Student Reactions to Content-Based Instruction in EFL Reading Classes:

A Survey on Motivational Strategies

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英語リーディングクラスにおける内容中心授業に関する学生の反応：
動機づけ調査からの一考察

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Abstract

　　This is an action research project concerning teaching methodology and learner motivation in English as a foreign language (EFL) reading classes at two Japanese universities. The classes featured content-based instruction (CBI) in a collaborative classroom setting to foster a comfortable learning community. Students were administered a questionnaire in an effort to discover their notions about CBI, English learning motivation, and improvement of English proficiency. The questionnaire was given three times during the academic year, with responses from 166 students at the beginning, 163 students in the middle, and 142 students at the end. The survey also included questions about Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) classes to help students clarify and compare with the CBI classes. This paper demonstrates and explains how content-based instruction promotes students' language learning and motivates them to learn by analyzing their responses.

Key words: content-based instruction, motivation, motivational strategies,
learning community, collaborative learning

(Received September 30, 2014)

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　　本研究は、私が受け持った 2 つの日本の大学の英語のリーディングの授業における教授法と学習者動機について学生の意識を調査したものである。心地よい学習環境を築くため協同学習を盛り込み、内容中心の授業法を試みた。学年の最初、途中、最後にアンケートを取り、内容中心教授法、英語を学ぶ動機、習熟度改善に関する学生の意識を調査し、それぞれ 166 名、163 名、142 名より回答を得た。内容中心授業の定義の理解を深めるため、TOEIC の授業に関する質問も加えた。内容中心授業がいかに語学学習を促進し、学習動機を高めるかについて学生のアンケート結果をもとに考察する。

INTRODUCTION

I have been teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) for about ten years at universities in Japan, and I am always wondering how I can motivate my students. Motivating students is one of the most challenging tasks for teachers as not every student comes to classes full of excitement. Besides, even if they are motivated at the beginning, there is no guarantee that they will retain their motivation for the entire semester or the entire academic year. Dörnyei (2001) suggests 35 motivational strategies in his book, *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Although these strategies seem to be very effective, I was not sure if I could utilize all of them at once. He encourages teachers, saying that we, teachers, are human beings and can try the strategies we feel comfortable with without having to be perfect. This is very encouraging and I decided to use just those I was interested in. Therefore, I gave lessons focused on content-based instruction (CBI) in a collaborative classroom setting to see whether it affected my students' motivation toward English classes and English learning, and improved their English proficiency. In this paper, I will show that CBI can, in fact, promote students' language learning and motivate them to learn.

BACKGROUND

1. Motivational strategies

Zoltán Dörnyei (2001) introduces 35 strategies to motivate students to learn in his book, *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. He emphasizes four teaching practices connected to motivation (p. 29).

(1) Creating the basic motivational conditions

(2) Generating initial motivation

(3) Maintaining and protecting motivation

(4) Encouraging positive self-evaluation

Within these four main practices, he suggests some strategies as sub-factors. His idea is based on a 'process-oriented approach' (p. 19). It is important to get students motivated to start learning, but maintaining motivation is a key element as well. Teachers cannot take it for granted that students motivated at the beginning will retain their motivation until the end of the semester. At times, the degree of student motivation may increase or decrease according to the classroom situation or personal reasons. There are a number of theories about learner

motivation, but they do not seem to talk about it as a process as Dörnyei does.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) developed a famous motivational theory. According to their theory, the orientations to motivation can be integrative or instrumental. For example, some people want to learn a foreign language because they are interested in the culture and they want to get closer to the communities of the speakers of the target language. This is the integrative orientation to motivation. On the other hand, others get motivated to learn a foreign language because the society they belong to values the target language and they think getting competence in the practical use of the language will bring them a successful career. This is the instrumental orientation.

