

Foreword

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On December 20, 2018, the JALT Yokohama chapter staged their annual My Share event, where chapter members were invited to share practical classroom ideas for local language teachers.

This issue of Accents Asia is a selection of papers written by five of the presenters. Lucinda and Yusuke Okuyama review the use of the learning app, Edmodo® (edmodo.com) in EFL classrooms. Gota Hayashi introduces open-ended questions as a solution for promoting under-performing language learners' self-regulation skills. Claire Bower introduces a novel approach to managing student-created vocabulary flashcards. Azusa Sato shares her review of the Intensive English Program at Ferris University (Yokohama, Japan). And lastly, Samuel Gildart argues for greater emphasis on the teaching of culture in Business English classes.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all authors for their inspiring manuscripts and dedication behind the scenes as reviewers. It has been a pleasure to work with such a professional group of teachers. Each article in this issue presents very practical suggestions for the EFL classroom and Sato's article presents the often-overlooked opinions from EFL students. I hope this issue will trigger some reflection on current classroom practices and that some of the ideas presented here are applied in other language learning contexts.

For readers who are interested in participating in future JALT Yokohama events, please visit yojalt.org.

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Using Edmodo as a social networking platform to enhance students' emotional connectedness to learning

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated why Japanese EFL students utilised Edmodo so effectively despite language anxieties that inhibit participation. To answer this research question, a small-scale qualitative study was designed. This involved a survey of 75 EFL students and three teacher participants. This study found that Edmodo, an educational social networking platform, (a) provided an emotionally supportive learning environment, (b) improved informal student-instructor communication, and (c) provided students with a user friendly and mobile system for completing homework tasks. These findings indicate that students actively engaged with Edmodo because it helped them to overcome emotional barriers to participate in dynamic learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

Technology plays a major role in the field of education, and the development of web technologies has promoted and maintained “education standards” (Al-Kathiri, 2015, p. 189). These web tools allow multiple users collaborate rather than working in isolation (Al-Kathiri, 2015). Edmodo is an example of these technologies. Edmodo is an educational “social networking platform” specifically designed for learning and “has been recognised as one of the popular online learning tools used in the world” (Okumura, 2016, p. 36). Many researchers and educators refer to Edmodo as the ‘Facebook for Education’ (Dominican University of California, Enriquez, 2014; 2017; Khodary, 2017; Okumura & Bronson, 2016). Edmodo allow teachers and students to:

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- collaborate in secure online environment monitored and controlled by the teacher via a message board.
- chat, access files and set/upload assignments 24/7 through a cloud-based ‘library’ from any device.

For more information about using Edmodo please visit www.edmodo.com and consult the Edmodo Teacher’s Guide (Edmodo, n.d.).

Some articles have been written about the use of Edmodo by EFL and non EFL students from the Philippines (Enriquez, 2014), Saudi Arabia (Khodary, 2017) and Malaysia (Mokhtar, 2018), to name a few. Among these, some investigated the interaction between American and Japanese students using Edmodo (e.g., Okumura & Bronson, 2016; Okumura, 2017). The findings of these studies have mainly centered around topics such as perception, authentic communication, exchange programs and self-directed learning (Khodary, 2017; Mokhtar, 2018; Enriquez, 2014; Okumura & Bronson, 2016; Okumura, 2017). However, there is a gap in the literature as few articles have specifically examined the emotional influence of Edmodo on Japanese students with their teachers and peers in a university context. This article aims to contribute to this field of knowledge.

It was decided to capture the experiences of EFL teachers and students at Hitotsubashi University, a national university in Japan, who have been using Edmodo as a learning tool. This decision was made during an observation of Hitotsubashi students. During the observation, it was noted that Japanese students, who generally tend to be more reserved, actively engaged with each other in English using Edmodo. This observation was significant because Japanese students often experience language anxiety due to “communication apprehension, social evaluation, and inter-learner competition” which inhibit their expression (Cutrone, 2009, p. 55). This “language anxiety can have a debilitating effect of L2 performance” (Cutrone, 2009, p.56). This study investigated why Japanese students utilised Edmodo so effectively despite anxieties that inhibit participation.

METHOD

This small-scale qualitative research study involved 75 student and three teacher participants, and data was analysed thematically. The rationale for this approach was to gather emergent experiences from both sides of the teaching and learning spectrum. The participants were interviewed between November and December 2018 and were recruited from Hitotsubashi University. University students were recruited based on the criteria outlined below:

TABLE 1
Selection Criteria (student and teacher participants)

Participants	Criteria	Rationale
Students	Used Edmodo for 12 months	To be familiar with Edmodo
Students	Intermediate or upper intermediate level of English	English - to understand the survey
Teachers	Instructed the student participants Actively used Edmodo in class for 12 months	To be familiar with students' issues To be familiar with Edmodo

Participant Recruitment and Ethical Considerations

Participants were recruited by sending an electronic invitation via their Edmodo page and by asking their teachers to verbally invite them. Students were informed that (a) their participation is voluntary, (b) their responses would be anonymous, and (c) their answers would not affect their grades.

