Challenges Associated with the Implementation of Active Learning: A Small-scale Study of Japanese University EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Active learning (AL)—recently described as "independent, dialogical, and deep learning"— has been widely adopted by Japanese universities. Now, despite reservations and anxieties expressed by high school EFL teachers, the upcoming educational reform will also require the implementation of AL in all Japanese high schools. This small-scale study, therefore, aims to investigate specific challenges and/or difficulties encountered by Japanese university EFL teachers in implementing AL and provide practical suggestions for high school EFL teachers to help address their specific concerns with AL. A questionnaire consisting of a four-point Likert scale and open-ended questions was used and a total of 20 Japanese university EFL teachers took part in this study. Results revealed that in implementing AL in English classes, Japanese EFL teachers tend to experience the following difficulties in particular: various language proficiency levels among learners in the same class, learners' low motivation to study through AL, and lack of clear criteria for evaluation. Based on the results, this study attempts to provide several suggestions for high school EFL teachers, including ways to foster collaborative learning.

Keywords: active learning, EFL, teaching experience, challenges and difficulties

Introduction

Active learning (AL)—recently described as "independent, dialogical, and deep learning"—has been widely adopted in Japanese universities. Now, with the upcoming educational reform, high schools are also highly expected to implement AL in all subjects. However, there have been reservations and anxieties being expressed by high school EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers regarding its implementation (Kabeya, Mineshima, Nakamura, & Mochizuki, 2016; Nakai, 2016) as many of them are still not sure of what AL means and what difficulties they might encounter in employing AL in their English classes. This small-scale study, therefore, aims to investigate specific challenges encountered by Japanese university EFL teachers in implementing AL and provide practical suggestions for high school EFL teachers to help address such challenges in their teaching context.

Literature Review

"Active learning" and "Active-learning-based instruction"

One of the well-known definitions of AL can be found in Bonwell and Eison (1991), "a pioneering work that lays out the principles of active learning and one of the most frequently cited works (Matsushita, 2018)." They defined AL as "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" and provided the following five general characteristics:

- Students are involved in more than listening.
- Less emphasis is placed on transmitting information and more on developing students' skills.
- Students are involved in higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation).
- Students are engaged in activities (e.g., reading, discussing, writing).
- Greater emphasis is placed on students' exploration of their own attitudes and values.

Adding to these five conditions, Matsushita (2015) included a sixth characteristic, "It requires externalizing cognitive processes in the activities," in the definition, on the basis of Mizokami (2014). This definition, consisting of six characteristics, has been frequently referred to as a general definition of AL in today's higher education (Yoshida, Matsuda, & Sato, 2017). As the educational paradigm was shifting from teaching-centered to learning-centered (Barr & Tagg, 1995), AL was proposed as a learning which goes beyond listening to a lecture given by a teacher. Based on this paradigm shift, Mizokami (2014, 2018) operationally regarded "listening to a lecture" as "passive learning" and attempted to define AL as "all kinds of learning beyond the mere one-way transmission of knowledge in lecture-style classes (=*passive learning*)." Noting that this does not explain what constitutes "active," he further added that AL "requires engagement in activities (writing, discussion, and presentation) and externalizing cognitive processes in the activities." He stated that activities such as writing, discussion, and presentation are representative examples of learning which goes beyond just listening to a lecture, implying the paradigm shift at the activity level. And by engaging students in such activities he claimed that it becomes possible to have students use various cognitive functions that they need not use when just listening to someone talk, making it possible for them to externalize

cognitive processes. It is thus considered necessary that learners engage in activities which require them to externalize all sorts of cognitive processes.

It is important to note that fostering students' engagement in such activities does not necessarily require the abandonment of lecture or teachers' instruction. As Mizokami (2014) stated, since AL is one form of learning, it is not only applied to courses which are intensively learner-centered (e.g., Project-based learning, Learning through discussion) but also applied to a type of lesson which combines lecture and activities incorporating writing, discussion or presentation. He thus introduced the term "active-learning-based instruction (hereafter AL-based instruction)" to refer to both types of course and lesson (Mizokami, 2014).