Brown (2007) explains another motivational theory: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Some people learn a foreign language because they simply want to. Engaging in the learning activities is the most important factor for the learners. This is intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, other people learn a foreign language because they expect to get certain rewards from outside. In other words, the reward is their biggest concern. This is extrinsic motivation.

Scovel (2001) summarizes these motivational theories: integrative and instrumental orientations to motivation by Gardner and Lambert, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by Brown. He mentions that people's motivational states may change among these four or in combination over time. For example, college freshmen start to learn a foreign language because they are interested in the culture of the language and want to communicate with the speakers of the language. However, two years later, they want to continue studying the language because they think that they can get a better job if they know the language. This shows that the motivational orientations to learn the language may change from integrative to instrumental. Scovel points out this fundamental element which teachers need to remember to deal with students. However, he does not refer to the degree of motivation people have as time goes by. The theory of motivation as a process is also important and seems to fit the actual situation of students very well.

Before I read Dörnyei's theory, I had a tendency to pay attention mainly to students' motivational factors as a state of being. Generally, students were motivated to learn at the beginning in my class, but at times, some of them lost their motivation, and I often had a hard time to motivate them again. When I read this theory, I realized that I did not try hard enough to maintain the initial motivation. I was very much interested in his idea and wanted to try the motivational strategies and see how they worked in my classes.

2. Learning community and collaborative learning

According to Cummins (1994), students should be comfortable enough to share their personal experiences and feelings related to the learning materials to truly learn in class. Therefore, a friendly learning community is necessary to let them take risks. Peirce (1995)

also states that social factors are a key element for language learners to become motivated to learn or to communicate in the target language. They need to be accepted as a member of the learning community to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence to lower the affective filter which may hinder them from learning. Furthermore, Lightbown and Spada (2006) point out that a collaborative and supportive learning atmosphere in the classroom motivates students to come to the class and learn. Cooperation fosters students' self-confidence and enhances their learning. Haley and Austin (2004) also mention that meaningful interactions in collaborative settings encourage students to try something challenging and promote learning.

3. Content-based instruction (CBI)

According to Brinton, et al. (2003), CBI is a way to teach languages through content. I was interested especially in the theme-based model among content-based instructional types, and adopted it in my classes. In the theme-based model, the learning goal is mastering the target language, but the learning materials are focused on the content of certain themes rather than linguistic aspects. The materials are supposed to be authentic and taken from real life. In this model, students can acquire language skills in natural settings by learning content. Brinton (2003) emphasizes that CBI encourages student-centered classrooms and interactive activities. Students play active roles in each task in a collaborative setting and teachers need to act as an organizer or facilitator of the class.

I chose global issues as a theme because I assumed that college students in this global age need to have certain knowledge about the issues happening in the world, develop skills to talk about, and think about possible solutions for global problems and ideas for taking action to solve them.

For example, when I dealt with the theme of 'global economy,' I started out the lesson by brainstorming the issue. I questioned the class as to where their clothes, bags, shoes and cell phones came from. "Are they made in Japan?" They shared their answers quickly in pairs and with the whole class. I gave some online information about international trade so that the students could have background knowledge. We worked on some vocabulary to understand about global economy and read a related story from the textbook.

In CBI, the teaching materials are supposed to be authentic materials from real life. However, many students were not familiar with the global issues, and, therefore, we used a textbook as the primary resource. After working on the textbook, I assigned them to research the "Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)" and write the information and their opinions about whether Japan should join TPP or not as their homework. In the following class, they shared the information and discussed the issue in a group and with the whole class. In this lesson, the students became familiarized with some vocabulary about economics and practiced expressing their opinions through the content.

In the following sections, I describe how I tried the theory of motivational strategies

in a collaborative classroom with content-based instruction, and how it promoted student motivation for learning in my EFL reading courses.

