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A survey of online teaching by native-speaker English instructors at Japanese universities

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This study investigates how native-speaker English teachers working at Japanese universities use the Internet in their classes. In 2008, 50 instructors completed a survey about their teaching-related use of the Internet; another group of 50 was polled in 2012. The respondents were asked about their teaching situations, whether they used Internet-based activities in class, and what they saw as the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching. The findings are considered in the light of recent research in the field.

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to discover how native-speaker EFL teachers working at Japanese universities use the Internet in their classes, and what role they believe computer technology should play in the language classroom. A considerable body of work that is relevant to these themes can be found in the literature, including, for example, investigations of the effects of CALL classes on learner performance, surveys of teachers' views about online instruction methods, and analyses of major historical developments in CALL.

In the first category, Bingham and Larson (2006) aimed to discover whether using CALL as the principal constituent of an English course at a Japanese university improved students' language skills. One hundred-forty Japanese university students spent a total of at least 36 hours working with proprietary English learning software, both in a controlled classroom setting, and in outside lessons. Before and after using the software, the subjects were given placement tests. These tests, together with data

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gathered on the students' study habits, were used to determine whether the learners had made progress, which was measured in terms of the levels indicated by the software. The students were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire about their listening and speaking habits, and their opinions about the CALL programme. The authors confirmed that exposure to the CALL software did indeed significantly raise the English ability levels of the students.

Several surveys of teachers' views of the role of technology in the language classroom have been conducted in various countries and in several types of institution. Shin and Son (2007) investigated the attitudes and practices of 101 Korean high school English teachers with regard to Internet-based instruction. Their questionnaire, which was the model for the one used in the present study, included personal information, a multiple-choice section designed to record participants' views on the use of Internet-based activities, and an open response section to elicit more general comments. The authors found that almost half of the teachers they polled used the Internet in class. Web-surfing, crosswords, and email tasks were the three most common online activities. Among other findings was that less than half of the participants had attended training courses on using the Internet for teaching purposes. The teachers also cited several barriers and problems associated with Internet-assisted teaching, including technical problems, slow connection speeds, students visiting irrelevant websites, their own lack of competence in using Internet-based materials, and the time needed for lesson preparation. However, most participants agreed that online classes were generally of benefit to students, and most viewed the Internet as a rich source of information and authentic materials. The respondents made several recommendations aimed at improving Internet-assisted teaching in Korea.

Alshumaimeri (2008) used a questionnaire to survey 183 secondary school EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the teachers' previous CALL training and their attitudes towards the use of computers in the English language classroom. The results showed that more female than male students had generally positive attitudes towards CALL technology, and that teachers who had attended CALL training courses reported more positive attitudes, but that the fact of having attended a general computer training course was not in itself enough to ensure a likelihood that teachers would use the school's computer rooms for their English classes.

Park and Son (2009) used questionnaires and detailed interviews to elicit the opinions of 12 EFL teachers working in Korean secondary schools about the use of CALL in their classes, and how computer-based instruction could be improved. They found that the teachers had generally positive attitudes towards CALL, because it offered their students a range of language input types, and encouraged them to learn in real-world, authentic contexts. However, the teachers identified several obstacles that prevented them from properly implementing computer-assisted classes. These were both internal barriers, such as instructors' limited knowledge and computer skills, and negative perceptions about computer-based teaching; and external ones, such as time constraints, lack of technical facilities, restrictions imposed by the rigid school curriculum and the need to teach to the textbook, and lack of administrative support.

Son, Robb and Charismiadji (2011) conducted a questionnaire survey of 73 EFL teachers working at high schools and universities in Indonesia, with the aim of determining the teachers' levels of computer literacy, their familiarity with computers in general, in both personal and a professional contexts, and their ability to perform various CALL-related teaching tasks. It was found that although the instructors' attitudes towards the

introduction of technology were very positive, and although their self-rated basic computing skills were quite high, in most cases their experience was in fact restricted to a few commonly used applications, such as word-processing software, and most lacked competence in the use of CALL activities. In response to the teachers' desire for increased computer literacy, the authors recommended greater provision of CALL facilities in schools, and the introduction of teacher training programmes so that instructors could learn various ways of using technology and explore a range of computer-based classroom activities.

Dashtestani (2012) used a combination of a survey, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations to investigate 212 Iranian teachers' attitudes towards CALL, and to discover whether there were any barriers to its implementation. The study found that the Iranian teachers had generally positive attitudes towards CALL, seeing it as potentially beneficial for their students, but that they perceived several barriers to the incorporation of technology in their classes. These included internal factors, such as teachers' lack of knowledge and resources, lack of experience, and difficulty in accessing CALL materials, and external ones, such as lack of time, insufficient teacher training, a shortage of proper facilities, and inflexible curricula.

As the present study is concerned with EFL teachers' use of various types of online activities, works that explore historical developments in the field of CALL are also relevant. Bax (2003) introduced the term "normalisation" to describe the process by which new technologies can gradually become an accepted feature of the language classroom. He divided normalisation into three stages: Restricted CALL, Open CALL and Integrated CALL. The final stage, Integrated CALL, is reached when computers "are used every day by language students and teachers as an integral part of every lesson, like a pen or a book. Teachers and students will use them without fear or inhibition, and equally without an exaggerated respect for what they can do" (Bax, 2003, pp. 23–24) Decisions to use technology in class will be informed purely by an understanding of the learners' educational needs, and the technology will make a positive contribution to the language learning process (Bax, 2003, pp. 23–24). However, Bax (2008) also pointed out that in most educational environments, this kind of relationship between education and technology has not yet been achieved, and many teachers continue to view technology as something marginal and distinct from their normal classroom experience. To encourage teachers and administrators to use technology more effectively, he advocates a needs assessment that focuses on the educational process in the specific setting, followed by a tailored learning plan that explains how the technology will incorporate four pedagogical elements in the lesson: "access, participation, interaction and expert intervention (including scaffolding, modelling and challenge)" (2011, p. 11). Bax has said that, in the context of normalisation, he prefers to adopt a broad definition of the term "technology," taking it to mean "any thing which effectively facilitates some aspect of human life." By this definition, in the educational field, a traditional textbook can be a type of technology, as can an abstract concept, such as literacy (Elliott, 2012). Although individual instructors may differ greatly in their knowledge and experience of technology, they often make decisions about whether to use it in their classes. Collectively, they also have considerable influence over how their students perceive the role of technology in the educational environment, and, in the longer term, over which technologies will become normalised.