AL in the Japanese educational context

In Japan, the term AL began to gain attention in the context of higher education in 2012 when the Central Council for Education (hereafter CCE), the advisory body of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), released a report named *Towards a Qualitative Transformation of University Education for Building a New Future*. The report proposed the idea of AL to foster changes in Japanese higher education where most classes tended to involve teachers' one-way delivery of knowledge. It defined AL as follows: "Different from the one-way lecture-based education given by a teacher, AL is defined as the general term for teaching and learning methods which include learners' active participation in learning" (CCE, 2012). As the effective AL methods and/or formats, "discovery learning, problem-based learning (PBL), experiential learning, investigative learning" as well as "group discussion, debate, group work" were proposed in the report. A comparison with the one-way lecture-based education as well as external factors were particularly underscored (Matsushita, 2018; Jiang & Mizokami, 2015).

Though it is still a relatively new concept, AL has been widely implemented in higher education in Japan (Yamada, 2017). This boom around AL, however, does not only remain in university today. With the upcoming changes to the university entrance examinations which aim to assess students' critical thinking, judgment and expression, AL was also introduced to secondary educational policy in 2014. Regarding high school, the newly revised Course of Study (MEXT, 2018) will require the implementation of AL, now officially described as "independent, dialogical, and deep learning," in all high school subjects, starting in 2022.

AL in Japanese high school English classes

Under the new curriculum, a couple major changes will be put into action for high school English subjects. One is the emphasis of integrative language activity. Pointing out the students' insufficient experience of learning through the integration of different language skills, the new curriculum sets five language areas (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing) and encourages students' active engagement in communication by integrating two or more of these areas. Another is to cultivate students' productive skills (i.e., speak and write). Though such skills have been less prioritized in high school English classes, the new curriculum will place emphasis on enhancing students' productive skills through various activities (e.g., speech, presentation, debate and discussion) in a newly established

class—"Logic and Expression." In just a few years, all high school EFL teachers will be highly expected to foster students' communicative, interactive and productive skills through the adoption of AL using a variety of instructional approaches and activities.

However, the majority of high school teachers rather seem to show passive attitudes towards the implementation of AL while they consider students' active engagements in production and interaction important. The survey conducted on 2, 134 Japanese high school EFL teachers (Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, 2016) (hereafter Benesse, 2016) showed a huge gap between their beliefs and their actual classroom practices, particularly regarding productive and integrated skills. The survey results showed that while a large number of teachers consider "providing opportunities for students to express their own opinions in English" and "providing activities which require the use of integrated skills" extremely important, only less than 10% of them answered that they conduct them in class sufficiently. In fact, only a small number of them engage their students in activities related to productive skills (i.e., speak and write): Less than 30% of them answered that they employ "speech/presentation" or "textbook summary writing in English." As for "debate" and "discussion," only less than 10% of them responded that they implement such activities in their classes. These results suggest that though many teachers feel the necessity to foster students' involvements in interaction and production, they are faced with difficulty achieving them.

Two main factors seem to contribute to this situation. One is their limited learning and teaching experience of AL both as a student and a teacher. Research on teacher belief (Borg, 2003) showed that teachers' prior language learning experience influences their decisions of classroom practices. As Japanese education has traditionally been putting emphasis on grammar translation and drill, most teachers today have very limited experience of studying through activities such as debate or discussion in neither English nor Japanese. Without being able to make references to their own learning experience, therefore, incorporating such activities should be challenging. In addition, most teachers have insufficient experience teaching speaking or writing because they have been under significant pressure to prepare their students to succeed in college entrance examinations which mainly aim at assessing students' receptive skills (Hagerman, 2009). As the survey by Benesse (2016) showed, the teaching methods that high school EFL teachers want to learn the most in teacher workshops today are "speaking skills," followed by "integrated skills" and "writing skills."

Another is how this new term, AL, is being perceived among high school teachers. Past studies indicated that because CCE (2012)'s report lacked detailed explanations of "activeness" and how and why the proposed methods and/or formats would work, many teachers in Japan are confused about this term and tend to perceive it as the mere use of instructional methods and/or formats such as cooperative learning and problem/project-based learning (PBL) (Ito, 2017; Nakai, 2016). Followings are some of the reservations expressed by high school teachers: Whether engaging students in cooperative learning can help foster their language skills, whether summaries and reflections conducted by students can lead to the achievement of learning objectives, whether students can acquire knowledge by talking to each other, and whether the lecture-based teaching methods (e.g., presentation-practice-production method) are

not effective at all (Edagawa, Tani, & Sato, 2016; Nakai, 2016). Though AL does not mean to only have students engage in activities or require the complete abandonment of lecture (Mizokami, 2014), teachers seem to be under the impression that the approaches they have been using were somewhat denied under the new educational reform and that the promotion of AL in their classes might lead to what Matsushita (2018) explained as "many activities and little learning."