METHOD

1. Students

The research was done in six EFL reading classes I taught at two Japanese universities during the academic years of 2010-2011. Students majored in engineering in two classes, and humanities, including culture, psychology and geography, in four classes. There were about 25-30 students in each class. With two Chinese students among the Japanese, 60 percent of the students were male and 40 percent female. All were sophomore classes with mixed English ability. Two classes were intermediate (TOEIC score: about 400 or below). The remaining four classes were not streamed (TOEIC score: about 500 or below). The majority of students had not experienced CBI in the previous years and I needed to explain it to them. Since they were in their second year, some of them knew each other well, but others were together for the first time.

2. Course description and materials

The courses were year-long mandatory liberal arts classes. The primary purpose of the entire course of study set by the universities was acquiring four English skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. I taught the courses focused on reading which provided students with fundamental learning resources. Students had pre- and post-reading activities to gain speaking, listening and writing skills. The courses were taught only in English for most of the class period unless students faced serious difficulty in understanding. I utilized the idea of CBI and the class dealt with global issues such as poverty, human rights, world cooperation, environment, etc. In CBI, the teaching materials are supposed to be authentic from real life. However, as previously mentioned, since many students were not familiar with the issues, we used a textbook as the primary resource. The textbook used in the academic year of 2010 was different from the one used in 2011, but they had very similar global issues as themes. In pre-reading and post-reading activities, I used authentic materials. For example, I introduced the background of the issues through online information. I showed pictures related to the topics and students guessed the people's situations in the pictures. Later, they discussed the situation and role-played. As post-reading activities, students worked on looking for more information on the issues, wrote reports and shared them both in a group and with the whole class. At the end of each term, they were required to give a presentation: in a group in the spring semester and individually in the fall.

In the spring, the theme of group presentations was poverty. Before the group presentations, students worked on the issues described in the reading and in the

supplementary activity: 'The Cycle of Poverty.' In the activity, I introduced eight main factors causing poverty. In a group, students investigated each factor and discussed how these factors were related to each other and which was the biggest factor to cause poverty. They also talked about how to support people in developing countries. In their presentations, I assigned engineering students to present about science inventions to save the world, and humanities students to present about NGOs for world cooperation. In the fall, everybody presented about Cooperate Social Responsibility (CSR) of the company they were interested in joining for their future career. Students were encouraged to do all activities and assignments in English.

3. Assessment

CBI encourages interactive student-centered work. How students are assessed may influence how much they try to take initiative in the learning. Here, I explain how I assessed the CBI class.

The assessment criteria for each university were as follows:

University A: Class Work 50% (in-class work, discussions, homework, quizzes), Reports 20%, Presentations (group and individual) 30%

University B: Writings 20%, Homework 20%, Quizzes 30%, Presentations (group and individual) 30%

The assessment was on-going throughout the semesters and the classes required active participation. Students were expected to read the text and answer comprehension questions in advance. After each unit, a quiz was given to check vocabulary and comprehension. At the end of each semester, students gave two presentations, one in a group and one individually.

Even though many activities were done in a group, students were basically assessed on an individual basis. When all group members got a higher than average score in a presentation, bonus points were given to each member. They were supposed to be responsible for the group roles and also to make an effort to do their own work.

4. Motivational strategies

As I mentioned in the background section, I utilized some of the motivational strategies suggested by Dörnyei (2001) who created 35 strategies within four motivational teaching practices. I selected one or two strategies from each practice (p. 137-144).

Practice 1. Creating the basic motivational conditions

Strategy 6: Promote the development of group cohesiveness.

I carried out a lot of interactive work at the early stage of the semester and it continued throughout the entire year. Quick pair work was done to brainstorm about a topic and to check answers of the reading comprehension questions. In pre- and post-reading activities, students participated in discussions and shared their homework writings about environment, nuclear power, child labor and so on in a group and with the whole class. As a final project, they gave group presentations on the assigned topics.

Practice 2. Generating initial motivation

Strategy 15: Make the curriculum and the teaching materials relevant to the students.

