

To *Moodle* or not to *Moodle*: Can It Be an Ideal e-Learning Environment?

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Abstract

Moodle is popular all over the world as a course or content management system (CMS)¹. It's a free, open source software package designed using sound pedagogical principles, to help both educators and researchers create effective online learning communities. It is quite useful and convenient to set up with some basic databases on a server and it's possible to teach any class or provide interactive Web pages using it on any Web server platform that supports PHP. Without any special web editing skills, teachers can present online materials to be a coherent whole and simplify the way students access it by the *Moodle* interface. The author has been teaching a variety of courses including several semester-long undergraduate and graduate classes since 2005 while coordinating CALL (computer assisted language learning) programs. He has found it essential in a blended learning situation or a distance-learning environment to promote active learning by students. The author will make a practical report on one of them at a Japanese university while effectively using *Moodle*. The key information of the online courses such as objectives, syllabi, assignments, forum discussions, quizzes, course evaluations, etc. is investigated. This is followed by the author discussing the pros and cons of demonstrating the basic functions of *Moodle*.

Keywords

e-Learning, EGAP, ESP, *Moodle*, Social Constructivism

Introduction

More than a decade and half have passed since the introduction of *Moodle* and its infrastructure improvement for various broadband network systems has been constantly improving our society since the explosive growth of the Internet in the mid 1990s. Today e-learning is an established learning style in higher education and it faces a momentous turning point under

further advancement of ICT (information communication technology). In particular, in the field of foreign language education, OSS (open source system), which can provide management functions for learning records, multimedia materials, interactive communication and so on, has become very popular in commercial WBT (web-based training) such as *WebCT* and *Blackboard* in tertiary education all over the world. Japan is not an exception to adopt this ICT for educational environments under financial support from e-Japan strategic policies.²

Students can attend blended learning style of EFL (English as a foreign language) classes while attending at the CALL laboratories with technical assistants who support technical matters. The instructor has installed *Moodle* on his self-managed Web servers either on Mac OS X or Windows 2003 R2 in a common server room and his own research office. He used *Moodle* to teach EFL/ESL (English as a second language) classes to promote ESP (English for specific purposes) or EGAP (English for general academic purposes) in undergraduate programs and content-based classes (Seminar in Language Education and Information Science IV and Intercultural Communication II) for post-graduate programs using *Moodle*.³ This paper focuses particularly on these undergraduate classes using *Moodle* and discusses the pros and cons to improve this style of e-Learning.

I . Literature Review

Dougiamas (1998) developed *Moodle* for educators from the beginning under a philosophy so-called SCP (social constructionist pedagogy). He claims that constructivism occurs especially well when the learner is engaged in constructing something for others to see. (Dougiamas, p. 12) Dougiamas & Taylor (2003) summarize a PhD research project with the application result of theoretical perspectives such as “social constructivism” and “separate and connected of knowing”⁴ to the analysis of their online classes as well as the growing learning community of other *Moodle* users. SCP is a bit different from other similar philosophies as follows:

1. Constructivism: Knowledge is created through the interaction with the environment.
2. Constructionism: Learning effectiveness can be observed when something is usefully created for people.
3. Social Constructivism: Movement toward a whole community forms culture and meaningfulness.
4. Connected Behavior: Thoughtful actions stimulate learning.

CALL Researchers and practioners in the world have been participating in the further development and improvement of *Moodle* in a collaborative style. Teachers or practioners are not

required to have advanced knowledge and skills while *Moodle* is easy to use and stable. Harashima (2004a, 2004b), Robb (2004a, 2004b), Brandl (2005), Su (2006), Cole & Foster (2007) and Yamada (2009) introduce basic features of *Moodle* and discuss its usefulness of social interaction between teachers and students and among the students in language education with sample learning tasks and tools.

Miyazoe (2008) reports a comparative study of two LMSs (*Blackboard Academic Suite 7.1* and *Moodle 1.7.2*) in four blended courses of ESP and EAP (English for academic purposes) at two different universities in Tokyo. The two courses used a semi-identical instructional design and LMS usage for comparative purposes to make the most of synchronous oral interaction and asynchronous written interaction in the target language. The post-course questionnaire focusing on students' evaluation of the blended course design, online interaction, and LMS usability reveals that a higher usability of *Moodle* over *Blackboard* in the course designs while the correlation analysis reveals that such a result is related to students' participation in online interaction and appreciation of the blended course delivery over traditional learning.

Al-Jarf (2008) compares the effectiveness of *WebCT*, *Moodle* and *Nicenet* in EFL instruction by attempting to teach grammar to freshman students at a college in Saudi Arabia. She reports that *Nicenet* made a group of the students the best results in post-test scores and the post-treatment questionnaire revealed the positive attitudes towards it while groups of the students using *WebCT* and *Moodle* were not motivated and had negative attitudes towards online learning. However, these students had a low proficiency level in English and computer literacy with no prior experience in online instruction. So if they are more sophisticated linguistically as well as technically, the results would be different by introducing more online activities under clear instructions with useful tools such as forums, quizzes, and additional resources.

Although *Moodle* is not designed particularly for language teaching, it provides a number of useful learning tools that can be used in EFL/ESL settings or teacher training projects. For example, Suvorov (2010) proposes its use for ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) writing classes because a typical *Moodle* course consists of a set of tools that allow for the integration of a wide range of assignments, activities, and multimedia resources, electric delivery of teaching materials, synchronous and asynchronous teacher-student and student-student communication, and testing and assessment of students' work. Similarly, Su (2008) also introduces the basic features of *Moodle* with pedagogical background and briefly reports its application in a collegiate writing environment. He mentions its advantages that it would effectively help English writing teachers organize their teaching materials, improve their means of communication, and retrieve their records of interaction with students when necessary. However, he also mentions major obstacles to overcome such as technical issues, computer facilities, and treatment of errors. (Su, 2008, p. 53)

Britto (2006) introduces *Moodle* with a quick guide for beginner users at Sophia University under the support of the university media center and also provides his teaching experiences of using *Moodle* courses as an auxiliary tool. He emphasizes the importance of the educational philosophy of 'social constructivism' to understand and appreciate *Moodle* as an ideal e-Learning environment for both teachers and students.