Observing such situations surrounding high school teachers today, we can see that to a great extent their concerns and reservations have derived from the limited learning opportunities and insufficient knowledge provided on AL practices. As is often the case with most of us, when we face something that appears completely new, we are likely to be at a loss, not being able to picture what could happen if we put it into action. We tend to find it difficult to imagine what challenges we might encounter on the way and find ourselves feeling afraid of making fatal mistakes. Japanese high school teachers now being expected to adopt a new method and not fully understanding what benefits or challenges would exist in implementing it, it is not too difficult to imagine the fear they face and the reservations they have. Considering such situations, the pedagogical insights gained from actual classroom practices on AL should play a crucial role in supporting their teaching from now on. In particular, exploring and identifying specific challenges associated with the implementation of AL in the Japanese EFL context should help them gain practical knowledge on what need to be taken into consideration when they conduct AL-based instruction in their own teaching context.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify specific challenges and/or difficulties encountered by Japanese EFL teachers in higher education, where AL has been more widely practiced than high schools, and provide practical suggestions for high school EFL teachers.

Research Questions

The main research questions of this study are as follows:
1) What are Japanese university EFL teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of AL?
2) What are the challenges and/or difficulties associated with the implementation of AL in the Japanese EFL context?
3) How can we help Japanese high school EFL teachers address such challenges and/or difficulties in their classes?

Methodology

Participants

The present study was carried out in February, 2018. Participants were all university EFL teachers and they were selected based on the following three criteria: (a) the teachers were native speakers of Japanese; (b) the teachers have taught EFL courses at university in Japan; and (c) applying Mizokami (2014)'s definition, the teachers have had relatively rich experiences of conducting AL-based instruction in their English

classes. The questionnaire surveys developed for this study were sent to 25 Japanese university EFL teachers in western and eastern Japan, all of whom fulfilled the above criteria. A total of 20 teachers (10 males and 10 females) completed and returned the survey, producing 80% response rate. Their experience of teaching EFL courses spread widely, ranging from 2 to 20 years. As Table 1 shows, the majority of them have implemented a variety of AL techniques in their classes, including the techniques to facilitate students' participation in discussion as well as the ones that require critical thinking and problem-solving.

Table 1: Teachers' experiences of implementing techniques used in AL-based instruction (N=20)

	have implemented		often implement		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Think-Pair-Share	10	50	9	45	19	95
Round Robin	11	55	5	25	16	80
Buzz Groups	9	45	9	45	18	90
Talking Chips	1	5	3	15	4	20
3-Step Interview	10	50	2	10	12	60
Critical Debates	11	55	3	15	14	70
Note-Taking Pairs	7	35	1	5	8	40
Learning Cell	4	20	2	10	6	30
Fishbowl	0	0	3	15	3	15
Role Play	10	50	2	10	12	60
Jigsaw	7	35	4	20	11	55
Test-Taking Teams	1	5	2	10	3	15
TAPPS (Think Aloud Pair Problem Solving)	4	20	3	15	7	35
Send a Problem	2	10	2	10	4	20
Case Studies	7	35	3	15	10	50
Structured Problem Solving	1	5	3	15	4	20
Analytic Teams	3	15	2	10	5	25
Group Investigation	11	55	5	25	16	80
Affinity Grouping	9	45	4	20	13	65
Group Grid	1	5	3	15	4	20
Team Matrix	0	0	3	15	3	15
Sequence Chains	4	20	3	15	7	35
Word Webs	11	55	2	10	13	65
Dialogue Journals	2	10	2	10	4	20
Round Table	1	5	2	10	3	15
Dyadic Essays	2	10	2	10	4	20
Peer Editing	10	50	5	25	15	75
Collaborative Writing	10	50	5	25	15	75
Team Anthology	1	5	3	15	4	20
Paper Seminar	4	20	9	45	13	65

Note: This table was made based on Barkley et al. (2005), Mizokami (2014) and Nakai (2016)

Instrument

In order to explore the research questions, a questionnaire survey was developed (See Appendix). The survey comprised the following three sections. The first section consisted of five questions regarding the participants' demographic information and their experiences of implementing techniques used in AL-based instruction. The latter part was made based on the 30-techniques of collaborative learning, one of the AL-based instruction, provided in the previous studies (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005; Mizokami, 2014; Nakai, 2016); the participants were asked whether they "have implemented" or "often implement" these techniques in class. The data obtained from this section are summarized above (Table 1). The second section dealt with two questions (four-point Likert scale and open-ended questions) regarding the participants' attitudes towards the implementation of AL in English classes. The third section asked about the participants' experience of employing AL. In particular, it asked about the challenges and/or difficulties that they encountered in implementing AL to teach English. All questions were presented in Japanese; after the data collection, both questions and answers were translated into English.

