

[研究ノート]

Course Development for the Tama University English Shower Program: Evaluations of the First Year Curriculum

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As part of a university-wide curriculum reform effort, the School of Management and Information Sciences at Tama University instituted a compulsory English-language education program, the English Shower Program, in April 2002. The twofold objective of the program is to develop (a) the English proficiency, and (b) the general and intercultural communication skills of all undergraduate business students in the school, who will need such skills in their careers (English Shower Program Handbook 2007). The program contents and criteria have been reviewed periodically, and based on feedback from instructors and students, new activities have been added to the curriculum. This paper presents the results of a survey of first-year students conducted in July, 2007 to assess the needs of current students and the current state of the program. A questionnaire was distributed on the day of the final exam for English Shower courses in the Spring 2007 semester; students selected responses to survey questions from among alternatives provided.

English Shower classes for the first-year of the program meet four days a week, with the course contents divided into two curricula, each offered on

two days per week. The I-A curriculum, offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays, emphasizes speaking and listening activities for developing communication skills; this curriculum is designed to foster students' ability to engage in discourse ranging from small talk to discussions on social issues. The I-B curriculum, offered on Wednesdays and Fridays, emphasizes the development of speech and presentation skills, which will be essential in the future workplaces of the business-major students for whom the program was designed.

In view of the structure of the course, the questionnaire comprised three parts. The first part investigated students' responses to the overall curriculum, the second the I-A curriculum, and the third the I-B curriculum.

. Students' Responses to the Overall Curriculum

The English Shower Program takes a communicative approach, and therefore maintains an English-only policy that requires instructors and students to use English at all times during classes. For

first-year students, who are unfamiliar with such a learning environment, understanding this policy and maintaining a positive engagement in learning English represents a major challenge. Hence, this section of the questionnaire was designed to answer the following two questions. (1) What are the learning objectives of students in the program, and are the English Shower curriculum objectives in accord with these objectives? (2) How effective is the English Shower curriculum in developing students' English proficiency?

1. Students' learning objectives

Figure 1 shows the English skills that students indicated a desire to develop through their university English classes.

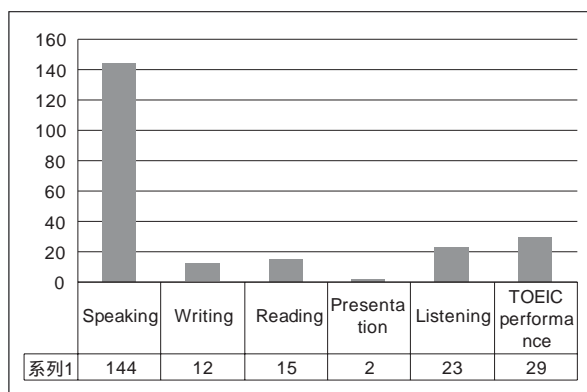


Figure 1: Skills students wish to develop

In that English Shower classes emphasize the development of speaking skills, the survey results presented in Figure 1 show that the objectives of the program corresponded well with students' objectives; the skill that students most want to develop is the focus of the program. However, students do not seem to be as interested in other skills that are also important; in particular, one main objective of the program, the development of presentation skills, was not shared widely by students, as we had hoped. The survey

results show that as we help to improve students' speaking skills, we need to communicate more effectively to students the importance of presentation skills.

2. Students' reported progress in English Shower classes

The questionnaire asked students to report improvement that they observed in particular skill areas as a result of a semester of study in an English Shower course. Figure 2 shows their responses.