Since many students were not familiar with the global issues and their English proficiency was not high, I utilized pictures, role-play, simulation games, etc. to give them the necessary background information before reading. For example, when we worked on refugees, I showed pictures of refugees to brainstorm about the topic. In a group, they looked at the pictures, and guessed and discussed who they were, what they were doing, and why. Then I gave them some questions about refugees. When they got some idea about refugees, they had a role-play activity to understand the situation of refugee people deeply. After reading the story about refugees in the textbook, I gave a writing assignment. When writing, I encouraged students to relate the issues to themselves. For example, I asked questions: "What would you do if refugee people come to your city? Would you try to support them?" Even though students did not seem to be interested in the issue at the beginning because they did not have enough idea about refugees, after several activities, they participated more actively in the class.

On the group presentation, for the engineering students, I modified the assignment to let them think of science inventions to save the world, especially developing countries. The students found the inventions they were interested in and pretended to be the inventors in their presentations. The humanities students introduced NGOs to support people suffering from poverty in the world. They found the NGO projects they were interested in and presented them so that class members could actually take action for the projects with donations, consumer campaigns or simply spreading the information to other people.

Practice 3. Maintaining and protecting motivation

Strategy 18: Make learning stimulating and enjoyable for the learner by increasing the attractiveness of the tasks.

Strategy 28: Increase student motivation by promoting cooperation among the learners.

Again, I assigned interactive activities throughout the entire year and encouraged my students to support each other. When they worked in a group, I assigned the role each student had to be responsible for. For example, in the case of four people in a group, the assigned roles were a leader who facilitated the group activity, a question-maker who asked questions when they shared their opinions in a group, a note-taker who took notes in a group discussion, and a reporter who presented group opinions in the class. They were basically assessed individually and they could not rely on someone else for their share of the work. I emphasized each student's contribution for successful group work. As far as the tasks were concerned, giving presentations in English was challenging for most of the students. In the first semester, I let them work in a group so that they were able to collaborate on something they could not accomplish by themselves, which made the tasks challenging but still enjoyable.

Practice 4. Encouraging positive self-evaluation

Strategy 32: Provide students with positive information feedback.

I tried to praise students whenever I had a chance. Especially, when I evaluated their writing assignments, I wrote positive comments as well as the points students needed to work on. For example, I pointed out the good organization of their writing and their impressive opinions toward the issues. At the same time, I encouraged them to work harder to summarize the content more logically. After the group presentation, I admired their work and thanked them for their effort on such challenging work. I also reminded them that when they did their best, the feeling of the accomplishment was the best reward.

5. Questionnaire

To test the theory of motivational strategies in a collaborative classroom with content-based instruction, I gave students a questionnaire concerning CBI at the beginning of the spring semester in April, at the end of the spring semester in July, and at the end of the fall semester in January. The questionnaire aimed to understand student notions about CBI, English learning motivation, and the improvement of their English proficiency, and to see how the ideas affected each other and changed according to the time of the year. When giving the questionnaire, I explained the concept of CBI. Especially in April, many students were not familiar with CBI, so I gave a sample lesson in the second class and gave the questionnaire in the third class. Questions were in both English and Japanese to help students understand them clearly.

I asked one question especially related to presentation as an interactive task. Presentation projects are a common activity in CBI. However, it is very challenging for many students, and I wanted to see if the projects motivated them to learn. I also included questions about the classes for Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Since the students in the second year knew about TOEIC very well, I thought these questions might help them understand CBI by comparing it to the TOEIC focused class. The students responded to the questions using a Likert scale (5: strongly agree to 1: strongly disagree) and gave a reason for each answer.

Questions.:

(1) The content-based class will promote my interest in the English class.

(2) The content-based class will motivate me to participate in the English class.

(3) The assignment of research and presentation on a certain topic will motivate me to study English.

(4) The content-based class will help me improve my English proficiency.

(5) The TOEIC focused class will help me improve my English proficiency.