Data collection

Data for the current study were collected through a questionnaire survey described above. Both online and paper-based surveys were sent in February 2018 to each participant with the explanation of the purpose of the study. The participants used the preferred survey form to fill out their answers. The data collection took place for approximately one month (early February to early March). Prior to the distribution of the survey, the participants were informed that the information they provide would be confidential and used only for the purpose of this study and that by submitting the survey they provided their consent.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results obtained from the questionnaire, the research questions are discussed below. First, the participants' attitudes towards AL are shown in order to understand their overall impression of adopting AL in teaching English. Second, specific challenges and/or difficulties experienced by the participants in teaching English are reported. Last, several practical suggestions for implementing AL in high school English classes are discussed.

1) What are Japanese university EFL teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of AL?

Table 2 below shows the results of Q6-1, which asked the participants whether they agree with the implementation of AL in English classes. It presents the descriptive statistics as well as the number of participants who chose each answer on the four-point Likert scale, ranging from "disagree" on one end to "agree" on the other, as a percentage. The total percentages of the respondents who disagreed (1 and 2) and agreed (3 and 4) are shown in the columns Disagree and Agree. As indicated in this Table, all participants showed positive attitudes towards giving AL-based instruction in English classes.

Table 2: Teachers' opinions about the use of AL in English classes (%) (N=20)

MEAN	SD	1	2	3	4	Disagree	Agree
3.85	0.37	0	0	15	85	0	100

Note: 1= disagree, 2= somewhat disagree, 3= somewhat agree, 4= agree

Based on the results of Q6-2 (Please tell us your reason for Q6-1), we found that the participants experienced three main benefits in conducting AL-based instruction in English classes. First, they perceive AL as effective in English classes because it can provide ample opportunity for students to use English. Nearly half of the participants emphasized the necessity of using the target language in order to improve one's foreign language proficiency and stated that AL is the most suitable for providing such opportunities. One respondent wrote, "It is using English that leads to the improvement of one's language proficiency. From my experience, AL seems the most suitable for creating such opportunities."

Second, they consider AL important because it can also influence students' learning motivation positively. Five referred to the improvement of learner motivation through AL, for example, "Comparing with those who study in classes which do not incorporate AL, students studying through AL tend to keep their learning motivation high," and "As AL requires students to do more than just sit and listen, we can prevent their passive learning attitudes."

Third, they also find AL necessary because they regard AL as crucial for all kinds of learning, not limited to learning English. 7 out of 20 respondents expressed their positive attitudes towards AL by writing specifically about learning in general, for example, "In any subject, class is just one of many places to know about something. If we truly want to learn something, we need to make efforts initiatively. In that sense, I believe AL is the nature of all learning."

However, a few other perspectives were also shared as three referred to the aspects that require further attention in adopting AL. One highlighted the importance of improving students' English language skills: "We cannot deny the fact that students with low level of English proficiency tend to face great difficulty learning English through AL." In addition, two focused on how to adopt AL in teaching English, commenting, "I learned that AL methods are suitable for language education, but I also think that there are benefits in the traditional, lecture-based classes. I'd like to incorporate various methods appropriately."

2) What are the challenges and/or difficulties associated with the implementation of AL in the Japanese EFL context?

As the previous section showed, we can see that the participants felt various benefits of adopting AL in their English classes. However, it was also indicated that some difficulties exist as well. This section further describes specific difficulties associated with AL-based instruction in the Japanese EFL context based on the results of Q7, which asked the participants to share their teaching experience of AL. It specifically asked about the challenges and/or difficulties they have encountered in implementing

AL in teaching English. Based on content analysis of the responses provided for Q7, the following three major challenges were found.