Procedures

Students and teachers participated by completing a five-minute electronic ‘SurveyMonkey’ survey which collected demographic data and comprised of open and closed ended questions. Participants rated their degree of agreement or disagreement with closed questions and wrote brief paragraphs to answer open ended questions. The quantitative data was analysed using the Survey Monkey database and the qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Participants’ demographic data is outlined in Table 2 and Table 3 below:

TABLE 2
Participant Profile (75 students)

Demographic Data		Number	Percentage
Ethnicity	Japanese Other	71 4	95% 5% (Korean, Chinese and Australian)
Gender	Female Male	36 39	48% 52%
Age	19-24	75	100%
English Level	Upper Intermediate Intermediate Unknown	18 56 1	24% 75% 1%

TABLE 3
Participant Profile (3 teachers)

Demographic Data		Number	Percentage
Ethnicity	English Australian	2 1	67% 33%
Gender	Female Male	1 2	33% 67%
Age	40-45	3	100%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that 56% of participants engaged with Edmodo once a week for between 5 and 30 minutes per session. Occasionally students spent up to 60 minutes or more per week. Three prominent themes emerged from the data namely, Edmodo (a) provides an emotionally supportive learning space, (b) is an effective teacher-student communication tool and (c) is a user-friendly system for accessing and completing homework tasks. Student responses to the survey are as follows:

TABLE 4
Student Survey Responses

Question	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Edmodo is a safe place to practise my English online.	3%	2	9%	7	24%	18	53%	40	11%	8

The above results show that 64% of students felt that Edmodo was a safe place to practise their English online.

The key themes from the open-ended questions are discussed below:

Edmodo provided a communal space which enhanced emotional connectedness to learning.

Students were asked what the advantages were of using Edmodo for them. Students voiced that Edmodo provided a communal space to share homework which motivated and supported them emotionally:

“Sometimes I don't know how to do my homework; others' posts can help me”

“...getting some clues to complete my own homework”

“everyone in the class can check [my homework], so I feel pressure to complete my homework better”

“Receiving “favourite” on my homework from my friends”

“I could improve my skill by reading other classmates' posts”

“We make more effort with our homework on Edmodo than when we do it on paper”

From the quotes above, it is evident that Edmodo provided meaningful communication opportunities where students could “express” themselves informally and “accept” others in the virtual classroom (Okumura, 2016, p. 45). Consistent with the findings by Mokhtar (2018, p.70),

Edmodo provided a “safe haven for learning”, and students felt “welcomed and independent in navigating their learning process”. Similarly, Mokhtar’s (2018), students’ “emotional needs were fulfilled” when they “received positive reactions” from teachers and peers (p. 70). In turn, this experience facilitated “peer tutoring” and enhanced “student engagement” (Mokhtar, 2018, p. 70).

Edmodo improved students’ communication with teachers.

A strong theme that had emerged was that students saw Edmodo as an effective communication tool especially for communicating with their teachers. In addition, it appeared that students believed sending an online message or text was less confronting than speaking to their teachers in person if they had difficulty with their homework or peers:

“Being connected with my teacher and sending messages directly to her is important”

“It is a good idea that teachers and students can communicate with Edmodo”

“It is easy and convenient for me to communicate with my teacher on Edmodo”

“For students, Edmodo is a good communication tool with teachers”

Further confirming this theme, a teacher noted:

“...students can communicate privately with me. This was quite useful when a student messaged to say she did not want to be paired with her usual partner any more. I had not realised!”

Similar to Khodary's (2017, p. 124) study of Saudi Arabian students, Edmodo appears to be “an effective platform for fostering students-instructors communication”. Edmodo provided students an informal and relaxed medium for (a) communicating with teachers about problems and (b) confirming exactly what the expectations of the homework tasks were.

Edmodo was a very convenient system for doing English homework.

Students found Edmodo to be very user friendly. Students particularly stressed the convenience of using Edmodo for their homework:

“It is easy to submit homework”

“I get notified before due dates”

“I can do homework anywhere on my smartphone and don't need a pen or notebook”

Additionally, teachers also found Edmodo as a convenient tool for managing students' homework:

"I can collect it all in one place and keep track of who has done it, and what homework I have set"

These findings are supported by Enriquez (2014), who noted that Edmodo is a “simple” and efficient “learning platform” that has received a “high level of acceptance” by its users (p. 5). Additionally, Kongchan (2012) found that Edmodo was a user-friendly social networking system for both students and “non-digital teachers” (p. 1). It is clear that Edmodo not only reduces emotional barriers to learning but also decreases physical⁴ barriers to completing homework tasks.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study investigated why Japanese EFL students actively engaged with Edmodo despite experiencing language learning anxiety. A qualitative survey of 75 students and three teachers revealed that Edmodo helped the Japanese EFL students to overcome emotional barriers to participating in dynamic learning environments. Edmodo connected students with their peers for support and encouragement. In turn, this created a positive learning environment. Edmodo provided students with an informal pathway to communicate with their teachers. And lastly, it was found that Edmodo is a user-friendly social networking system for both students and teachers. It is recommended that future research investigate how Edmodo enables students to overcome emotional barriers to learning English.

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⁴ Edmodo reduced physical barriers by providing students with easy homework submission options, notifications, access to an online platform for peer learning any time they needed it.

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APPENDIX 1: STUDENT SURVEY

*This survey will **not** be read by your teacher or your university. It is **strictly confidential** and will not influence your grade in any way.*

Using Edmodo to do my English Homework

Gender	Ethnicity	Class/ English Level
<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female My age is: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Upper Intermediate Level <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate Level

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Edmodo is a safe place to practise my English online.					