2. Methodology

In May 2008, 50 native-speaker English teachers working at universities in Japan completed a survey about how they used the Internet in their classes. In September 2012, another group of 50 instructors was polled in the same way. The aim of the second survey was to replicate the first, and to provide additional data for a longitudinal study. In each case, a questionnaire was uploaded to a survey website, and a covering message containing a link to the site was sent to the teachers. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. In Section A, the teachers were asked to give basic biographical details, such as their age and gender, the extent of their teaching experience, and the kind of institution where they worked. Section B focused on whether the teachers used the Internet in class, and if they did, what types of activities were involved. To allow the respondents to explain how their decisions about online activities applied to their individual teaching situations, optional comment boxes were provided. In Section C, the teachers used rating scales to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about online teaching. In Section D, they were asked to describe in their own words what they saw as the advantages and disadvantages of using online activities in **EFL** classes.

In designing the questionnaire, care was taken not to give the impression that the author was strongly prejudiced either in favour or against online teaching. It was thought that participants would be more like to cooperate and to give honest responses if they knew that the survey was not going to be used to criticise their classroom practices. The cover email therefore stated that the researcher was simply interested in finding out about other teachers' experiences in this area, while in the rating-scale section of the questionnaire, along with statements which could have been made by supporters of online teaching, others were included that could be taken to represent the voices of opponents. Many comment boxes were added to items throughout the questionnaire, so that participants had the opportunity to freely express their own opinions, and did not feel constrained by having to choose between limited or over-simplified responses that did not accurately reflect their views.

Native-speaker teachers of English were chosen as the subjects because the author was mainly interested in the use of the Internet in the teaching of oral and written English. Although there are of course many exceptions, the majority of native-speaker English instructors employed at Japanese universities are responsible for various types of oral and written English courses, in which their knowledge can be put to best use, whereas, generally speaking, Japanese teachers of English tend to specialize in other areas, such as literature, grammar, or intensive and extensive reading. It was hoped that if the participants' use of online activities and their reasons for using the Internet in class (or for not using it) were based on a similar teaching experience, the survey results would be relevant to a potential readership of other native-speaker teachers of English, in Japan and elsewhere. The matter of whether native-speaker **EFL** teachers working in Japanese universities use the Internet in their classes more often than their Japanese counterparts, or for different types of activities, was originally one of the research questions for the first survey in this study, but it was later omitted, on the grounds that by including Japanese teachers, the research would lose its single focus, and would be trying to cover too much ground.

The teachers' email addresses were found in the archives of Japan-based academic **EFL** journals, online publicity for **EFL** conferences, and on university websites. Emails were sent out to the potential respondents in batches every few days until 50 completed

questionnaires were received. A sample size of 50 was chosen as a practical limit, because response rates were quite low, and several weeks were needed to gather even 50 replies. For the 2008 survey, there was a deadline for an MA report paper to be delivered, so unfortunately it was not possible to spend more time assembling a larger sample. The response rate in the 2008 survey was 21% (238 emails were sent out before 50 completed survey replies could be collected, not counting messages returned undelivered by web servers); in the 2012 survey, the rate was 24% (208 emails were needed to achieve the same sample size).

Three limitations of this study should be mentioned. Firstly, because the potential respondents' email addresses were obtained from academic journal articles and conference publicity, and also because the actual survey participants were self-selecting from among those who received the email about the questionnaire, it is likely that the sample was biased towards teachers who are more interested in new developments in EFL. The results cannot therefore be considered to accurately represent the views and practices of all native-speaker EFL instructors working in Japanese universities. Also, regrettably, it was not possible to question the same teachers in both surveys, as in 2012, it was found that many of the respondents who had been interviewed four years earlier were no longer working in Japan, or could no longer be contacted. Thirdly, although the survey recorded the numbers of teachers who had used each type of online activity, it did not establish how often or how recently these activities were used. A question about frequency was originally included in the first survey, but as several respondents pointed out, it failed to distinguish between teachers using online activities in different lessons and in multiple instances of the same lesson, so the data was of little value.

A point of terminology should be mentioned here. Because this study focuses on the use of activities that involve connecting to the Internet, as opposed to the use of software on "standalone" terminals or isolated networks, the phrases "online teaching," "online activities" and "Internet-based activities" have been preferred to the broader and more established term "computer-assisted language learning" (CALL).

3. Results

In order to present the data in the most accessible form, the teachers' responses are shown as bar graphs. Salient features of the data are discussed, including notable differences between the 2008 results and those from 2012.

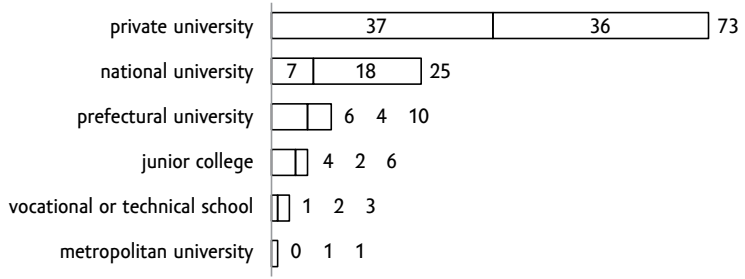
A. The respondents

The 100 teachers who took part in the surveys ranged from 29 to 66 years old (2008: from 30 to 66, 2012: from 29 to 64), and had an average (mean) age of 42.6 (2008: 41.4, 2012: 43.8). All were native speakers of English. 84 were male and 16 female (2008: 44 male, 6 female; 2012: 40 male, 10 female), reflecting the unequal gender balance among university faculty in Japan. Including previous employment, both in Japan and elsewhere, they had worked as English teachers for a period of between 4 and 41 years (2008: 5 to 39 years, 2012: 4 to 41 years), with an average experience of 17.4 years (2008: 16.3 years, 2012: 18.5 years). They had spent between 3 and 38 years in Japan (2008: from 3 to 38 years, 2012: from 4 to 33 years), with an average stay of 15 years (2008: 13.8 years, 2012: 16.2 years). Nearly three quarters (73) were working at private universities. The only significant difference between the demographics of the groups of teachers for the two survey years was that the number of

respondents working at national universities increased significantly from 7 in 2008 to 18 in 2012, because different sources were used for finding potential respondents' email addresses. A few of the teachers had second or third jobs, either at other universities (accounting for the total of over 100 replies in the table) or at other kinds of institutions, such as privately owned English schools, local authorities, companies or hospitals. The types of university at which the teachers worked are shown in Table 1.

