Linc English: A Web-Based, Multimedia English Language Curriculum Implementation and Effectiveness Report

Yuka Tachibana

1) Center for the Advancement of Higher Education, Tohoku University

Linc English Implementation Process and Result

Tohoku University is one of the top research institutions in the world. English competency is essential for our students to succeed in a very competitive, globalized environment. We started our new English curriculum for freshmen and sophomores in 2009, and the following five tactics were employed: (1) Class time was doubled for freshman year; (2) The reading and communication skills coursework was strengthened; (3) TOEFL-ITP testing was implemented; (4) Corresponding to a broad range of English learning scenarios, English education was connected to students’ various major fields of study.

The time required to learn English is about 2000 hours. Japanese students typically have 300~400 hours of English education by the time they graduate from high school. Students need an additional 1500 hours or more of English learning hours during their four years of college. A successful English curriculum must allow individual learners access to practice a large volume of content. Overall, repetitive drill practice, rapid reading, and grammar/vocabulary building are necessary to improve competency skills. An emphasis on reading aloud, shadowing, and dictation practice is also helpful for the improvement of listening and speaking skills.
With online study as part of a curriculum, more individualized learning is possible by allowing students to choose their own level and work at their own pace. More effective learning is achieved through the use of audio, video and other multimedia lesson content and forum communication. The one-dimensional paper approach is no longer adequate. Taking advantage of a well developed, web-based program helps students to develop the following competences: (1) overall English proficiency, (2) the use of English as a means of expression, and (3) the use of English for information gathering and problem solving. To reiterate, the use of an online curriculum is now an essential part of English language teaching and learning.

Therefore, I believe the use of Linc English has helped to achieve these aims. With a username and password, students are able to access the curriculum anytime, anywhere from most Internet enabled computers and mobile devices. Linc English works on most platforms including Windows, Mac, Linux, Google’s Android OS for mobile phones and tablet computers, and Apple’s iOS for iPhones and iPads. Linc English also runs on most browsers including Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, or Chrome. Prior to the use of a web-based curriculum there was inadequate study time as students had to access CALL materials during computer lab hours. Linc English rapidly expanded student-learning hours by providing unlimited access to a wide range of engaging multimedia content. This increase in study time has enabled students to significantly improve their English skills.

**Linc English Structure and Lesson Outline**

The practice lessons are organized into six main categories: Pre-Bronze, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum A, and Platinum B. Each category is divided into three levels of twelve lessons, for a total of thirty-six lessons. There are four components: Listening, Reading, Grammar/Vocabulary, and Lesson Quizzes. The individual lessons in each category contain a total of nine different practice activities: (1) Image Listening, (2) Question and Response, (3) Short Conversations, (4) Short Talks, (5) Speed Paragraph Reading, (6) Reading Comprehension, (7) Sentence Insertion Practice, (8) Error Recognition, and (9) Incomplete Sentences. These activities are

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 1.** This screen image shows: (1) Home page, (2) Lesson Outline page.
designed to improve listening, reading, and grammar/vocabulary skills. Quizzes that are associated with specific lessons are separated into two parts, Reading/Grammar and Listening (Figure 1).

To complete a lesson, students need to spend at least two hours; however, this does not need to be done all at once and can be done anytime. I find that my students spend an average of three to four hours per week preparing for each class meeting. The order for completing each activity is up to individual students to decide. If the time available for working on a lesson’s practices is limited, the lesson practice can be started and then saved. In order to do this, the student scrolls to the bottom of the practice and clicks on the Save Progress button. The lesson can then be completed at a later time. Once an activity has been completed, the student selects the Submit Answer button following the last question and clicks on it to see attempt results.

Administration-Grades

Students are able to view their grades for an entire lesson. A screen showing overall results for Practices and Quizzes is displayed (Figure 2). The student clicks on either the word Practice or Quizzes to see specific scores for each. In order to master each lesson, a student may reattempt each practice until a score of 80% or better is reached.