Berggren et al. (2005) documents the discussions and experiments of a team of teachers active in the *Moodle* community who are concerned with the development of international standards in the future versions of *Moodle*. After the analysis of the implications of integrating the learning design (LD) specification into *Moodle* and the operation of various tools within the *Moodle* environment, they concluded that continued and open dialogue between teachers and developers of both LD and *Moodle* is necessary to achieve transparent integration.

Baskerville & Robb (2005) reports the summary of how *Moodle* has successfully been implemented at Kyoto Sangyo University with a Business English course with an emphasis on written communication. It was a hybrid course with a published textbook and *Moodle* providing the interactive aspects.

Kennedy (2005a) investigates what advantages *Moodle* offers over other commercial LMS such as *Blackboard* from the perspective of the lecturer or the student at Hong Kong Institute of Education and reports that only a partial preference for *Moodle* over *Blackboard* implications for pre-service teachers are found after the analysis of institutional evaluations of teaching and a questionnaire. Kennedy (2005b) also describes the initial investigations, observations and experiences of pre-service teachers regarding how they have developed design experience for their future teaching roles using *Moodle*.

Bakharia & Obexer (2005) technically review basic characteristics of open source learning management systems such as *ATutor*, *ILIAS*, *Moodle*, *Sakai* and *.LRN (dotLRN)* as well as commercial learning management systems such as *Angel*, *Blackboard*, *Desire2Learn*, and *WebCT*.

Pandey & Pandey (2009) describe the approach to develop a course-centered LMS system for the academic institutions and examine and study the features of *Moodle*. They compare *Moodle* with other commercial software such as *Blackboard*, *eCollege*, *Angel LMS*, and *Desire2Learn*.

In addition, regarding the emerging importance of second language (L2) digital literacy within EFL, Meurant (2010) discusses that *Moodle* has a special potential in EFL education to promote students' development of L2 digital literacy in Korea because *Moodle* forces English to be used exclusively throughout a course website and the meta-language can be made the target L2.

Williams (2010) reports a training course for pre-service Educational Technology teachers focusing on *Moodle* quiz project and survey results. The trainees' comments indicate an increase of self-motivation by a series of creative tasks and cognitive benefits with new ICT and teaching skills.

Ryobe (2010) investigates the implementation of *Skype*-video chat with overseas partners

in seven required IT English classes that use *Moodle* as a medium of instruction at a Japanese university in 2009. The aim of the activity was to increase students' motivation to develop oral communication ability to promote intercultural awareness and understanding of World Englishes. She claims that the students showed great satisfaction and positive responses for discussions on specific topics. In addition, she reports that the questionnaire results and their analysis showed the project made students motivated, developed intercultural awareness, and improved oral communication ability successfully. She recommends that every teacher can employ to expose students to authentic communication with overseas partners by using a low-cost, user-friendly *Skype* technology, though students may face some technical difficulties.

Hinkelman & Johnson (2010) provides a preliminary report on a three-year development to solve the issue of easy online content-sharing among teachers who use *Moodle*, work in collaborative teams, generate their own materials, utilize a blend of audio, video, and text activities in the courses. They conclude that an interactive development strategy based on the direct needs of a teaching team was critical to developing immediately useful tools such as *Moodle* course formats and repositories. It is very useful for any practioner to share digital repositories in public and the project course format is downloadable under General Public License from <http://englishforum.sgu.ac.jp/downloads/projectformat/>.

Hinkelman & Grose (2005) reports the results of a pilot listening/reading comprehension placement test in 2004 at Sapporo Gakuen University. They discussed testing approaches, test design, hardware and software selection, test administration, placement procedures, and evaluation of results with item analysis. They concluded that with sufficient hardware resources, *Moodle* was successful in providing a practical technical platform for administering placement tests to large number of students in a short time with time savings in the making and analysis of test results.

Stanley (2007) focuses on vocabulary acquisition in an intensive reading course at Kanda University of International Studies while using *Moodle*. He reports the summary of a student-generated glossary that provides students with information necessary vocabulary items as well as a variety of opportunities to see the items in different contexts. He concludes that *Moodle* and its glossary module in particular have been of immense help to teachers while offering students opportunities to learn vocabulary well beyond the classroom even with limited class hours of learning.

Bateson (2008) provides nine ideas for language teachers to incorporate into their teaching with *Moodle* that range from small tips to more fundamental changes the way *Moodle* is used. He suggests that creating bi-lingual resources, exploring new types of *Moodle* activities using modules such as the HotPot, Glossary, Choice, and Database, linking single resources into a cohesive set of tasks, using Windows *Notepad* as a whiteboard, using HTML resources instead of *MS Office* documents, using invisible text to line up conversations, using HTML tables to line up page items,

using grades to motivate students, using groups to save duplicating course. All of these ideas seem to be useful not only for language teachers but also those participating students.

Bateson (2009) pays a special attention to QuizPort module for *Moodle* to create adaptive online learning materials to match with students' ability and preferences and gives detailed examples step by step. Since this is technical information in the Column section of the journal, it is very useful for those who are beginner *Moodle* users.

II. Pros and Cons of Moodle

As Naddabi (2007) reports an example of design and implementation of *Moodle* in EGAP instruction in Oman, there are advantages to integrate it by making use of the features such as forum, resource links of dictionaries and newspapers, quiz, and journal in teaching EFL. He claims the following five advantages: (1) Enhancing student-student interactions and teacher-student interactions; (2) Finding a real audience to interact with; (3) Helping students do their research for their independent study project; (4) Fostering students' independence; (5) A change of routine. These advantages would commonly be found in any CMS, but it's still the basic usefulness of *Moodle*.

On the other hand, he states five problems and concerns in its implementation: (1) Logging a large number of students for the first time was a difficult task; (2) Because of a non-assessed course component in a large program, only a small number of students participated in *Moodle* activities; (3) Lack of computer literacies of both some teachers and many students who used *Moodle* inefficiently; (4) Jamming students' email accounts with unwanted messages when they used sharing forums; (5) Finding of "social monologues" in the sharing forums to contradict the purpose of interaction and communication among the students.⁵ These problems are common among less computer literate teachers as well as lower level EFL students even in Japan.

