

Successfully Learning English in Japan with e-Learning in a mass

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Abstract

In this paper, the data of the Test of English for International Communication, Institutional Program (TOEIC-IP) that the third graders or older students took, such as its score differences between the average of other college or university students in Japan, and the differences of the groups at Nara National College of Technology (NNCT), are analyzed. Certain groups at NNCT noticeably show the flaws and successes of e-Learning in the TOEIC-IP scores. The analysis of the teaching approaches shows how effectively the instructors utilize e-Learning in a mass. The framework of the class, in which the highly evaluated groups are belonging, and the instructors' roles to form the "Hybrid Class" are introduced. Until Japanese turn into the third graders (Grade 12) at high schools, they just spend at least about 400 hours in their main stream education. It is obvious that they have not spent enough time to learn English to communicate in the world. It is stated that one of the best e-Learning softwares and how effectively and practically it works in a mass of my students. "e-Learning" has been still developing. Therefore, the better e-Learning softwares are urgently necessary for Japanese students to make them successful in the prospective future. This research has been supported with the "Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research" (KAKENHI) (21520626) of "Japan Society for the Promotion of Science" (JSPS).

1. Introduction

"e-Learning" itself has just started lately and has been developed for individual use. Some people might say it is too early to talk about the effect and result of e-Learning in a mass, though it has been obvious that some groups studying English with e-Learning in a mass got the better scores on the Test of English for International Communication, Institutional Program (TOEIC-IP). The data based on the TOEIC-IP scores are introduced and analyzed in this paper. How to successfully introduce in class and the instructors' roles in class is stated. It has been fascinatingly difficult for the individual to develop the better e-Learning software by instructors, themselves. It is the time to unify the professionals for the further stage.

It has been so serious that the number of Japanese people is decreasing. The birth rate of Japanese is now 1.2. It means the market in Japan has been shrinking, and even famous companies try to cooperate together with the other famous ones. Under the situation, it is very hard for the seniors at colleges and universities to get jobs. To solve the problem, the Japanese have 2 options. They had better accept the immigrants to keep the market size in Japan, or sell Japanese products to the other countries. Although "Globalization" has been discussed for more than 20 years, they finally need to communicate at least in English with neighbors even "in Japan." Therefore "Activity in English" for the fifth graders at public elementary schools started "drastically," but the Japanese companies won't be able to wait until they grow up. The companies in Japan badly want to hire people who can communicate in English. It is very common for the personnel departments or sections in Japanese companies to ask job-seekers about the scores of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Therefore the TOEIC is not only an English test, but has also held the sociality in Japanese

society. What is the success for the students at Nara National College of Technology is the higher TOEIC scores to get jobs and their prospective future.

2. Data Analysis of TOEIC scores at Nara National College of Technology from 2007 to 2011

Analyzing the average score differences of the Test of English for International Communication, Institutional Program (TOEIC-IP) among the third graders (17 to 18 years old) or older students at Nara National College of Technology (NNCT), it is obvious that the TOEIC-IP average scores of certain grade groups are higher than the other same grade groups. The higher average scores these grade groups took are at least over 380 points.

The TOEIC-IP has been utilized as a standardized test for the students in the third grade or older at NNCT since 2004. The following data shows NNCT students' TOEIC score transition from 2007 to 2011. The third graders or older must take the TOEIC-IP so that some of students started to sleep even in the listening part, and the following data included the scores of them.

