English e-Learning at Saga University:
Meeting Students' Needs and Expectations Online

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1. Introduction

Through the joint cooperation of faculty and staff in the university's Center for Research and Development in Higher Education and the e-Learning Studio, Saga University gives high priority to providing superior quality English-content e-Learning in online NetClass courses.　Saga Studies in English「英語で学ぶ佐賀学」, for example, has proven to be a popular area studies course that attracts over 300 participants annually.　More recently, an online component in English Public Speaking I and II for juniors and seniors has spread across class boundaries and now includes NetClass discussion, debate and student-created English lessons for undergraduates and graduates from the freshman to senior levels.

This paper introduces the creation of an e-Learning version of English Public Speaking I & II, or "Public Speaking Online", a new course design that effectively responds to students' academic needs both online and offline.　Prospects for further possibilities in English e-Learning are also considered.

2. Overview of Public Speaking Online

Since Saga University introduced "full e-Learning" in 2002 (Ehara 2007), English learning opportunities have expanded significantly, offering a favorable "bottom up" educational environment (Hoyashita 2007) that addresses the five aims put forth in the university's Basic Principles for English Education: English for Communication,

Know the World through English, Exposure to English, English Classes for Your Needs, and English for Academic Purposes (Hayase 2006). Saga University's Learning Management System (LMS), through Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) and Windows' free software, has made possible the creation of original materials for online courses readily accessible to virtual classroom students. In the case of English Public Speaking I & II, required subjects for education majors preparing to obtain a teacher's license, these new e-Learning offerings are serving well in achieving the stated academic goals for students of English.

Initially introduced in 2008 as a portion of the Public Speaking I and II, "Public Speaking Online" has developed to become the main thrust of Public Speaking I & II, with students of English Oral Communication I, II, III, Intercultural Communication I & II, Anglo-American Culture I & II, and English Thesis Writing I & II also given access to peer-designed online English lessons. Through the production process in Public Speaking class, student lesson-designers strengthen their own English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, and upon completion of their original online lessons, peers in the above-listed classes take the lessons, offering online feedback to each student designer-teacher.

While the combined benefit of English and computer learning is assessed by 60 percent of respondents as an attractive point of Public Speaking Online, the core purpose of the course is to strengthen academic English skills. With this in mind, students begin with the question, "Who am I speaking to and what do I want to say?" After filling in an initial lesson outline stating the topic, audience, focus, and purpose, students write a one-page essay and design quiz content, employing vocabulary and sentence structure at the level of their stated audience (junior high or university, for example). Fig. 1 shows an example of a lesson outline as it appears on the LMS screen.

Through the research and writing process, reading and writing skills are strengthened, while student-teacher interaction and essay voice-recording focuses on increasing proficiency in speaking and listening. The Windows recording system makes it possible for students to voice record at any location (in class or at home, for example), listen immediately to the recording, and re-record as many times as they

Fig.1.　Topic Outline Example (from LMS screen)

like, until they have perfected their voice recording to their satisfaction. Throughout the process of writing and recording, students receive feedback from the teacher in class and online, take note of points for correction and improvement, and make necessary revisions as needed.

When lesson content—including essay, quizzes, and recording—has reached A quality, it is then entered into the LMS system, where peers and online class members access the recorded lessons, listen to peer-created essays, enjoy learning through a variety of quiz styles, and offer feedback to their fellow lesson-designers.　In this way, academic English skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening, are repeatedly strengthened from the design stage to the feedback stage, with the added benefit of experience in the creation of English-content e-Learning educational materials.

3. Quiz/Exercise Types and Expected Outcomes

For the present class, five basic quiz/exercise types are used, each addressing different language skills and eliciting a variety of responses.　For the fill-in-the-blank exercise, the student lesson-designer selects key words to be left out, and the