Moloney & Gutierrez (2006) reports the summary of interview results regarding an enquiry on *Moodle* knowledge and usage in a CALL-based ESP undergraduate program at College of Information Science and Engineering (hereafter, CISE), Ritsumeikan University. They recommended ways to promote lecturers' use of *Moodle* in undergraduate programs and to discuss some limitations of professional education. They concluded that *Moodle* was a positive and useful educational tool and available to all to use, though there were still few lecturers who knew what and how *Moodle* could be implemented in CALL classes and how it might help learners to learn online. However, *Moodle* can still be an ideal solution for promoting efficient blended or distant learning style because of the followings:

1. To provide a common e-learning or communication platform in a multipoint environment;

2. To allow only students who enroll for a particular course;
3. To motivate students in a different style of learning or presenting their ideas to share without any hesitation;
4. To provide downloadable e-documents to students without having printing and shipping them out in advance.

The author, however, needs to offer more basic and intermediate *Moodle* training sessions as a part of faculty development (FD) activities for part-time EFL instructors who teach CISE EGAP classes but who lack the fundamental knowledge and skills to use *Moodle* before each semester in order to utilize it efficiently as well as systematically. The teaching guide with *Moodle* is available to those instructors in CISE UI and IM classes, but the author needs to revise it with more detailed information of the basic step-by-step procedures to use *Moodle* efficiently as well.

III. Moodle Use at CISE

As Nozawa (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) reports, the author, who has been the CALL coordinator and who has been enthusiastic about the implementation of *Moodle* since 2005, has installed it into his own-managed as well as commonly-used Mac OS X servers for Freshman ESP or EGAP programs at CISE, Ritsumeikan University as well as for his other undergraduate and post-graduate classes including ones at different universities (Kyoto University and Kyoto Notre Dame University) where he lectured part-time until the end of January 2010. Here the author focuses on how *Moodle* is implemented at CISE.

One of the implementations was done for the CISE EFL classes as ESP (2004-2007) or EGAP (2008-2010) programs. For the ESP program an originally developed online program with PHP and MySQL database to promote teaching the ESP basics in a blended learning style was created and used but it did not last more than two years to use the system under the supervision of a former colleague who programmed it but resigned his position and moved to a different university. As a result, the author could not fully take care of the program by himself without the programmer's continuous support. Even though it was used for four years since 2004 under a team effort of the author and his IT student assistant, he found that it was difficult to maintain the program by resetting it again and again for each semester by following careful step-by-step procedures and managing it while struggling with unexpected minor problems during each semester. In addition, the EFL curriculum was changed completely from ESP into EGAP from the 2008 academic year. These were major reasons for the author to change it into *Moodle* which could provide an easy installation and its management. However, *Moodle* has not been used by all the 1st-year classes at CISE because some of colleagues felt that lower intermediate and pre-intermediate level students

should be trained more for the EFL's typical four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in face-to-face classroom settings with textbooks so that about the half of 1st-year students, who were upper intermediate (UI) and intermediate (IM) level, registered and enrolled into their own *Moodle* courses taught as English 3 (CALL I) in the first semester and English 6 (CALL II) in the second semester by different instructors including part-timers under the author's coordination.⁶

The current *Moodle* Website titled 'CISE - English for General Academic Purposes (<http://www.esp.ritsumei.ac.jp/cise/>)' has been used by eight different 1st-year EGAP classes of UI and IM level. For the first semester the main objectives of the English 3 courses are: (1) some basic 'academic study skills' development activities with online tasks and evaluation of their understanding with a quiz for the first 6-7 weeks; (2) a collaborative group project by randomly assigned members and *MS-PowerPoint* (hereafter, *PPT*) presentations on their chosen topics after learning different characteristics of search engines; (3) an individual learning with a commercial *TOEIC* preparation program called *ALC NetAcademy 2* (hereafter, *ALCNA2*) (<https://www.engplus1.is.ritsumei.ac.jp/onet2/>).⁷

For the second semester the main objectives of the English 6 courses are similar but slightly different from ones of English 3 in the first semester: (1) a collaborative group Web project with different topics from ones in the first semester and presentations with different members of each group using their created Webpages with CSS and HTML after reviewing the Webpage creation basics; (2) an individual learning during and after class hours with *ALCNA2*; (3) an optional and individual writing project called 'CISE Writing Laboratory (<http://www.esp.ritsumei.ac.jp/wp/>)' using a weblog - *Word Press*.⁸ Due to the lack of pre-semester *Word Press* training sessions for English 6 instructors, using this site is limited to those who would like to try it out as an experimental basis so that topics for writing activities are different depending on each instructor's plan. Any digital story telling approach can be adopted to enhance writing skills of the students.

In addition, there is another option of an e-Learning program called *e-sia - The Internet school* (<http://www.e-sia.is.ritsumei.ac.jp/>) run on a Linux server.⁹ *e-sia* is an animation-based *TOEIC* preparation program to be used by some motivated students who would like to study more with a different type of e-Learning programs outside class or at home. It was the first commercial e-Learning program that the author purchased it with the initial starting budget for building EFL e-Learning programs when CISE was founded in 2004. However, it still works well for the purpose to prepare for improving *TOEIC* test taking skills.

Fig. 1 shows the *Moodle* top page of the second semester for the 2010-11 academic year. Only the courses in the second semester are visible to the enrolled students.