> (6) The TOEIC focused class will motivate me to participate in the English class.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the changes of student notions about motivation and English proficiency in the content-based classes and the TOEIC focused classes through the academic year. I gave the questionnaire with six questions three times during the year. In April, 166 students responded. In July, 163 students responded. In January, 142 students responded. In January, there were fewer respondents because some students dropped out during the academic year and others were simply absent due to sickness on the day of the survey. Each graph shows the responses to each question. The number (5-1) shows the Likert scale (5: strongly agree, 4: agree, 3: can't judge, 2: disagree, 1: strongly disagree) the students checked to respond to the questions. The percentage shows the ratio of the total respondents on the scale. The students' majors were different and the surveys were conducted in two different academic years, but the results were very similar, so I simply put the data all together.

In April, in Question 1 on CBI and interest in the English class, about 45 % of the students chose number 4 (agree). The main reason was because if the topics were interesting, they would be more interested in the class too. Some commented, "If there is no content, I would not be interested in learning."

In Question 2 on CBI and motivation, more than half of the students chose number 3 (can't judge). Many students commented on their previous experience about CBI, saying, "I have never experienced CBI and do not know what it is." Since many students remained unsure what CBI was, even though I gave them the sample lesson in the second class and the questionnaire in the third class, they tended to choose number 3.

In Question 3 on presentations, since the students had some ideas about them from the previous year, they seemed to be able to answer whether they agreed or disagreed.

In Question 4 on CBI and English proficiency, about half of the students chose number 4 (agree) even though many of them had no experience of CBI before. They wrote their assumptions about CBI when explaining their reasons. Some students commented, "I have a feeling to be able to learn vocabulary more easily in context." Others said, "I would learn the expressions or phrases more precisely in context." They seemed to assume that they would gain English proficiency through content due to learning words and expressions in context.

In Question 5 on TOEIC and English proficiency, nearly half of the students chose number 4 (agree). The main reason for this was because they could learn grammar in the TOEIC focused class.