student-listener writes in the appropriate word while listening to her peer's recorded essay.　Key words may be of particular importance in understanding the overall meaning of the text, they may be grammatically significant, or they may be the most challenging word to pronounce or understand.　This type of question is automatically computer-checked, and allows the student another chance or multiple chances to answer, until the right answer is selected.　The second type of exercise, question-and-answer, requires the ability to understand the English content, listen for and express the main point, and summarize the answer coherently. Matching, the third exercise type, checks the listener's understanding of selected words and expressions, and through the process of choosing the most appropriate corresponding words and phrases, the learner's vocabulary is built and strengthened.　This type of question is automatically evaluated as well.　Next, multiple-choice questions evaluate the student's ability to correctly understand the written and recorded text.　For the quiz-designer, consideration is required as to what kind of mistake is easily made. Finally, the long-reading question requires either a so-many-word-summary or a more specific answer to a certain question such as, "What is the author's view of such-and-such?" or "Explain such-and-such according to the essay."　The learner's ability to clearly and concisely express desired content, while keeping in mind the language level of the audience, is tested and strengthened in this exercise.

4.　Questionnaire Results and Analysis

At the close of each semester, a class evaluation/survey is given, providing respondents with an opportunity to measure their satisfaction with the course on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest level of satisfaction.The ten-question evaluation tool also offers a free-writing section where students can describe in detail their evaluation of the class experience and their own performance.　To date, the vast majority of responses reveals an overwhelmingly positive impression of the course. Table 1 shows the content of the questionnaire answered by participating students

Table 1.　Class Evaluation/Survey (Questions Part I)

Please rate your answer to the following questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the preferred ranking:
1:not much 2:below average 3:average 4:above average 5:yes, very much

1.　This class was helpful to me in improving my English speaking skills.

2.　This class was helpful to me in improving my English listening skills.

3.　This class was helpful to me in improving my English writing skills.

4.　This class was helpful to me in improving my English reading skills.

5.　This class was helpful to me in improving my overall communication skills.

6.　The combined benefit of English and computer learning is a positive advantage of this class.

7.　I have received the technological support I need to successfully complete my Online project.

8.　I have enjoyed English Public Speaking I.

9.　I would recommend this class to others.

10.　My expectations for this class have been met.

on the NetClass site. Fig. 2 shows that all responses fall in the "average", "above average", and "yes, very much" range, with no responses in the "not much" or "below average" range.　It is also clear from Fig. 2 that the highest rank on the scale, "yes, very much" is the most-selected answer of the five-point range. Fig. 3 indicates the ranking for each question.

　Of ten respondents, in a combined measurement of spring and fall semesters, 90% indicated that the class was helpful in improving English writing skills.　In answer to the question "This class was helpful to me in improving my English speaking skills", 70% of respondents indicated the highest degree of satisfaction according to the five-point scale.　Fifty-percent ranked an "average" and "above-average" (3-4 points) level of satisfaction in response to the question "This class was helpful to me in improving my listening skills", with the other 50% answering "yes, very much" (5 points) in response to the same question.　A similar tendency was observed in respondents' measure of 80% "above-average" satisfaction in the area "This class was
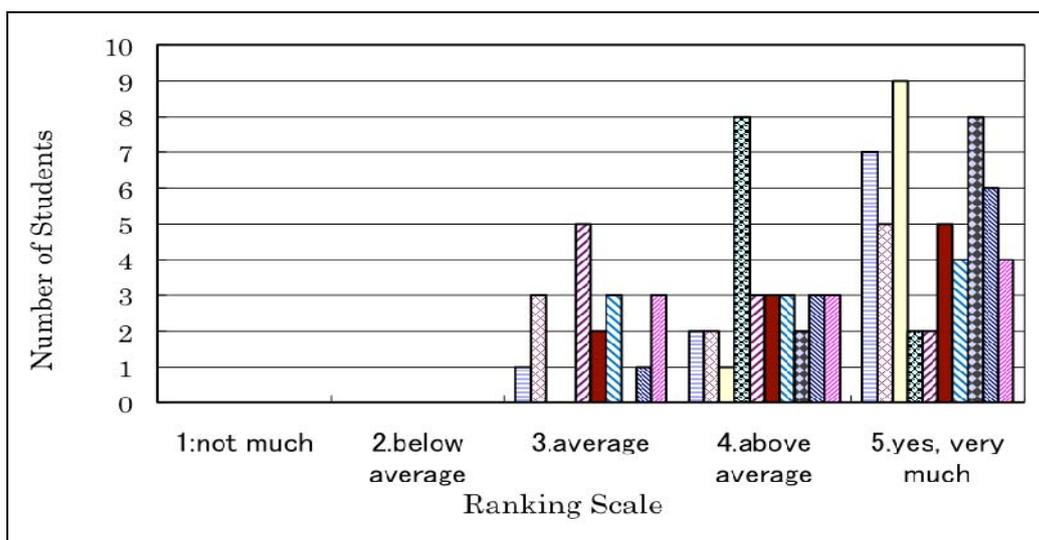
Fig. 2.　Student Evaluation/Survey (Overview of Answers Part I)