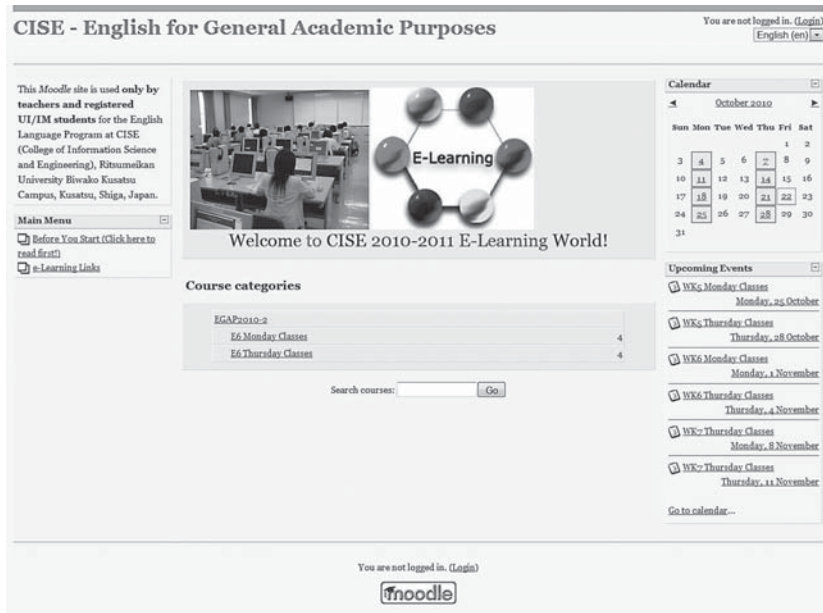


Fig. 1: Top page of CISE Moodle site (2nd Semester, 2010-2011)

Fig. 2 shows a sample of English 3 weekly outline for the author's class (English 3 QA-UI) in 1st Semester, 2010. Although a booklet of the teacher's guide is given at the teachers' meeting before the 1st semester begins, a pdf file to describe weekly tasks for the students is also given on line. The teacher can open it only with a given password by the coordinator while the students can see the file but can't open it.

A variety of tasks or assignments are given to the students during the class hour each week or as homework and the students submit them on line as a MS-Word file after doing a spell-check by themselves. In class as a part of interactive activities chat or forum discussions are provided to exchange their opinions in a writing format with the time limitation. The student blog as a Moodle module is used to write their self-introduction. A series of questionnaires for academic study skills with their related handouts as pdf files are given until Week 6 and they make the students realize the importance of the skills with the instructor's reports on the analysis results. The main topics for the questionnaires are as follows:

1. What kind of learners are you?
2. Are you a slow or fast learner?
3. Motivating yourself and setting the goal
4. Extroversion and introversion

5. General self-confidence

6. Classroom tests

The HotPotatoes final quiz is given to check their comprehension and their results become a part (10%) of the final grade.

A computer literacy (computacy) test with no grade is given to check study skills knowledge in Week 1 to make the student realize their current knowledge. The computer literacy test consists of four parts consisting 10 questions in English on basic computer terms and famous personage and test takers have to choose the word or phrase that best fits the definition. In the case of two 2009-2010 English 3 classes, the author asked his students to complete it in Week 1 and 25 out of 31 (80.65%) in 2009 and 14 out of 28 (50%) in 2010 completed it within the limited time and the average scores were 24.48/40 (61.2%) in 2009 and 16.64/40 (41.6%) in 2010. 6 students in 2009 and 14 students in 2010 could not complete it probably because of their inability to read and understand the questions in English quickly enough to answer or probably because they simply forgot to press the 'submit' button to send their responses.

After learning how to do the Internet research and watching some selected YouTube video clips to get some hints, the students are guided to their own information search activities. 11 groups (2009) and 9 groups (2010) were randomly formed and selected each group leader who was more responsible to communicate with other members and put all the information in a PPT file to submit. Then, each of the group members started his/her role to search information for a PPT project.

During classes from Week 7 to Week 11, each group concentrates gathering information and creating a PPT file by spending the half (45 minutes) of the class hour. The rest of the class hour was used for e-Learning activities. The instructor move around and give proper advice to improve their contents while a technical support (student assistant) solve any technical problems.¹⁰

English 3-QA(UI)

You are logged in as Kazunori Nozawa (Logout)

Switch role to: [] Turn editing on

People []

Participants []

Activities []

- Assignments []
- Forums []
- Hot Potatoes Quizzes []
- Questionnaires []
- Quizzes []
- Resources []

Search Forums []

Advanced search []

Administration []

- Turn editing on
- Settings []
- Assign roles []
- Grades []
- Groups []
- Backup []
- Restore []
- Import []
- Reset []
- Reports []
- Questions []
- Files []
- Manual maintenance []
- Profile []

Course categories []

- EGA20000A []
- EGA20000B []
- MiniSessions []
- All courses ...

Weekly outline

The assessment tasks are intended to determine whether students have been able to achieve the objectives. They consist of Attendance (20%); In-class Task (20%); Study Skills Quiz (20%); CALL Activities (20%); Small Group PowerPoint Project Presentation and Peer Evaluation (20%); Small Group PowerPoint Project Presentation and Product Evaluation by the Instructor (20%).

- Week forum
- A List of Search Engines
- e-Learning Links
- Online Evaluation Form for Presentations
- PPT Project Topics - OA
- Project Sample PPTs

8 April - 14 April

WK1: Overview of the Course, Self-Introduction & Competency Quiz

- Find your computer level
- EG100YK (Teacher Only)

15 April - 21 April

WK2: Study Skills Basics & CALL Activity

- Writing Activity #1: Get to Know Each Other
- WK2: Study Skills Handouts
- Questionnaire 1: What kind of learner are you?
- WK2: Study Skills Handouts
- EG100YK (Teacher Only)

22 April - 28 April

WK3: Study Skills Basics & CALL Activity

- WK3: Handouts
- Timed Writing Assignment (possibly becomes a homework by Week 4)
- Questionnaire 2: Are you a slow or fast learner?
- WK3: Handouts
- WK3: TG (Teacher Only)

29 April - 5 May

WK4: Study Skills Basics & CALL Activity

- Magiarism
- Questionnaire 3: Motivating Yourself and Setting Goals
- WK4: TG (Teacher Only)

6 May - 12 May

WK5: Study Skills Basics & CALL Activity

- Questionnaire 4: Extroversion and Introversion
- WK5: Handout 1
- WK5: Handout 2
- Questionnaire 5: General Self-Confidence
- WK5: Handout 3
- WK5: Handout 4
- WK5: TG (Teacher Only)

13 May - 19 May

WK6: Study Skills Basics, Quiz & PowerPoint Workshop

- Questionnaire 6: Classroom Tests
- WK6: Handouts
- WK6: Handouts
- Study Skills Quiz
- PPT Tutorial
- WK6: TG (Teacher Only)