In Question 6 on TOEIC and motivation, more students chose number 3 (can't judge). Some commented, "I think TOEIC is important, but I am not sure if I get motivated to work
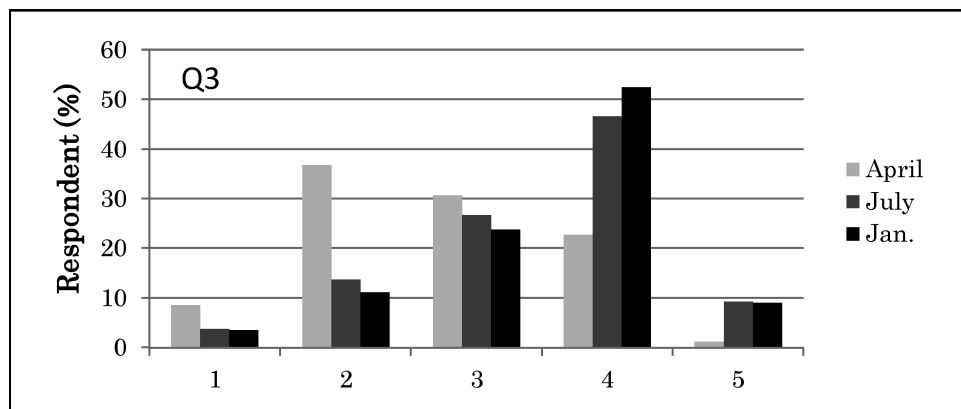
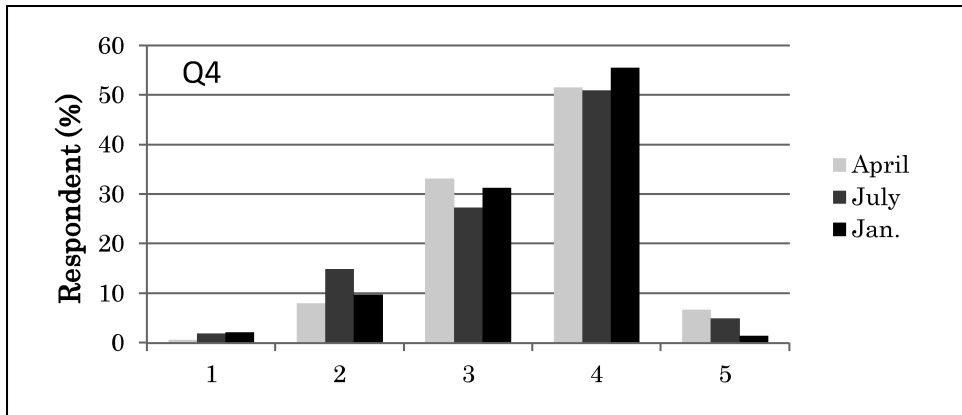Q1: The content-based class will promote my interest in the English class.
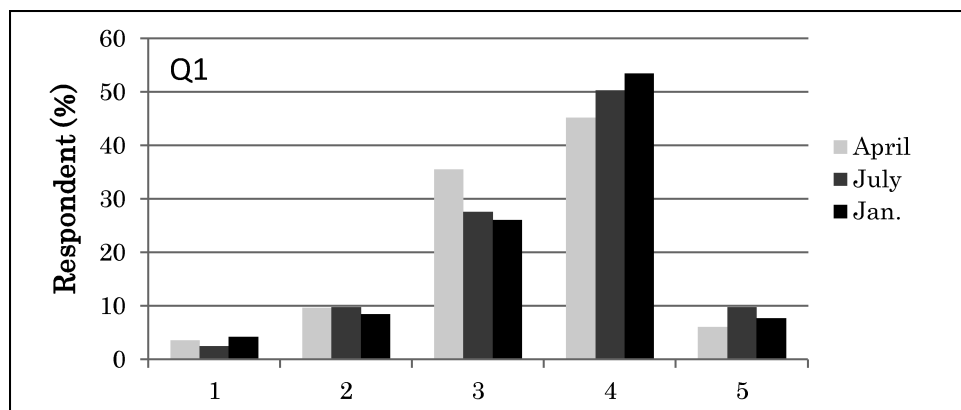
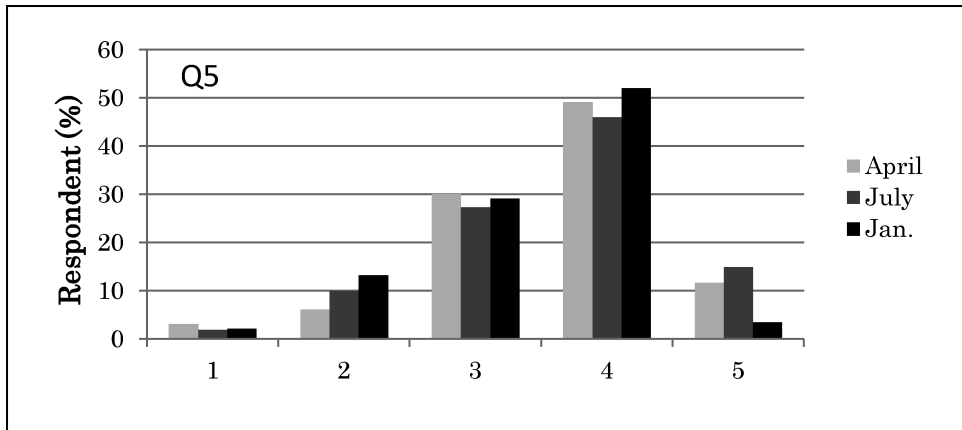Q2: The content-based class will motivate me to participate in the English class.
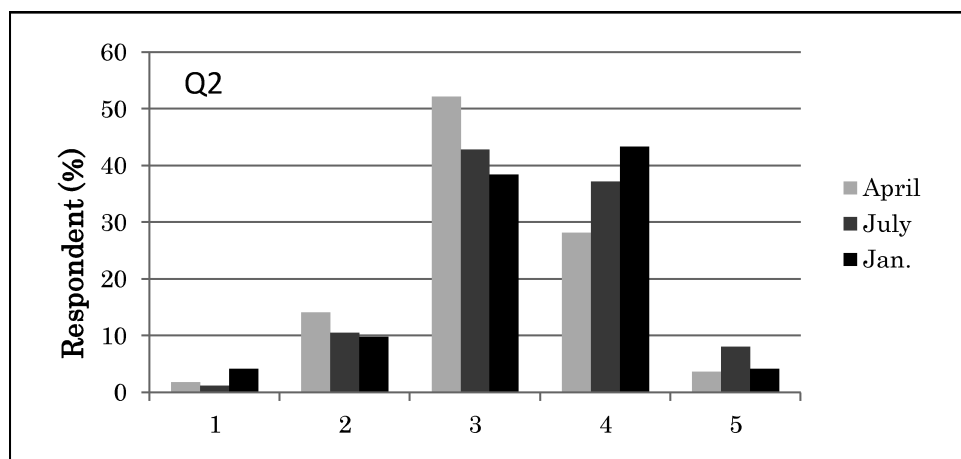
Q3: The assignment of research and presentation on a certain topic will motivate me to study English.