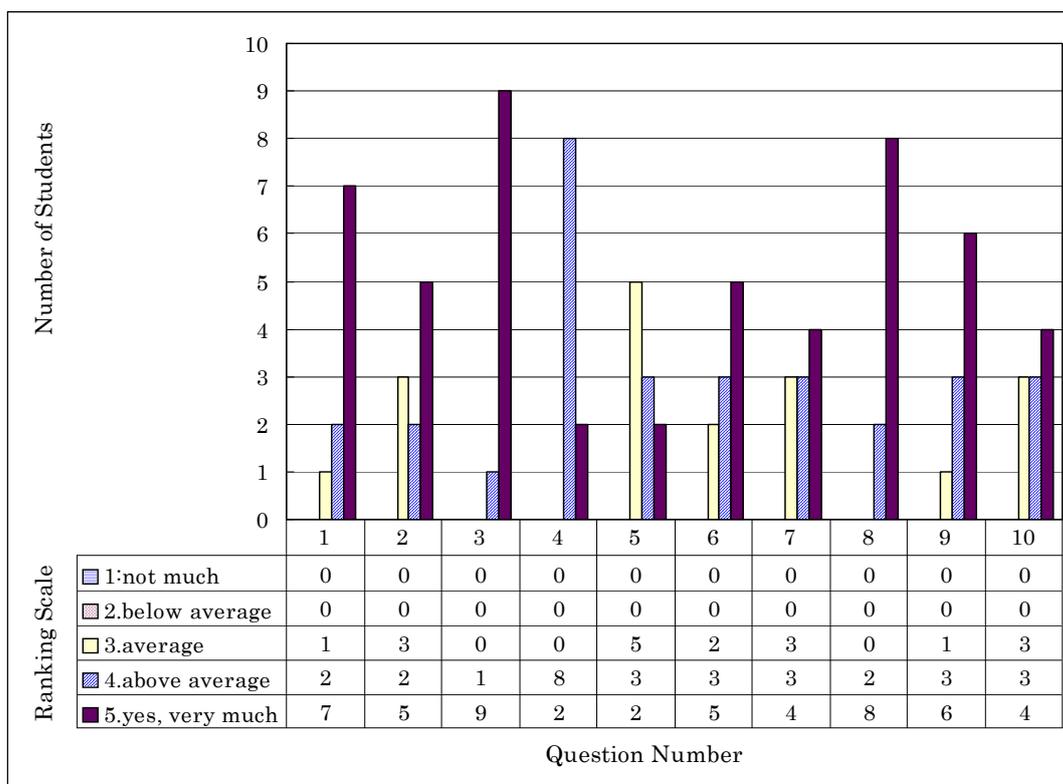| Ranking Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1:not much	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.below average	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3.average	1	3	0	0	5	2	3	0	1	3
4.above average	2	2	1	8	3	3	3	2	3	3
5.yes, very much	7	5	9	2	2	5	4	8	6	4

Fig. 3.　Student Evaluation/Survey (Answers Part I)

Table 2.　Student Evaluation/Survey (Answers Part II, Spring Semester)

II.　Write an essay of 250 to 300 words describing your evaluation of your experience with Online English lessons in Public Speaking II. Include positive points as well as points for improvement, from the perspective of lesson designer and student of your classmates' lessons.

- This was my first experience to design an internet class for other students. It was very fascinating to think that our classes will help and stimulate each other. Most of the time, it is very hard to share what we're interested in and passionate about in normal university classes; it's mostly one way from teachers to students. However, this class provides us with medium of mutual intellectual communication among students, and furthermore it gives us training to plan and organize a class with the instruction and practice using computer technique.