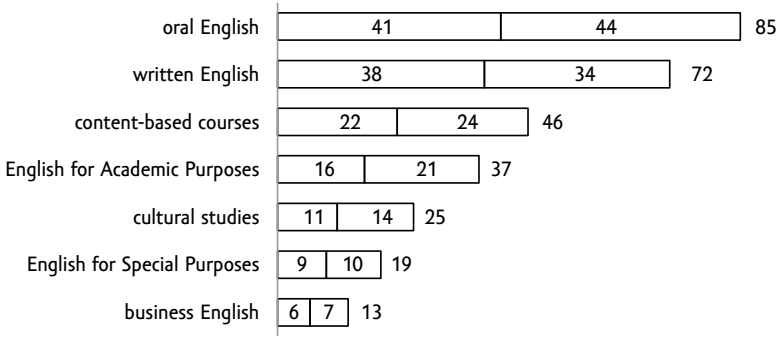
Note: In the tables in this study, the first figure in each row shows the result for the 2008 survey (the number of teachers out of 50); the second is the result for 2012 (again, out of 50); the third figure is the total for both surveys (out of 100).

Table 1: Types of university at which the teachers worked



The subjects taught by the respondents are shown in Table 2. Oral and written English were the most common, though there is clearly a considerable overlap between some of the categories.

Table 2: Subjects taught by the respondents



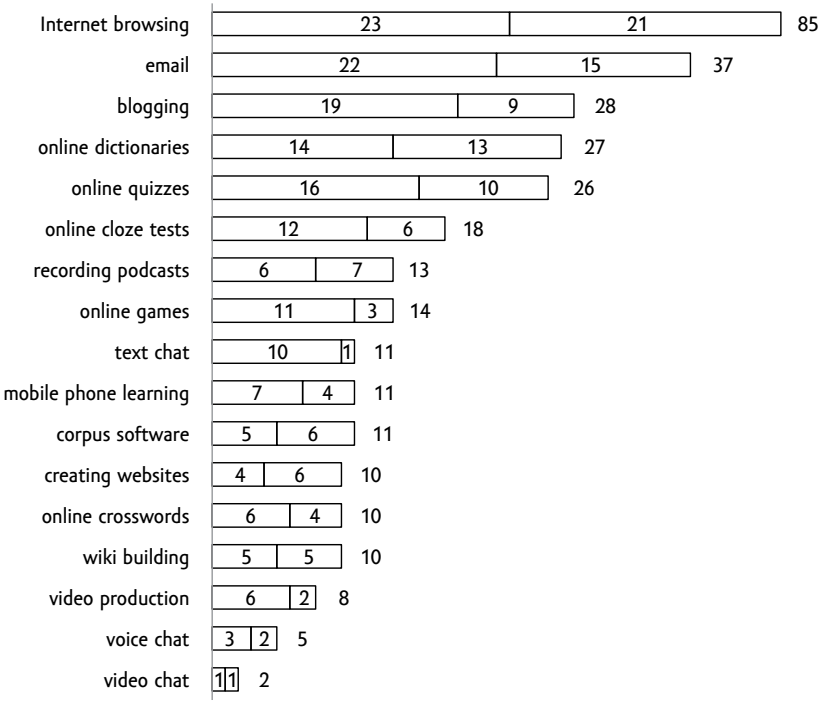
Ninety-four of the teachers (2008: 49, 2012: 45) said that their university had computer rooms suitable for online teaching, and 88 (2008: 45, 2012: 43) reported that the rooms had enough computers for all their students. Four participants admitted that they didn't know what was in the computer rooms. Asked how they felt about the difficulty of booking the computer room for their classes, 47 of the 93 respondents who answered this question said this was "easy" or "very easy" (2008: 27, 2012: 20), while 20 of them (2008: 6, 2012: 14) said

it was "difficult" or "very difficult." These responses are of course subjective, and may not only reflect availability of rooms and booking procedures, but could also be influenced by factors such as the teachers' Japanese language ability, their previous experience in room-booking, and how often they interact on a daily basis with administrative staff.

B. Using online activities in class

Seventy of the 100 instructors polled said that they used online teaching in class, though the number of teachers using online activities fell from 38 out of 50 in 2008 to 32 out of 50 in 2012. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the online activity mentioned by the greatest number of teachers in both survey years was using an Internet browser (see Table 3). In descending order of popularity, use of browsers was followed by email, blogging, online dictionaries, quizzes, and cloze tests. Reflecting the fall in the number of teachers using online activities, the total number of mentions for all types of activities declined by a third, from 150 in 2008 to 99 in 2012. There was also a drop in the popularity of several types of task: blogging (down from 19 teachers to 9), online cloze tests (down from 12 to 6), online games (down from 11 to 3) and, most markedly, text chat (from 10 to 1). Online quizzes and cloze tests were among the most highly ranked items, though the number of teachers mentioning them fell from the first to the second survey. In both years, audio chat and video chat were the least popular activities.