20 May - 26 May

WK7: Internet Research for PowerPoint Projects & CALL Activity

- Google Guide
- How to Do the Internet Research
- WK7: TG (Teacher Only)

27 May - 2 June

WK8: Internet Research for PowerPoint Projects & CALL Activity

- You Tube video clips to show you some hints!
- Web Research Guide - Doing research on the Web
- WK8: TG (Teacher Only)

3 June - 9 June

WK9: Internet Research for PowerPoint Projects & CALL Activity

- WK9: TG (Teacher Only)

10 June - 16 June

WK10: Internet Research for PowerPoint Projects & CALL Activity

- WK10: TG (Teacher Only)

17 June - 23 June

WK11: Internet Research for PowerPoint Projects & CALL Activity

- WK11: TG (Teacher Only)

24 June - 30 June

WK12: Presentation Rehearsal for PowerPoint Projects & CALL Activity

- Warnings for presentations!
- WK12: TG (Teacher Only)

1 July - 7 July

WK13: Small Group PowerPoint Projects - Presentation 1

- WK13: TG (Teacher Only)

8 July - 14 July

WK14: Small Group PowerPoint Projects - Presentation 2

- WK14: TG (Teacher Only)

15 July - 21 July

WK15: Small Group PowerPoint Projects - Presentation 3 & Class Survey

- Post-Course Questionnaire
- WK15: TG (Teacher Only)

Latest News []

Add news, update ...

No news has been posted yet!

Upcoming Events []

- WK: Monday Classes Monday, 22 October
- WK: Thursday Classes Thursday, 28 October
- WK6: Monday Classes Monday, 4 November
- WK6: Thursday Classes Thursday, 11 November
- WK: Thursday Classes Thursday, 18 November
- WK: Thursday Classes Monday, 8 November
- WK: Thursday Classes Thursday, 15 November

Go to calendar ->

Next Event ->

Recent Activity []

Activity since Thursday, 11 October 2010, 09:12 am

Full report of recent activity...

Nothing new since your last login

Moodle Docs for this page

You are logged in as Kazunori Nozawa (Logout)

Home

Fig. 2: English 3 weekly outline (1st Semester, 2010)

Fig. 3 shows a sample of English 6 weekly outline for the author's class (English 6 QA-UI) in 2nd Semester, 2009. English 6 follows the similar *Moodle* course style of English 3, but there are no study skills trainings or quizzes. Instead, students start with an essay writing about their summer holidays and give their comments to other classmates' writings in Week 1 and then review how to effectively use a search engine in Week 2. In Week 3 they learn the basics about plagiarism by accessing Plagiarism.org (<http://www.plagiarism.org/>). In Week 5 and Week 6 they visit their own favorite Websites and choose one for each week to write a summary report using a downloadable *MS-Word* form as a class task. In addition, small groups are formed to conduct Web projects but the members are assigned differently from ones from the 1st semester while the group leader is selected again. After the discussion of the topics for the project, students use an e-Learning program (*ALCNA2*) to brush up their English. There is an option to use *Word Press* to write something assigned by the teacher in charge. In Week 7 and Week 8 HTML/CSS workshops are given. First, a sample Website from the author's previous class is introduced and then a HTML quiz from W3 School (http://www.w3schools.com/html/html_quiz.asp) is given to make student understand their basic knowledge about HTML. In Week 8 students explore CSS tutorial at W3 School (<http://www.w3schools.com/css/default.asp>) as well as visiting some free templates sites such as [freewebtemplates.com](http://www.freewebtemplates.com/) (<http://www.freewebtemplates.com/>) and [Free Site Templates](http://www.freesitetemplates.com/) (<http://www.freesitetemplates.com/>). In Week 9 and Week 10 students use e-Learning programs to concentrate preparing for *TOEIC-IP* test which is administered in early December. However, the following week (Week 11) is focused on creating a group's web page. In Week 12 a presentation rehearsal is done by visiting other groups while giving some suggestions to improve the Web pages. After that, revising the contents as well as improving the technical parts is done at each group. Week 13 - Week 15 are presentation weeks and 3 or 4 groups give presentations per week using their created Webpages while the rest of classmates give the evaluations using the online evaluation form.

The screenshot displays the Moodle interface for the course "English 6-QA (Nozawa)". At the top, it indicates the user is logged in as "Kamuroi Nozawa (Logout)". The course title "English 6-QA (Nozawa)" is prominently displayed. Below the title, there are navigation options like "Switch role to..." and "Turn editing on".

The main content area is titled "Weekly outline" and lists the following items:

- Learning Links:**
 - "ALC NetAcademy 2" - <https://www.english.its.ritsumei.ac.jp/aneta/>
 - "e-sta - Internet School" Creating a new account - <http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/~maomugi/esta/>
 - "e-sta - Internet School" - <http://www.e-sta.its.ritsumei.ac.jp/esta/>
 - "CBS News World" - <http://www.tell.is.ritsumei.ac.jp/movies/CBSNewsWorld/>
- Web Projects (2007 A3 class sample)**
- [Web Projects (Online Evaluation System)]**
- News forum**

The weekly schedule follows:

- 1 October - 7 October:** WK1: Course Overview; WK1.TG (Teachers Only)
- 8 October - 14 October:** WK2; WK2.TG (Teachers Only)
- 15 October - 21 October:** WK: Due to the typhoon hitting the area, the class was cancelled so that the make-up class will be done on 11/28. WK1.TG (Teachers Only)
- 22 October - 28 October:** WK4 (-WK3); Website Review Form (Word); WK4.TG (Teachers Only)
- 29 October - 4 November:** WK5 (-WK4); Submit your Word file here. WK5.TG (Teachers Only)
- 5 November - 11 November:** WK6 (-WK5); WK6.TG (Teachers Only); Write & Discuss
- 12 November - 18 November:** WK7 (-WK6); HTML Quiz; WK7.TG (Teachers Only)
- 19 November - 25 November:** WK8 (-WK7); WK8.TG (Teachers Only)
- 26 November - 2 December:** WK9 (11/26) & WK9 (11/28); MP Resources; WK9.TG (Teachers Only)
- 3 December - 9 December:** WK10 (12/3) & WK11 (12/3); WK10.TG (Teachers Only); WK11.TG (Teachers Only)
- 10 December - 16 December:** Due to the instructor's overseas trip, the class will be cancelled. The make-up will be done on 11/5.
- 17 December - 23 December:** WK12: Rehearsal for Group Presentations; Reference: Effective Presentations (Slide Show); WK12.TG (Teachers Only)
- 24 December - 30 December:** WK13: Group Presentations #1; WK13.1.TG (Teachers Only)
- 31 December - 6 January:** Winter Holidays
- 7 January - 13 January:** WK14: Group Presentations #2
- 14 January - 20 January:** WK15: Group Presentations #3

