

# Evaluation and Report of Intensive Communicative English Program (NKB 33)

Nicole Sonobe

*Department of Health and Nutrition Sciences, Faculty of Health and Nutrition Sciences, Nishikyushu University, Saga, Japan*

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## Abstract

The opportunity to participate in an Intensive Communicative English Program during the summer vacation is a valuable way for students who have time restrictions due to their majors (non-English) to improve their English skills. This is an evaluation and report of an intensive communicative English program which was held at the Saga Campus of Nishikyushu University from August 17-September 5, 2015. This intensive communicative English course shows that students improved in areas such as; confidence in speaking English, ability to make an English presentation, increased vocabulary, improved pronunciation and improved English communication skills. The 30 participants were freshmen, sophomores and juniors from Health and Nutrition Sciences, Health and Welfare Sciences, Rehabilitation Sciences and Children Studies. Two students belonged to the Junior College. Pre-and post-testing was carried out and the results for testing showed that there was an increase in scores. These results show the importance of conducting an intensive English course and show the need for it to be elective subject in the general curriculum.

Key words : intensive language study, item response theory, oral proficiency interview, communication skills

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of the Intensive Communicative English Program (Nishikyushu University Group Borderless Program by Heisei 33: NKB 33) was to provide an intensive English course for students who are highly motivated and eager to improve their English language skills. The naming of the program is based on the university's international vision of educating global human resources by the year Heisei 33 and has been abbreviated to NKB 33. Through varied classroom activities, students were able to work toward actively using English to communicate. Students learned to take responsibility for their own progress and learned specific strategies that they can apply to their study and usage of English. They also developed an awareness of cross-cultural differences and similarities, as well as an awareness of differences and similarities in first and second language communication skills. A strong emphasis was placed on active participation through group work, pair work, and student-teacher interaction. Instruction was done in English where possible and also when communicating with the native English speaking teaching assistants. Regular attendance and homework were required elements, with daily progress being recorded. Another objective of the course was to improve communication skills and build up student confidence to be able to communicate in English with foreigners. An additional aim was to make students aware of the need to be able to use English in order to be able to play a more successful role in a global society.

## 2 Evaluation Methods

Student improvement was measure and calculated. The two types of testing used were Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) which is a global standard for oral proficiency testing and NHK's Item Response Theory test (IRT) English A (grammar and vocabulary). The OPI test originated in America and was developed by The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). It first came to Japan in 2013 and is currently being used to evaluate English communication skills in the fields of business and everyday conversation. OPIc is the computer generated version of the test. Firstly, students complete a background survey and fill in a self assessment survey. According to student responses an interview is carried out at a later date. The test itself consists of a 20 minute orientation followed by a maximum of 40 minute interview - a total of 60 minutes (maximum). The results are based on seven levels. These being NOVICE: low,

medium, high; INTERMEDIATE: low, medium, high; ADVANCED: low. The IRT test was conducted on July 16, 2015 prior to the course starting and the second time on September 4, 2015. The first OPIc testing was on August 17, 2015 and the second time was on September 4, 2015. Students received individual certificates with their score and advice on how to improve their English speaking communication skills.

## 3 Course Details

The course was an elective one with no credit given. Due to the high cost of running a course of this nature students were asked to pay a fee of 20000 yen to cover the testing costs. A maximum of 30 students were to be accepted and an orientation talk was held at Kanzaki campus and Saga campus on two separate occasions to explain the details and students were then asked to apply. Applications closed after two hours with the quota being met much quicker than it was expected. The course was held from August 17 - September 5, 2015 and consisted of over 40 hours of contact time (excluding time spent for computer based learning). The 30 participants were freshmen, sophomores and juniors from Health and Nutrition Sciences, Health and Welfare Sciences, Rehabilitation Sciences and Children Studies. Two students belonged to the Junior College. The components of the course consisted of: communications skills (Japanese), bullet input, global village, communication skills (English), role model workshop, English discussion/presentation and e-learning (English Central). Classes were held every morning for three six-day weeks. The full schedule can be seen in Table 1.

In week 1 and 2 Group A consisted of 12 students planning to take part in the study abroad program to Curtin University (September 13-26, 2015) and Group B consisted of the other 18 students. In week 3 students were mixed up to improve the overall dynamics. The classes were held in the active learning studio (ALS) at Saga campus. E-learning was held in the computer room.