Table 3: Numbers of teachers who used each type of online activity in class

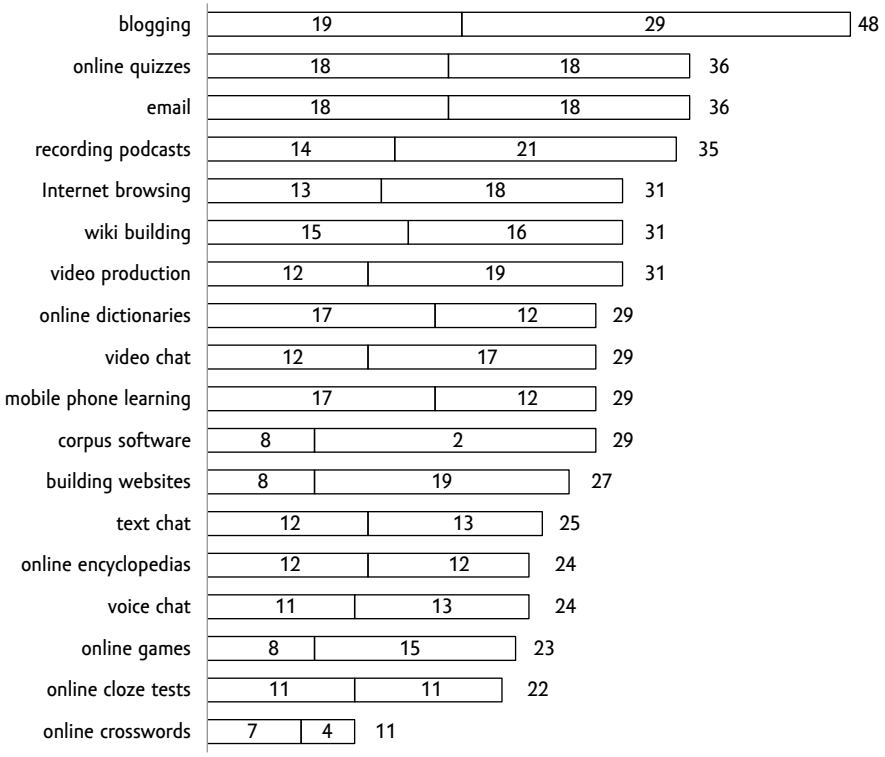


In the free comment box for this question, several teachers mentioned other online activities and websites that they had used in their classes:

- Editing and writing content for Simple English Wikipedia (simple.wikipedia.org)
- Watching native speakers on video, recording students' voices (englishcentral.com)
- Online writing and evaluation (criterion.ets.org)
- Creating English comics online (pixton.com), uploading comics to reddit.com
- Extensive reading practice (beeoasis.com)
- Building vocabulary for EFL exams (wordengine.jp)
- Timed skimming, scanning, and rapid word-recognition activities
- Listening to sound files on Moodle, completing related quizzes and vocabulary tasks
- Completing various teacher-created activities (quia.com)
- Listening to podcasts and language-learning-related YouTube clips

Next, the teachers were asked what types of online activities they might be interested in using in their classes in the future. Here, blogging was easily the most popular choice, notably because the number of teachers who mentioned it rose from 19 in 2008 to 29 in 2012 (see Table 2). Online quizzes and podcasts also featured strongly. Video production

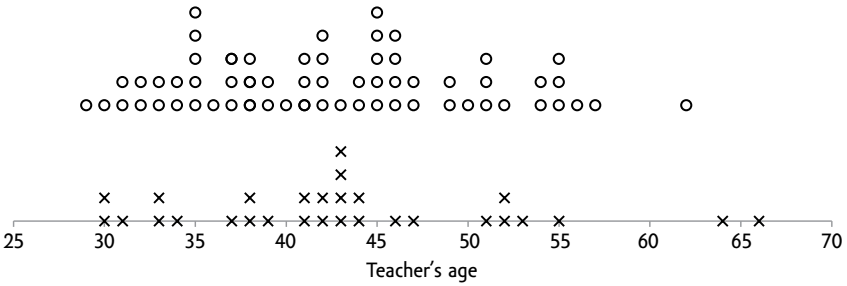
Table 4: Numbers of teachers interested in using each online activity in future



and online games were among other "aspired-to" activities that registered increases, with particularly large gains for concordance software and website building. It is interesting to compare the relative positions of online activities that teachers actually used (Table 3) and those that they aspired to use (Table 4), and to see how the popularity of each activity changed from 2008 to 2012.

To test the supposition that younger teachers are more likely than older ones to use online activities in their classes, the instructors' ages at the time of each survey were mapped against whether they used online activities in class. In fact, however, the data did not show any marked correlation of this kind (see Table 5).

Table 5: Age distribution of teachers

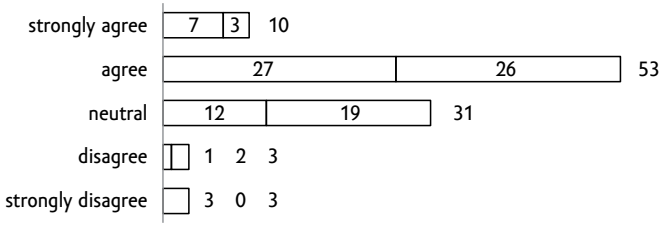


This graph shows combined data from both survey years.
o = Teacher using online activities x = Teacher not using online activities

C. Rating scale questions

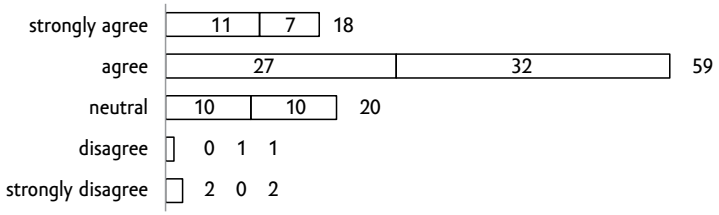
In this section, the teachers were asked to use a five-point Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement with several statements relating to the use of the Internet in EFL classes. The results are shown in Tables 6 to 12 below. As before, the first figure in each row shows the number of teachers who mentioned this activity in the 2008 survey (out of 50); the second is the result for 2012 (out of 50); the third figure outside the bar is the total for both surveys (out of 100).