Please tick the right box to give your opinion about using Edmodo in your class:

1. How often do you check comments on your homework?
 Never Once a month Once a week Once a day + 5 times a day
Other _____
2. How much time do you spend on Edmodo reading and making comments per week?
 5 minutes 10 Minutes 20 Minutes 30 Minutes 45 Minutes 60 Minutes
 +60 Minutes Other _____

Please write some sentences to answer the questions below:

3. What are the advantages of using Edmodo for your English homework?
4. What are the disadvantages of using Edmodo for your English homework?
5. Would you recommend other teachers to use Edmodo in their class?
 Yes No
Why/ Why not:
6. Would you recommend other students to use Edmodo in their class?

Yes No

Why/ Why not:

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX 1: TEACHER SURVEY

This survey is strictly confidential

Using Edmodo in my English Class

Gender	Ethnicity	Classes I teach
<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female Age: (20-30), (30-40), (40-50), (50-60), (60- 65), (65+)	<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Upper Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are the advantages of using Edmodo in your class?

2. What are the disadvantages of using Edmodo in your class?

3. Would you recommend other teachers to use Edmodo in their class?
 Yes No
Why/ Why not:

4. Would you recommend other students to use Edmodo in their class?
 Yes No
Why/ Why not:

Thank you for your time!

Asking Open-Ended Questions to Encourage Self-Regulation in EFL Learners at a Japanese University

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows how a teacher made a total of sixteen open-ended questions for his students in his repeaters' course throughout a course of the fall 2018 semester to encourage self-regulation in EFL learners at a Japanese University. Students were asked to prepare answers for six open-ended questions prior to the midterm exam. After the midterm, ten additional open-ended questions were developed, totaling sixteen open-ended questions. Both the midterm and the final exam were based on those open-ended questions. Following a discussion of the student-population in the introduction, the actual questions used, and how the teacher used the questions to teach the class are presented for readers to flexibly use open-ended questions as a way to build rapport with the students and promote students' development of self-regulation skills.

INTRODUCTION

Why do students repeat their English courses? There are a number of possible reasons including but not limited to: not seeing the purpose of university education, mental illness, and absenteeism based on non-academic interests such as gambling. The teacher was in charge of a repeaters' course for fall 2018; fourteen students were initially on the roster. Four out of fourteen students never showed up. For example, it was discovered that one student who never showed up to class dropped out of university all together. During one class, a student asked the teacher "*There is no purpose to college education. Why do we have to attend university?*" There was another student enrolled who was diagnosed as having an anxiety disorder. The teacher received a doctor's note in the faculty mailbox regarding her symptoms. The note was a reminder that she cannot always come to class because of her mental illness, and that the mental illness needed to be taken into account when teaching. Another student informed the teacher when sharing his answer to one of the open-ended questions that he had trouble getting credit for his classes in the past because he got into a habit of gambling. What many students seemed to need help with was not learning EFL, but rather, learning about themselves for better self-regulation.

The question was how self-regulation can be encouraged in an English as a foreign language course with ten students who were repeating for different reasons. One approach is to take a socially oriented theoretical perspective (Gao 2013; ; Norton & Toohey, 2001;

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Palfreyman, 2011; Parks & Raymond, 2004) which suggests that language learning does not take place in a sociocultural vacuum. Rather, it is a social process in which culturally and historically situated individuals are in active pursuit of both linguistic and non-linguistic objectives basically related to identity formation (Wray & Hajar 2014). For this reason, the learning context or “real-world situations” are “fundamental, not ancillary, to learners” (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 37). From this sociocultural stance, language learners act on the world with the assistance of both some social agents (e.g., family members, friends, classmates or teachers), a host of material tools (e.g., class-handouts or technology), and symbolic artefacts (e.g., language, gestures) (Kalaja, Alanen, Palvianinen, & Dufva, 2011; Kehrwald, 2013; Kuure, 2011).

Vygotsky (1978) advocated a “developmental approach...to experimental psychology” (p. 61). He included not only the study of ontogenetic processes in children, the major component of his own research program, but also construed development to comprise the changes that occur in mental functioning over the span of a few weeks, a few days or even a few seconds. It can be, therefore, argued that a semester is enough for observation in students’ development of functioning which can contribute to the development of individual identity. According to Wertsch (1985), “Vygotsky reasoned that it should also be possible to gain access to psychological functions by introducing a complication, or disruption, into what otherwise would be an automatized, smoothly operating process” (p. 26). A set of open-ended questions that ask students’ automatic ways of thinking can be considered a disruption. Furthermore, Vygotsky’s principal claim was that “individuals use psychological tools such as language for directing and controlling their physical and mental behavior” (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Vygotsky viewed consciousness “as comprised of the self-regulatory mechanisms that humans deploy in solving problems” (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 3). Answering open-ended questions can help students reflect on the challenges that they are facing in their daily lives. Sixteen open-ended questions were asked in order to get students to deeply think about themselves through Japanese and English for their identity development as well as the development of their self-regulatory skills.

THE SIXTEEN QUESTIONS

The following was the list of six questions developed in partnership with the students and they were used in class for and until the midterm. (1) What is your hobby? (2) What are you interested in? (3) Tell me about your surprising experience. (4) Tell me about your memorable experience. (5) What do you want right now? (6) What do you hope to do in the future? One question was covered each week in which students were asked to work on writing seven to twelve sentences, bring the script to the teacher for him to check and correct, and learn to say the script out-loud before the end of class in front of the teacher. This way, students can start opening up and talking about themselves related to their past, present, and future and reflect on their experiences. Furthermore, by allocating time to have students bring their finished scripts to the teacher and having a one-on-one consultation, it made it easier to build a relationship with each of the students. For the midterm, the students chose two questions from the list and the teacher chose another randomly, and students were tested individually. The students had to share an oral response to the teacher.

