Integrated English at Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College—follow up study

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Integrated English classes were introduced in Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College's English department. After an initial year of the program students were surveyed to ascertain the effectiveness of the course. Needs analysis and environmental analysis both find students to be satisfied with the course and perceive it to prepare them for "real life" English situations. However, there was a perceived lack of attention to writing from both perspectives and also a lack of tech resources at the college that compromised students' learning experiences. Environmental analysis showed time allocation to be satisfactory but lack of tech infrastructure hindered student autonomous study.

Key Words:〔Integrated English〕〔Environmental Analysis〕
　　　　　　〔Needs analysis〕

1. Follow up study

In an effort to provide a study method that more closely replicates the multi-use way English is used outside the classroom, Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College (KIHC) introduced an Integrated English Class for first year students that combines the separate disciplines of speech and writing.

In this type of course, where traditional study boundaries are blurred, there is a risk that students may not fully understand the remit of the course, and thus may be unclear about the objectives. Traditionally at this college, speech and writing have been taught separately, but as they are both subjects where students have to produce English there is an opportunity to have students both discuss and write about class topics — if the class is well designed and well run.

This is a new course concept at this college and we felt that student input to a review of the course would be advantageous for making amendments to the course in order to try and improve the effectiveness of the program.

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2. Methodology:

Following the first year of this course we designed a small survey to see if the course had been effective in the eyes of the students. Survey Link below:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ous2vD_sxhRZ9ZrrwIJ3m3tsa8qkl-DBtfFch49R3sc/viewanalytics

The topics covered were as follows: Receiving adequate information about the course, asking your instructor for help when necessary, using E-Learning, internet access at school, class frequency, homework amount, class attendance, student achievement, student contribution during class.

Student feedback covered the following areas: Problems with the course, class experience, what students liked & disliked about the course.

Taking the survey questions as the basis for our review of the course, we looked at the class through the following parameters (discussed in more detail in our previous paper —Forbes et al, 2017): Necessities, lacks, wants, learner constraints, purpose of study, availability of suitable resources, classroom setting & resources, time available.

This analysis is located within the framework of Nation and Macalister's (2010) curriculum design model (Diagram 1). We are focusing here on the three areas of principles, needs and environment. This can be further made clear if we use Nation and Macalister's (2010) broad categorization of these areas into present knowledge, required knowledge and subjective needs. Brown (1994) also addressed similar issues by looking at the gap between the learners' performance in the L2 and their desired performance in L2. This is the *discrepancy approach.* Following on from this the *analytical approach* Brown looks at what learners need to know in order to move on in a developmental sequence.

3. Results

3.1 Needs analysis

Following the Needs analysis performed using Nation and Macalister's (2010) curriculum design model for the Integrative English course as discussed in Forbes et al. 2017, this paper aims to proceed to a review of the course and to investigate whether it satisfied the needs of the students. A survey was conducted at the end of the academic year to evaluate the implementation of this integrative teaching approach for teaching English as a second language to first year students at KIHC.

Needs analysis is an important procedure in the process of designing and implementing a language course and it has many approaches. According to Nation and Macalister's (2010) curriculum design model the needs of the students can be divided into three categories:

necessities, lacks and wants.

As discussed in a previous paper (Forbes et al. 2017), the necessities of KIHC students are focused around their ability to listen and understand class instructions in English, their ability to maintain conversations on a range of topics and their ability to produce cohesive written paragraphs on different topics. The results gathered from the survey show that the students enjoyed conversing with their peers and felt that they had developed their speaking skills and that they had improved confidence regarding their ability to speak in L2. When the students were asked to comment on the most attractive aspect of the course, they stated that they had, by speaking in pairs and in front of other people, gained confidence and had also improved their communication and presentation skills.

The survey indicated that the students were satisfied with the organization of the course and that the instructors had provided adequate and clear information about the course's objectives and assessment. As can be seen in section one of the survey, 60.78% of the students thought that the instructions for course materials were clear and 68.63% of the students agreed that the course was well organized. The results also revealed that 86.3% of the students were content with the number of classes per week. Integrative English was held three times a week and the students found that the class frequency responded to their needs.

The students were able to successfully hold conversations with their partners about basic topics and they understood the class instructions in English. The results of the survey showed that around 47% of the students asked their instructor to help them in the class, something that follows from the fact that most of them didn't have any serious comprehension problems in the class. The instructor was always careful to ensure that all the students could follow the instructions in the classroom, by answering individual questions and endeavouring to provide appropriate feedback.

