cons of using a textbook.		1	1		
	Since teaching this course, I better understand the challenges of training autonomous learners.	2				
	In the future, I intend to incorporate autonomous learner training into my teaching.	2				
Ability	Since teaching this course, my ability to get students to interact verbally has improved.		2			
	Since teaching this course, my ability to organize, manage and teach a student-centered course has improved.		2			
	In the future, I intend to practice and improve this style of teaching.	1		1		
Authenticity	Since teaching this course, I feel that I know my students better as individuals.	1	1			
	Since taking this course, I feel more sincere in my interactions with students.		2			
	In the future, I want my lessons to be more like the real world.		2			

Note. Values represent the number of responses to each question by both teachers.