	All 3rd Graders	Listening	Reading	Total	All 4th Graders	Listening	Reading	Total	All 5th Graders	Listening	Reading	Total
2010	Average (n=189)	191.0	123.3	314.3	Average (n=194)	196.3	126.7	323.0	Average (n=168)	223.8	160.8	384.6
	Highest	495	435	930	Highest	365	290	655	Highest	480	435	915
	Lowest	80	45	155	Lowest	100	65	180	Lowest	110	70	190
2011	Average (n=208)	177.0	116.7	293.7	Average (n=187)	212.1	133.9	346.0	Average (n=196)	205.6	144.3	349.9
	Highest	305	250	555	Highest	445	365	810	Highest	355	365	700
	Lowest	85	60	155	Lowest	75	55	170	Lowest	90	60	170
2009	Average (n=195)	187.2	125.2	312.4	Average (n=196)	189.0	125.5	314.5	Average (n=199)	218.7	163.2	381.9
	Highest	385	335	720	Highest	395	350	745	Highest	430	400	810
	Lowest	105	55	180	Lowest	70	60	135	Lowest	90	60	150
2008	Average (n=206)	177.8	123.0	300.8	Average (n=199)	192.7	140.4	333.1	Average (n=185)	199.8	157.9	357.8
	Highest	305	280	585	Highest	345	300	645	Highest	435	380	780
	Lowest	85	60	155	Lowest	105	60	175	Lowest	105	60	180
2007	Average (n=203)	192.5	115.4	307.9	Average (n=192)	199.4	126.5	325.9	Average (n=182)	206.3	141.0	347.3
	Highest	330	235	505	Highest	410	285	695	Highest	460	330	755
	Lowest	100	65	180	Lowest	85	65	175	Lowest	100	70	185

Table 1. Students' average TOEIC-IP score transition at Nara National College of Technology from 2007 to 2011

	All 3rd Graders	Listening	Reading	Total	All 4th Graders	Listening	Reading	Total	All 5th Graders	Listening	Reading	Total
2010	Average (n=2,885)	199	127	326	Average (n=8,651)	203	133	336	Average (n=3,904)	216	147	363

Table 2. Average TOEIC-IP scores of 55 Colleges Technology in Japan [1]

	All HS 3rd Graders	Listening	Reading	Total	All Freshmen	Listening	Reading	Total	All Sophomores	Listening	Reading	Total
2010	Average (n=14,076)	237	165	402	Average (n=161,976)	236	183	419	Average (n=82,038)	252	190	442
	All Seniors	Listening	Reading	Total								
	Average (n=22,630)	286	223	509								

Table 3. Average TOEIC-IP scores of senior-high-school students and university students in Japan [1]

Comparing with these data, the average score range of the third graders at NNCT is between 293.7 and 314.3 points, and the average difference is at least 11.7 points lower than the one of all third graders at Colleges of Technology. The most fourth graders of Colleges of Technology are between 18 and 19 years old and the age range is as same as the freshmen at universities. The average score of other Colleges of Technology is 10 points lower than the highest average of the NNCT fourth

graders, but it is 21.5 higher than the lowest average of them. The difference between the freshmen's average score and the highest average of the NNCT fourth graders is 73 points. The average score of the fifth graders at NNCT is on the range between 347.3 and 384.6 points, and the groups in blue are at least 18.9 higher than the average scores of all fifth graders at Colleges. The average of sophomores at universities is at least 57.4 higher than the average of the fifth graders at NNCT.

Thus, there are not so big differences in the English ability among the NNCT third graders beyond the years on Table 1 and 4, but theirs is a little different from the average scores of other Colleges of Technology, which is a little higher than the NNCT third graders. Speaking of the NNCT fourth graders' English ability, it is on the range 314.5 to 346.0 points, and some differences happen among these years. There are two groups of the fifth graders at NNCT. One group has over 380 points and the other is on the range between 347.3 and 357.8. The higher groups are better than the average of other Colleges of Technology, but the other groups are lower than that. The average of sophomores is much higher (+56.3 points) than the highest group at NNCT.

