Courseware in Blended Learning Classrooms

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Introduction

In English language classes, online multimedia courseware has enormously contributed to the development of blended learning as an important tool to help students engage in various supplemental language tasks and exercises available at anytime and anywhere. Another benefit of using such courseware is, without the instructor's direct guidance and instruction, students with different learning styles are able to access multiple formats of language materials in a flexible way. Studies are needed to examine the feasibility of using such courseware as an aid of developing Japanese students' English language skills.

Purpose

What do students consider to be the benefits and drawbacks of the e-learning courseware with respect to their own learning experiences and progress?
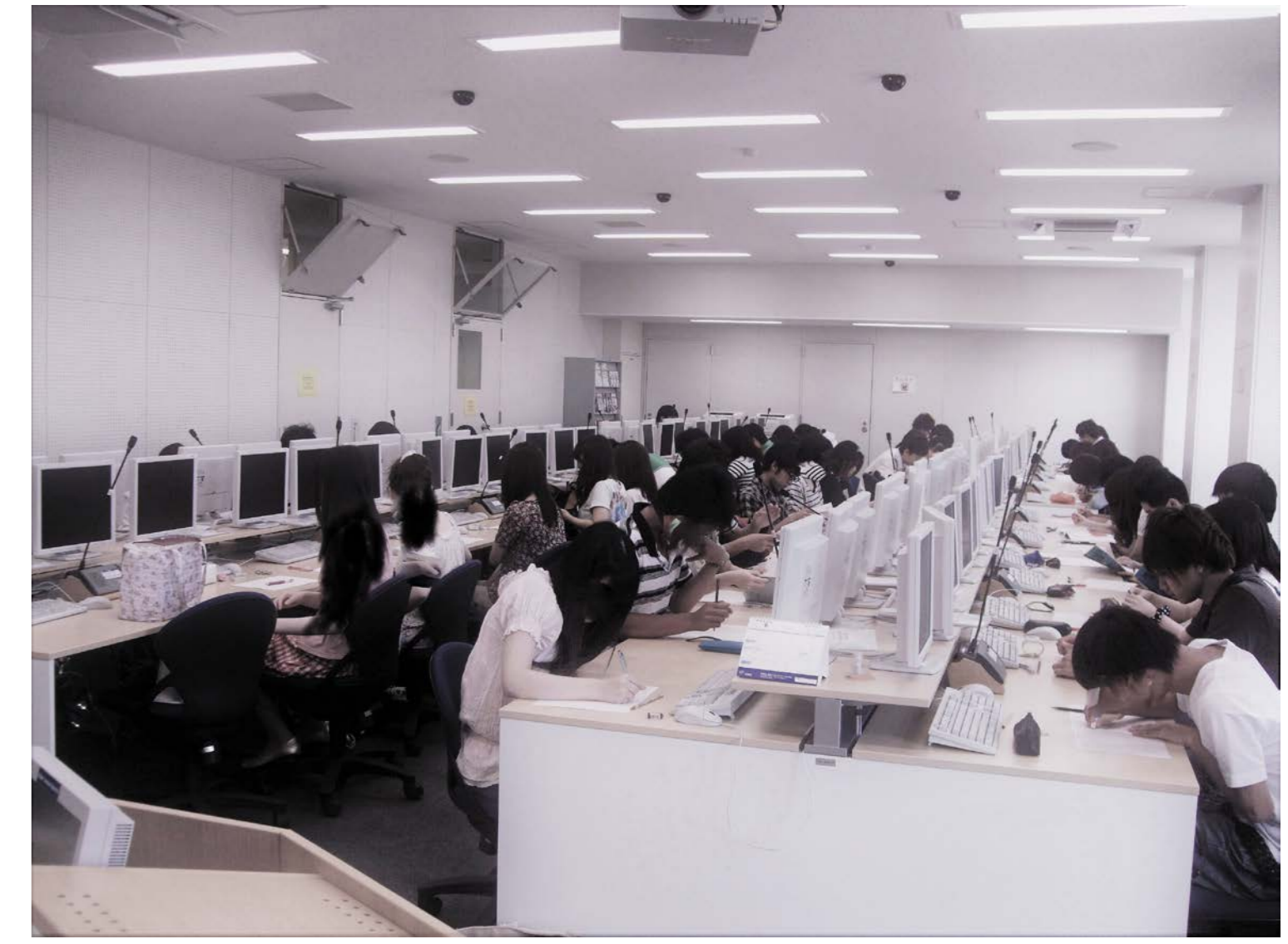
Participants