  In the early stage of the class, I was a bit confused with a length and content of the class including the part of deciding the audience. My topic was indigenous peoples in the world, but in the process, I learned how to narrow down the topic; the topic I chose was Ranald MacDonald, a Native American who came to Japan during Sakoku- era. Making a draft for the script was a very good writing practice, even though it was very challenging. Getting the important points of the content and make it very simple and short was very difficult, but meaningful for me to have much deeper understanding on the subject.

  Putting the materials on the Internet including my voice was very new experience for me, and it was kind of stressful task first, but as I got used to the work, it became very much fun. Fujii-sensei helped us a lot through all the technological work, and when I saw my class uploaded on the page, I felt great sense of accomplishment, and I was so happy.

  In the process of taking friends' classes, I learned a lot about the subjects that I really had not thought about before, and they were very educating and informative.

  This class is very valuable in that students can learn how to use computer technology along with the training of organizing and planning their own classes, which also help them to share what their interests with each other. The most fascinating part is that if this projects goes on for a long time, then students in the future will take our classes, and even after they're gone, they can still influence　other students.

- I could enjoy this class very much and develop my speaking skill. I am grateful to my professor,Mitchell for coaching my English speaking personally.

  I improved not only my English skills but also operating computer skills. I had not recorded my voice using computer but I understood it was very easy thanks to Fujii sennsei.

  After I had this class,I thought I have to try to speak English more and communicate person in English without fear of mistakes.

- I could study my assignments at my house.

- This is very interesting class.

  It looks like simple,but I really so much time on designing the class, especially recording my voice. To made a prefect recording, I read every paragraphs dozens of times before recording, and choose the best one from ten recordings I made uploaded onto Web site. It took a lot of time, but I have to say it is very good way to remember words and correct my pronunciation mistakes.

  In addition, I give a bonus to every people who pay attention to my lesson--teach them how to make Chinese dumpling. I think everyone can enjoy that better if I upload some pictures onto site.

- Public Speaking I class enables us to improve internet skill and construct essay. It is a very enjoyable and meaningful class. But this semester is busy for wanting to be a public teacher. I wanted to join more and more,and meet Mitchell sensei.I was very sorry to Mitchell sensei for not attending all classes. I want to do some soul-searching about this.

Table 3.　Student Evaluation/Survey (Answers Parts II & III, Fall Semester)

II.　Write an essay of 250 to 300 words describing your evaluation of your experience with Online English lessons in Public Speaking II. Include positive points as well as points for improvement, from the perspective of lesson designer and student of your classmates' lessons.

- I had a good time through this class. I'm glad to communicate with many people on online lesson not only saga university students but also people in Saga. In this class, I was able to know how to make online essays and questions and how to try my classmate's questions. I'm interested in famous people in Saga and funny champion ships in the world.
  In online debate, I enjoyed exchanging opinions with my classmates. This experience became a good opportunity for me to be able to know that there are another ways of thinking in our country.

- I have earned B. I had a good time in this class. It is a first time that I made a net class. It is difficult to speak my report in English fluently without mistakes. Sometimes I couldn't understand the system of e-learning. I want a guide to make the net class easily. It is good for me to think how to make the question.

- I had a good experience in this class. It was very fun for me to make e-learning lesson. When I was recoding, I have a difficulty. I coudn't read my essay easily without any misstakes. But it was interesting for me to listening my voice.
  I wanted to enjoy the discussion lesson more.

- My positive points:
  I could raise my speaking and writing competence in English. When I record my essay, I tried to read English aloud fluently. I could record many times so I think my recording became more better. In writing my essay, teacher checked my English essay so I could notice my mistakes. I didn't have confidence for detailed grammar , for example the use of preposition, so it was very good for me.

  My points for improvement :
  However, there are two points for improvement. First, I couldn't research for my topic so my essay became like an introduction of World Championships in Finland. Second, I couldn't send my feedbacks for other class members. I will try to answer their questions from now.

