

Report on Gakushuin Kasumikaikan English Seminar Online 2021 Lunchtime Sessions Led by University Students

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1. Introduction

Due to the spread of COVID-19 in 2021, Gakushuin Kasumikaikan English Seminar was held online. This was the first time for the students and the instructors as well as the staff members of the seminar committee to conduct the course online. The committee members gathered ideas for making the online seminar more attractive and fun for participants. One of these was lunchtime activities to be led by university students.

The total time available in the lunchtime was 60 minutes and the lunchtime sessions were held in the first half of the lunchtime so that the participants could have lunch and a short rest during the lunch break. The participants of the English seminar were free to choose whether to join an activity or take a rest. In addition, they could visit the same room or choose a different room each day.

The purpose of the session was to create a new learning opportunity among the pupils and students. The students and pupils gathered from different classes so that they could have varieties of pupils and students different from the regular class in the seminar and have a different atmosphere to learn and talk in English. The three main aims of the session were as follows:

1. The pupils and students could learn English with seniors at lunchtime
2. The instructors of the lessons could have a rest during lunchtime
3. The student-teachers could experience teaching English to pupils and students

2. Staff

The seven university students were all from the English Education Seminar led by Dr. Alison Stewart at Gakushuin University. Dr. Stewart and Mr. YAMAMOTO Akio, both members of the English Seminar committee, were in charge of the lunchtime sessions. Mr. NAKAMURA Tsuyoshi and KIHARA Tatsuaki, also seminar committee members, acted as supervisors of this session to support the teacher training of the university students.

The seven university students are all juniors in the English language and literature major at

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Gakushuin University. Some of them are intending to become teachers of English and the others are not, but all seven are interested in English language education.

3. Preparation and three rooms of the lunchtime sessions

The pre-service teacher training for the university students was also carried out online. Training sessions were conducted seven times online including a brief introduction to the seminar and brainstorming of activities that might be suitable. Each training session lasted about one hour. Dr. Stewart hosted all the pre-service sessions on Zoom and took charge of all the sessions with Mr. Yamamoto, Mr. Kihara and Mr. Nakamura joining in some of the training sessions.

As a result of the brainstorming among the students and the teachers, three activities were planned to be held in separate Zoom meeting rooms: Room 1 was Drawing and English, which included activities such as Picture Shiritori and Guess the Picture. Room 2 was English Word Games, which included games such as Hangman, Who Am I? Scrabble, and Find the Odd One Out. Room 3 was Presentation Support Room, which included Show & Tell, Mini-lecture (demonstrating how to give a presentation), and individual support of the participants and help with rehearsing presentations. During the English Seminar, Mr. Kihara was in charge of Room 1, Mr. Nakamura for Room 2, and Mr. Yamamoto for Room 3.

In Room 1, the participants were expected to learn English through drawing tasks which were conducted in English. In Room 2, the participants could test their skills and learn English spelling through word games. Room 3 offered a chance for the participants to practice giving a presentation in English.

The sessions in each room basically consisted of three parts: Introduction, Activity, and Conclusion. In the Introduction, the student-teachers and participants did self-introduction each day because the attendance of the lunchtime sessions was not reserved and it was not known in advance who would come to each room on any particular day. Some pupils and students might come everyday and some might not. Some might come just on the last day, for example.

In the Activity, each room had their own games such as drawing, word games, and show & tell. The university students prepared a number of different games for their room sessions, but they would choose one or two for each session because the time was limited.

In the Conclusion, the university students would wrap up the session and add some comments if needed.

The final pre-service training was held in the morning of the first day of the English seminar. The students became accustomed to managing a lesson and had more confidence than before.

4. Day 1

The first day is always difficult, but the university students managed their sessions most satisfactorily in these circumstances. The number of participants in each room was small compared with our expectations. The most probable explanation for the small number of participants in the lunchtime sessions was that they were likely tired out from their online classes in the morning. It is natural that the English Seminar participants would want time off at lunchtime.

There were some students who had a bad Internet connection in Room 3. Some of the participants disappeared suddenly or the screen was frozen. They managed to come back to the room but they seemed to experience some difficulty in catching up with the session because they missed some parts of the activity.

The student-teachers tried to adjust their sessions to the participants' wishes in each room. Because there was no reservation of participation in the lunchtime sessions, the student-teachers could not know who would come to the sessions and had to adjust to the participants day by day. Day 2 and 3 were easier than Day 1 because they figured out the numbers of the participants in each room and were more aware of their English level.