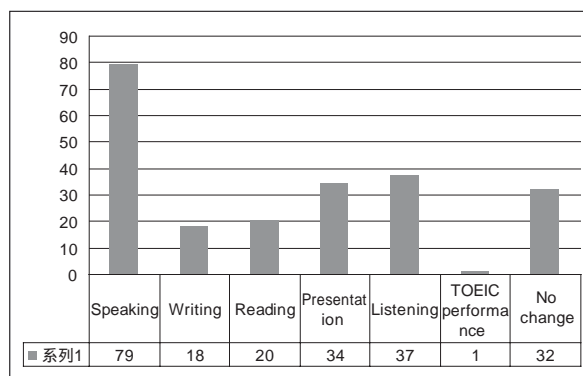


Figure 2: Skills improved through English Shower course

The data show that 86% of students observed some improvement in their English skills while 14% did not observe any improvement. The focus on communication in English Shower classes seems to have led to improved speaking and listening skills, and the heavy focus on presentation skills also seems to have yielded improvement.

The questionnaire also asked students' to report affective changes resulting from their English Shower course. Figure 3 presents students' responses.

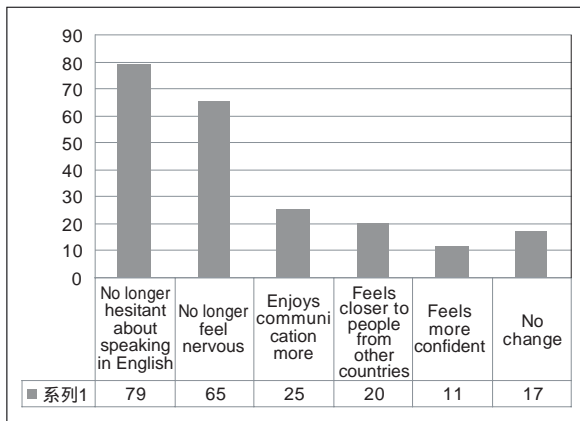


Figure 3: Affective changes resulting from English Shower course

ESI-A curriculum

English Shower I-A (henceforth, I-A) is designed to develop students' proficiency in English in the four skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this section, we focus on three main program-wide activities, vocabulary quizzes, listening marathon, and writing marathon, in the curriculum and attempt to evaluate students' perceptions and satisfaction levels of them by looking into our questionnaire survey results.

1. Vocabulary Quizzes

The I-A sets eight vocabulary quizzes during the semester. The main purposes of the quizzes are for students to strengthen their vocabulary and provide them with an opportunity to develop study habits. Students take one vocabulary quiz every week during the class. There are 20 questions in each quiz, consisting of 15 questions on vocabulary and five questions on grammar they have learnt in previous classes. Each correct answer is worth one point. Hence, the full mark is 20 points. All words tested in the quizzes are either taken from or closely related to the vocabulary found in the materials which are used in the classes (textbooks, handouts etc.) A word list for

each quiz is given in the student handbook distributed at the beginning of the academic year.

In our questionnaire survey, we asked the students the following four questions on vocabulary quizzes:

- 1) Did weekly vocabulary quizzes benefit you?
- 2) Why do you think weekly vocabulary quizzes were effective?
- 3) What was your usual target score?
- 4) How did you study for weekly vocabulary quizzes?

First, Figure 4 shows that almost 85% of the students found vocabulary quizzes beneficial to them.

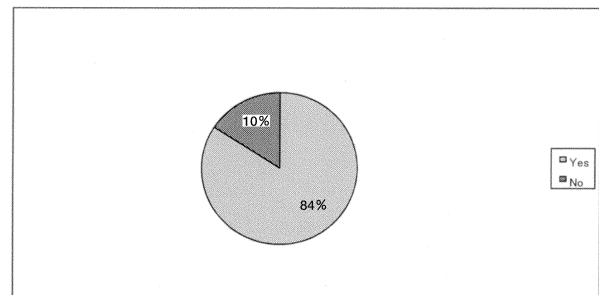


Figure 4: Did Weekly Vocabulary Quizzes benefit you?

Second, close to 45% of the students found the vocabulary quizzes useful since they helped them learn new words, while 16% of the students felt that the quizzes helped them develop study habits (Figure 5). Next, 90% of the students answered that their target score is above 10 points (Figure 6).