Five foreign teaching assistants (FTA) were chosen as assistants throughout the program. Three of the assistants were from Australia, one was from Bangladesh, one from Vietnam and one from Austria. A Japanese TA was responsible for the overall running of the program and overseeing the FTAs.

## 4 Course Components

### 4.1 Communications skills (Japanese)

This part of the course was conducted during the first two

Period /date	8/17 MON	8/18 TUE	8/19 WED	8/20 THU	8/21 FRI	8/22 SAT
1	Communication	Communication	Bullet Input	Bullet Input	Bullet Input	Global Village
2	Communication	Communication	e-learning	e-learning	e-learning	Global Village
3	OPIC		e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	Global Village
4						Global Village
Period /date	8/24 MON	8/25 TUE	8/26 WED	8/27 THU	8/28 FRI	8/29 SAT
1	Bullet Input	Bullet Input	Bullet Input	English Communication	English Communication	Role model
2	e-learning	e-learning	e-learning	e-learning	e-learning	Role model
3	Special Communication	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)
4	Special Communication					
Period /date	8/31 MON	9/1 TUE	9/2 WED	9/3 THU	9/4 FRI	9/5 SAT
1	Discussion presentation	Discussion presentation	Discussion presentation	Discussion presentation	Presentation	Presentation
2	e-learning	e-learning	e-learning	e-learning	Presentation	Presentation
3	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	e-learning (optional)	OPIC IRT	

Table 1: Full schedule for the 3 week program

\*Students were split into Group A and Group B and activities were carried out alternatively in period 1 and 2.

days of the program. Instructors from an acting group based in Fukuoka led the sessions in Japanese and the emphasis was on improving general communications skills. Voice projection, facial expression, body language and other aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication were taught. Students did unprepared 1 minute speeches and performed Japanese manzai in pairs and surprisingly enough even the most timid and

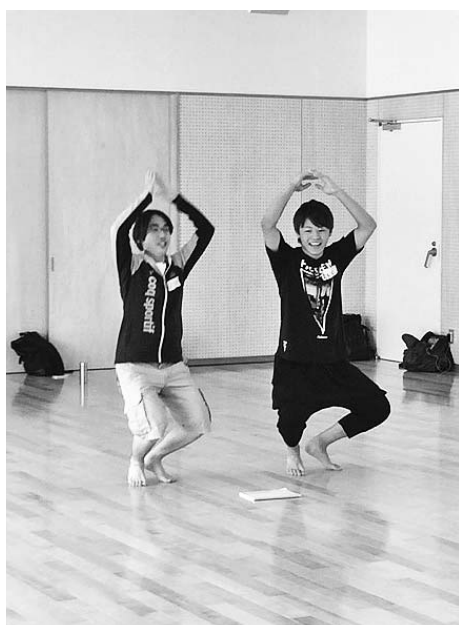


Photo 1: Students performing manzai in Communication Skills (Japanese)

quietest students were able to complete the tasks. Students were tested before and after this component and all students showed increased confidence and improved communication skills.

#### 4.2 Bullet input

This part of the course was conducted by leading instructors in fields of education, English education and communication. All instructors have lived overseas and could offer students valuable information about English, living abroad, psychology and education. Instructors prepared communication based activities which was followed by short



Photo 2: A group photo after the Bullet Input component

conversations in pairs. Students were required to speak naturally, speak quickly and also memorize. Students were timed and were praised if they could do it. Pair work was useful because students could fine-tune their pair communication skills by using eye contact and gestures.

#### 4.3 Global village

This part of the course included a workshop with foreign students from Asia Pacific University. There were students from India, Nepal, Indonesia, Kenya and Vietnam. Firstly, there were some ice-breaking activities. Next there was group work with the foreign students who introduced their countries. Finally there was a group discussion about ideas for a future world. This part of the course was very difficult for NU students because it was intense and communication in English was difficult. However, all students participated to the best of their ability and at the end each group gave a short poster presentation about what they had discussed. Students realized how important it is to have knowledge about other cultures and how important it is to use English to discuss ideas and be understood.



