

The Effective Use of Videoconferencing in Cross-Cultural English Language Instruction

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This paper describes the content of the course called Global Literacy, which is designed to enhance mutual understanding between Waseda University and Korea University students through the use of videoconferencing, and also discusses the practice of group work and videoconferencing by evaluating the classroom activities and the students' self-report.

1. Purpose

The fields of cross-cultural teaching and English language teaching have evolved together mainly in terms of the linkage between the teaching of English and the teaching of native English-speaking cultures such as American and British culture. However, with the widening of the expanding circle (Kachru, 1985), it is becoming pedagogically beneficial for EFL students to understand some aspects of other EFL cultures through English as well as to improve their communicative use of English.

With this perspective in mind, some ELT professionals who strongly advocate the role of English as a means of communication among the people who speak English as a second or foreign language have shifted their attention to the non-native vs. non-native interactions in the teaching of English. With the recent technological advances in videoconferencing, these ELT professionals have been developing some ways to incorporate culture into English language teaching by linking two EFL classrooms in different countries.

The purpose of this paper is 1) to show the class procedure in the Global Literacy Course by focusing on the link between group work and videoconferencing sessions, and 2) to present the results of the student questionnaire.

2. Method

2.1. Global Literacy Course

Global Literacy Course is a course consisting of two classes in a row at the "International Communication Theme College" at Waseda University. This course, lasting for spring and autumn semesters, is open to all majors. The objective of this course is two-fold: 1) to enhance mutual understanding between Japan and Korea through the use of English, and 2) to raise awareness of English as a means of communication through non-native vs. non-native interactions. In this paper I will report on the content of the 2003 spring semester course.

2.2. Class Procedure

Twenty students participated in the course. Four Japanese graduate students worked as group work tutors under the supervision of the instructor. This course consisted of two class periods (one class period lasting for 90 minutes). In the first class period, students engaged in group work activities under a TA or instructor. In the second class

period, they discussed various topics with Korea University students via videoconferencing.

The group work was conducted to get the students prepared for the following videoconferencing session. The group work had two purposes: 1) to provide the students with the background knowledge and the vocabulary necessary for each topic, and 2) to make the students feel comfortable expressing their opinions in English.

The topics covered for each week were as follows.

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Singaporean newspaper articles (Presentation by Korea Univ.)

Week 3: Singaporean newspaper articles (Presentation by Waseda Univ.)

Week 4: Japanese and Korean food

Week 5: Colloquial expression in Japanese and Korean

Week 6: Korean army and Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF)

Week 7: Korean and Japanese movies and songs

Week 8: Discussion on “Eat, Drink, Man, Woman” (a Taiwanese movie)

Week 9: Review sessions (1)

Week 10: Review sessions (2)

Week 11: Class presentation (1)

Week 12: Class presentation (2)

After the class, students wrote a 150-word summary on My Notebook on the Cross-Cultural Distance Learning (CCDL) Web page. They also engaged in on-line chat discussion using BizMate once a week for about 40 minutes. Two Waseda students and two Korea University students formed a chat group and exchanged opinions and comments based on the content of each videoconferencing session. Students also exchanged their opinions on the topic by posting their comments on the BBS on the CCDL Web page (See Appendix 1). As a final project, students conducted research of their own interest related to the topic covered and each student made a presentation to the class.

3. The results of the student questionnaire

3.1. Student questionnaire

Nineteen students responded to the items on the questionnaire based on the scale of 1 to 6 (e.g., with 1 being ‘strongly disagree’ and 6 being ‘strongly agree’). The questionnaire included items such as self-assessment of class participation and evaluation of topics. In the following discussion, I will report on the results of six items.

3.2. Students' reaction to each topic

As Table 1 shows, the students showed the most interest in the topic 'Korean army and Japanese Self-Defense Forces.'

Table 1. Students' interest in each topic (N=19)

How much were you interested in the topics? (On the scale of 1 to 6, with the 6 being 'very much interested'.)	Average	Rank
Singaporean newspaper articles	3.2	6
Korean and Japanese food	4.3	3
Colloquial expressions in Korean and Japanese	3.9	4
Korean army and Japanese SDF	5.0	1
Korean and Japanese movies and songs	4.8	2
Eat, drink, man, woman (a Taiwanese movie)	3.7	5

As for the liveliness of each discussion, they also ranked the topic 'Korean army and Japanese Self-Defense Forces' the highest, as in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The liveliness of each discussion (N=19)

How lively was the discussion in the video conference? (On the scale of 1 to 6, with the 6 being 'most lively'.)	Average	Rank
Singaporean newspaper articles	2.9	6
Korean and Japanese food	4.4	4
Colloquial expressions in Korean and Japanese	3.9	5
Korean army and Japanese SDF	4.9	1
Korean and Japanese movies and songs	4.6	2
Eat, drink, man, woman (a Taiwanese movie)	4.5	3

3.3. Students' reaction to the feedback in group work activities

As Table 3 shows, the students seemed to want their errors corrected in group work activities. This is true of two kinds of activities: reading a passage and speaking.