- I could find an interesting title and get some useful information about Japanese Anime and Otaku. I had a good experiences for writing essay in English and thinking questions about my essay. However, I was slow at making my lesson. When I work at company in the future, I need to finish many tasks by deadlines. I was lacking in a sense of responsibility in this class. I wanted to write attractive essy for freshmen. I could include some enjoyable parts in my essay by reading some references and getting advices from a teacher and friends. However, I didn't have enough time to think about questions about my essay so I wonder freshmen will be satisfied with the contents.

- It was good experience that what I made was seen by many other students. I practiced reading my essay many times because I dislike to make sutudents listen to my bad voice. So my pronnunciation became good. I was happy to be praise for it by Miss. Mitchell. It was also good experience that I had to investigate what I wanted to write essay. My interesting thing was McDonald's. I was interested in it more than before. My essay was corrected by my teacher and it became good essay.

III-1. The most helpful aspect of this class for me is

- that i was able to know how to use online lessons. I'm glad to know how to make online essay and questions, and how to answer my classmate's questions.

- writing because I made my essay thinking it is easy for many student to understand my essay.

- It is the most helpful for me to record my reading. It is hard work but very interesting, because I didn'thave an opportunity like this.

- It is that Ican record and listen my English spoken.

- writing essay in English because I'm not good at writing in English so this class was very useful for me to practice writing in English.

- reading skills.

III-2. This class could be improved by

- making all the students' works get into the same step. In the last lesson of last year, it would be more funny if we could talk about how to spend christmas day with more class members.

- too long time that we make the net class to talk each other. I want to talk each other more.

- I think this class was very nice. But I needed more time to do discussinon with others.

- making a middle-presentation before classmates.

- including communicative activities. For example, chatting with teacher students freely.

- speaking communication skills.

helpful to me in improving reading skills." Further, in the spring semester 60% indicated "above average" satisfaction, and 100% responded "above average" in the fall semester. While the class title indicates a focus on speaking, survey results clearly show that all four language-skill areas are effectively covered in "Public Speaking Online", with the "free answer" survey space further proving that students felt that the NetClass format significantly strengthened their English skills (see Tables 2 and 3).

Responses in Tables 2 and 3 repeatedly report an increased level of confidence and stronger motivation to study English and the subjects introduced by their classmates. Student-generated topics include short biographies of the lives of individuals such as Inazo Nitobe, Elizabeth I, Taichiro Morinaga, Ai Mitsu, and Ranold MacDonald. Several cultural topics selected are Japanese Otaku Culture, St. Valentine's Day,

Chinese Food, and McDonald's.　Education-related topics include Special Needs Children in Japan, Field Day Events, and World Championships in Finland.　Tables 2 and 3 are unedited student responses to the "free answer" space on the class survey.

　　The main area in need of attention, as indicated by students' written evaluations, is time allotted to in-class and online discussion and debate.　While the discussion and debate section of the course was evaluated positively by all respondents, most expressed a desire to invest more time in face-to-face interaction in the classroom.　In future classes, a more concerted effort should be made on the part of teachers and students to complete each online lesson more efficiently, thus increasing oral interaction opportunities in class.

5.　Conclusion and Future Research

　　The newly-designed course Public Speaking Online, as proven by the virtually unanimous voice of student, faculty and staff support, is clearly an idea whose time has come. Compared with regular classes, the new e-Learning design of Public Speaking offers many benefits missing in a regular English class.　Student feedback reveals a very high level of motivation, due to the fact that students in other classes will access their lessons.　Additionally, confidence-building, particularly in the area of speaking and writing, is also a strong benefit of the Public Speaking Online design. Because students have opportunity to repeatedly record, listen, and re-record their essay which has been perfected after multiple revisions, they report a high level of confidence and pride in their final written and oral product.

　　Conversations among participating students and interested observers reveal an infectious excitement about future prospects and possibilities for the development of the course.　Graduating seniors, ready to begin teaching careers in local schools at the elementary, junior high and high school levels, express keen interest in using their original online English lessons in their new workplaces, and veteran teachers and former graduates are requesting access to the newly-created NetClass materials and

NetDebates.

Beyond the local level, students, faculty and staff indicate great interest in making Public Speaking Online available to university students worldwide, thus further increasing vital interaction in global conversation, discussion, debate and research.

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