The following ten additional questions were presented after the midterm. (7) What did friendship mean to you in the past and what does friendship mean to you now? How did it

change over time? Provide examples. (8) What did cool/cute mean to you in the past and what does cool/cute mean to you now? How did it change over time? Provide examples. (9) What are three major life lessons that you learned through your relationships so far? (10) What are three characteristics you want to emulate from three people you know? (11) What are two characteristics you like about yourself and why? What is one characteristic that you would like to improve on and why? (12) What are three characteristics of an ideal partner aside from facial/physical features and why? (13) Explain three past failures and how you can reframe them into positive experiences. (14) Reflect on three interactions during the past month. If you could go back and change how you acted to improve how you interacted with others, what would you change and how would they make your life and the other person's life better? (15) What are three ways your life has changed since high school? How satisfied are you with each of those changes? (16) What are three ways that you think your life will change after graduating from this university? How satisfied do you think you will be with each of those changes?

It was observed that students often liked to talk with each other while making their own answer-scripts, especially because the scripts were self-paced, and students could talk and help each other. For question (12), students were talking about who was or was not attractive, and it seemed that during the conversation, a lot of the focus was on facial/physical features and not other factors such as personality. Furthermore, there was a lot of conversation on dating and wanting to have someone to go out with. Therefore, the teacher's decision was to go along with students' interests and attempt to get them to think about what the group of students chatting in class had largely ignored, which were attractive factors aside from looks.

The following is a student-sample for question (7) made together as a class before thinking about students' scripts individually:

I would like to talk about what friendship meant to me in the past and what friendship means to me now. First, let me talk about what friendship meant to me in the past. In the past, friendship meant somebody who plays together with me. For example, when I was in middle school, I used to play basketball with my friends, and because we played basketball together, I considered him a friend. However, now, friendship means more than that. To me, a friend is someone who I can talk about anything with, without restraining myself. For example, during childhood, we are not as interested in love relationships. However, we tend to be interested in them now. So a friend is not only a playmate but also someone who I can talk about relationships and other important things with.

CONCLUSION

Three out of ten students who attended the course participated in the electronic course evaluations administered by the university towards the end of the semester. For the question asking how satisfied students were after taking the course, all three students indicated that they were very satisfied with the course. Asking open-ended questions and requiring a paragraph-length response can help students open-up especially when the teacher listened carefully to what students were talking about amongst themselves and incorporated the topics into the open-ended questions and continued the conversation instead of forcefully shutting them down. For example, in a response to (10), one student volunteered and wrote as a sample that one characteristic he

wants to emulate is the kindness of the teacher teaching the course because “he does not reject others and I want to be able to accept others.” Asking open-ended questions can allow teachers to mentally move beyond thinking that they have to teach repeaters’ courses who must be repeating for different reasons. Through asking open-ended questions, teachers can start to understand and appreciate each student as a unique and worthy individual.

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Using Cumulative Flashcards and Varied Practice to Increase Vocabulary Retention

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an interactive classroom activity presented at Yokohama JALT MyShare on December 9, 2018, aimed at promoting vocabulary retention through repeated and varied lexis exposure. Specifically, flashcards were made and reused in diverse retrieval practice tasks over an academic semester. The activity was adaptable to most lesson stages, and its flexibility made it an efficient way of recycling old vocabulary while simultaneously introducing new words.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is an important aspect of language use, and language learners encounter seemingly never-ending new items, especially in reading lessons, where they are often key to pre, during, and post-text-related tasks. However, students need to meet these words several times in order to learn them (Nation, 2005). Research shows that regular information retrieval significantly enhances retention (Kang, Gollan & Pashler, 2013; Schmitt, 2010), and spaced retrieval, combined with task variation, is much more effective than mass practice or rereading (Brown, Roediger & McDaniel, 2014). This article will summarise the application and corresponding outcomes of a retrieval practice-based flashcard activity carried out over a 16 week semester as part of an Academic Reading class at a university in Japan.

METHOD

The activity is divided into two stages, and is designed to take place over separate lessons. As the titular *cumulative* indicates, the number of flashcards grows as the task is repeated throughout the semester. The description below is based on a class size of 15-20 students attending two 90 minute lessons a week.

Materials

- Small blank flashcards

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- As many envelopes as there are groups

Stage 1 (Approximately 15 minutes)

In small groups, towards the end of the lesson, students choose four or five newly encountered words. After the teacher eliminates any overtly easy or obscure items, the lists are narrowed down as a class to an overall final four or five items (ideally as many words as students per group). After a brief meaning and pronunciation review, the teacher monitors while group members each create a flashcard with the lexis and meaning on either side. The depth and format of the definitions may differ depending on the time limit and word complexity; potentially ranging from a basic synonym to a description or example, or possibly all. Students are encouraged to write their own definitions rather than use dictionaries, to encourage active learning and demonstrate understanding. Groups place the completed flashcards in their envelope, which the teacher keeps and brings to future lessons as required.