1. Various language proficiency levels among learners

First and foremost, over half of the participants (11 out of 20) highlighted the issues related to various language proficiency levels among learners in the same class. Because students often need to acquire knowledge in English in English classes (e.g., read an English passage, listen to a dialogue in English), the participants were concerned that low proficient students may not benefit from AL-based instruction because those students tend to have difficulty acquiring knowledge (content) in English before joining such activities as discussion or group work. In fact, most participants answered that they often saw different amount of output and unequal participation among students when they had students do group work based on the materials students had read or listened in English. For example, one teacher wrote, "I always find group work difficult in a reading class where students with different levels are enrolled. Their reading comprehensions vary widely, and it tends to affect their output in group work." As students can acquire knowledge (content) in their mother tongue in other subjects, this concern seems quite unique to English subjects.

2. Low motivation to study through AL

Second, nearly half of the participants (8 out of 20) expressed reservations concerning students' low motivation to study through AL as it could lead to an impediment to their active participation in learning. Regarding this issue, two trends seem to exist. One is students' preference of lecture-based instruction to AL-based instruction. As pointed out in past research (Matsushita, 2015), students who do not like AL tend to show their preference of the traditional learning style or become unwilling to study hard in AL-based instruction. The participants of this study also found such students' learning attitudes challenging. One teacher wrote that in a class where students tended to prefer grammar translation methods, they were unwilling to involve in in-group paragraph reading activities. Another is students' lack of confidence to write, discuss, or present in English. One teacher expressed serious concerns about students with strong anxiety: "Some students lack confidence and they have strong anxiety. Some students can't be motivated to speak or write in English because of that." In addition, three mentioned the difficulty of peer critique in regard to confidence, for example, "Most students are not used to doing peer feedback […] So they are not confident enough to critique others' work. But if such situations continue, there'll be no point in having this activity."

3. Lack of clear evaluation criteria for speaking tasks

Third, assessing and visualizing how students have developed their oral communication skills were also considered quite difficult by a number of respondents (11 out of 20). As Underhill (1987) claimed that teachers' subjective judgment is one of the key issues in conducting speaking tasks/tests, the participants of this study also raised their concerns about evaluating students' oral performance subjectively, explaining, "Evaluation criteria depends largely on each teacher's judgment and they tend to be ambiguous," and "Even though I use the criteria provided by the program, I tend to evaluate students' speaking based on my subjective judgment."

3) How can we help Japanese high school EFL teachers address such challenges and/or difficulties in their classes?

1. Suggestion: Various language proficiency levels among learners

The difficulty related to proficiency levels should also be found in high school EFL settings where, at least in most public high schools, classes are mostly homeroom-based, not language proficiency-based; there will be many students with various English proficiency levels in the same class. In order to overcome this barrier, teachers should consider making use of a flipped learning approach to ensure that enough time for every student to understand and acquire learning contents is provided before activities (e.g., discussion, group work). As Matsushita (2018) claimed, in order for students to engage in higher-order thinking and externalization of cognitive processes, it is necessary that students "acquire knowledge (content) appropriate for such thinking." In other words, even though AL requires time for activities and thus tends to require the reduction of time for students to acquire knowledge, the latter should not be neglected. In order to achieve this condition in a class full of students with different levels, implementing a flipped learning approach can be effective as it enables students to study various materials at their own pace outside of class in various ways (e.g., study through recorded lectures online, read an assigned part in a textbook, work on a worksheet) (Lee & Wallace, 2017). Utilizing this approach would provide enough time for all students to grasp learning contents beforehand and help teachers set aside enough time for in-class activities.

In addition, teachers should also try to make mixed-ability groups by taking group dynamics into consideration. Though gaps in language proficiency levels may result in poor learning outcome as expressed by some participants, it is not always the case. For example, in Zamani (2016), both low and high proficient students in the same group achieved greater writing performance through cooperative learning. Referring to a sociocultural perspective, she argued that while low proficient learners need interaction with their "more capable peers," whose proficiency levels are slightly beyond the learners' themselves, to improve their abilities, high proficient learners also benefit from teaching others to internalize their knowledge. As research on group interaction showed, the establishment of such elements as trust, respect, acceptance and the sense of belonging in a group influences good, positive group dynamics, helping learners benefit from interaction (Pham, 2017). It is thus crucial that teachers understand the positive influence of mixed-ability groups on students' learning and consider ways to create an atmosphere which fosters positive group dynamics.

