

Examining the Usage of E-learning in TOEIC English Classes: A Report Aimed at Optimizing and Individualizing Learning

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Abstract

This paper is a practical report on a Comprehensive English Course for fourth-year students of Yonago National College of Technology. Utilizing an e-learning program that enables students to learn according to their proficiency levels, efforts were made to improve students' TOEIC test scores. Students' attitudes toward the test significantly improved and average TOEIC scores increased by more than 50 points compared to the previous year. Results from a course questionnaire showed students requested changes to the class format and evaluation methods, thus, improvements will be made for the following academic year.

1. Introduction

Yonago National College of Technology (YNCT) has long been encouraging students to take the TOEIC test as part of their English coursework, with efforts focused on improving scores. In the YNCT's curriculum (Table 1), Comprehensive English I, II, and III are taught to 1st to 3rd-year students, primarily using the prescribed textbooks *English Communication I and II*. While these courses mainly focus on communication skills, some TOEIC practice exercises are also incorporated. In addition, Comprehensive English Course for fourth-year students focuses on TOEIC exercises.

Grade	Classes and credits
1	Comprehensive English I (3 credits), English Expression I (2 credits)
2	Comprehensive English II (3 credits), English Expression II (2 credits)
3	Comprehensive English III (3 credits), English Expression III (2 credits)
4	Comprehensive English Course (2 credits), Practical English (2 credits)
5	<u>Practical Industrial English, English and</u> <u>American Literature, English</u> <u>Conversation, English Practice</u> (2 credits)

Table 1: English Curriculum at YNCT (Underlined Subjects are Electives)

In addition to the above classes, TOEIC courses are offered after school to all grade levels during the first and second semesters. These courses are subsidized by the school's sponsorship association, allowing students

to purchase textbooks at a low cost, and participation in the courses is free of charge. Furthermore, YNCT conducts the TOEIC IP test twice a year (in May and January), for interested students, providing them the opportunity to take the test at a lower cost than the regular public test.

However, the average TOEIC score has remained relatively unchanged for many years, and previous efforts by English teachers have not yielded significant improvements in results. In addition, the Global Engineer Training Project, launched in 2024, emphasizes improving the TOEIC scores of YNCT faculty and students. Following the implementation of this project, further measures by the English department to enhance the TOEIC scores of students were required.

This paper reports on the practice of using e-learning in the Comprehensive English Course class conducted for all fourth-year students. Based on the results from questionnaires and TOEIC scores, potential approaches for improving future classes are also explored.

2. Current State and Issues of E-Learning in Traditional English Comprehensive Exercises

In the Comprehensive English Course for fourth-year students at YNCT, the focus has primarily been on practicing TOEIC problems. The traditional class structure consisted of two parts: in the first half, the instructor conducted problem-solving exercises and

provided explanations, while in the second half, students worked individually on an e-learning program. However, several challenges with this approach were identified by instructors responsible for the course:

- 1) Students have different English proficiency levels, and problem sets often do not match individual English abilities, leading to a lack of motivation among some students.
- 2) Some students prioritize finishing assignments quickly without thoroughly engaging with the learning content.
- 3) The TOEIC test for all fourth-year students (held in September), sometimes have absences without notice.

Regarding 1), many students at YNCT have an aversion to English, as their overall proficiency is not high. There have been complaints that the content of the conventional e-learning program was too difficult to understand. Alternatively, although a minority, there are students with familiarity with the TOEIC test. Some students voluntarily have taken measures to improve their scores, while others enjoy English and engage enthusiastically in their learning. Regarding 2), when working on e-learning in the second half of the class, some students (with variations across different departments and course streams) were observed attempting to quickly finish the lessons without engaging in the content. Many neglected to carefully read instructions or problems, merely skimming through the audio, or randomly answering questions. This behavior suggested that students were not effectively learning and not engaged in the e-learning. Regarding 3), the TOEIC test for all fourth-year students is held every year during the supplementary class period in September. However, there have been recurring issues with students missing the test without prior notification or permission. In addition, while the English faculty primarily supervised the test, some students were seen falling asleep in the middle of the test, indicating a lack of seriousness. To address these issues, significant changes to the syllabus, including the methods of class implementation, teaching materials, and evaluation systems, to improve the current situation was introduced.