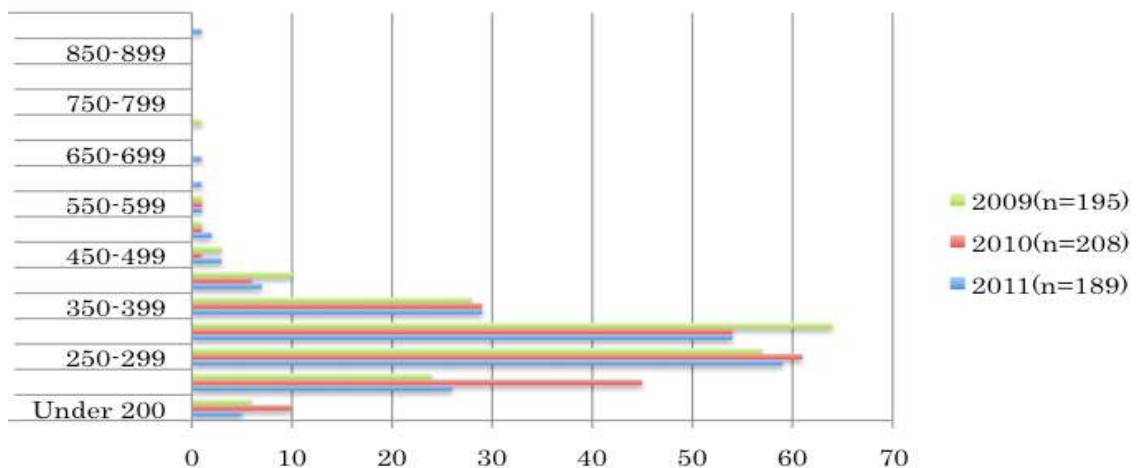


Table 4. Distribution of the third graders' TOEIC scores in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

On the purple parts of the data, the average difference of the TOEIC-IP scores is 29.3 points higher than the last year. On the yellow parts of them, it is just only 13.7 points higher in 2009. In the second year, it jumps up 35.4 points higher in 2010. On the gray parts, the difference is 31.9 points higher. On the blue part of them in the first year, the difference between 2010 and 2009 is 33.6 points, and it becomes 38.6 points higher than the last year in 2011. Moreover, on other blue parts, the difference between 2008 and 2007 is 25.2 points higher, and in the second year, the score leaps up to 48.8 point.

3. Differences among students at NNCT based on various teaching approaches

The instructor of the yellow parts on "Table1" is a native English speaker. The instructor uses Moodle for the TOEIC preparation in class, and extensive reading with Oxford Reading Tree, which has been a kind of a trend lately in Japan. It takes a year to become used to his approach, and after that, the average score in the second year jumped up to 32.4 points.

The instructors on the purple parts and the gray parts are same. The instructor used an e-Learning software, a half of "PowerWords [2]" by ALC in 2007, to build students' vocabularies (up to 6,000 out of 12,000 words). "PowerWords" is software on the web, and it was installed in 2004. "Active X" is used on Windows System, running the software, so the Information Center at NNCT limited to use it

just on intranet. These computer materials are replaced every 5 years. Another e-Learning software, "Newton TOEIC A course [3]" was introduced and install in 2010. In class, the instructor uses the workbook of the TOEIC Preparation, and explains the correct answers.

The instructor on the blue parts used a half of "PowerWords" by ALC in 2007, and the students repeated a half of "PowerWords" again and a half of "Newton TOEIC A course" in 2008. In 2009, full "Newton TOEIC A course" was only used. Each student progress was graded up to 40% of the whole evaluation. If you finished all of "Newton TOEIC A course", you will get 40 points of the whole class evaluation, so you have to take 20% more to pass the course. The evaluation scale is such as 40% based on the e-Learning, 20% of the final tests, 20% of the handouts, and 20% of the class participation.

Each red bubble shows, on Table 5, the difference between the TOEIC-IP pretest in 2009 and posttest in 2010 horizontally, and how many percentages of "Newton TOEIC A course" each student finished vertically. The students were insisted to finish the e-Learning material in 2009. The red bubbles are floated around the higher percentages of progress in 2009. On the other hand, the blue bobbles are evenly scattered around, because the instructor was not so strict to force the students to finish "Newton TOEIC A course."

170 students took both tests in 2009 and 2010 on Table 6 and each student's result of the pretest and the posttest is shown. On Table 7, 173 students took both tests and the table shows each student's difference. On Table 6, it is clear that the more dots cross over the red line.