2. Suggestion: Low motivation to study through AL

Because of learner diversity, there will always be a certain group of students who would perceive AL as unpleasant or more challenging, whether they be in university or high school. However, as students' interaction and participation cannot be avoided in order to cultivate their communicative, productive skills, teachers need to consider ways to improve students' learning motivation for AL at all times. For those who prefer lecture-style classes, there are mainly two things that teachers can take into consideration. One is to provide a clear explanation of the significance of interaction or communication in activities. It is because students' low motivation to study

through AL may be due to the lack of understanding of how important they are. Mizohata's study (2016) on collaborative learning clarifies this point. Incorporating collaborative learning requires students to understand the principle of PIES—"positive interdependence," "individual accountability," "equal participation," and "simultaneous interaction" (Kagan, 1994). When employing Jigsaw methods in one of his English classes, therefore, he first explained the importance of PIES well. As his students kept this principle in mind during the activity, he reported that they were able to cooperate with each other and achieve their learning goals.

Another is to find ways to make positive group dynamics because students' low motivation to study through AL may be influenced by their pair or group members. As in the case of Zamani (2016), having students with mixed-abilities work together may result in good learning outcome. In addition, if there are unmotivated male students, pairing up female students with them could be effective as past research on gender trends in PBL courses (Yamamoto & Ikoma, 2017) found that female students tended to be more motivated to study under AL-based instruction.

As for those who lack confidence to produce or interact in English, it is important to provide them with ample opportunity to write, speak, and discuss in class because such students' reservation is often due to their lack of experience (King, 2002). In other words, with enough practice and training they can gain confidence to do such tasks. In Fujita, Yamagata and Takenaka (2009), the students who had almost no experience of making presentations worked on English presentations multiple times throughout a semester. The questionnaire results showed that their negative attitudes towards this course task changed dramatically and that the majority of them referred to "gaining confidence to speak in public" as one of the abilities they improved in the course. Also, in Nagasaka (2005), the students with limited experience of essay writing were first reluctant to provide peer feedback, but towards the end of the course their negative perceptions changed greatly.

3. Suggestion: Lack of clear evaluation criteria for speaking task

As speaking tasks have not been implemented as much as reading or grammar tasks in high schools in Japan (Benesse, 2016), issues involving subjective judgement in evaluating speaking should also be one of the major concerns for high school EFL teachers in the near future. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to avoid subjective judgement in speaking assessment (Underhill, 1987); however, it is certainly possible to minimize it according to the study conducted by Talandis, Jr. (2017), which proposed rich ideas on evaluating students' speaking in the Japanese educational context. In order to evaluate speaking consistently and effectively, he suggested that teachers create their rating scale rubrics—the ones that clearly reflect what they want their students to achieve through speaking tasks/tests—expressed in language that their students can easily understand. One of his suggestions should be particularly helpful for teachers with insufficient experience of conducting speaking tasks. That is, teachers first consult the existing definition proposed by previous research and, rather than just "straight up using someone else's definitions," try to adapt it by reflecting on how they could change the wording or scale levels to "make it fit better" in their own teaching context (Talandis, Jr., 2017). As he claimed, by preparing and sharing such rubrics beforehand, students will also be able to understand learning objectives more clearly; furthermore, the rubrics will be able to serve as great feedback afterwards.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore specific challenges encountered by Japanese university EFL teachers in implementing AL and, by discussing how such challenges can be overcome, to provide practical suggestions for high school EFL teachers. The results showed that despite the teachers' overall positive impression of adopting AL in teaching English, several critical challenges were also found in their practice. In particular, they raised concerns about students' proficiency levels and learning motivation as well as evaluation criteria for speaking tasks. In other words, the teachers' concerns focused on how to encourage students to participate in activities and how to assess students' oral communication skills. As students' involvement in activities is the first step to achieving externalization of their cognitive processes and fostering their higher-order thinking, this study proposed several ideas to scaffold their participation: implementing a flipped learning approach, making mixed-ability groups by taking group dynamics into consideration, giving clear explanations of the significance of interaction and communication in activities, and designing lessons incorporating various activities involving student production and interaction. In addition, as teachers' own rating scale rubrics not only help them evaluate students' speaking more consistently but also enable students to understand learning objectives and serve as effective feedback, the study also suggested that teachers follow Talandis, Jr.'s idea (2017) and create their own rubrics that fit well in their teaching context.