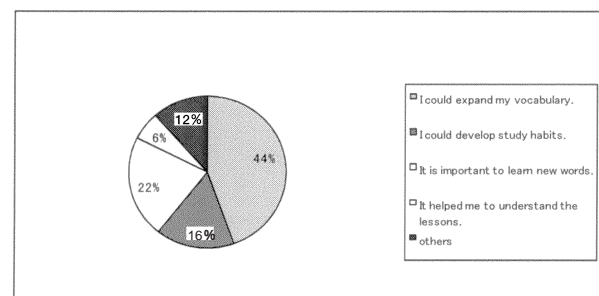


Figure 5: Reasons: Weekly Vocabulary Quizzes were effective

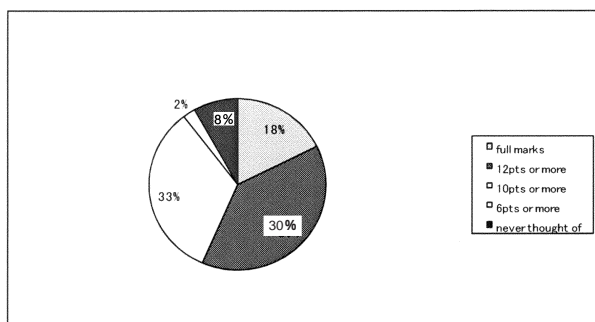


Figure 6: Target score set by students

As for the way the students study for quizzes, more students learn new words by checking them in a dictionary than writing them many times to memorize them (Figure 7).

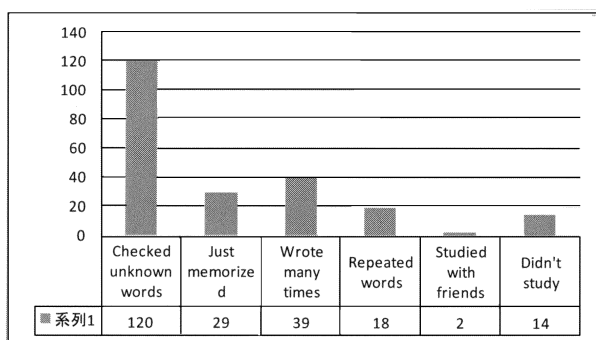


Figure 7: How did you study for Weekly Vocabulary Quizzes?

2. Listening Marathon

In I-A, students are required to do listening homework to improve their listening skills. They are assigned a unit from a textbook and a dictation sheet to complete every week. The teacher checks the textbook and collects the dictation sheets in class, which are returned to the students in the following week. By the end of the semester, they have completed 10 units from the textbook and 10 dictation sheets. In our survey, we asked the students the following questions on Listening Marathon:

- 1) Did Listening Marathon benefit you?
- 2) Did you work by yourself?

3) How long did it take to finish each listening assignment?

First, 85% of the students answered listening marathon was beneficial to them (Figure 8). Second, Figure 9 shows that approximately 75% of the students did the assignments by themselves and did not copy their friend's answers. For the majority of students (about 70%), it took from 10 to 30 minutes to complete one assignment (Figure 10).

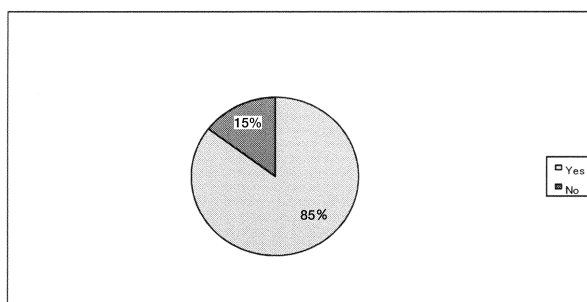


Figure 8: Did Listening Marathon benefit you?

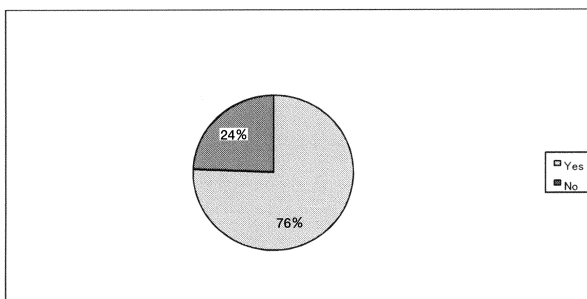


Figure 9: Did you work by yourself?