Table 6: "Most students are motivated by the use of the Internet in EFL classes."



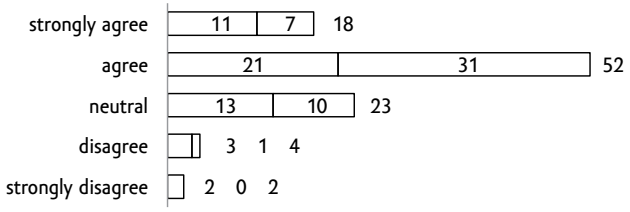
More than half of the teachers agreed with this statement, which expressed the main rationale for using online activities.

Table 7: "Students can improve their English skills by using the Internet in EFL classes."



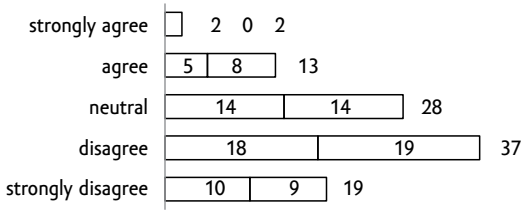
Hardly any teachers disagreed with this proposition.

Table 8: "Online teaching can be an alternative for students who have difficulty learning in conventional classes."



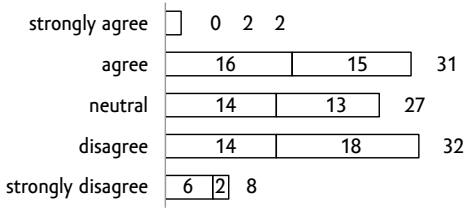
Here again, a sizeable majority of the teachers was in favour.

Table 9: "Online teaching wastes time that could be spent on conventional classes."



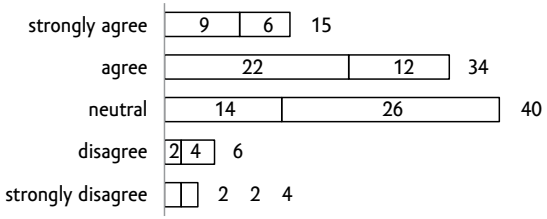
This statement, which expressed an unfavourable attitude towards online teaching, was rejected (or strongly rejected) by about half of the teachers, though almost a third remained neutral.

Table 10: "Online classes are difficult to organise."



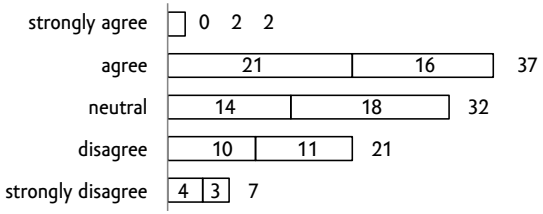
This proposition produced an almost equal balance between those in favour and those against.

Table 11: "The university authorities are in favour of me using online teaching."



Almost half of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The number who "agreed" fell significantly over the four-year period, and there was a considerable rise in the number remaining neutral.

Table 12: "In online classes, students often waste time by visiting non-EFL-related websites."



This statement expressed a frequently cited objection to using the Internet in class. More teachers agreed than disagreed, but about a third remained neutral.

D. Advantages and disadvantages of online activities

In this final section of the survey, the teachers were asked to describe in their own words what they saw as the advantages and disadvantages of using online activities in EFL classes. In the 2008 survey, 43 out of the 50 teachers submitted comments; in 2012, 40 out of 50 did so, though in both surveys, these remarks ranged from the briefest of notes to detailed explanations of the respondent's specific teaching situation, use of online activities, and more general remarks about the role of the Internet in the EFL classroom. Lack of space prohibits mention of every respondent's comments, but as many relevant points as possible have been included. To avoid giving undue weight to ideas expressed only by single individuals, the number of respondents who voiced each opinion is shown. As might be expected, in many cases, several teachers expressed similar views, but phrased their remarks differently. In the following summaries, the teachers' opinions are grouped together, so some approximation in meaning and loss of subtle detail are inevitable. Arguments in favour of online teaching are listed first, followed by the perceived disadvantages.

Advantages of online teaching. Though many implied this indirectly, ten respondents explicitly stated their view that using the Internet in class is intrinsically motivating for students. These teachers argued, for example, that for many students, online learning is a new approach, and that the Internet is still seen as a relatively modern, dynamic and versatile medium. In the words of one respondent, the Internet "brings the outside world into the

classroom, and makes learning meaningful and relevant." The Internet could be a source of more up-to-date, real-life and relevant multimedia materials than could be found in most textbooks, and teachers could take advantage of its growth as a medium for fast, cheap international communication. Seven teachers explicitly mentioned the notion of authenticity: the idea the Internet could give students the opportunity to engage in real-world, realistic and meaningful conversations with native speakers of English in other countries. A few others referred to the benefits of exposing students to "real English." One remarked that because learners tend to value activities that have an interactive element, they could be more engaged if they knew that their contributions to a blog, wiki or podcast would be seen, heard, and responded to by people in the "real world" outside their classroom. Two teachers noted that, compared to traditional paper-based courses, online teaching is more environmentally friendly.

Five respondents stated that they preferred to have their students use the Internet as part of their homework, rather than in the classroom, because during class time, traditional face-to-face methods were more appropriate. As one teacher put it, "Communication classes do not need Internet access. Students need to talk. To do this, they complete their research at home and bring their findings back to class for discussion." Another participant expressed a similar view: "There is a great case to be made for things like blogging, or listening to or creating podcasts outside of class, perhaps even cutting down total class hours to accommodate these things, but nothing beats the dynamism of direct, person-to-person communication."

It was pointed out that online activities such as blogging, wiki-building and podcasting could "open new channels of communication," encouraging learners to communicate in English with each other and with the teacher. The advantages and disadvantages of this type of collaborative learning are well known, and some were mentioned in this survey. On the one hand, respondents noted that if students cooperate in groups to contribute to a wiki site or a web page, they tend to be more reflective, and can judge and learn from each other's work. On the other hand, as is of course the case with group work in many educational fields, it could be difficult for the teacher to monitor the contributions of individual students, although computer programs could be written to present the accumulated data in formats that were accessible and useful to both teachers and learners.