Nevertheless, one necessity that was not fully met was the sufficient development of students' writing skills. Even though students could produce a short text, a criticism they had for the Integrative English course was that they wished for more opportunities to polish their writing skills as they were concerned that they needed more practice. As is evident from their comments (see section 5 of the survey), the students wanted more writing practice ('I wanted to practice writing. If I had had more chance to write something, I would improve my writing skills') and felt that it was neglected in favour of the speaking part of the course. When they were asked in the survey what changes they would suggest, a significant number of students arrived at the same conclusion, that they needed to practice and improve their writing skills and that they were hoping to have more classes focused on writing ('I think we have to improve writing skill. We had writing classes once a week. So, I thought we have to increase writing classes', 'I think we have to study writing skill').

The difficulties that the first-year students encountered were related to the fact that in junior and senior high school they learned English following a teaching methodology which relied heavily on repetition and pronunciation exercises (Forbes et al. 2017). The purpose of the Integrative English course is to enable the students to produce their own content, while developing their creativity and self-confidence. Another obstacle the students had to overcome was that they had to learn how to write well-structured essays. Many students were not taught the different stages of writing an essay, which they had to learn in the Integrative English course.

The survey allowed the teachers to identify another important constraint the students had during this course. There is no Wi-Fi network on the campus or in the dormitory (mandatory residence for 1st year English department students) and the students struggled to do homework assignments. First-year students in Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College reside in a dormitory with two native English speakers, as part of their English immersion experience. A tool used in the Integrative English course is English Central, an online platform which offers English videos from the web, a system allowing learners to expand their vocabulary and online one-on-one tutoring. This particular tool was incorporated into the Integrative English Course as a tool which the students could use to practice their English skills and do their homework at their own pace.

In addition, the students who enroll in Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College for the purpose of learning English have similar incentives and expect the same outcome: learning how to perform everyday tasks in English, developing their English communication skills, enriching their vocabulary with English slang from different English speaking countries and with English idioms (Forbes et al. 2017). Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College offers a one-month study abroad program to first-year students of the English Department and that provides much of the immediate motivation for students to learn daily routines and tasks in English. The results showed that the students were generally satisfied with the course (section 4 of the survey), with 62.7% of the students rating as excellent their experience in the course.

Finally, 60.78% of the learners felt that they had achieved the learning outcomes of the course. In general, the responses of students when they were asked in section 5 of the survey what they enjoyed more in this course were very encouraging and covered different topics, such as speaking ('I think speaking time is the best situation. At first, I was shy and I didn't want to speak in front of many people. However, this class had many opportunities to speak there. Thanks for this, I could enjoy this time'), presentation skills ('I liked presentations. I could acquire communication skill in front of many people'), storytelling ('We made a story by exchanging a piece of paper in a group') and writing ('I like writing subjects').

3.2 Environmental Analysis

As stated in our previous paper, Nation and Macalister (2010) establish that when designing and implementing a new language learning syllabus, a well thought out environmental analysis is important. The environmental analysis itself is the process of looking at which factors will have the greatest impact on the effectiveness and goals of the course and then deciding how to account for them. Such factors may originate from teachers or learners, economic, social or institutional issues and can all have a direct or indirect impact on curriculum development. According to Richards, J (2001) it is the process of determining whether or not the course will actually be useable in a language learning setting. In our initial environmental analysis, we focused on two areas in particular that we theorised would have the greatest impact on the course, these being time constraints and also classroom/resource constraints.

The new course was set at three times a week over each fifteen-week semester, to replace previous Oral Communication and Writing classes that had 2 classes and 1 class per week, respectively. The aim was to adequately cover the content of both speaking and writing skills through balanced goals and student autonomy. The results of our survey, Figure 7, showed that the majority of students were satisfied with the number of classes per week. However, some comments in section 5 of the survey (What would you like to change about this course?) indicated that perhaps the balance between speaking and writing activities is not quite adequate. Such comments as, 'I want to do more writing', 'I think we should study more writing skills' and 'I wanted to practice more writing' show that even though a majority of students agreed that their writing ability had improved, more planning can be done in the future to perhaps better address the time balance between the speaking and writing sections of the course.