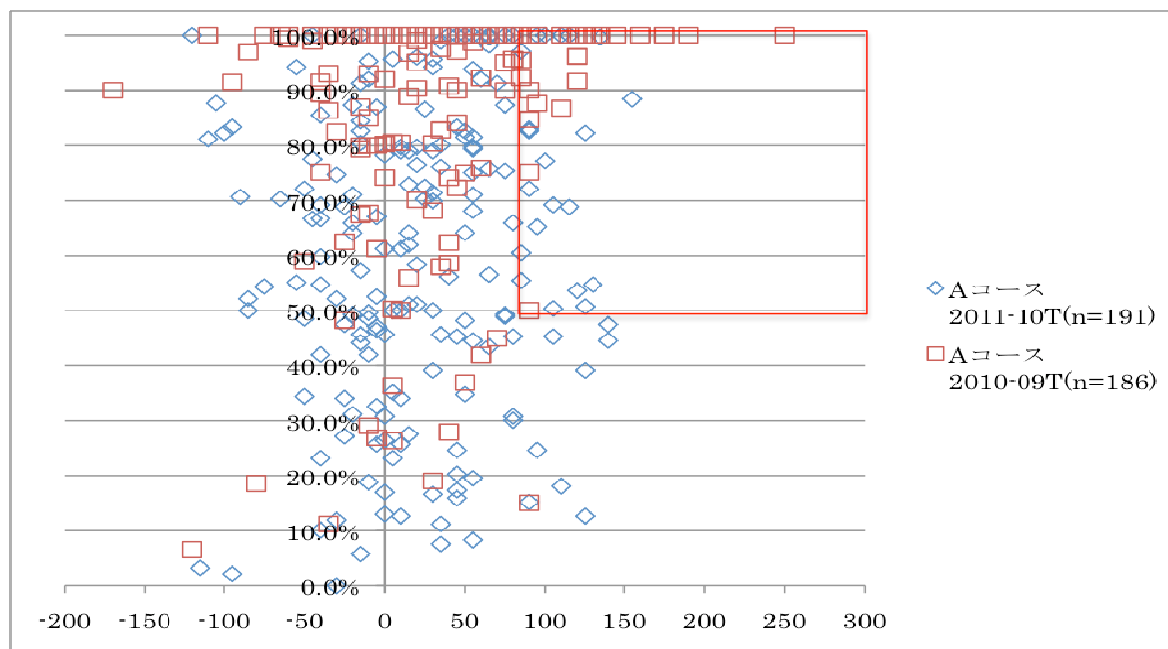


Table 5. Distribution of the progress of the Newton TOEIC A course and the score differences between TOEIC-IP pretest and posttest

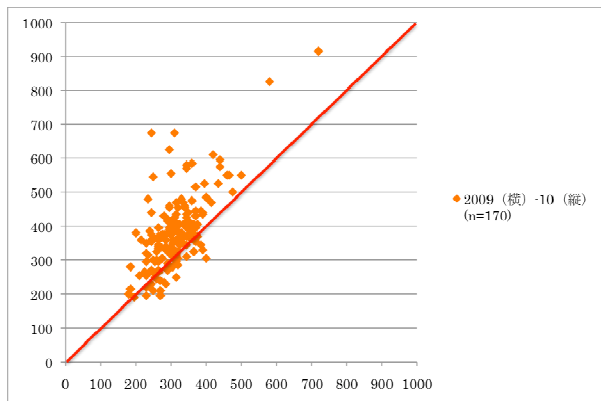


Table 6. Distribution of the Third Graders' TOEIC-IP scores of the pretest in 2009 (horizontally) and the posttest in 2010 (vertically)

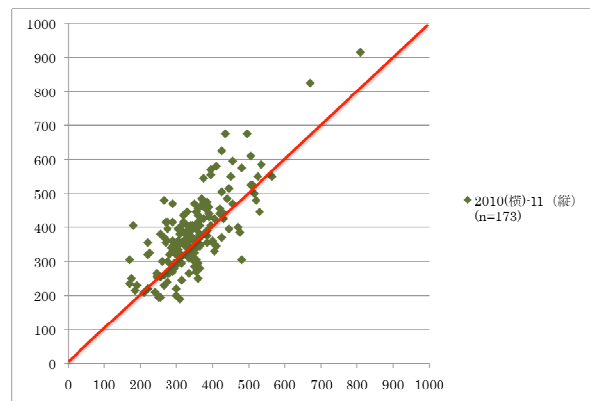


Table 7. Distribution of the Third Graders' TOEIC-IP scores of the pretest in 2010 (horizontally) and the posttest in 2011 (vertically)