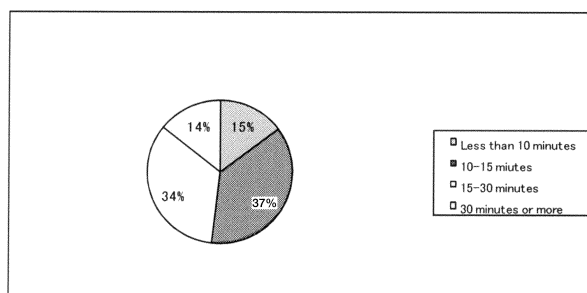


Figure 10: How long did it take to finish each listening assignment?

3. Writing Marathon

In addition to Listening Marathon, students are given writing homework to improve their writing ability. Students are assigned altogether five to six pieces of writing homework during the semester. Writing topics may vary from class to class, but usually they are something closely related to the subjects they have studied or discussed in classes, for example, describing their neighborhood or describing someone they respect.

Our survey asked the following questions to our students on Writing Marathon:

- 1) Did writing marathon benefit you?
- 2) How long did it take to finish each writing assignment?
- 3) Did you use translation software when you did your writing homework?

Figure 11 shows more than 90 percent of the students found writing homework useful. The time spent on each assignment varies from student to student (Figure 12). Thirty seven percent of the students spent up to 15 minutes, 33% of the students spent 15 to 30 minutes, and 30% of the students spent 30 minutes or more. As for the use of translation software, 70% of the students answered that they did not use them while the rest of the students (30%) answered that they did (Figure 13).

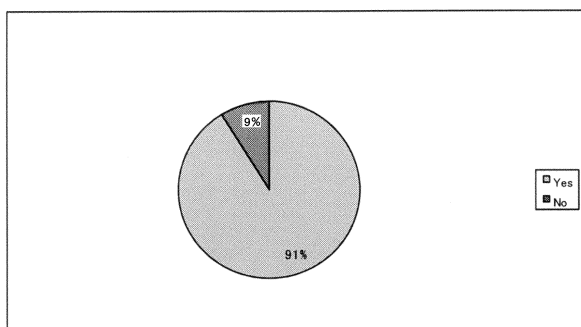


Figure 11: Did Writing Marathon benefit you?

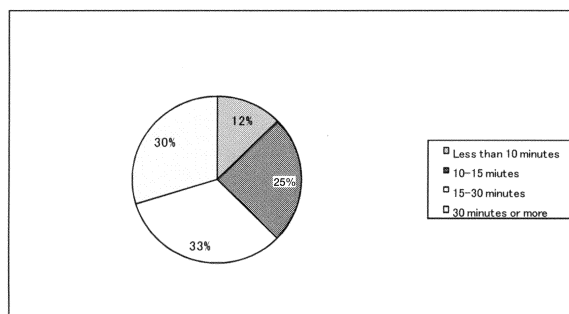


Figure 12: How long did it take to finish each writing assignment?

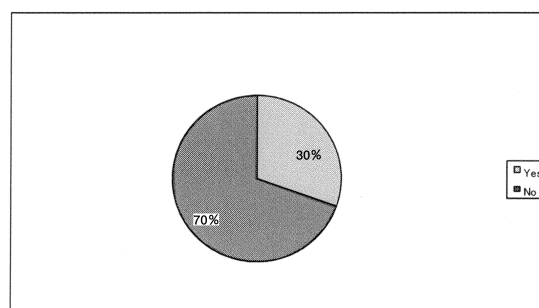


Figure 13: Did you use translation software when you did writing homework?

The above survey results show that the students are generally satisfied with the activities in I-A and find them useful. Writing marathon, in particular, is regarded as most beneficial by the students.