The right sidebar contains sections for "Latest News" (No news has been posted yet), "Upcoming Events" (There are no upcoming events), and "Recent Activity" (Activity since Wednesday, 20 October 2010, 12:16 pm). Below these are sections for "New users:" (empty) and "Assignments submitted:" (30 Oct, 01:53 by Ryota Sakurai, Submit your Word file here).

At the bottom of the page, there is a "Moodle Docs for this page" link, the user's name "You are logged in as Kamuroi Nozawa (Logout)", and a "Home" link.


Fig. 3: English 6 weekly outline (2nd Semester, 2009)

Fig. 4 shows a typical scene of small-group project presentations. Each group normally consists of three students in seven groups and two pair-groups in the case of the English 3 UI-QA class (No. of students=25) in 2010. 93% of the students are male, so the author could assign female students only to two groups. The number of enrolled students in other classes is varied. The rehearsal time is given in Week 12 by visiting other groups for the limited class time and actual presentations and peer-to-peer evaluations are done in Week 13 – Week 15 as mentioned above. The teacher recommends that each presentation in English should be rehearsed a few times in advance and also should be done by looking at the monitor screen without reading any memo sheet while using an eye-contact technique for the audience. However, there is always room to improve their presentation skills.



Fig. 4: A small-group project presentation scene

Fig. 5 shows a CGI program of the peer-to-peer online evaluation form to evaluate the presentations. This form is used to evaluate either each group's or individual's performance on oral presentation and PPT or Webpages. After completing individual reviewer's information, the reviewer completes the oral presentation parts such as body language, eye contact, voice quality and loudness, time management, and accuracy and fluency of spoken English. Furthermore, the reviewer also completes the visual aids (PPT or Webpages) such as content quality and quantity, accuracy and appropriateness in use of written English, originality of ideas or opinions, special effects in use, and resources. All the submitted data are sent to the server and retrieved by the coordinator after the presentation weeks are over. Then he sends the class data as an Excel file to each teacher in order to become a part of the final grade in his/her class.



Evaluation System

Evaluator Information

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Your Student Number | <input type="text"/> | (ex: 1234567890-1) |
| Your User ID | <input type="text"/> | (ex: is123456, gr123456) |
| Your Name | <input type="text"/> | (ex: Taro Ritsumei) |
| Teacher | <input type="text"/> | |
| Your Group Number | <input type="text"/> | |
| Week Day | <input type="text"/> | |
| Class Time | <input type="text"/> | |
| The group or individual to be evaluated | If you evaluate an individual, input the name. → <input type="text"/> Or you evaluate a group, select the group number. → <input type="text"/> | |

Evaluation Form

| | | Very Bad | Poor | Fair | Good | Excellent |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|------|------|----------------------|
| Oral Presentation | Physical (Eye Contact, Gestures, Posture) | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| | Oral (Fluency, Pronunciation, Volume) | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| | Visual (Matching with Visual Information) | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| | Organizational (Clarity of Structure, Transitional Expressions) | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| Visual Aids - PowerPoint/Web Pages | Technical (Fonts, Graphics, Animations, Sounds, Movies) | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| | Content (Originality, Accuracy, Usefulness) | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| | English (Accuracy, Clarity) | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| Overall Evaluation | As a Whole | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ⊙ |
| (Free Comment) | <input type="text"/> | | | | | <input type="text"/> |

/

Fig. 5: Peer-to-peer online evaluation form

Fig. 6 shows an example of 2009 web project topics in the author's class (English 6-QA). Although the chosen topics were up to each group's discussion result, but ones in the first semester were ICT-related and ones in the second semester became more or less students' favorites.

| 表1 グループとトピック (前期) | | 表2 グループとトピック (後期) | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| グループ | トピック | グループ | トピック |
| A | Nintendo | A | Constellation |
| B | Google | B | Disney |
| C | Masayoshi Son & Soft Bank | C | Dragon Ball |
| D | Bill Gates & Microsoft | D | Lipton |
| E | Osamu Tezuka's World | E | Apple Computer |
| F | Cell Phones - au by KDDI | F | Mr. Donut |
| G | NTT | G | Coca Cola |
| H | McDonald's | H | Universal Studios |
| I | Amazon.com | I | Starbucks |
| J | Sony | J | Jiburi |
| K | iPod, iTunes & Podcasting | K | Drug Issues |

Fig. 6: An example of project topics (2009)

Fig. 7 shows an example of the Web project top page that the author made for his own class (English 6-QA). It was created to make a link as the class top page with each group's index page of 11 groups.

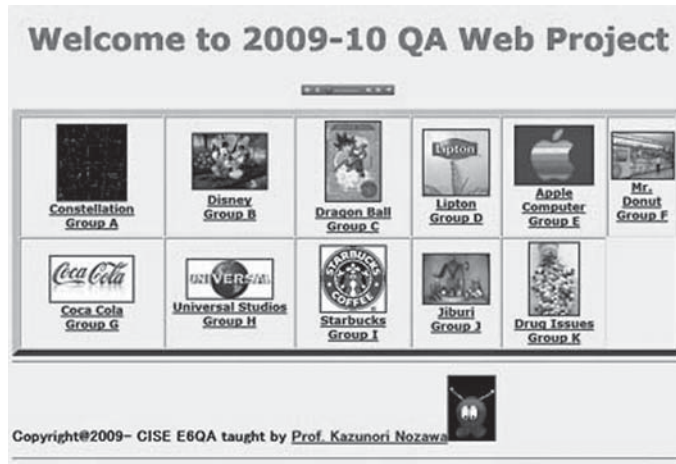


Fig. 7: An example of web project top page (2nd Semester, 2010)

Fig. 8 shows the login page of *ALCNA2*. As described above, *ALCNA2* is installed on a different server and managed by one of the colleagues. *ALCNA2* is used as a part of the weekly class especially in the second semester to prepare for *TOEIC-IP* (Institutional Program). It is exclusively used as a preparation tool for the required *TOEIC-IP* test that is administered free-of-charge to both 1st-year and 2nd-year students in early December in order to examine the students' achievement of general English skills. The results of *TOEIC-IP* are compared with those of the placement test that is administered during the orientation period in early April before the start of Week 1 in the first semester for about 4,000 1st-year students at seven colleges on the same campus by the Language Education Center.