Table 3. 'To what degree were you willing to receive the feedback from the TA

		want all errors corrected (%)	want errors corrected if they are noticeable (%)	want only major errors corrected (%)	do not want to have minor errors corrected if they do not disrupt the flow of communication (%)	do not want to have errors corrected (%)	do not want any errors corrected no matter what (%)
reading a passage aloud in GW	Pronunciation	21.0	57.9	21.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Grammar	21.0	47.0	31.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
speaking in GW	Grammar	21.0	63.2	15.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Vocabulary	21.0	36.8	42.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

in Group Work (GW)?' (N=19)

3.4. Students' contribution to group work activities and videoconferencing sessions

Table 4 indicates that the students contributed more in group work activities than in videoconferencing sessions.

Table 4. 'To what degree did you contribute in GW and videoconferencing

	very strongly disagree (%)	strongly disagree (%)	disagree (%)	agree (%)	strongly agree (%)	very strongly agree (%)
Contribute a lot in a group discussion	0	5.3	15.8	52.6	21.1	5.6
Contribute a lot in a video conference sessions?	10.5	21.1	21.1	31.6	15.8	0

(N=19)

3.5. Students' improvement in four English skills

Table 5 shows that the more than half of the students reported that they improved four English skills to a certain extent during the semester.

Table 5. 'Did you feel improvement in reading, writing, speaking, and listening to English?' (N=19)

	very stongly disagree (%)	strongly disagree (%)	disagree (%)	agree (%)	strongly agree (%)	very strongly agree (%)
Improve in speaking	0	5.3	5.3	52.6	36.8	0
Improve in listening	10.5	10.5	26.3	42.1	10.5	0
Improve in reading	5.3	0	26.3	42.1	21.1	5.3
Improve in writing	5.3	0	5.3	36.8	31.6	21.1

3.6. Students' understanding of comments made by classmates

As Table 6 shows, the Japanese students seemed to have more difficulty understanding what Korean students were saying. This may be due to the technical difficulties we sometimes had in terms of sound quality during the videoconferencing sessions.

Table 6. 'Were you able to understand what Japanese and Korean students were saying?' (N=19)

	very stongly disagree (%)	strongly disagree (%)	disagree (%)	agree (%)	strongly agree (%)	very strongly agree (%)
Understand what Japanese studentns said	0	15.8	5.3	36.8	26.3	15.8
Understand what Japanese Korean studentns said	21.1	21.1	31.6	10.5	15.8	0

4. Conclusion

So far we have examined the content of Global Literacy Course by focusing on the effective use of videoconferencing in cross-cultural English language instruction. Although this study is small in scale, three major findings can be drawn from this study. First, the students gave varied responses to the topics and showed the most interest in the topic 'Korean army and Japanese Self-Defense Forces.' Second, the students preferred to receive corrective feedback in group work activities. This indicates that they did not mind being corrected in a small group. Third, more than 80% of the students felt improvement in speaking and writing English. This means that they were able to improve English through the meaningful cultural interactions. As a final note, this case study suggested that through the use of videoconferencing, the teaching of both English and culture can coexist to provide a unique educational environment where EFL students can improve their English proficiency by learning from each other.

References

Kachru, B. (1985). ‘Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle,’ in R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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Appendix 1. Examples of BBS Messages: Korean army and Japanese SDF (Week 6)

A Comment by a Waseda University student.
 ('Response Message' indicates this comment received five feedbacks.)

No.	00132 (Response Message: 00149 00158 00176 00218 00226)
Title	Military service
Name	
Date	2003/06/05 12:25:56
Comment	<p>We discussed about Korean's military service and Japanese SDF. Though it was a little touchy topic but I was really interested in knowing about them.</p> <p>In Japan there's no conscription, so military affairs are not an everyday topic. This class is a good chance to think of the military and SDF.</p> <p>Some Korean students wore their military wears and showed us some pictures of their conscription days. It helped us a lot to imagine how it is like. Wearing the uniforms, they looked more matured than us.</p> <p>Korean students' opinions about this topic is more serious than ours because their nation exists to the south of North-Korea. I can't forget the word 'unification' they used much in their speech.</p> <p>I want to learn more about the situation between North and South Korea. And I also felt the need to think about our own country's defense system.</p>

One of the five feedbacks from the Korea University students:

No.	00176 (Response Message:)
Title	Re: Military service
Name	
Date	2003/06/09 1:47:06
Comment	<p>Do you think that we are more serious because of North Korea? I don't think like that. The reason why we are serious are based on some practical things. Actually, Korean men nowadays are getting more selfish than our parents' ages. Our parents' were much concerned with political issues, a patriotism, military services and N.K. But in these days, many Korean men don't want to go army. They think that it is wasting their time to go military service.</p> <p>From foreigners' point of view, it is the most remarkable issues that is relations between North Korea and South Korea, I guess.</p> <p>I agree to the idea entirely that it is the most sensitive issues in Korea. But many Korean think that it is localized just politics.</p>