An instructor wishing to follow a class of students’ progress on a given lesson will find their grades in the specified group for that class of students. The overall points and percentages for both Practices and Quizzes will be shown for all students, as well as the combined Total points and % (percentages). To view the grades for a specific class of students, the teacher clicks on the Separate Groups drop down list and selects the desired group (Figure 2). In addition, an instructor can look at specific scores for Practices or Quizzes by clicking on either of those titles (Figure 2). Clicking on Practices or Quizzes provides a listing of each student’s best attempt for the activities in the selected area (Figure 3). The results are shown in a raw number score as well as a percentage of the possible points for each activity. A total points score and percentage are also shown. To focus on an individual student, the instructor double clicks on a user name, and the individual's result for that lesson will show on the screen (Figure 4). One useful feature found on Grades is the capability to download the information into several different file formats that include Excel or a generic text file.

Figure 2. This screen image shows the initial grades screen and selecting a group’s grades to view.
Curriculum Levels, Content Quantity, and Functional Features

Linc English is composed of levels for students in junior high school to adult (primary to advanced level). Therefore, the goal of this curriculum is to improve overall English skill by offering an abundance of content. In addition, use of the materials improves overall listening, reading and grammar/vocabulary skills in order to effectively increase test scores for TOEFL/TOEIC (Figure 5).

The key functional features are the following (Figure 6): (1) Learning Management System (LMS) which is a web-based software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, and reporting of training programs, and classroom and online events; (2) Announcements Board that allows teachers to make announcements to all currently enrolled students; (3) Voice Recording System is an LMS integrated applet that can be used by someone to record, playback and save their voice on a web page within Linc English; (4) The Class Forum is an integral part of Linc English that provides a great way for students to respond to an instructor’s idea topics and to learn the viewpoints of other students. Instructor and students can interact and communicate in the class in writing and by voice recording. The Class Forum can be used for the following question types and activities; any of these can be typed or recorded as an audio file:

- Dictation practice—during class, type what is
spoken

• Composition practice—during class, students write summaries of Short Talks and Reading Comprehension
• Comment or provide an explanation for: (1) a direct question, i.e. What is your future career plan?; (2) reading comprehension, i.e. state the main idea for each paragraph; (3) respond to a visual presentation, i.e. a short YouTube movie, CNN video or New York Times’ video, etc.
• Student initiated comments and replies

How to Implement Linc English in the Classroom?

The class meets one time per week for 90 minutes. Students are required to study each lesson by attempting each of the lesson practices for at least two hours prior to each class. During class I cover Linc English lesson content for about 70 minutes and spend another 20 minutes discussing additional original source materials. These materials include engaging video content that covers a variety of topics with English scripts available. The use of these materials allows my students to experience authentic English language media sources. I collect and present these materials using a website I developed located at this address (www.yukamedia.
com). My students seem to enjoy the combination of drill-based and repetitive practices along with authentic online video materials.

The following is a list of the events that make up my typical Linc English class:

1. Reading and Grammar/Vocabulary Quiz (9 minutes)
2. Listening Quiz (8 minutes)
3. Check quiz results and review mistakes (1 minute)
4. Listening Quiz Review through dictation practice of Question and Response and Short Conversation questions. Students listen and type what they hear and post their results to the Class Forum.

5. Short Conversation: Listening and repeating practice (10 minutes)
6. Speaking Practice: Students listen to and read aloud the 15 speaking practice questions. (3 minutes) After that I quickly ask random students questions to test their ability to reply. (5 minutes)
7. Short Talks: Students listen to five Short Talks together in class. I then provide my students with summaries of the Short Talks and ask them additional questions. (15 minutes)
8. Reading Practice: Review the Reading Comprehension vocabulary and ask questions regarding each paragraph.

Figure 7. Linc English class photos.
I use the Class Forum to provide Short Talks and Reading Comprehension written summaries and provide additional questions that the students need to answer and post to the Class Forum during class time. (10 minutes)

9. Original Materials (www.yukamedia.com) :
TED conference presentations, *New York Times* written and video articles, CNN reports, MIT Technology Review, Stanford University Channel, MIT Channel, YouTube, etc. (20 minutes).