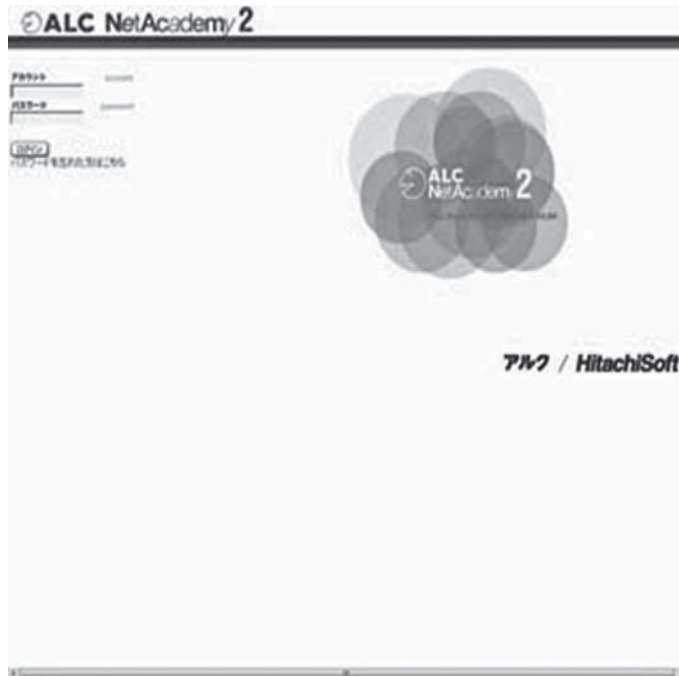


Fig. 8: Login page of ALCNA2

Fig. 9 shows the login page of the 'CISE Writing Laboratory' Website which is only available from 2nd Semester 2010 and a limited number of CISE UI/IM teachers started to use it at the time of writing this paper.



Fig. 9: Login page of CISE Writing Laboratory

Fig. 10 shows the students' login page of *e-sia – The Internet School*. There is the administrator's site which has a different interface.



Fig. 10: Login page of *e-sia – The Internet School*
Students' Opinion

There were no objective results of the questionnaires or interviews as a whole until 2009 to ask students about the *Moodle* courseware itself and how it was effective on their acquiring computer literacy and general academic English skills. This happened partially because there was no time to complete them toward the end of each semester due to the tight schedule for the group presentations and their evaluation tasks in class. However, from the author's personal experiences of his own *Moodle* classes (English 3 and English 6) at CISE, he found that the students responded very positively with a 95-97% attendance rate and also a variety of activities in a combination of learner-centered individual tasks while collaborative small group project-based learning style using *Moodle* were favorably received. The instruction was given all in English style by the author who was a non-native speaker of English but there were no problems for the UI students to carry out their tasks and assignments. Although the implications of the following graphs do not represent all the CALL classes, most of the questionnaire results show the favorable ones for the author's class (English 3-QA) in the first semester of 2010. Fig. 11 shows that 96% of the students found useful for 'study skills' tasks and resources to improve their own study skills or change their learning attitudes. Fig. 12 shows that 88% of the students acquired knowledge and skills of PPT in class. Fig.13 shows that 92% of the students were satisfied with small group PPT projects as a member. Fig. 14 shows that 88% of the students enjoyed the small group project work as a whole. Fig. 15

shows that 83% of the students felt the improvement of English skills in this class. Fig. 16 shows that the students' listening, speaking and presentation skills are the most improved skill areas. Fig. 17 shows that 71% of the students enjoyed e-Learning programs such as *Moodle* itself and *ALCNA2*. Fig. 18 shows only a negative result that 8% of the students felt that it was very difficult and 71% of them felt that it was difficult to take quizzes and answer the questionnaires. This is probably because the students are freshmen who lack computer literacy skills, so that they are not familiar with the online tasks or assignments such as taking quizzes or answering the surveys.