Though this study attempted to provide insight into the challenges associated with the implementation of AL in the Japanese EFL context, it is not without limitations. First, as the sample size of this study was small, the future study should examine this topic with larger sample size. Second, since the instrument for this study was limited to questionnaire, alternative instruments such as interviews should also be included for the purpose of investigating the challenges more deeply.

Appendix

Questionnaire (English version)

Q1. What is your area of specialization?

Q2. Which institution do you currently work at?
  College/University   High school   Junior high school   Elementary school
  National institute of technology   □Language school   Others 〔   〕

Q3. Please tell us your English teaching experience.
  3 years or less   3-5 years   5-10 years
  10-15 years   15-20 years   20 years or more

Q4. What kinds of English classes have you taught? (e.g., Writing, Reading, TOEIC etc.)

Q5. Below are some of the existing techniques used in AL-based instruction. Please tell us if you "have implemented" or "often implement" the following techniques in your classes. (If there is an item that you have never implemented, please leave it blank.)

	Explanations	have implemented	often implement
Think-Pair-Share	Think individually for a few minutes, and then discuss and compare their responses with a partner before sharing with the entire class		
Round Robin	Generate ideas and speak in order moving from one student to the next		
Buzz Groups	Discuss course-related questions informally in small groups of peers		
Talking Chips	Participate in a group discussion and surrender a token each time they speak		
3-Step Interview	Interview each other and report what they learn to another pair		
Critical Debates	Assume and argue the side of an issue that is in opposition to their personal views		
Note-Taking Pairs	Pool information from their individual notes to create an improved, partner version		
Learning Cell	Quiz each other using questions they have developed individually about a reading assignment or other learning activity		
Fishbowl	Form concentric circles with the smaller, inside group of students discussing and the larger, outside group listening and observing		
Role Play	Assume a different identity and act out a scenario		
Jigsaw	Develop knowledge about a given topic and then teach it to others		
Test-Taking Teams	Prepare for a test in working groups, take the test individually, and then retake the test in groups		
TAPPS (Think Aloud Pair Problem Solving)	Solve problems aloud to try out their reasoning on a listening peer		

Send a Problem	Try to solve a problem as a group, and then pass the problem and solution to a nearby group who does the same; the final group evaluates the solutions		
Case Studies	Review a written study of a real world scenario and develop a solution to the dilemma presented in the case		
Structured Problem Solving	Follow a structured format to solve problems		
Analytic Teams	Assume roles and specific tasks when critically reading an assignment, listening to a lecture, or watching a video.		
Group Investigation	Plan, conduct, and report on in-depth research project		
Affinity Grouping	Generate ideas, identify common themes, and then sort and organize the ideas accordingly		
Group Grid	Are given pieces of information and asked to place them in the blank cells of a grid according to category rubrics		
Team Matrix	Discriminate between similar concepts by noticing and marking on a chart the presence or absence of important, defining features		
Sequence Chains	Analyze and depict graphically a series of events, actions, roles, or decisions		
Word Webs	Generate a list of related ideas and then organize them in a graphic. Identifying relationships by drawing lines or arrows to represent the connections		
Dialogue Journals	Record their thoughts in a journal that they exchange with peers for comments and questions		
Round Table	Take turns responding to a prompt by writing one or two words, phrases, or sentences before passing the paper along to others who do the same		
Dyadic Essays	Write essay questions and model answers for each other, exchange questions, and after responding, compare their answers to the model answer		
Peer Editing	Critically review and provide editorial feedback on a peer's essay, report, argument, research paper, or other writing		
Collaborative Writing	Write a formal paper together		
Team Anthology	Develop a compilation of course-related reading with student reaction to the material		
Paper Seminar	Write and then present an original paper, receive formal feedback from selected peers, and engage in a general discussion of the issues in the paper with the entire group		

Q6-1. Do you agree with the implementation of Active Learning (AL) in English classes? Please select the answer that best represents your opinion.

Agree   Somewhat agree   Somewhat disagree   Disagree

Q6-2. Please tell us your reason for Q6-1.

Q7. Please tell us your experience regarding the implementation of Active Learning (AL) in English classes. In conducting AL-based instruction, have you encountered any difficulties or challenges that are unique to English subjects? If you have any, please share your experience here. What kinds of difficulties or challenges have you experienced in implementing AL in teaching English?

Acknowledgements

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