3. New E-Learning Implementation Method at YNCT

Starting from the 2024 academic year, the e-learning program used in classes has been updated to Edulinx's Comprehensive English Course 8. This program includes a feature called Adaptive Focus, which adjusts lesson content based on each student's proficiency level. Unlike the previous program, where students worked on the same problems, the new program provides tailored exercises suited to individual English abilities. This change was expected to encourage students to engage more actively in their learning. In addition, drawing on examples from Osaka Seikei Junior College, where the program is already in use, a booklet was developed and distributed to students. This booklet allowed students to record their learning progress, including new words and expressions covered during lessons, encouraging them to record and reflect on what they had learned. This approach aimed to address the previous tendency for students to complete and forget their e-learning activities, promoting a more engaged and reflective attitude toward learning. Previously, the TOEIC test was taken by all students, with the results awarding bonus points to high achievers. Under the new syllabus, the TOEIC results and those from an end-of-year mock test are reflected in the subject evaluation.

In each class, students were instructed to complete one Listening (L) and one Reading (R) lesson per session, with a total of 50 lessons planned for the year (Table 2). In addition, at the end of each lesson, a confirmation test was conducted with a rate of 70% or higher being required to pass. The instructor monitored student's progress during class and collected booklets at the end of each session. Comments and advice from the instructors were added for individualized feedback.

Term	No. of Lessons	Lesson Period
1	12 (L6 • R6)	4/8~6/13
2	12 (L6 • R6)	6/14~8/7
3	14 (L7 • R7)	9/18~12/3
4	12 (L6 • R6)	12/4~2/5

Table 2: Number of Lessons and Timeframe of Classes

Grading Criteria are as follows:

- Assignments: 50 points (1 point per lesson passed)
- Percentage of correct answers on test at the beginning of each lesson: 10 points
(Below 50% - 4 points; 50~60% - 6 points; 61~80% - 8 points; 81% or above - 10 points)
- Submissions (booklets): 10 points; 1 point deduction for each unfilled page
- TOEIC (mandatory for all 4th-year students, held in September): 15 points
(Below 350 - 5 points, 350~395 - 8 points, 400~495 - 10 points, 500~595 - 13 points, 600 or above - 15 points)
- TOEIC mock test (held in February): 15 points
(Below 30% - 5 points; 30%-49% - 8 points, 50%-59% - 10 points; 60% or above - 15 points)

4. Student Questionnaire Results

A survey was conducted during class time in July and December using Microsoft Forms.

Question 1: Have you ever taken the TOEIC test?

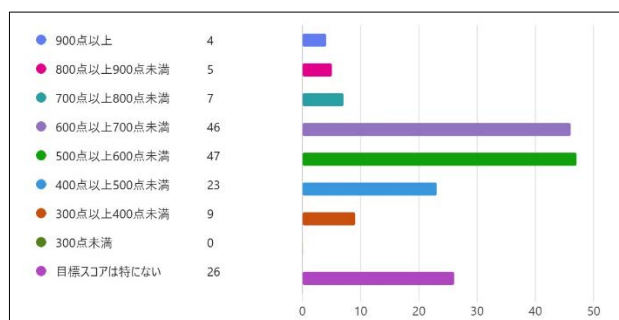
Figure 1: Students' experience taking the TOEIC test



The number of students who had taken the TOEIC test was higher than teachers had expected. The number of students who had taken the exam was as follows: M-Course: 8 students; E-Course 7 students; J-Course: 4 students; C-Course: 9 students, and A-Course: 2 students. The fact that C-Course students (Chemistry and Biotechnology) had the most experience is likely influenced by the larger number of students aiming to transfer to university programs.

Question 2: Choose the one that most closely matches your target TOEIC score.

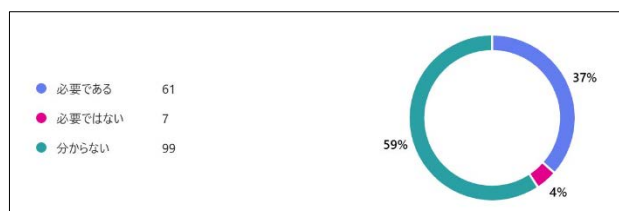
Figure 2 Student's target TOEIC scores



The largest number of students were aiming for scores between 500-700. This is likely due to those scores being required for university transfer entrance examinations and specialized courses at YNCT.

Question 3: Is it necessary to submit TOEIC scores to obtain jobs or transfers to a university?