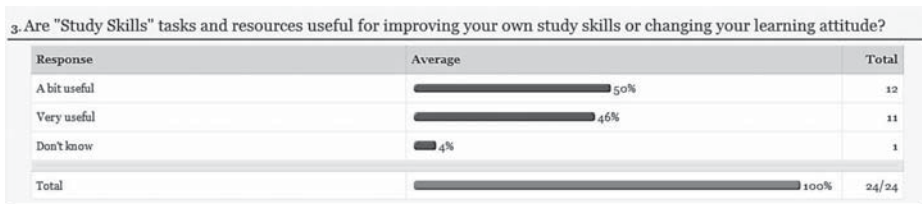


Fig. 11: Usefulness of 'study skills' tasks

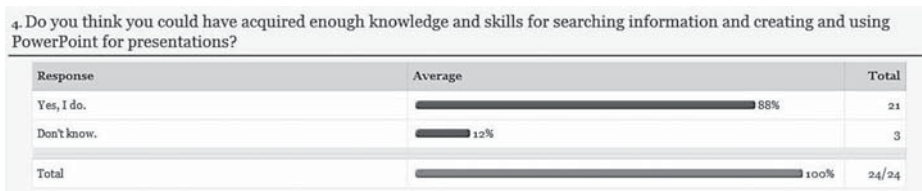


Fig. 12: Acquired knowledge and skills of PPT

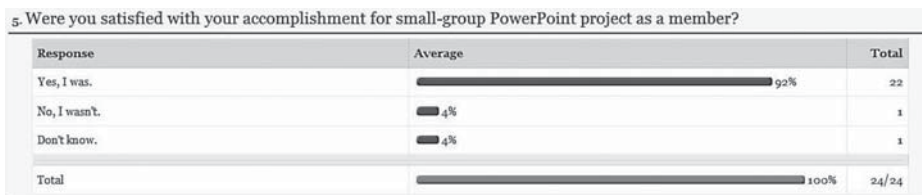


Fig. 13: Satisfaction of small group PPT project

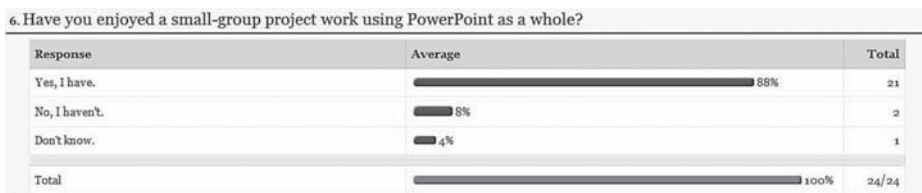


Fig. 14: Small group project work as a whole

8. Do you think you have improved your English skills through this class?

| Response | Average | Total |
|-------------|---------|-------|
| Yes, I do. | 83% | 20 |
| Don't know. | 17% | 4 |
| Total | 100% | 24/24 |

Fig.15: Improved English skills or not

9. Which English skills do you think you have improved through this class? (Multiple choice is possible.)

| Response | Average | Total |
|--------------|---------|-------|
| Listening | 67% | 16 |
| Speaking | 58% | 14 |
| Vocabulary | 25% | 6 |
| Reading | 42% | 10 |
| Grammar | 8% | 2 |
| Writing | 21% | 5 |
| Presentation | 58% | 14 |

Fig. 16: Improved English skill areas

10. Have you enjoyed learning English by using e-Learning programs such as this Moodle site or ALC NetAcademy 2?

| Response | Average | Total |
|----------------|---------|-------|
| Yes, I have. | 71% | 17 |
| No, I haven't. | 17% | 4 |
| Don't know. | 12% | 3 |
| Total | 100% | 24/24 |

Fig. 17: Use of e-Learning programs

11. Was it difficult or easy for you to take quizzes or answer questionnaires on line?

| Response | Average | Total |
|-----------------|---------|-------|
| Quite difficult | 8% | 2 |
| Difficult | 75% | 18 |
| Easy | 4% | 1 |
| Not answerable | 13% | 3 |
| Total | 100% | 24/24 |

Fig. 18: Difficulty of online quizzes and questionnaires

There is doubt that some evaluation measures using the questionnaire module for all the classes should be available to find out the efficiency of *Moodle* use in the EGAP curriculum as well as the content analysis in the coming academic year of 2011 and after.

Conclusion

There are many advantages to use *Moodle* as a common platform in a tertiary education setting, in particular in a multipoint e-learning environment. As Su (2006: p. 10) states, *Moodle* is a great tool for English teachers as a platform to save and archive teaching material easily as well as a collaborative platform for teachers and students to learn together. However, as Warschauer & Meskill (2000) claims that the key to successful use of technology in language teaching lies not in hardware or software but in humanware, *Moodle* itself does not promote learning or teaching on its own so that its effectiveness definitely lies in the way of teachers' active and interactive participation. The author intends offer more *Moodle* training sessions or workshops to promote 'professionalism' of EFL teachers at CISE. There are still some unfamiliar functions or unused modules of *Moodle*, and it is quite ideal for the author to use *Moodle* continuously for teaching and sharing information purposes. The author will continue to teach both undergraduate EFL programs and content-based post-graduate programs to meet their needs or conduct collaborative research projects with an updated version of *Moodle* and employ it as an efficient, communicative way to interact with both teachers and students.

Notes

- 1 *Moodle* stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment.
- 2 In light of the urgency to adapt ourselves to the world's rapid and drastic changes in the socio-economic structure caused by the utilization of information and telecommunications technology, in order to promote measures for forming an advanced information and telecommunications network society expeditiously and intensively, e-Japan strategic policies were adopted by the cabinet in January 2001.
- 3 See more information in Japanese: Nozawa, Kazunori. (2006). Mudoru o riyoshita kontentsu beesu no jyugyo jissen to joho komunyukeeshon (A content-based teaching and information exchanges using *Moodle*). *Ritsumeikan studies in language and culture*, 8(1), 157-168. Nozawa, Kazunori. (March 2007). *Moodle* o tsukatta tachitenkan e-learning kankyo no kochiku to jyugyo jissen: Higengo komyunikeeshon kyoiku o chuushin ni (Developing a Multipoint e-learning Environment Using *Moodle*: Teaching a Nonverbal Communication Class)" *Ritsumeikan higher education research*, 7, 107-122.
- 4 See more about this philosophy at http://docs.moodle.org/en/Separate_and_Connected_ways_of_knowing.
- 5 "Social monologues" in which learners express their opinions without connecting much to the other's contributions with little of the instructor's presence or guidance. See more Henri (1991) and Pawan et al. (2003).
- 6 At the beginning of each academic year the placement test is administered and 1st-year students are divided into four levels (Upper Intermediate, Intermediate, Lower Intermediate, and Pre-Intermediate) according to their test scores since 2004. Although the original placement test was used for all six colleges including CISE on the same campus until 2007, it was replaced in 2008 with the *TOEIC Bridge* under the support of

Language Education Center.

- 7 The system of *ALC NetAcademy 2* was developed and supported by Hitachi Software Engineering Co. Ltd.
- 8 The core software of *Word Press* is built by hundreds of community volunteers, and there are thousands of plugins and themes to create any blogs. The current version is 3.0.1 and it's downloadable from <http://wordpress.org/>.
- 9 Information in Japanese on *e-sia* can be obtained from <http://www.e-sia.com/index.php>. There are two main courseware (TOEIC Test Course and TOEIC Bridge Course) provided by e-sia, Co. Ltd.
- 10 The student assistant is assigned to each CALL classes at Ritsumeikan University and the Language Education Center manages the employment, training and class assignment. In the case of the author's class, there was no student assistant because he himself could handle technical matters.

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