. ESI-B curriculum

In the I-B curriculum, students are taught the structure of two types of speech as well as being instructed on how to prepare and give speeches that include power point visual aids. All speeches are presented to their home room classmates and teacher with exception of the end-of-year speech given to a guest teacher as well. Since 2002 until the present day, the I-B curriculum content has primarily consisted of speech structure and to a much lesser degree, non-verbal communication, and speech presentation skills.

1. A new approach

Pre 1980's approaches to teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL & EFL respectively) can be summarized as a Second Language Instruction (SLI) approach. After the 1980's, the general approach focused on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Research done in social-psychology and applied to second language learning has been the catalyst for the most recent adaptation of focus, a Second Language Socialization (SLS) approach. The data in the eight questions about the I-B curriculum, viewed from the SLS perspective, identifies areas that with some adjusting, will better suit students' needs and provide more opportunities for successful language learning experiences.

Question by question, data is studied with the view of adding practices, based on SLS concepts, to the curriculum. A report on these changes is planned for the next edition of the Tama University Journal of Management and Information Sciences.

2. I-B curriculum objectives

The main, though not exclusive, aims of the I-B curriculum are as follows;

1. introduce oneself
2. make simple descriptions
3. make a short speech
4. make a short presentation

(English Shower Program Handbook 2007)

3. I-B curriculum workload

Table 1 shows the curriculum requirements for individual speeches and group presentation requirements from 2003 - 2007. At the time of this survey, students had only completed the spring semester of 2007, and so had not yet experienced the end-of-year group presentation.

Table 1: Curriculum Speech and Presentation Requirements

	2005	2006	2007
SPRING individual speeches	7	6	5
AUTUMN group presentations	5	5	4
SPRING & AUTUMN written tests	2	2	2

4. The data

The prescribed I-B speech topics are; Self-introduction, Demonstration, and Show and Tell. The first question aims to discern the student satisfaction level with the current speech topics and also learn what other topics may be of interest.

The data reveals that one of the prescribed topics, the Self-introduction, is quite popular gaining a 19 % positive response. However, two of the prescribed topics, Demonstration and Show and Tell, were less popular than five of the other newly suggested topics.

The interestingly high (25%) response to the topic of Personal Experience implies that a significant number of students are interested in sharing their experiences with, and hearing about the experiences of others.

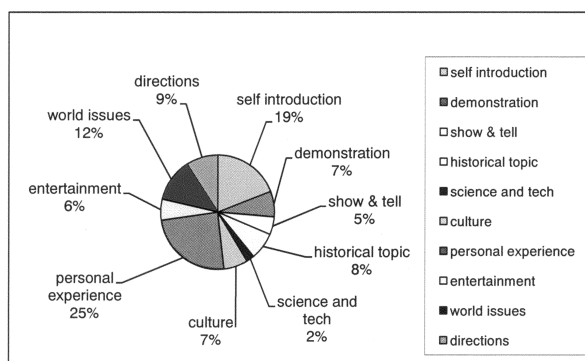


Figure 14: What topic would you like to give a speech on?

The second question shows students' preferences for either spending a short time covering a wide range of speech topics, or spending a long time on fewer speech topics.

Fifty nine percent of the respondents would prefer to move at a slower than current pace, spending more time on developing their content and presentation skills. There was also a 35% positive response to not increasing the current number of speeches, which is three.

A convincing 94% response clearly states the wish to keep the number of speeches at either three or fewer.

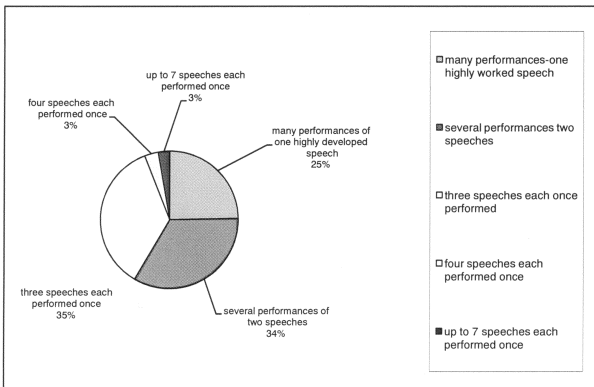


Figure 15: Preference for range or depth of speeches

Evidence supporting the notion of the empowering effect of social networks can be found in the data from the third question (figure 16). Ninety percent of the students said they were inspired, interested (or both), or amused by their classmates' speeches. The remaining 10% felt that it was the difficulty of content or language articulation that was the root of their experienced lack of interest.