Photo 3: An international student from Kenya giving a workshop about his country in the Global Village Component

#### 4.4 Communication skills (English)

This part of the course gave students a chance to use the verbal and non-verbal skills they had acquired. Using body language student played game-like activities to expand their adjectives, verbs and nouns. Students learned how to make facial expressions, use gestures, improve pronunciation and also learned about acting. Students made pairs and were required to interpret a given script (conversation) and act it out in English. The instructor gave feedback by praising the students as well as offering them advice on how to improve the pair's interpretation and output. It was the first time most students had ever tried acting in English.



Photo 4: A student practicing pronunciation in the Special Communication session



Photo 5: Using gestures in Communication skills (English)

#### 4.5 Role model workshop

A role model was invited to speak about their life and work experiences. The role model was born and raised in Saga and now works in the field of International Relations for City Hall. The talk was conducted in English. It was followed by a discussion about where students see themselves in the future and how internationalization/globalization will fit into their life plans. While the discussion was a difficult task for all involved, it was an excellent opportunity for students to learn



Photo 6: Discussing ideas after the Role Model workshop

from a role model and take the time to think in more depth about their plans for the future.

#### 4.6 English presentation

Students were required to make a presentation about the topic - A Country you would like to visit the most. The country and at least three reasons were to be included in the 3-4 minute speech. At least one of the reasons had to be researched on the internet via an English site. Following the speech students in the audience asked questions pertaining to the content. All students were required to participate and the common language was English. Countries of interest included Australia, Canada, Singapore, Korea and France. The reasons why they wanted to visit this country were varied and all students made a unique power point presentation in English.



Photo 7: Making a presentation about 'A country you would like to visit the most'

#### 4.7 E-learning (English Central)

Students were required to finish a daily component of English Central online. English Central is a site where students can watch pre-recorded videos which are recommended based on their level and interests; learn new

words by filling in the blanks while interacting with the video line; speak new words in context, getting instant feedback on their pronunciation and fluency; participate in the GoLive option by having a 1-on-1 conversation with a private tutor about the video. A weekly quota was set with a target number of videos to be watched and a target number of new words to be learned. Students have subscribed to a six month course so they have access to it even after the course finishes. E-learning was compulsory for one period per day and students were encouraged to do an extra period of optional e-learning either on campus, or at home (using smart phones).

## 5 Evaluation of Scores

### (a) IRT

The results of the first IRT held on July 16, 2015 showed an average score of 550.63, which is approximately Level 3 of the English Proficiency test (EIKEN) or 1<sup>st</sup> grade of high school level. There were 22 students at this level or above and there were five students at the Pre 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Level, which corresponds to a university level of English ability. In comparison the results of the second test on September 5, 2015 the total average increased with the individual average being 566.46. There was increase of three in the number of students who achieved the Pre 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level.

### (b) OPIc

The results of the first OPIc test held on August 17, 2015 showed that there was one student in the Intermediate low level, 14 students at the Novice high, 13 students at the Novice medium and 1 student at the Novice low level. The post test results show that a total of 9 students went up to Intermediate low level, 13 students to the Novice high level and 7 students to the Novice medium level.

Overall the results from both types of testing are encouraging. In future courses of this time, it would be more beneficial if only the OPIc tests are done, because skills for improving the IRT test scores are not adequate in a communication based course like this. Tips on how to improve pronunciation, listening and speaking should be addressed in more detail and if successful, the ratio of increase will be more significant.

Sonobe questions the effectiveness of OPI testing in evaluating improvement during short term SA 4, but in fact, the increased scores following this course indicate that OPIc is an effective method of evaluation and further research needs to be done in short term intensive communicative English programs.

## 6 Student Feed back

A questionnaire was conducted at the end of the program. The questionnaire asked 7 questions with a 4 point response. Questions included such as how motivated were you, did you participate in a positive way, did you get on well with your classmates, did you communicate frequently with the FTAs, which part of the course was most beneficial, which part did you achieve the most in and what was your overall level of satisfaction.

The results of the survey show that 88% of the students were very interested in the course and were motivated with high expectations prior to participating. 84% participated in a positive way, 79% worked well with the other participants and 75% of the students communicated with the FTAs on a regular basis. The overall satisfaction with the course was encouraging with 42% extremely satisfied and 58% satisfied, making a total of 100% satisfied participants.