Linc English Student Feedback

A survey of 682 students was conducted at Tohoku University. Overall survey results indicated that Linc English contains useful materials that meet the needs of students. The majority of students commented that Linc English helped to improve their listening comprehension and speed-reading skill. The following is a summary of student comments:
- Linc English provides a sophisticated learning management system.
- The listening, speed-reading and grammar drill training uses interesting practice patterns.
- My overall English language skill improved.
- My typing skill and listening comprehension really improved through dictation practice.
- There is enough variety to keep me interested.
- My ability to understand the meaning of spoken English has improved.
- Improved listening skills and increased vocabulary by extensive reading.
- Immediately after I finish a practice I can view my results. This is really convenient.
- Class Forum assignments can be prepared conveniently outside of class.
- The grading system gave me immediate feedback and helped keep my learning on the right track. This also allowed me to make sure I thoroughly learned the materials before I moved on to the next lesson.
- It was a little embarrassing to record my own voice with the voice recording function but it is fun to practice reading aloud and doing shadowing practice.
- Due to the variety of class activities and writing practice using the Class Forum we were able to participate in class without getting sleepy or losing our concentration.
- The teacher’s announcement board allowed us to see the syllabus and homework in advance.
- At first I thought the pace of Linc English was too fast but after four weeks I got used to the speed. By the second semester my listening skill really improved.
- Linc English uses a lot of useful educational materials that can be accessed anytime on any PC anywhere inside and outside of the university.
- I could practice at a level that fits my ability. My reading ability is at a higher level than my listening comprehension ability. The program allows me to work at the level I want.
- I seriously studied the 179 practice questions for each lesson. I felt after I completed 24 lessons in a year that I wanted to continue using this material.
- Each 90-minutes class went by quickly. I wanted to understand the original materials and lectures from Prof. Tachibana’s website (yukamedia.com) and to improve my English skills by using Linc English. Not being able to completely understand authentic materials such as CNN anchors and Stanford University professor’s lectures really motivated me to practice more and listen to English more.
- Because Linc English is content-rich, if you seriously study for two years it is possible to improve overall English skill without doing study abroad.
I was able to grasp the sense of the information more quickly.

There is a variety of topics for short conversation.

Linc English is convenient to use because I can access it anytime from anywhere as long as my PC or mobile phone is connected to the Internet.

Summary:

I introduced Linc English to Tohoku University students Fall Semester 2008. While teaching at the University of Montana I helped lead a team of American and Japanese university scholars and expert computer programmers in developing Linc English. I have experience with Technology Enhanced Learning which is commonly used for language instruction and learning at universities in Canada and the United States. An online curriculum is pedagogy empowered by digital technologies, mainly computers and the Internet. I strongly believe providing the highest quality English language program and comprehensive curriculum will help Tohoku University students to achieve their academic and professional goals.

To compensate for very few class meetings and some larger class sizes, we need to provide our students access to a pedagogically correct online curriculum that utilizes the latest LMS instructional design. Linc English has proven to be a positive addition to the classroom environment as well as an effective self-study program. It was designed for both classroom use and self-study to improve overall English competency skills. Most CALL materials are used for self-study only. However, with the implementation of Linc English, an instructor can plan class activities, give quizzes during class hours, and interact with students via the Class Forum. In other words, Linc English works well for both classroom instruction and self-study practice. It also allows teachers more effective use of limited class time.

I have taught using Linc English at Tohoku University for three years. I clearly understand Tohoku University students’ English level. In December 2011 our freshman class of 2411 students took the TOEFL-ITP. Their average score was over 485. This is a remarkable score for freshmen. Linc English is a very challenging curriculum that makes it appropriate for Tohoku University students. In order for our students’ English to improve, they need a large amount of challenging content. Tohoku University students can handle the rigorous Linc English class schedule and are well prepared for each class meeting.

I would like to collaborate with my colleagues at the Center for the Advancement of Higher Education and with high school teachers to facilitate CALL educational seminars and workshops designed to teach educators about the Linc English instructional approach and other online learning methods and strategies.

Lastly, I realize that an online curriculum such as Linc English requires constant improvement to update both technological features and content quality. I plan to work carefully with fellow English educators and technologists to improve Linc English on a regular basis.