Six participants explicitly mentioned the concept of learner autonomy in connection with online teaching, while one or two others made closely related comments, such as "the Internet provides attractive ways for students to study English by themselves." One instructor noted that his students felt empowered, as they could select tasks that interested them, that were suited to their individual learning styles, and that allowed them to work at their own pace and level. Another respondent raised the issue of learner identity, explaining in some detail that some online activities, such as chat forums, provide a degree of anonymity, which can help nervous or shy learners feel more comfortable. With some forms of electronic social media, users do not have to respond immediately to incoming messages. Less able students can find these asynchronous exchanges more comfortable, as they have more time to think before replying. Students could also explore various ways of presenting themselves online in English, and of course, their online personae could be quite different from their real-life identities. Additionally, some social media have developed characteristic phrases ("moves"), neologisms and abbreviations, and teachers with experience of this could devise online activities to help their students practise using them.

Several respondents said they had used virtual learning environments (VLEs) such as

Moodle (mentioned by six teachers), while two teachers had written software for these kinds of platforms. It was observed that VLEs could provide learners with multimodal language input (text, audio, video), and could make it easier to organise course materials according to language points, ability levels, or common themes. As one instructor commented, "EFL programs can and do provide much more useful input through virtual learning environments such as Moodle now than in the past. This is not trivial in an environment like Japan, where English is not used widely enough in society to impact on college students' proficiency." Administrative tasks, such as integrating activities within a curriculum, modifying syllabus content, keeping records, building student portfolios, evaluating courses and grading could be simplified by the tracking capabilities of the VLE. It was also claimed that VLEs made it easier for students and teachers to contact each other and to share content. However, more than one participant noted that arranging and organising the VLE in the first place could be inconvenient and time-consuming: "There is a lot of frustration in setting up seemingly simple things like class blogs. Problems are worse when the institutional firewall is obsessively strong. Moodle is very fiddly. I am usually just a click away from getting it right, but one incorrect setting can result in a number of students not being able to complete a weekly task."

On a more practical note, one respondent noted that if learners are aware that their login times and contributions are being recorded, they are more likely to hand in homework promptly: "With Moodle, students have to complete assignments on time, or the quiz closes. Teachers can overcome some student avoidance strategies used with traditional paper-based homework, for example, 'I missed the class, so I didn't get the hand out.' or 'Here's the homework from two weeks ago. Sorry.'" On the other hand, another participant observed, "For independent study avoidance, on Moodle, for example, the excuse 'I had log-in problems' is much better than the old 'my dog ate my homework.'"

Disadvantages of online teaching. Six teachers were critical of online activities that were badly designed, or were simply "tacked on" to a lesson, without a proper pedagogic goal. One respondent, for example, referred to tasks that were "poorly conceived and used by lazy, often incompetent teachers."another to "teachers who misunderstand the purpose of the technology," while others stressed that ESL classes should focus on language and content, rather than on the machines or the software. While acknowledging that technology could sometimes play a useful part in language learning, others cautioned against the lure of the "wow factor," and the view that the Internet could be some kind of panacea for language teaching problems. In the words of one instructor, "Some people seem to get excited about a new tool and want to rush off and use it for everything. Some people are daft." Five respondents included some statement to the effect that the Internet should be seen merely as an educational tool like any other. One teacher played down the idea that using technology in the classroom was in any way a radical approach: "The use of technology in general, and of the Internet in particular, is vastly misunderstood by administration, by teachers who don't use the Internet, and by many teachers who do. By that, I mean it is not revolutionary at all. Rather, it is an extension of bringing realia into the classroom."

Four instructors implied that Internet-based activities were not suitable for their courses, or at least saw no particular advantage in moving their classes online. All four expressed the idea that, rather than being teaching aids, computers could act as barriers, encouraging artificial interaction, and isolating learners from normal, face-to-face communication. "Machines physically increase the gap between teacher and students. They become

a common enemy," one respondent commented. Another instructor, while conceding that computers could certainly play a role in language teaching, was wary of exposing his students to inadequate or unrealistic interactions on monitor screens: "I am totally against classic CALL in computer labs. I use face-to-face activities for 70% of activities and online for 30% of activities. Online-only approaches do not prepare students for the contexts of one-to-one and group communication, especially non-verbal aspects." A third was a little more optimistic: "As students face a screen, face-to-face inter-student interaction becomes more of a challenge, but can be set up," though a fourth instructor added a general caveat: "At its worst, I feel that CALL has the potential to undercut the creation of an interaction-friendly environment, hurt the classroom dynamic by deemphasizing collaboration, and lead to the deskilling of teachers." As one reviewer noted, these comments about computers interfering with normal speaking practice refer to teaching in the classroom environment; they are less relevant if online tasks are assigned for homework.

Other criticisms included the argument that online teaching is not suitable for all types of learner. As one participant noted, "It can be very motivating for students who are already motivated and at a level capable of taking advantage of the options available. For students who are unmotivated or whose level is too low, it is often just another task they are asked to do by the teacher." Another pointed out that, for some students, the transition from traditional patterns of classroom interaction to the more autonomous forms of learning associated with computer-based classes could be difficult. As in other fields, language learners who have been accustomed to close supervision since high school usually need guidance before they can begin to take greater responsibility for their own studies. If asked to read an English-language blog, for example, students could feel "overwhelmed by the sheer volume of English on the screen," and quickly become discouraged. Also, despite the recent pervasiveness of Internet-capable mobile devices, not all students may have easy access to a laptop or desktop computer outside class, making it more difficult for them to complete online homework.