The number of participants in each room on Day 1

Room 1 Drawing	Room 2 Spelling	Room 3 Presentation
4	5	3

5. Day 2

On Day 2 the student-teachers became better at managing their sessions. They talked more fluently and, naturally, and had more confidence.

One problem of the lunchtime sessions each day was that there were some students who came late. However, in the preparation of the lunchtime sessions, the university students learned how to solve this problem through peer learning. They asked one or two of the pupils and students who came to the room from the beginning to tell the late-comers about the procedure of the activity. The student-teachers did not have to explain the activity. This technique was also used in the situation where a session included some participants who had joined on Day 1 and others who joined for the first time on Day 2 or Day 3. Although the contents of the games changed each day, the rules were the same and thus the "experienced" learners could teach the rules of the games to the new comers. The pupils and students had a peer-learning and they had a stronger bond in the room.

Surprisingly, Room 2 had just one pupil and Room 1 had more pupils and students on Day 2. The

student-teachers in Room 2 had a chat with the participant and they all enjoyed it. Room 1 was perhaps more attractive than the other two because drawing may be a more relaxing activity. The student-teachers noticed that the participants were good at drawing. Room 3 had the same number of participants but only one student out of the three participants who came on Day 1 and another student came to Room 3 on Day 2 and 3 consecutively.

The number of participants in each room on Day 2

Room 1 Drawing	Room 2 Spelling	Room 3 Presentation
5	1	3

6. Day 3

Day 3 was the last day of the lunchtime sessions. The Drawing room attracted more participants and some of the participants who came to Room 2 and Room 3 joined those rooms again. Room 3 was created in order for the participants to improve their English presentation activities. However, those students who gathered in Room 3 were already skillful in speaking English in most cases. The student-teachers and the staff members were impressed with their English performance.

The number of participants in each room on Day 3

Room 1 Drawing	Room 2 Spelling	Room 3 Presentation
6	2	3

7. Reflection

The seven student-teachers were asked to submit a reflection to the supervisors after the three days. The reflection was free description sent by email. In this feedback, all the student-teachers stated that leading the lunchtime activity sessions had been a precious experience for them. Most of them observed that the participants had enjoyed their sessions too. However, three of the student-teachers expressed some misgivings: they found that the participants spoke English more fluently than they had expected and felt that their own English abilities and communication skills were inadequate. These student-teachers also said that they had felt anxious in the pre-service sessions.

A second survey was sent out four weeks after the end of the English Seminar asking for critical feedback from the student-teachers to which all but one of the students responded. Regarding preparation for the lunchtime activities, two thought that the amount of time for preparation was

sufficient, but four indicated that more time might have been better. Similarly, two of them thought that there was sufficient guidance and instruction, but four indicated that they would have benefited from more.

To the question of what they had found most helpful or effective in the preparation sessions, the student teachers replied that they very much appreciated the opportunity to demonstrate their activities to Gakushuin teachers and obtain valuable feedback from them, particularly in the final meeting just before they started the actual activities for the English Seminar. They also set up a LINE group among themselves, which was useful for instant communication.

What they found least helpful or effective was preparing a script for their session, since they were unable to follow it in the actual sessions. As one student commented, "I made a script for the session in case I got stuck in words, but we shouldn't have our script in order to focus on interacting with students." Although all of the students had responded that the time for preparation was sufficient, either entirely or to some extent, they felt that more time could be spent on preparation in future training.

The student teachers were also asked for feedback on the actual sessions. To the question of whether the sessions had gone as they expected, three replied that they had to some extent, two answered that they had, and one replied that they had not gone as expected. Since the students were leading the activities in pairs and a group of three, this shows that different students reacted differently to the same experience.

Overall, the students enjoyed the experience, although half of them enjoyed it fully, while half responded that they enjoyed it to some extent. Asked what exactly they enjoyed the most, all of them replied that they had enjoyed interacting with the English Seminar students and pupils. They enjoyed seeing the participants "having fun" and "listening to students' dreams", and they were particularly happy when the participants returned to their room the following day. Asked what the least enjoyable thing was, two replied that everything was enjoyable, while the others were critical of their own abilities in English or abilities to be flexible, or of some problems with the internet connection.

The student-teachers were asked how they would improve the activities in future. As already mentioned, two of them felt that more time was needed on preparation, while two felt that the activities could be conducted more smoothly if the student-teachers could know how many participants would be in the session. One student hoped that the lunchtime sessions would not have to be conducted online in future, while another expressed the opinion that the scheme would be better with fewer student-teachers. Finally, to the question of whether they would be willing to take part in the English Seminar next year as student-teachers again or as trainers, half of them responded that they would, while half answered "maybe" .