Stage 2 (10-15 minutes)

Based on the idea that varied practice increases cognitive learning (Brown, Roediger & McDaniel, 2014), the cards are incorporated into subsequent lessons in assorted vocabulary recall tasks or games. Trialed activities include basic testing in pairs or threes, taboo, bingo, hangman, pictionary, mini-quizzes and noughts and crosses (also known as tic-tac-toe). Schmitt (2010) suggests that ‘virtually anything’ (p. 28) that results in increased contact with lexical items has a positive effect. Due to the initially small number of cards, and in the interest of familiarization with the procedure and the flashcards themselves, it is perhaps advisable to have students simply test each other in pairs (or threes if necessary) the first one or two times. In this instance, a group of four students splits into pairs, and flashcards are shared between them. Each student tells their partner the definition on their flashcard and elicits the word. Flashcards are exchanged with the other pair until all have been practiced.

Stages 1 and 2 are repeated weekly or bi-weekly as suits the lesson schedule, and the flashcard sets grow over the semester. As the envelopes contain identical sets of words, groups need not remain the same each time.

OUTCOMES

As the title indicates, the primary aim for trialing the flashcards was to increase students' vocabulary retention, however, the activity proved to serve multiple purposes. Its flexible nature meant that Stage 2 was adaptable as a warmer, lead-in, cooler, or filler, depending on lesson requirements, which supplied cohesion between lessons across the semester, as well as helping to activate schemata for upcoming content. This saved time during planning and was very conducive to recycling words from several weeks earlier.

Furthermore, the flashcards were essentially student-constructed, thereby increasing the proportion of student-led learning. The Stage 1 process of collaboratively selecting lexis, conceiving definitions and independently writing the flashcards utilised several skills simultaneously, as did the different task types in Stage 2. Attention to vocabulary form is important in order to reinforce the link with meaning (Schmitt, 2010), thus skills such as

pronunciation and spelling were emphasised as desired via tasks like noughts and crosses and hangman. Taboo was useful for fluency practice, and bingo tested their listening skills.

Interestingly, despite minimal teacher interference during Stage 1, the most salient text items still tended to emerge. Therefore, by carefully selecting or adapting the reading content, it was possible to wield some control without compromising student-centredness, for example, incorporating appropriate Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) items into texts chosen for lower levels. This facilitated exposure to more advanced vocabulary while keeping the overall text at a suitable level.

Foreseeably, some obstacles were met during the task, although they were mainly concerned with practicality. Firstly, allowing students the freedom to choose the vocabulary meant Stage 1 had the potential to run over time. In an attempt to counter this, students sometimes completed their flashcards as homework, but perhaps unsurprisingly, they did not always return them, which led to some inconsistent or incomplete sets. As the sets increased by four every time Stage 1 was implemented, by the end of the semester there should have been 28 flashcards per group, but this was not always the case. Additionally, as the sets grew, it became harder to use every flashcard in a Stage 2 activity within the time restraints. This was addressed by sometimes withholding frequently practiced words to ensure new ones received attention. Increased teacher participation during Stage 1 could ameliorate the former issue, either by scaffolding definitions or making final vocabulary decisions, although this would, of course, detract from the aforementioned student-centred learning environment.

CONCLUSION

This article has outlined how using cumulative flashcards in the classroom may be used to assist learning and retaining vocabulary. Additionally, there appear to be further positive effects for both students and teachers in terms of offering a holistic learning experience and a more efficient lesson plan. As outlined above, there are some practical issues that should be considered regarding task timing and execution. Nevertheless, the activity appears to be achievable and simple to implement for most teaching contexts, while yielding multiple benefits beyond its chief aim of improved memorization.

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A Students' Survey of the Intensive English Course at Ferris University

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ABSTRACT

Ferris University runs an intensive English course and approximately 180 students enroll every year. A survey was conducted at the end of the semester in order to gauge the level of satisfaction of the students and to get an image of what could be improved. The results indicated that while most of the students were satisfied with the program, some students had specific ideas about how the program could be improved, particularly in comparison to similar programs at other universities.

INTRODUCTION

Ferris University has three departments: the Faculty of Letters (English, Japanese, Communication), the Faculty of Global and Intercultural Studies, and the College of Music. Every year, approximately 650 students enter the university. Any freshmen who wish to study English intensively will take a placement test, and only the top 180 students (about 27% of the first year students) are allowed to join the *Intensive English Course*. They take a total of 18 English classes through four semesters (from the Fall semester of the first year to the Spring semester of the third year). In the first Intensive semester, students study four skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing), a Language Development class, and Kodoku-Reading class (intensive reading with a Japanese teacher). In the following semester, students study the four skills and a Language Development class. In the third Intensive semester, they study the four skills and a Kodoku-Reading class. In the last Intensive semester, they have only Speaking and Reading classes. Students are divided into 10 classes according to the results of the placement test. This means that each class has a maximum of 18 students.

Usually, five full-time teachers write all syllabi and choose textbooks after briefly hearing part-time teachers' opinions. When I was involved in this process, I could see what other teachers were doing, thinking, and trying in the Intensive classes. However, there was little chance to understand what students were thinking about the course. Although Ferris University undertakes end-of-semester questionnaires, not many students respond and the questions are very general. Therefore, it is not very useful to understand students' specific reactions to the Intensive course. This situation led me to do a student survey at the end of the 2017 Spring semester.