Another point was more teacher-related: in order to accommodate the more autonomous forms of learning associated with CALL, instructors accustomed to traditional methods often have to change their teaching style. In the words of one respondent, "In Internet-assisted classes, it is difficult to keep student attention, and lock-step teaching becomes almost impossible. There are simple ways around this, but a traditional teaching approach will not work well." This adjustment extended outside the classroom: teachers had to weigh the advantages of autonomous learning against a considerable initial investment in lesson planning and lesson conversion. One instructor enjoyed this commitment: "You can spend a lot of time preparing your lesson, but it's usually fun to do," while another could see the potential benefits, but lacked sufficient incentive: "The ideal would be tailor-made exercises and activities and materials, but I don't have the time to make these, and the payoff (both for my students, and for me personally and professionally) is not worth it." A third remarked that some commercially produced Internet-based software was not conducive to learning because the activities were often unimaginative, and, interestingly, that they lacked the physical movement associated with more traditional methods: "Many online elements of textbook courses do little more than reproduce textbook-style exercises online. Such activities are less kinesthetic than those done with pencil and paper, and so are less effective."

Another obstacle to online teaching reported by several respondents was that Japanese university students vary greatly in the level of their basic computer skills. Although some

could be described as true "digital natives," many others seem unaware of simple Internet search techniques, or have little experience in using common software, such as Microsoft Word. One teacher commented, "Actual time spent on task seems to be quite limited because in Japan it seems that you have to spend more time getting the students up to speed as how to access the information. [...] Most students in Japan are whizzes at making their cell phones work, but when it comes to actually using a computer in the classroom, they seem to be quite ignorant about how to actually use them." As another instructor put it, "Where student interest and course goals converge, and where teachers are not introducing too much new technology but only adapting what most student [sic] already know [...], Internet use in the classroom should prove to be so much more successful."

The points raised by the greatest numbers of respondents were connected with perceived disadvantages of online teaching. A total of 11 teachers (7 of whom were in the 2008 survey) mentioned having technical problems with computers. These included waiting for machines to start up, load software, or reboot after crashes, unreliable Internet connections, screens freezing, losing files, and difficulties connecting external equipment, such as digital projectors. Technology's intolerance of human error could also be very frustrating: one incorrect setting or a forgotten password could delay or ruin a whole lesson.

Finally, 12 participants (7 in the 2008 survey; 5 in 2012) raised the point that while online, learners can be distracted by non-**EFL**-related websites and by other programmes. As one respondent put it, "The students lose their focus, check their email and go shopping." In the rating-scale section of the survey, 39% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that learners do get distracted in this way, and noted that poorly designed online tasks exacerbate the situation by discouraging learners or leaving them bored. Another teacher commented, "Simply accessing the Internet or interesting sites does not mean that beneficial learning is going on. It takes just as much planning to make Internet-assisted teaching work as regular teaching."

4. Discussion

Seventy of the 100 **EFL** teachers polled said they used online activities in their classes. It is worth pointing out that this figure includes a wide range of frequency of use: teachers who rarely use Internet-based tasks are grouped together with those who use them in every class. Interestingly, the number of teachers using online activities fell from 38 (out of 50) in 2008 to 32 in 2012. As the Internet has begun to play a more important role in people's lives, and online connectivity has increased, one might expect the number of English teachers using it in their lessons to have risen over this four-year period, but in these surveys, the reverse was the case. This decline could be a random effect, accentuated by the small sample size, or might be partly due to the fact that in the later poll, a higher number of teachers were working at national universities (7 in 2008; 18 in 2012). If this was indeed a factor, it could reflect the curriculum at these universities, or the technical resources available.

The activities used by the greatest number of teachers were (in descending order of popularity): using Internet browsers, email, blogging, online dictionaries, online quizzes, cloze tests, and podcasts. Browsers were at the top of the list, no doubt because they are often used in "gateway tasks," in which students use search engines to look for information that will be processed later in other tasks, such as writing or giving presentations. Notably, online quizzes and cloze tests were among the most highly ranked items in the earlier survey. Several activities in which the computer plays a relatively simple grading role

declined in teacher popularity from 2008 to 2012: online quizzes (down from 16 teachers to 10), online cloze tests (down from 12 to 6), and online games (down from 11 to 3). This suggests that, with increases in Internet speed and availability, and perhaps teacher awareness, there has been a move away from using computers as crude marking machines, and towards a more sophisticated use of the medium, involving greater interpersonal student communication and free expression. Indeed, Bax (2003, p. 21) sees online quizzes and cloze tests as characteristic of his first two stages of normalisation (Restricted **CALL** and Open **CALL**), but omits them from his final stage, Integrated **CALL**, in which computers act as a platform for interactions between the students themselves.

However, such a move towards greater student-student interaction would not explain the similar fall in the number of teachers asking their students to write blogs (down from 19 teachers to 9), as blogging would seem to be an activity ideally suited to a world of greater Internet connectivity offers a channel for student expression, as well as many opportunities for subsequent peer review and comment. The fall in the popularity of blogging was particularly surprising in the light of the fact that when the teachers were asked which kinds of online tasks they might like to incorporate in their classes in the future, of all the activities mentioned, blogging was the most popular choice of all.

In the rating scale section of the questionnaire (Section C), a majority of the respondents expressed generally positive attitudes about various rationales for online teaching (Tables 6, 7 and 8). These favourable attitudes reflect the findings of several previous studies carried out in various countries and types of institution (Shin & Son, 2007; Park & Son, 2009; Son, Robb, & Charismiadji, 2011; Dashtestani, 2012). A statement expressing hostility towards Internet-assisted activities (Table 9) was rejected by over half of the teachers, but a small minority were in favour. The idea that "online classes are difficult to organise" (Table 10) produced an almost even split in opinion, with equal numbers agreeing and disagreeing. The teachers' response to the statement, "The university authorities are in favour of me using online teaching" (Table 11), seems at first glance to reflect a belief that authorities' attitudes towards online teaching had cooled significantly over the four-year period, but this finding is clearly very subjective. Asked to comment on the common objection that "In online classes, students often waste time by visiting non-**EFL**-related websites" (Table 12), more teachers agreed than disagreed, but almost a third remained neutral.