Q4: The content-based class will help me improve my English proficiency.

Q5: The TOEIC focused class will help me improve my English proficiency.

Q6: The TOEIC focused class will motivate me to participate in the English class.
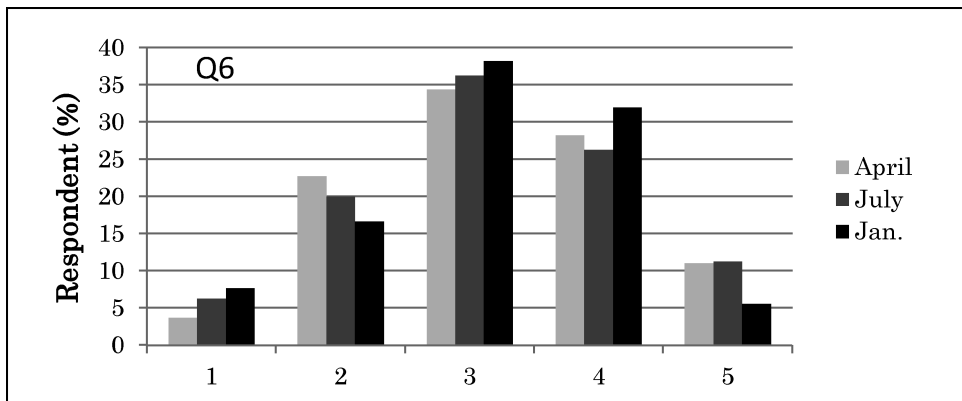

Figure 1. Changes in student notions about CBI, motivation and English proficiency
1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: can't judge, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree

hard in the English class."

In July and January, there were fewer number 3 (can't judge) responses. The students experienced CBI and had a better idea about it and were able to choose the number to show their notions. In general, they seemed to value CBI more to motivate themselves to learn English as the semester went by, and they felt their English proficiency increased as they had expected at the beginning.

The dramatic change was a positive notion about presentations in Question 3 despite a negative start. It is a very interesting phenomenon. Some commented, "I did not want to speak up in front of the class at the beginning, but I was very happy to be able to do it." After the first group presentation, many of them seemed to change their mind.