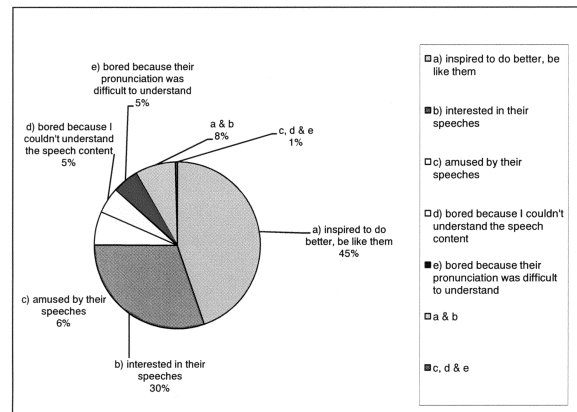


Figure 16: How did you feel when you listened to your classmates' speeches?

The implications from the data below (figures 17 and 18) can be used by teachers to review their class time allocation for the various public speaking practice activities they introduce in class.

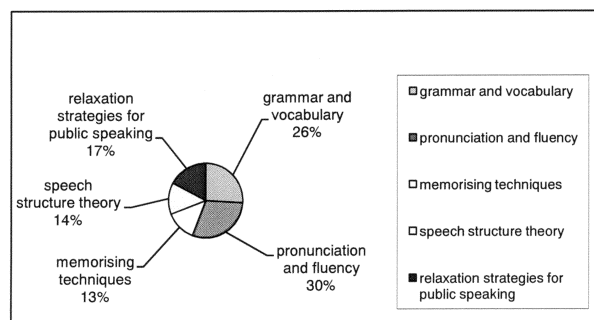


Figure 17: Which part of speech giving would you liked to have spent more time on?

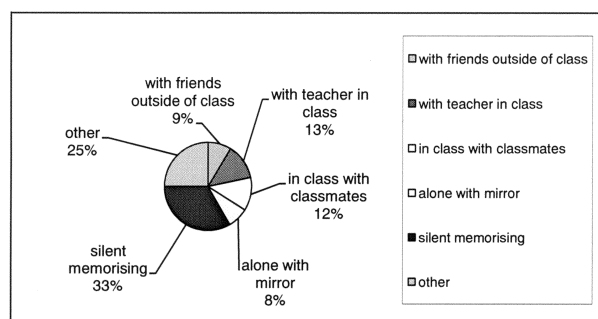


Figure 18: Methods of practice outside of class

. Summary

Despite being a compulsory EFL program taught entirely in English, indications from the data in the spring 2007 survey show that program objectives and the students' study objectives are somewhat in sync. In addition, students are generally happy with the English Shower curriculum, and 86% of respondents observed some improvement in their language skills.

In regards to the I-A curriculum, vocabulary quizzes, listening marathon, and writing marathon all had close to a 90% positive response for perceived benefit.

In the I-B curriculum, the majority responded negatively to inquiry about the belief that training in public speaking was beneficial to language skills development. Possible reasons for this are the lack of involvement of the learners in curriculum development, limited attention paid to confidence building for public speaking, and the un-fulfillment of the need for peer interaction deliberately structured to enhance individual development through the broadening of their social network.

Involvement of learners in the design of curriculum is not a new idea. What is relatively new is the SLS approach to ESL and EFL teaching arena. At present, the English Shower I-B curriculum content relies heavily upon teacher instruction (SLI).

Research into content, methodologies, and classroom practices in alignment with an SLS approach will be carried out in order to include them in the I-B curriculum from spring 2008.

Reference

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