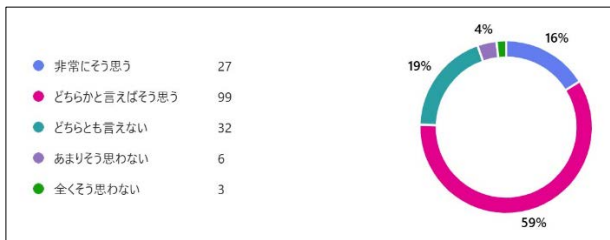
Figure 3: Necessity of submitting TOEIC scores



The number of students who answered "Yes, it is necessary" regarding submitting TOEIC scores was consistent with the number of students who typically advance to further studies in YNCT (approximately 60–70 students each year). However, the fact that 99 students answered "I don't know" suggests a lack of awareness about career paths and an insufficient gathering of information regarding their future options.

Question 4: After taking the first placement test, do you feel that the lessons (listening and reading) designed for you are suitable for your English proficiency?

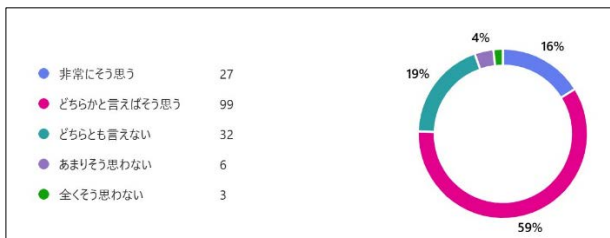
Figure 4: Relevance of the assignments provided after the placement test



75% of the students felt that the lessons provided were appropriate for their level, suggesting that overall, the assigned tasks were suited to each student's individual English proficiency.

Question 5 Do you feel that the lessons assigned to you are appropriate for your English ability? (In this e-learning program, the level of the lessons assigned changes based on the results of the review test at the end of each lesson.)

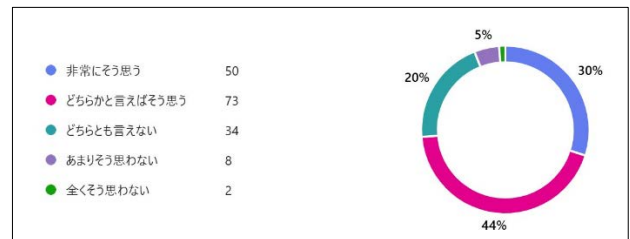
Figure 5: Appropriateness of the assignments provided each time



74% of students felt that lessons were appropriate for their level, indicating that, based on test results from each lesson, the tasks assigned were generally well-suited to each student's individual English proficiency.

Question 6: Do you find the progression of e-learning in class easy to understand?

Figure 6: Clarity of the E-Learning Process



75% of students felt positive about the e-learning process, indicating that they found it effective and appropriate for their level.

Question 7: Do you concentrate on the lessons during class?

Figure 7: Level of Focus in Class (July)

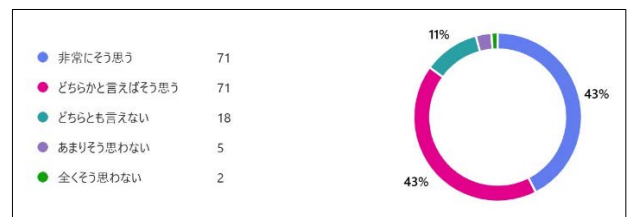
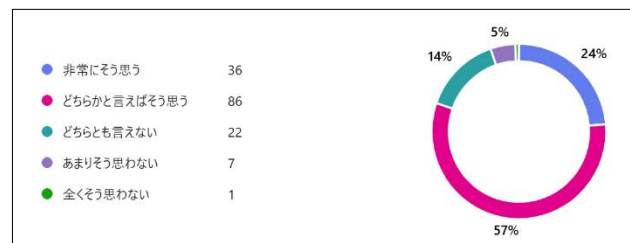


Figure 8: Level of Focus in Class (December)



In the July questionnaire, 43% of students said they strongly focused, and 43% said they focused on class content. It can be seen that about 86% of the students concentrated on the class. However, in December, 24% of students said they strongly focused, a decrease of 19%. This suggests that, over time, students' focus and engagement with the lessons gradually decreased.

Question 8: Do you actively engage in the lessons?