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SURVEY

A Google Form was used to survey students, and the URL was distributed to students by a piece of paper. Out of 281 students, 52 completed the survey. A total of 45 respondents (86.5%) of the respondents were second-years and 7 (13.5%) were first-year Intensive students.

About 71% of respondents were positive about the Intensive course. The top two reasons why students decided to join the Intensive course were: I like English, and I want to use English in my future career. The top three reasons students liked the course so far were: small size class, ‘native teachers’, and getting more friends. The subject with the highest satisfaction rating was Writing (88% were happy) and the lowest was Speaking (77%). The students’ comments mainly focused on the teachers (comparing non-Japanese and Japanese teachers), textbooks, and extra activities. For example, students were happy with Japanese teachers’ detailed corrections and explanations as well as learning cursive writing in Reading class, however, they wanted to be able to write about more interesting topics (not the topics included in the textbooks). In Listening class, students said that having ‘native’ teachers was a good listening exercise, and listening besides textbooks, for example, TED talks and movies was beneficial for additional listening practice. One common concern among students relating to the program was that they wanted more listening training for TOEIC or TOEFL tests.

The survey asked about the placement test and class streaming. When the survey was conducted, the TOEFL ITP test was used at the end of the school year. Students change their classes twice during the Intensive course. A total of 56% of students think the TOEFL ITP is suitable as a placement test, and 48% think the frequency of the test is appropriate. 29% of students want the test more often. Focussing on class streaming, half of the students think they are placed in the right level and 27% believe they were placed in a class above their actual English level. The last question of the survey was if students have ever considered dropping out of the course, and 51.9% of students said yes, but they continued in order to acquire enough credits for graduation.

CONCLUSIONS

The survey shows that more than half of the students are satisfied with the current Intensive program. This is great news for teachers. Students’ comments provide hints for improvements. Students tend to see teachers as “native” or Japanese. However, this distinction is probably more about each teacher’s strengths and approaches to teaching. Therefore, how teachers share their skills and knowledge with other teachers should be considered to make the whole course better. A FD (Faculty Development) meeting is conducted annually, but this is probably not enough. Another big issue that should be discussed is textbooks. Some seem to be too easy. In other cases, students want something more authentic or relevant to themselves. Even though teachers’ opinions about textbooks reflect textbook choices, the textbook selection process needs to be reconsidered.

Some other universities have similar English courses, and the ways they are conducted could be great examples for Ferris. On top of an annual meeting, ICU has monthly meetings so full-time and part-time teachers can work together to meet the goals of the course (2006). Toyo Eiwa Women’s University has a textbook committee who conducts a teachers’ survey every year (1996).

The question remaining is the goal of the course since there is a discrepancy between

students and the university. Students expect to improve their English for their career, but according to the Ferris University homepage, the goal of the course is to reach the TOEFL iBT 79-80 level which focuses on academic purposes. Further research on students who have completed the Intensive course should be conducted as such research will help to develop a better Intensive English Course for both teachers and students.

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International Management and Culture in the EFL Environment

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on teaching about International Management and the importance of culture to business majors taking English language classes. The main objective is to emphasize the role that culture plays in international business including how effective managers are aware of intercultural differences. Knowledge of culture is said to be the fifth language skill and even surpasses corporate strategy in importance.

INTRODUCTION

In order for students to be successful in developing communicative competence and overall language skills, they will need to learn about culture. This can be termed the fifth language skill that would follow learning the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing (Tomalin, 1995). Through learning a language, students should be provided with the opportunity to learn how others think, feel and interact with other people.

English has become the international lingua franca in trade, academic affairs, and international diplomacy. As such, teaching culture will help students react to culturally significant information, teach tolerance for others, and aid them in thinking about being part of the international environment. For modern business majors, this can surely help them in becoming successful future managers in an increasingly globalized marketplace. With the above points in mind, I spike students' interest by asking the following questions usually at the start of the course. The main purpose for this is to point out to students that the companies operate in a variety of cultural environments and need to understand inter-cultural relations in order to run successful international businesses. I also elicit their views on how or what kind of role culture plays with the following questions and how they may relate to international management.

- What international companies do you like?
- What international companies do you use?
- What products or services from international companies do you use?
- Do you eat at McDonald's?
- Do you drink Coca-Cola?
- Do you use a smartphone from Apple?

In Figure 1, students are asked to think about what kind of menu items are available in Japan and how they might be different in McDonald's overseas. What would a McDonald's have on its

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menu in a country like India, a predominantly Hindu nation?

FIGURE 1
An advertisement for McDonald's Japan

McDonald's in Japan – 35 Unique Menu Items



Source: Smaili (2017)

While examining Figure 2, students are asked what kinds of products are offered by the Coca-Cola company? Would a Coca-Cola produced coffee product be sold overseas?

FIGURE 2
Coffee Plus. A Coca-Cola product unique to Japan.



Source: Coca-Cola Japan

With Figure 3, I ask how many countries and cultures are involved in the process of making and selling the *iPhone*. I ask the following questions.

1. Where was your computer made?
 2. How about the parts?
 3. Where was your smart phone made?
 4. How many companies were involved with the design, manufacturing and final sale of your favorite smart phone, computer or other electronic device?
 5. Would culture play a role in this process?

Figure 3
The *iPhone*



Source: Apple

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT?