One of the main strategies we used to reduce the impact of time constraints was to promote the before mentioned idea of student autonomy. The aim was to provide teachers with more time to cover class work, while also contributing to the students' better understanding of the integrated nature of these English skills as described in Nation and Macalister (2010). The results of the survey suggest that this aim has been largely successful but has to some extent been affected by the classroom / resource constraints of the college. The main way we implemented our aim for student autonomy was utilizing the online English resource and activity website English Central. Set as a 1-month homework block, students complete, at minimum, a specified number of videos and speaking activities. The overall use of this resource proved successful. The survey showed that the majority of students completed the set number of videos by the end of the month, Figure 4, and feedback was primarily positive.

However, the previously identified problems with the college's aging infrastructure, limited number of PC facilities and a lack of internet/Wi-Fi on campus proved to be an issue.

As seen in Figure 5, 37.3% of students express internet access as a problem for English Central use, in addition to comments relating to the lack of Wi-Fi in the student dormitory being a hindrance to adequate self-study. While this lack of facilities is a very challenging issue to solve, going forward we must try to find creative solutions to continue to promote student autonomy and provide stimulating activities outside of class time. Several student comments (Figure 6) also showed that a large majority of students expressed the wish to use English Central within class time. While this will again be constrained by resources and class time, it could be an option worth considering in the future to better develop the students speaking, listening and presentation skills.

4. Conclusion

Based on feedback from a student survey (distinct from instructor feedback) the course is operating to a high level of satisfaction among students (88.2% of students rated the course either excellent or very good). Needs analysis showed that students rated the course more highly for speech than for writing.

Speech needs (Present knowledge) were perceived to have been met and goals attained. However, although writing aims were clear, implementation of those goals was not universally carried out to the degree to which students would like (required knowledge deficit). Environmental analysis showed up similar trends with writing being identified as the area that required more time spent on practice. Both Environmental and needs analysis recognized that the deficiencies in technology (specifically Wi-Fi) at KIHC hampered students' ability to learn autonomously, and made the learning process more time consuming and place dependent (the need to book a computer lab) than is ideal.

We therefore find the course, and therefore the gap between the learners' performance in the L2 and their desired performance in L2 to be constrained primarily by a lack of access to appropriate technology and secondarily by the amount of time available for writing, which, although it is a core subject must compete with a very congested timetable.

Going forward, the instructors may wish to look for opportunities to include computer room access for English Central practice within class time, and also to think about substituting some of the speaking allocation with writing. Another alternative would be to make more of the written practice an out-of-class activity (graded or ungraded), so that students feel they are getting the practice they require.

Nation and Macalister's (2010) curriculum design model.
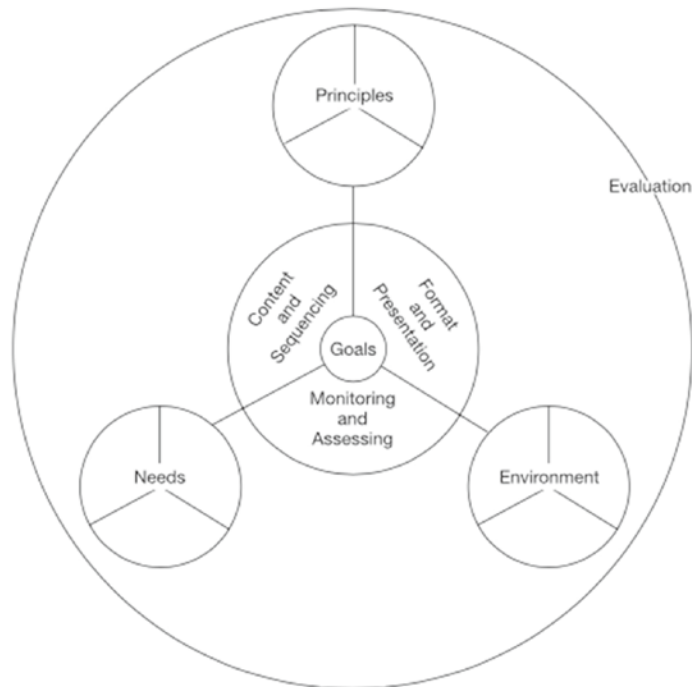
(Diagram 1)

Survey Link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ous2vD_sxhRZ9ZrrwIJ3m3tsa8qkl-DBtfFch49R3sc/
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