The responses to Question 5 and 6 did not seem to change very much and the students' reasons did not change very much either. Some students thought they would be motivated to work on TOIEC in class and felt their proficiency would increase. Others did not. There was not clear relationship between the CBI and TOEIC classes. In other words, CBI did not seem to influence student notions about the TOEIC classes. As far as proficiency is concerned, nearly half of the students chose number 4 (agree) to Question 4 and 5, and the CBI and TOEIC classes seemed to go hand in hand to improve students' competence. However, many students did not seem to be able to judge if they were interested in working mainly on TOEIC in class even by the end of the academic year. Some students said, "I do not want to work on test preparation in class, but others may like it to get higher scores on the test." I asked them to answer about themselves; however, some of them considered the situation in general.

DISCUSSION

What can we say about the results? In July and January, since the students better understood CBI, they were better ready to respond to the survey. At this time, as described above, more students valued CBI as a means to promote their interest and motivation to learn English. Some students commented, "When I got interested in the topic, I felt I wanted to study more about it." Since all the assignments were supposed to be done in English, those who invested in learning for the class naturally engaged in more English use. According to Coyle, et al. (2010), students can learn language when they are in real-life situations. This natural setting promotes language learning. The students who felt that their English proficiency improved said, "I was exposed to more English and I learned reading and writing skills through the assignments." They also learned grammar and vocabulary by recycling them in their reading, writing, speaking and listening through the content. Those students were convinced that CBI is not only very effective, but very interesting. They liked the topics and enjoyed learning about them. Among the assignments, they seemed to enjoy working

especially on the presentations. Some said, "I was very afraid of speaking in public about serious issues in English at the beginning of the semester." However, once they had done it, they found that the assignment was manageable. I can say that it was due to their individual effort, but the biggest reason was they worked in a group and the groups functioned properly. Others commented, "I did not think that I could have completed the first presentation project by myself, but with peer support I was able to do it." In July, many said, "I wanted to continue working in a group in the second semester." However, once they got confidence, they tried harder to give presentations, even individually, at the end of the second semester. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), when students gain self-confidence, it promotes their motivation to learn. In January, they seemed to be satisfied with their efforts.

As far as TOEIC is concerned, many students believed that TOEIC deals mainly with grammar. Those who did not place much value on CBI to improve their English proficiency commented, "I wanted to work on TOEIC rather than CBI to increase my knowledge of grammar." Some students' top priority seemed to be grammar. Furthermore, since these days many companies seem to value TOEIC and ask for the score when hiring new workers, it is understandable that students want to work on improving TOEIC scores, and it may indeed lead to improvements in their English proficiency in general. However, as some students commented on Question 6, "I do not want to work only for test preparation. It may be boring," it appears that not many students were highly motivated to learn English in TOEIC classes. Some students commented, "I wanted to work on TOEIC because I think I have to rather than I enjoy learning for the test."

What can I say from the results as far as motivational strategies? Overall, I can say that many students were motivated to learn in a collaborative classroom setting using CBI along with the motivational strategies I tried. They became interested in topics in a comfortable learning environment and were able to become motivated and maintain their motivation until the end of the academic year.

However, there were some problems. Some students were not interested in the topics the classes provided and did not enjoy working in a group. Ushioda (2008) says that it is crucial that students should be motivated to learn by themselves rather than by their teachers, and then their motivation will last for a longer period of the time. Some students commented, "Interest in topics and motivation to learn English are different issues because I simply found the information I wanted in Japanese and then translated it into English." This was a boring process for those learners and did not lead them to improve their English proficiency. They said that because their current proficiency was too low to try researching in English, they mainly wanted to review grammar with vocabulary lists made by the teacher.

Overall, I felt that using CBI for language learning motivation produced a positive outcome. However, for future study in motivating as many students as possible in my classes,

I would like to investigate the students who had negative responses by giving them more surveys.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I found that motivating students is very challenging, as I expected. However, I think the more teachers try, the harder students seem to work. When students are motivated and accomplish their goals, their satisfaction is unmeasurable. When seeing such students, teachers may feel satisfaction too. I would like to continue working on motivating students by using different methods and hope to promote their language learning.

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