I ask the students how international management is defined. Deresky (2000) defines international management as,

The management of business operations for an organization that conducts business in more than one country. International management requires knowledge and skills above and beyond normal business expertise, such as familiarity with the business regulations of the nations in which the organization operates, understanding of local customs and laws, and the capability to conduct transactions that may involve multiple currencies (p. 4).

To compete effectively on the global stage, firms must make considerable investments overseas. Companies need to invest in capital, such as building new factories. These firms also need to invest in well-trained managers. The managers must have the skills to work effectively in

a multicultural environment.

In any foreign environment, managers need to handle a set of dynamic and fast changing variables. These include political, economic, legal, technological and ecological variables. International managers must be aware of the important variable of culture. Thus, culture is the main focus of the effective international manager. As Deresky (2000) explains, “International Management is the process of developing strategies, designing and operating systems, and working with people around the world to ensure sustained competitive advantage” (p. 4). She further points out, “International Business refers to profit related activities conducted across national boundaries” (p. 5).

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

International competitiveness has now reached a level of sophistication that many people refer to as globalism. This means global competition where there are networks that link countries, institutions and people together. This forms an interdependent economy. Companies that want to remain globally competitive and expand their operations to other countries will need to have good managers. These managers will have experience working abroad. They will need to know how to conduct business in other countries and work with people from different cultures.

INCREASING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

According to Deresky (2000), the international workforce is undergoing rapid change due to three main factors: (1) the increasing movement across borders of workers of all skill levels; (2) the rising average age of employees; and, (3) the addition of great numbers of women to the workforce, especially in developing countries.

HOW DO WE DEFINE CULTURE?

The students are asked what they think about culture. They often give examples of obvious aspects such as food and clothing. They seldom mention the ways of thinking or the shared values of a society. According to Hofstede (1980), the culture of a society consists of the shared values, understandings, assumptions and goals that are learned from previous generations, imposed by present members of society and then passed on to the next generation. The shared outlook forms the common attitudes, codes of conduct, societal expectations and norms of behavior. Similarly, Kawar (2012) defines culture as “the inherited values, concepts, and ways of living which are shared by people of the same social group” (p. 105).

The anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1977) makes the following assertion on communication in culture,

A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC)

communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code (p. 91).

Hall's Theory highlights aspects of high-context and low-context cultures (See Figure 4). In sum, in high context cultures, communication is implicit, meaning that context and relationships are more important than actual words.

FIGURE 4
Hall's theory

HALL'S THEORY	
High-Context	Low-Context
Covert messages	Overt Messages
Internalized Messages	Plainly Coded Messages
Extensive non-verbal codes	Details verbalized
Reaction Reserved	Reaction on surface
Distinct In and Out Groups	Flexible In and Out Groups
Strong interpersonal bonds	Weak interpersonal bonds
High commitment	Low commitment
Open time	Closed time

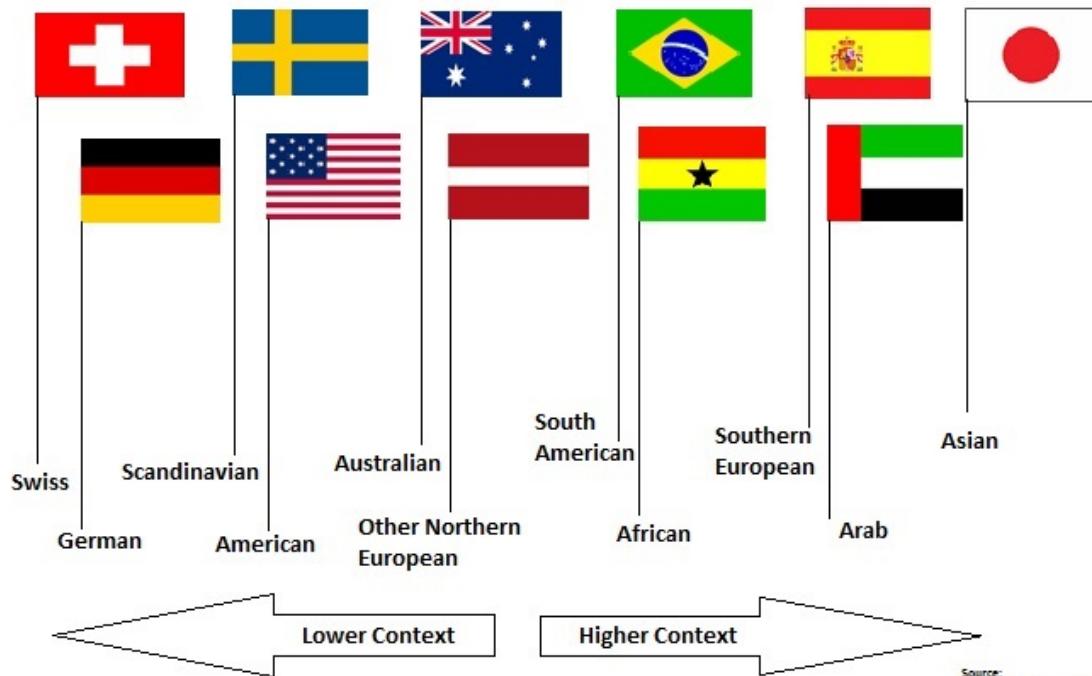
Source: Edward T. Hall (1977)

Similarly, Frost (2013) summarizes aspects of high context and low context cultures. High context cultures tend to have the following qualities: (1) Value traditions; (2) Foster long-lasting relationships; (3) Rely on non-verbal signs such as tone of voice, facial expressions, body language etc.; (4) Tend to be non-confrontational and more indirect; (5) Require little explanation; (6) Are more collectivistic and identify with the group; (7) Value group harmony; and, (8) Are slow to change.