Figure 9: Motivation to take classes (July)

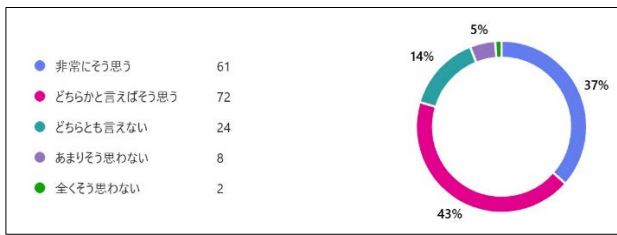
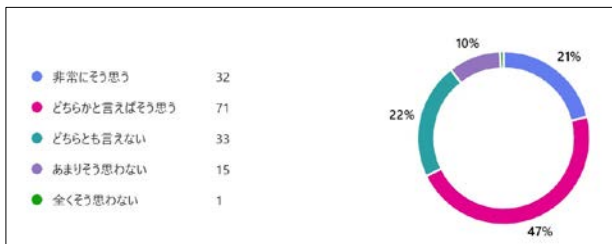


Figure 10: Motivation to take classes (December)



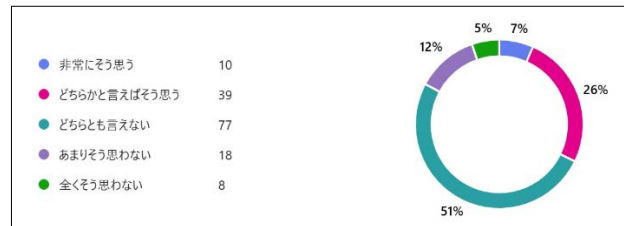
In the July questionnaire, 37% of students answered Strongly Agree and 43% said Somewhat Agree with being motivated in class, indicating that approximately 80% of students were actively engaged in the class. However, in December, 21% of students answered Strongly Agree, a decrease of 16%. The percentage of students answering Somewhat Agree also decreased to 47%, and the total number of students giving positive responses dropped to 68%. Similar to the trend in responses to question 7, student motivation seemed to gradually decline over time.

Question 9: Do you feel that the content of the e-learning lessons helps improve your TOEIC score?

Figure 11: Do lessons help improve TOEIC scores (July)



Figure 12: Do lessons help improve TOEIC scores (December)



In the July questionnaire, 23% of students said they Strongly Agreed that the lessons helped improve their TOEIC results, while 59% said the lessons were somewhat helpful. Approximately 82% of students rated e-learning lessons as being helpful overall. In December, after students took the TOEIC test, 26% of students answered the lessons strongly helped them, a slight increase compared to July. However, the percentage of students who suggested the lessons somewhat helped decreased by 8% to 51%. Furthermore, the percentage of students with negative responses also increased from the responses in July. Although there was a slight increase in the number of students who felt lessons helped improve their scores, 26% of students gave negative evaluations suggesting that a significant portion did not feel the lessons did not contribute to their score improvements.

Question 10: For those who answered "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" to Question 9, what aspects of the lessons do you feel contributed to your score improvement?

July Responses:

- The ability to practice listening skills (14 students)
- The ability to work at an appropriate pace and difficulty level (5 students)
- The similarity of the practice questions to the TOEIC test format (4 students)
- The opportunity to increase the amount of practice (2 students)

December Responses:

- Improved ability to understand spoken English (listening skills) (10 students)
- Learning conversations, vocabulary, and grammar commonly found on the TOEIC test (9 students)

- Further opportunities to engage with English (TOEIC-related content) (6 students)
- The ability to receive questions tailored to one's skill level (5 students)
- The ability to immediately review and correct mistakes (2 students)
- The ability to prepare for the test format through actual test simulations
- The opportunity to deepen understanding after practicing listening and reading comprehension through follow-up test questions

These responses highlight that students found various aspects of the e-learning lessons helpful in improving their TOEIC scores, such as practicing listening, increasing exposure to TOEIC-specific content, and adapting the lessons to individual levels. Additionally, the ability to immediately check and correct mistakes also contributed to the student's confidence and their learning progress. In both the July and December questionnaires, the most frequently mentioned factor that contributed to score improvement was related to listening. The ability to practice a large volume of listening exercises, which is difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom setting, was particularly beneficial for students. Additionally, many students appreciated the ability to work at their own pace and the tailored level of difficulty for questions they received. Other notable points included the increased volume of TOEIC-specific practice, and the opportunity to learn content, vocabulary, and grammar likely to appear on the actual TOEIC test. These aspects clearly helped students feel the e-learning lessons contributed positively to their TOEIC score improvement.

Question 11: Are you satisfied with the e-learning program used in the class?