Fifteen full-time Japanese university students majoring in engineering. They enrolled in university English courses. All of them were experienced smartphone users, but their educational experiences using digital resources and e-learning systems were limited. None had experienced online language learning in or beyond the classroom.

Course Description

1. In-person sessions focusing on the improvement of discourse competencies
2. E-learning Program
3. Weekly Presentation Tasks

➡ Help students acquire comprehensive English skills and improve their speaking competence.

Methodology

Exercises in E-learning Program

1. Listening comprehension
2. Explanation
3. Exercises

Review tests

➡ Explanation of key expressions and sentences, multiple choice and fill-in-the-blanks style exercises and recording student own voice help student to avoid consulting dictionaries to look up words and phrases, or even ask teachers for help.

Data Collection

Data was collected from a 30-item anonymous questionnaire, which was distributed to the students after the course had been completed.

Questionnaire

The rating scale in the questionnaire was a 10-point Likert Scale with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 10 representing "strongly agree." The responses were totaled and averaged to attain a mean response for each question.

Student Comments

"I was able to use my smartphone to complete the program. It was a big surprise for me!"

"The exercises in the system were well-organized and well-written. I was also able to see my own progress and scores quite easily."

More than half of the students pointed out the ease of doing exercises with software as opposed to having to open up paper-based textbook.

Students appreciated how the system provided them with repeated exposure to the large number and wide variety of exercises. The majority of students also commented favorably on the opportunity to listen to conversations whose contexts were clear or presented in easily imagined real-life situations.

"The explanation and instructions were easy and straightforward to understand."

Findings

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire: students' satisfaction with the courseware

	Questions	Average (±SD)
1.	I was able to learn the various words, phrases, and sentences.	6.8 (1.2)
2.	The listening content was easy to follow as a non-native speaker.	5.5 (1.6)
3.	The number of exercises was appropriate.	6.7 (2.0)
4.	The quality of exercises was appropriate.	7.0 (1.8)
5.	The courseware provided me with the skills and knowledge necessary for business situations.	5.5 (1.6)

Overall students' responses appeared lukewarm throughout the questionnaire, with an overall average score of 6.2 However, students were especially satisfied with the quantity and quality of the exercises (Q3, Q4) along with the variety of words and phrase (Q1).

Table 2. Results of the questionnaire: students' satisfaction with the courseware

	Questions	Average (±SD)
6.	The courseware helped me to have valuable English learning experiences.	6.5 (2.0)
7.	The courseware helped me enhance my motivation to study English more.	6.1 (2.3)
8.	The courseware was compatible with how I like to learn English.	6.1 (2.3)
9.	The four skills were provided in a well-balanced way.	5.7 (2.3)
10.	Completing the program gave me a sense of accomplishment.	5.7 (1.9)

Students were divided on whether the course provided a valuable English learning experience (Q6). Those whose scores for this question were low expressed that they struggled with the difficulty of the exercises and, therefore, could not fully appreciate the program (Q10). On the other had, half of them still appeared to believe that the e-learning style of English study was right for them (Q8).

Discussion

- The courseware provided students with ample opportunities to self-improve their English ability with self-learning exercises.
- Students enjoyed the familiar multiple-choice question-answer assessment style with the immediate instructional feedback.

Conclusion

- Overall, the e-learning system reviewed in this study proved effective in providing students with a large selection of English language content featuring many of the beneficial features intrinsic to computerized learning, including an ability to learn at one's own pace, in one's own time, with real-time feedback and progress reporting.

- In order to maximize the effectiveness of e-learning itself, it appears clear that a means to increase students' opportunities to engage in communicative activities is essential just as it is essential in off-line learning environments.