In the case of low context cultures, the message is almost completely by words and is explicit. For example, we can state that Australia would be higher context than Germany, but lower context than Japan as shown in Figure 5. According to Frost (2013), low context cultures: (1) Tend to make shallower, short-term relationships; (2) Require explicit communication since they lack additional context; (3) Communication is more direct and confrontational; (4) Are more individualistic; (5) Identity lies with the individual; (6) Value individual needs; (7) Require all

the information in the message; (8) Can change quickly.

FIGURE 5
The high context-low context continuum



Source: Banducci Consulting.

Kawar (2012) gives an outline of a model of culture in Figure 6. As an example, high context cultures would often have a polychronic perception of time whereby they see time as fluid and do multiple tasks at once, while low context cultures are monochronic and see time as tangible and sequential where strict deadlines must be adhered to. Saudi Arabia would tend to be polychronic, while the US would be monochronic.

FIGURE 6
A model of culture

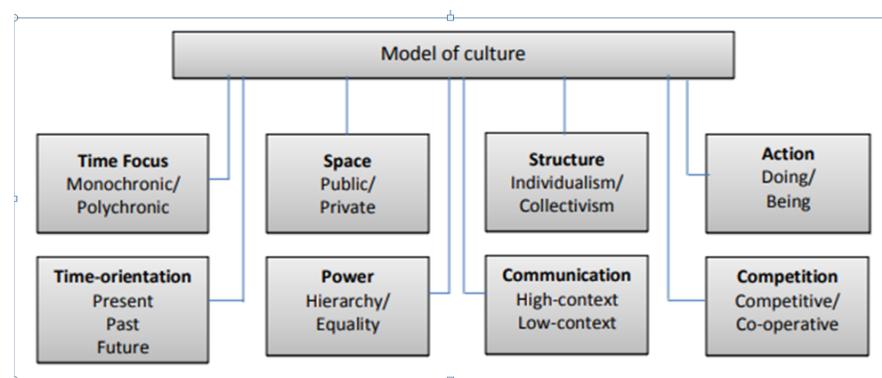


Figure 7 provides a detailed list of the differences between individualist and collectivist societies. A Western nation like Canada would fit into the individualist side, while group-orientated Japan would be considered collectivist.

FIGURE 7
A Summary of Individualist and Collective Cultures

Individualist Culture	Collective Culture
1- Transaction oriented (focus on results).	1- Relationship oriented (focus on process)
2- Short-term gains	2- Long-term growth
3- Emphasis on content (facts, numbers, ratios, statistics)	3- Emphasis on context (experience, intuition, the relationship)
4- Independent	4- Interdependent
5- Competitive, decision-driven	5- Collaborative
6- Direct, explicit communication	6- Indirect, circuitous communication
7- Personal accountability	7- Protection of face
8- Private offices	8- Open office plan
9- Linear time, impatient	9- Flexible time, patient

Source: Tagreed Issa Kawar (2012).

CULTURE IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: MISHAPS

Students are asked to think about problems that have happened in international business. For example, when President George Bush gave Chinese Premier Li Peng a gift of cowboy boots embroidered with the American and Chinese flags, was it an appropriate gift?

1. Yes, a thoughtful sentiment and a keepsake appropriate to the occasion.
2. No, a significant mistake on the part of administration protocol experts.
3. Yes, a good choice, if only President Bush had known the Premier's correct shoe size.

Answer: #2

In China, the soles of the feet are considered to be the lowliest part of the body. Thus, gifts of footwear with each nation's respective flag, was a significant mistake on the part of U.S. administration protocol experts (Hummel, 2009).

DISNEY'S EXPANSION TO EUROPE

One corporate name which students are undoubtedly familiar with is Disney. The company has had astounding success in the US and Japan. However, when it expanded to France it faced serious problems. For one, it did not initially serve alcohol at its park in Paris, despite the fact that the French commonly enjoy a glass of wine with their main meal. The park's name, "Euro Disney Resort," sounded like their currency. It was not a hit with the French, thus the name had to be changed to Disneyland Paris. Moreover, at first, most of the managers were Americans, who did not know how to deal with their French employees (Binus University,

2017). Only after suffering significant financial loss did the company make changes, and eventually the venture turned successful.

WHAT IS THE ROLE AND FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND HOW IMPORTANT IS INTER-CULTURAL COMPETENCE?

International Management will need to keep pace with the amount of international business and intensifying competition. As the world becomes more interdependent, international managers will need to deal with changes in political, economic, technological, regulatory and financial variables. Capable managers will benefit from future opportunities by maintaining a global perspective and orientation. They see the world as one giant market to profit from through cooperation and interdependence. The international manager will use the ability to work with people from different cultures. This will help them to play a more powerful role in leading their companies to make profits and expand in the international marketplace.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of introducing culture into the English language classroom for business majors is to create a level of awareness that will help them succeed as future participants and stakeholders in international management. This is in addition to having students gain a larger understanding of cross-cultural issues and fostering a broader perspective of the world. With a view to culture as the fifth language skill, helping students to develop knowledge of and sensitivity to cross-cultural issues and solutions is a valuable process for business majors alike.

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