

Integrating the Four Skills for the Next Generation of Japanese Teachers of English

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Abstract

This article outlines the approach to teaching two related courses: Speaking & Listening, and Reading & Writing. It explains first the importance of integrating these courses into a four-skills curriculum, and then how this is achieved in practice by means of a combination of Content-Based Instruction and Task-Based Instruction. Finally it describes how this integrated skills course achieves the parallel function of preparing teacher-license students to conduct similar courses themselves in Japanese school contexts.

Background of Tsuru University English Department English Skills courses

While the English Department has delivered an effective English language skills training package up until now, we are continually seeking to develop that effectiveness, especially in the light of our students' current and projected needs for English, including those related to teaching careers in the Japanese education system.

Up until now, the four skills have been taught individually, and in no particular order, as Eikaiwa (英会話), Eisakubun (英作文), LL Enshuu (演習), and Eibunkoudoku (英文講読) – these representing Speaking, Writing, Listening and Reading respectively. Meanwhile, it should be added that Eibunkoudoku, as its title suggests, has focused specifically on fostering students' reading skills for English literature to the exclusion of other reading genres.

However, in recognition of the benefits of treating the four skills as interrelated, from 2012 we began an experiment with an integrated skills curriculum, by first creating a top stream of first year English major students and then assigning them the same teacher for both Eikaiwa and Eisakubun classes. Put simply, each semester was divided into 3 consecutive task sequences (units), each sequence based on a different theme and involving a multi-skilled progression towards a larger outcome within that theme.

Figure 1: Sample Unit Flow – *Study Abroad* Unit

on interactive tasks, the list highlights the importance of personalizing the language learning process in several ways. First, the curriculum should be geared towards fulfilling the needs of the learners in terms of the target language. Second, it should allow the learners to express themselves and talk about their lives using the target language. And finally, it should foster their autonomy in language learning: raising their awareness of their goals, and strengths & weaknesses, as well as helping them develop effective learning strategies to achieve those goals.

Putting it all together: Integrated-Skills, CBI & TBI in Context

Let us now look at how this combination of CBI and TBI methodologies, based on an Integrated-Skills Approach, has been realized in the author's context.

➤ **Focus on the students' needs**

Tsuru University has enjoyed a strong and long-lasting reputation as a teacher-training institution since its foundation, and hence many students join the English Department to take the Teaching Licence program with a view to becoming Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs). In addition, our Global Careers Program has proved very attractive to an equally broad range of students.

Therefore the syllabus has been developed to enable students not just to communicate confidently and effectively in English in a range of educational and business situations but also increase their capacity to engage in self-directed learning by making them aware of a range of learning strategies. This recognizes that learning a

second language, as with any kind of learning, is not a finite process and will need to continue far beyond graduation. Moreover, those students who go on to become language teachers themselves also need to be able to foster such a capacity in their own students.

Third, students need to broaden their knowledge of culture: both the target language culture and their own Japanese culture, since use of a second language inevitably entails cross-cultural communication. However, in the case of learning English as a second language, students need to recognize that there is no single culture associated with English: not only is there a range of countries where English is spoken either as a native or official language, but there is also the reality of English as the world's primary lingua franca and the fact that our students are more likely to communicate in English with non-native English speakers than native English speakers. Therefore it is insufficient and inappropriate simply to teach them American or British culture.

➤ **Content**

Themes and topics have been selected to reflect the students' needs as outlined above. These include: independent language learning & learning strategies; study abroad; jobs & careers; culture; innovation in business – crowd-funding.

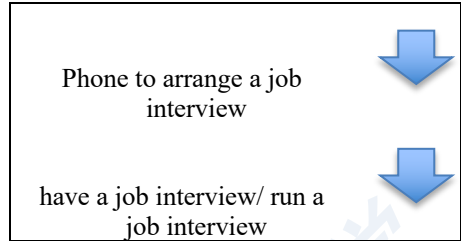
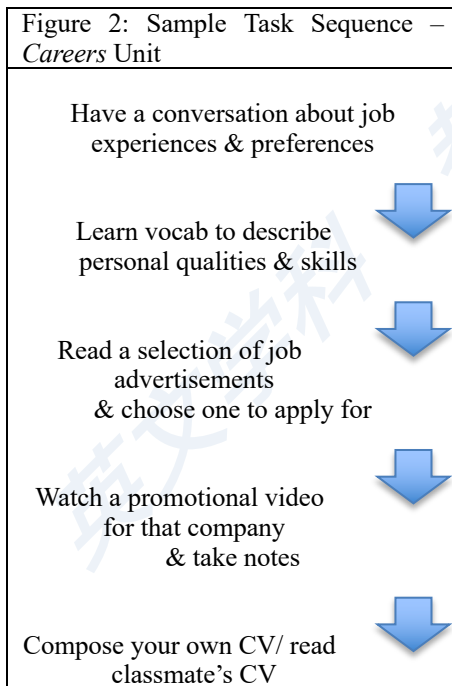
➤ **Tasks**

These naturally involve all four skills, but also reflect the students' needs in that they represent the types of English communicative tasks that the students (and the students' future students, in the case of

those who will go on to become teachers) are likely to face in their future careers and life in general. As one would expect with a CLT approach, a key feature of these tasks is the exchange of meaning, along with an underlying purpose for that exchange, whether it be interpersonal or transactional.

➤ Task sequences

As with the language skills, tasks are not seen as isolated units. Rather, they allow for the integration of the skills through the setting up of task sequences. A sample task sequence, based on the theme of *Careers*, specifically applying for a job, can be seen in Figure 2 below.



What does all this mean for future JTEs?

Through participation in an integrated skills course based on CBI and TBI, students enrolled in the Teaching Licence program are exposed to a teaching approach which is not simply CLT in name but employs a methodology which promotes meaningful communication via task sequences interrelated via both real-life content and real-life communication sequences. Secondly, and of equal importance, through the course's inclusion of language learning strategy training, the students' awareness of the language learning process is raised so that they can not only enhance their own learning but also pass on such awareness and skills to their future charges.

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