Figure 13: Satisfaction with e-learning (July)

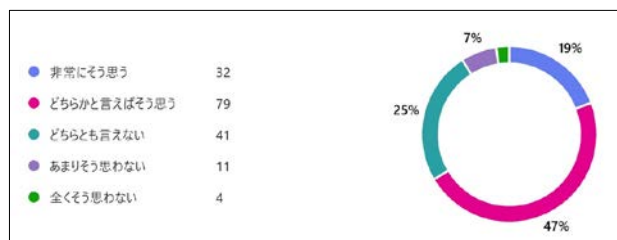


Figure 14: Satisfaction with e-learning (December)



In July, 66% of students expressed satisfaction with the e-learning program, with 19% answering Strongly Agree and 47% answering Somewhat Agree. However, in December, 10% of students answered Strongly Agree and 41% said Somewhat Agree. Overall, the percentage of students satisfied with e-learning (51%) was 15% less than in July. The proportion of students who answered Neither also increased from 25% to 35%. The decline in satisfaction over time may be attributed to several factors, as identified in the students' comments. Many considered the difficulty of the e-learning program to be inconsistent with some noting that they were unsure of their progress because the levels varied with each lesson. Others mentioned that the listening exercises became much more difficult over time, to the point of being incomprehensible. A few students also expressed frustration that the problems were set at a much higher level than their target TOEIC score. The e-learning program used by the students was designed to adjust lessons according to their proficiency level, which was intended to enhance satisfaction. However, feedback and the review of collected booklets revealed that higher-achieving and more motivated students were increasingly finding lessons too difficult. It appears that the gap between students' English proficiency and the difficulty of the lessons may have increased over time, contributing to the overall decline in satisfaction.

5. Methods and Implementations for Course and Lesson Improvements

Based on questionnaire results and classroom observations, several changes for the next academic year are suggested focusing on three main areas. 1) Teaching methods. In 2024, students were solely engaged in e-learning during class time. At the beginning of each class, feedback was given based on responses and unanswered questions from students' booklets in the previous classes. However, only having students complete e-learning resulted in some finishing their work early and having too much free time at the end of class. In addition, comments from the questionnaire and booklets showed there was a desire for a more traditional class format. Therefore, in the next academic year, students will additionally have a textbook for TOEIC preparation, with the first half of class involving teacher-led instruction using the textbook, followed by e-learning. If students do not complete the e-learning, it will be assigned as homework. Furthermore, instead of relying solely on TOEIC and mock test scores for grading, the next year will include final exams in both the 1st and 2nd semesters, with questions based on the content covered in the first part of the class. 2) Improvements to the booklet. Although students were allowed to engage in e-learning they did not demonstrate a strong positive attitude toward this learning method, often passively listening or answering questions without much consideration. In an attempt to improve and make the process more active, students were instructed to record what they learned in booklets. However, many students left excessive blank space in their booklets, even after completing the activities, suggesting there was too much space for comments and reflections. For next year, the booklet will have narrower spaces, with less content to write, ensuring students only write essential information. This will also reduce the burden on instructors when preparing booklets at the start of the academic year. 3) Evaluation Method Adjustments. With the aim of encouraging students to concentrate on lessons, scores from tests at the beginning of the lessons were included in the grading. However, some students expressed dissatisfaction and felt this grading method was unfair. Additionally, recording those scores added to

the teacher's workload. Therefore, for the next year, weekly test scores from class will no longer be used in the grading. The grading criteria and point distribution will also be reviewed and revised to ensure fairness. These changes aim to better align the course structure with student needs and improve both the learning experience and the assessment methods.

6. Conclusion

This year, a new approach was adopted for utilizing e-learning, and the evaluation method was significantly revised. During the TOEIC exam in September, which all fourth-year students took, there were no instances of unexcused absences, and very few students were seen sleeping during the test. Most students worked diligently until the end, a positive sign. As a result, the average score increased by more than 50 points compared to the previous year, a significant improvement in results. However, looking at the distribution of results, it was seen that many students were concentrated in the lower score ranges. This indicates that more targeted interventions are needed for students with lower English proficiency. Based on results from questionnaires and daily classroom observations, improvements will be made for the next year. For instance, TOEIC preparation tips and concepts will be explained during the first part of classes, changes to the evaluation methods, and improvements to the journaling process for student booklets will be incorporated to further enhance the learning experience. Overall, the goal is to continue exploring ways to provide the best possible lessons for students, taking into account both positive outcomes and considering areas for improvement.

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