8. Discussion

As organisers of the lunchtime activities, there were a number of issues that we did not expect or predict

First, the number of participants in each room was smaller than we had expected. Second, the student-teachers did a better job than we expected, judging from the initial training sessions, but they still had some difficulties in communicating with the participants who came to their activity rooms. The student-teachers and supervisors had a short reflection after the session every day and the students submitted a report on the lunchtime sessions after the three days. In addition, the students provided critical feedback after some time had passed. These sources of feedback help shed light on the problems and suggest ways of improving the scheme in the future.

8.1. Participation

Various reasons can be suggested as to why the size of the turnout was small. It is possible that there may have been some pupils and students who wanted to visit some of the rooms, but thought that they could not join if they did not enter the room from the beginning of the session and thus hesitated to join.

Another reason might be the sedentary style of lessons. The pupils and students had to stay in front of their screens in the lesson for hours, in contrast with face-to-face classes. We learned that the pupils ran around their houses by the order of the instructor in one of the Introductory classes, but it seemed that most participants of the English seminar wanted a rest at lunchtime and chose to have free time.

8.2. Participants

The participants of the English seminar had lessons for three hours in the morning: from 9:00 to 12:00. The instructors in each regular class were told to finish the morning lesson about ten minutes before noon so that the participants could have some break before the lunchtime session. It would not be surprising if the pupils and students were exhausted after listening to English and speaking English for about three hours in the morning. Room 2 had the largest number of participants on the first day, but the number decreased day by day. Room 3 had three participants on each day. Only Room 1, the Drawing room, increased the number of participants day by day. Artists gathered in Room 1. Drawing seemed to be more attractive than English word games and presentation practice, giving participants a chance to use different parts of their brains.

Some participants came late to each room every day in spite of the instruction that they were supposed to stay in the session from the beginning to the end. Every time a participant came in, the lesson was stopped, although this did not interfere with the conduct of the lesson. Each room had

one supervisor who managed additional participants at the moment of entering the room. Some of the student-teachers used a technique of peer activity; one of the first comers told the late comers about the instruction that the student-teachers said in the beginning of the session. This technique was taught by the supervisors in the preparation sessions for the student-teachers before the seminar.

8.3. Student-teachers

The university students unanimously said that they learned a lot from the practice for the English seminar and from having fun in the English seminar with the participants in the lunchtime sessions. They felt it quite difficult first in the stage of preparation (practice time), but they gradually became accustomed to conveying instructions to the participants and their English instruction became more natural and fluent. Some of them felt that their English needed to be improved more when they found some participants spoke English more fluently. They became very happy when they saw the participants got involved in the games with a smile.

8.4. Evaluation

Each of the activity rooms was monitored by a supervisor who, in addition to supporting the student-teachers during their sessions, was also able to evaluate their performance. It seemed difficult for the student-teachers to continue a conversation freely in English. Some students occasionally stopped chatting with the participants and became silent.

It also seemed difficult for them to come up with a new activity or task when what they had prepared was not suitable for the participants, as was the case in Room 3. It was initially planned that the student-teachers could be of help for the participants to prepare for making a presentation in their class, but the participants said there was no assignment of presentation even on the last day. The student-teachers could have asked their participants for details about their lessons so that they could devise an activity to build on what they had done in class from the participants that the lesson instructors presumably gave them and were to give a suitable task for the preparation to the participants.

The fact that the lunchtime sessions were elective and participants did not need to register in advance was convenient for the participants but was difficult for the student-teachers and the supervisors. The office staff came to each room during the session and counted the number of the participants there.

The committee of the English seminar failed to get clearance to take a photograph of the participants in each room in the lunchtime sessions. Next time, we would aim to obtain permission in advance in order to take a picture of each session.

9. Conclusion

The supervisors from the seminar committee learned a lot from teaching the university students in the stage of preparation (practice time), and enjoyed it very much. It took time and effort, but the considerable improvement in the performance of the student-teachers from the first training made it extremely worthwhile.

It is possible that the student-teachers who experienced the lunchtime sessions this year may be able to teach the next student-teachers how to become instructors in the next lunchtime sessions as mentors or teaching assistants so that the supervisors can reduce the work of teaching the student-teachers next and the experience of mentors or teaching assistants will be also a good experience of teaching itself. This would enable the student-led sessions to run more smoothly and effectively. We hope the lunchtime activities scheme can be perpetuated in this way, with the involvement of the students and with the support of the Gakushuin Kasumikaikan English Seminar Committee.

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