4. Framework of Successful Class with e-Learning in a Mass

- I. To keep students e-Learning by themselves, the instructor insists to do "Newton TOEIC A course" for 10-15 minutes in the beginning of class.
- II. Students take 4 or 5 questions look like the TOEIC questions, and write their marks on the answer sheet. The instructor collects the answer sheets.
- III. 40 to 43 students are separated into 12 groups.
- IV. The students start to make the group report about the questions they took. The group report is framed as the template to stimulate and develop their critical thinking through the TOEIC questions.
- V. After turning in the group report, the students do "Newton TOEIC A course" until the last report is collected.
- VI. The instructor collects the group reports, asks some volunteers to score the reports, who have less class participation in class, and explains what to think as the trigger and how to solve the questions as framed. "Predictable Input/Output System" is applied in class.
- VII. The instructor hands out the answer sheet to the person whose answer sheet is not his or hers, to solve the same questions again and score the answer sheet.
- VIII. The students will answer 4 to 5 questions again.

5. Conclusion

The above data prove that the TOEIC-IP scores of the third graders are almost same over the years, but it is clear that the better results among some students are not coincident. The differences between TOEIC-IP pretest and posttest depend on whether the instructors use the better software with enough quantity and how the instructors introduce it in a mass.

Although it is hard to say, the data also explain that the instructors should not commit students to the care of e-Learning. It is easy for the students to be free and out of studying. The students are too childish to entrust their independency to study by themselves without their strong motivation. Therefore the instructors set up some "devices" to do e-Learning in class. When the instructors tell the students about the evaluation system in class, they had better evaluate and score how much the students finished as their progress. Please let the students use the software in the beginning of the class for 10 to 15 minutes as applying "Suggestopedia" [4]. The atmosphere in class becomes very

positive to work hard. The instructors teach the testing techniques and how to think critically through the TOEIC-like-questions. The students in the "hybrid class" consider the same question once by themselves, twice with the group members, three times with the instructors' explanation, four times to correct and score their peer's answers.

e-Learning has been developed in person originally. Moreover e-Learning in class has been still developing. It is the time to take the big chance to develop "e-Learning in a mass" for the language instructors. The software, "Newton TOEIC A course" is published by Newton Press. The company is famous for publishing a science magazine "Newton" in Italy and Japan. It has 3,184 listening questions with pictures, 3,420 listening questions in proper response, 6,624 dialog questions, 3,712 grammar questions and 5,544 reading comprehension questions, which mean the total is 22,484 questions. It takes about 125 hours if you answer each question in 20 seconds. If your answer is wrong once, the question is piled up on Level B. If you make it wrong twice, it is piled up on Level C. If it is your third and fourth times, it is on Level D and F. After you cleared Level F, you will get the "Certification number." Even though the students spent more than 100 hours on this program, more red bubbles on Table 5 should be in the red square. The team, to which the instructors as the content planners, IT technicians and sponsors are belonging, has been set up to solve this problem and to develop the students' motivation for the software.

Under these circumstances in Japan, students have not been in trouble without English in life. They maybe aware of the reality, but avert their eyes from the challengeable future, because most of Japanese students have not deserved challenge with difficulty. English education as a subject starts from junior high schools (Grade 7). Until the students at NNCT are the third graders, they spend at least 400 hours to learn English. In April, 2011, English Activities started for the fifth and sixth graders at public elementary schools who will spend about 52.5 hours for 2 years. This is the reason why the Japanese cannot communicate in English well. The Japanese need more time to learn English to communicate in English well. Thus e-Learning is definitely necessary for Japanese to make the students learn English more, and fill the gap to communicate in English in the world.

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