Although the issue was not a focus of this study, the teachers' comments in Section D revealed wide variations in the quality and accessibility of **CALL** facilities at Japanese universities. As we have seen, some teachers did not feel that online activities were suited to the goals of their courses, but of those who did use some form of online instruction most did not report any difficulty in getting online for their lessons. However, more than a few were employed at institutions that appeared to suffer from some combination of a lack of up-to-date equipment, limited Internet connectivity, and administrative problems that restricted access to computer rooms. Such external barriers to the implementation of online teaching have been cited in a large number of previous surveys of **EFL** teachers' opinions (for example, Shin & Son, 2007; Park & Son, 2009; Dashtestani, 2012). About 10 respondents made comments that showed they faced real difficulties if they wanted to use the Internet in their classes. One stated, for example, that there was "no access in 90% of classrooms"; another that "access to **CALL** labs is not always possible"; a third that the "only classroom that has Internet access must be shared by the entire school." Teachers also had to deal with administrative problems, such as inconvenient or inflexible timetables, or having to book **CALL** rooms many months in advance.

A small number of respondents raised the issue of the design and layout of computer classrooms. Three teachers said that they had access to modern blended learning rooms. In one case, this was within a purpose-built e-learning centre. Blended learning rooms have flexible furniture layouts that allow the teacher to move easily from working with a whole class offline to small-group or individual online activities. This flexible teaching situation has been defined as "synchronous blended learning" (MacKenzie, Promnitz-Hayashi, Jenks, Geluso, Delgado, Castellano, & Hinkelman, 2011, p. 43). However, many universities appear still to have only the older type of **CALL** rooms, in which the students' desks are arranged in fixed rows facing the teacher. One respondent felt that the computer room at her university was not a good place for her students to learn, because "the fixed rows of computers make for an isolated or teacher-focused working environment." This remark could be seen as lending support to a call for the more widespread installation of blended learning rooms (Hanson-Smith, 2007, pp. 42–46).

Three respondents pointed out that, in their experience, Japanese university students differ greatly in their level of basic computer skills, noting that this presented problems for teachers who use online activities. Murray and Blyth (2011) found that more than half of the 103 Japanese university students they surveyed said they either never or almost never used word processing software. In a similar but more wide-ranging poll of 105 first-year Japanese college students, Lockley (2011, p. 100) found that although teachers often mention students' lack of familiarity with communications technology, almost all the college students interviewed had attended **ICT** classes in junior and senior high school, and it was confidence in using computers that they lacked, rather than knowledge. Of course, though young Japanese may not have experience or confidence in using computers, their expertise lies far more in mobile communications devices, and the idea that this proficiency can be harnessed for educational purposes is the main rationale behind mobile phone learning.

Several teachers argued, sometimes in quite strong terms, that **EFL** classes should focus on language and content, rather than on technology. In a recent video interview, Bax has argued that teachers who use technology in their classes merely as some kind of gimmick run the risk of devaluing the educational potential of that technology in the minds of the learners, so that it appears as just a frivolous extra (Elliott, 2012). Bax stresses that he sees nothing wrong with a teacher deciding not to use technology in class, either because it is not suited to the aims of the lesson, or even simply because it is too much trouble (Elliott, 2012). Nor should teachers be worried that technology will somehow take over their jobs. Face-to-face human interaction still has an important role to play in the classroom, and that there can be a role for both teacher and technology:

> Technology is fantastic nowadays at bringing information into the classroom, bringing pictures, bringing things into the classroom. It's also fantastic at allowing communication of various sorts, within the classroom and outside the classroom. It's a wonderful tool for social interaction, and social media. But then the teacher can bring things, such as, for example, the ability to guide learning, the ability to assess learning, the ability to model good approaches to learning, (...) and most importantly, the ability to critique and correct and challenge. (Elliott, 2012)

5. Conclusion

In this study, a majority of native-speaker EFL teachers surveyed said that they used online activities in their classes, and most of the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards online instruction methods. In terms of the types of activities used, the teachers' responses indicated a move away from tasks in which the computers act as simple grading machines, and towards the use of the Internet as a versatile platform for communication. There were a few unexpected findings, such as the fall in the number of teachers using online activities between the two surveys, and the year-to-year fall in the popularity of blogging, but on the whole, if the results of the first survey are compared to those of the second, the results were remarkably similar.

The teachers' comments show that, in some Japanese universities, a lack of properly equipped, modern and flexible computer rooms, together with a failure to properly include foreign faculty in relevant CALL training and explanation of room booking procedures is hindering the potential benefits of online instruction. However, to adopt Bax's (2003) terminology, whether or not a state of Integrated CALL can be deemed to exist at a particular university does not depend solely on whether that institution has up-to-date computer facilities or an online curriculum. Clearly, it is also essential that teachers should be in a position to take informed decisions about when to use computer technology in their classes, and when not to use it. If teachers do decide to use such technology, as with any other educational tool, they should consider carefully which types of activities and teaching methods can most effectively harness its strengths in pursuit of specific pedagogical goals.

Areas that could have been investigated more thoroughly in this study include the teachers' experience and skill as computer users, how often they used online activities in their classes, how many of them had developed their own online materials, whether they felt under obligation from university authorities or from peer pressure to use online teaching methods, and how much interest they thought their department heads and other university authorities took in the online content of their classes. As indicated above, a promising direction for future research might be to pursue one of this paper's original research questions by conducting a similar survey of *non*-native speaker (Japanese) teachers of English working in the same environment, as the results would provide several interesting comparisons with the findings of the present study. Another possibility would be to extend the longitudinal research by carrying out similar surveys in future years, to assess the continuing impact of changing technology and new pedagogical theories on teachers' classroom practices and on their attitudes towards online teaching.

It is hoped that the pooling of statistical and qualitative information in this study will be of interest to educators, course administrators and materials developers. The successful use of online teaching methods, and the consequent benefits to students depend partly on external factors, such as availability of modern computer rooms, but also to a great extent on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers about the role of technology in the language classroom. By carefully evaluating quantitative and qualitative data from surveys of teacher opinion such as this one, decision makers can tailor the provision of technology and of more focussed CALL teacher training, catering to the specific requirements of instructors who work in particular areas of EFL.

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