Table 2 shows which part of the course students found most beneficial. With global village, communication skills (Japanese) and bullet input being the three most beneficial components. A total of 29 students responded to this question.

Table 3 shows the part of the course students felt they achieved the most. The final presentation, communication skills (Japanese) and global village being the three components where the students felt they achieved the most. A

total of 27 students responded to this question.

## 7 Comments from Students

Students were able to write freely about why they were satisfied with the course, the good points, the bad points as well as comments about the individual components of the course. Students felt satisfied because they usually have no chance to speak English or meet foreign students in their daily life; it was a good experience and their English speaking ability improved; they overcame a fear of public speaking; they were able to make friends with students from other years/courses.

The good points included such comments as: they were able to communicate with many people and make many friends; they were able to use English on a daily basis; their English speaking, listening and pronunciation skills improved; the course was friendly and easy going. The bad points included such comments as: the early morning starts were a killer; e-learning was fun in the beginning but it became troublesome; it should have been a longer course; e-learning should be a compulsory activity with time set aside rather than being optional; there needs to be more information about each component of the course and its contents; there needs to be a dress rehearsal for the final presentation.

The comments for the most popular three components of the course were:

1. Final Presentation - students had never thought about

	Course Component	Type of Activity	No. of participants
1	Communication Skills	workshop	6 people
2	Bullet Input	output activity	6 people
3	Global Village	workshop	7 people
4	English Communication	lecture	3 people
5	Role Model	workshop	3 people
6	Final Presentation	expression	4 people

Table 2: The results of a questionnaire asking which components the students found most beneficial.

	Course Component	Type of Activity	No. of participants
1	Communication Skills	workshop	7 people
2	Bullet Input	output activity	2 people
3	Global Village	workshop	3 people
4	English Communication	lecture	2 people
5	Role Model	workshop	2 people
6	Final Presentation	expression	11 people

Table 3: The results of a questionnaire asking the students which part of the course they felt they achieved the most in.

which country they wanted to visit and the reasons why before this; they are not good at public speaking and very shy but they did it; they were excited about sharing their ideas with others and relieved that others were able to understand them and their thoughts. The most rewarding comment, “In the final English presentation I was able to review everything I had learned and my presentation was a manifestation of this course in total!”

2. Communication Skills - it was fun, exciting and a fresh approach to communication; students were able to overcome their shyness; they learned about verbal and non-verbal communication and the importance of both; they know their limits but they learned how to improve their communication skills.

3. Global Village - it was a great chance to meet many foreigners and experience cross-cultural understanding; students gained lots of information about many countries; it was interesting, stimulating and changed their outlook. On the down side, the content was too difficult and the length of the course was too short.

## 8 Conclusion

This was the first time a program of this kind has been conducted at Nishikyushu University. The response from the students was amazing and the improvement shown in English speaking ability and in communication skills was remarkable. It shows that this kind of intensive program is a valuable one for students who have non-English majors. Following the program, twelve students participated in a Study Abroad trip to Australia, three students applied for Tobitate Scholarships and two students will participate in study abroad programs to Thailand and Vietnam later this year. This shows that due to the influence of this intensive course, more than half of the students have chosen to be involved in international activities. In addition, many students have kept up friendships with the foreign TA and communicate via SNS.

Students showed an increase in their willingness to communicate (WTC) in a L 2 and this area of research will be the theme for following programs of this nature. Models of research<sup>5)7)1)</sup> will be examined and implemented. Communication models<sup>7)</sup> and questionnaires related to motivational intensity<sup>6)</sup> will also be carried out. Studies show that SA can increase L 2 motivation<sup>3)</sup> short SA lessens the anxiety students feel when communicating in L 2<sup>2)</sup>. However Sonobe wishes to use these models and apply these criteria to intensive L 2 courses. Results of this course indicate that increased scores may be a result of higher WTC levels and

higher motivation levels without students having to travel or study abroad.

The need for this kind of course is imperative if Nishikyushu University wants to encourage students to be globally minded and study abroad. Plans are being made for this course to be a credited elective intensive course in 2016.

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