【研究ノート】

A Study Report on the Understanding of Active Learning by Polish Students in a Teacher Training Course

SUZUKI, Chizuko and BASIŃSKA, Anna

Introduction

In Japan, the term 'Active Learning' (AL) has often appeared in the public eye, attracting much attention particularly from persons concerned with education, including teachers currently active in schools as well as universities, since the Central Council for Education highlighted in its report on educational reform issued in August, 2012 (Kobari) the importance of shifting the direction of the teaching method toward a more student-centered one. This report defined Active Learning as a classroom teaching method, providing students with an environment enabling them to learn something in an active way on their own initiative and by applying their own process and method, which they have decided on and selected. Along with the increasing publicity of the term, information or fragmentary knowledge regarding on how it can be practiced in actual classes has been widely spread. It is still questionable, however, exactly how much and how deeply the student teachers as well as the currently active teachers have understood such a new concept and if they actually will be able to conduct their classes by adopting the Active Learning method sufficiently and properly.

The origin of this method can be traced back to the 1980s in the USA. A structural change in American society happened to bring about the popularization of universities, and a paradigm shift in higher education from being teacher-centered to student-centered was definitely needed (Onishi). Therefore, it is assumed that the concept of Active Learning has already been rooted deeply and is fully understood in the USA. However, what is the situation in Japan and other parts of the world? That is a simple question shared by the present authors who have taught university students majoring in a teaching certificate course for becoming teachers of the English language in Japan and in Poland. To begin with, we surveyed how much and to what extent the student teachers in a university in Poland had understood the concept of Active Learning and a few central points related to the concept, especially focusing on the early education of the English language, which is to be the second language for the majority of each nation.

This paper is a report on that survey, by explaining its methods, and giving the results of

analyses which consisted of observational analysis and corpus analyses to illuminate how the Polish students understood the concept. Following this, is a discussion on issues revealed by the survey, which might present further as well as important areas to be considered in order to implement the ideal method of Active Learning in our classes.

Methods

The methods, including the procedures used in this study, are described below in the sections 'Respondents', 'Responded time and place', 'Questionnaire' and 'Ways of examining the answers'.

Respondents

There were 23 student respondents: 19 females and 4 males, aged 21 through 25 (4 were twenty-one; 12 were twenty-two; 4 were twenty-three; and 3 were twenty-five). The students were studying at the Faculty of Educational Studies of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Republic of Poland. Most of them majored in the English language and the teaching credential course.

Responded time and place

The survey was conducted from October 13th to the 20th in 2016 on the campus of Adam Mickiewicz University.

Questionnaire

The survey consisted of seven open questions (listed below) to be answered freely by hand on a sheet of A4 size paper. The questionnaire was based on one originally composed by a Japanese university student, Ms. Asuka Ohue, who worked on the theme, "How to incorporate Active Learning into English classes in Japan in order to enable students to speak English fluently" as her graduation thesis in the academic year 2016, under the guidance of one of the present authors.

1. What do you think is the most important thing to do when teaching English to students in class?
2. What's your ideal class of the English language? How do you think you can improve the current class to become an ideal one?
3. How do you recognize the Active Learning? What do you think of Active Learning?
4. Do you think you need to adopt a method of Active Learning so that your students can become able to speak English?
5. If you think Active Learning is useful, how do you use Active Learning to improve your

students' English skills, especially speaking ability?

6. What do you think about English education from the lower grades? What things do you
   regard as important when teaching English to children?

7. What devices/technologies do you think are more effective to use when using an Active
   Learning method?

Ways of examining the answers

The answers written by the students were studied in the following two ways. The first one was an observational analysis, in which the researchers manually read the students' written text, interpreting it from the viewpoint of the primary study question: How much the student teachers have understood what Active Learning is. Then, the researchers applied the second way, which was corpus analyses after compiling seven sub corpora, one for each survey question. To obtain the profile of the entire overall corpus and that of each sub corpus, WordSmith 5.0 by Mike Scott was used. AntConc. 3.2.4w. by Laurence Anthony was utilized for getting the Keyword Lists of the overall text and of the seven sub corpora in order to extract characteristic words of each corpus. To obtain the keywords of the overall corpus, 'FLOB' was used as a reference corpus since the Polish mostly use British English, and as for each sub corpus, the other sub corpora were made use of as its reference corpus.

Results

The results are presented as follows divided into those gained by observation and those through corpus studies.

Observational analysis

What was observed to be noticeable and relevant to this study are listed below with examples by student respondents according to each survey question, from Q 1 to Q 7.

Q 1. What do you think is the most important thing to do when teaching English to students
   in class?

The phrases or sentences that show the students' understanding of Active Learning are as follows: "trying to activate all the students"[1], "good atmosphere", "Helping them to learn instead of teaching them.", and "The most important things are: motivate students . . ., appreciate students' efforts, be patient, and inspire students.". On the other hand, answers which can be interpreted as expressing the respondents' beliefs in the traditional method of teaching were also found as seen in: "The most important thing is to transfer knowledge to students and make them aware of its

importance.", and "The most important thing is to give students the proper knowledge."

Q 2. What's your ideal class of the English language? How do you think you can improve the
current class to become an ideal one?

Several students presented ideas which may show the characteristics of Active Learning as
possible ways for improving the present classes. The following examples show this: "teachers
should reduce the amount of time devoted to exercises and give students much time to talk in
English", "Active, reactional class with the involvement of real language and students' active
participation", ". . . they shouldn't be overwhelmed by the information they receive.", "In an ideal
environment everyone is encouraged to participate.", "Class in which students are eager to talk
and share ideas.", "The perfect class is when my students are willing to talk to me and try out new
knowledge in practice without fear.", ". . . students are more autonomous. . .", and "With students
that are willing to learn. Make students more involved in the lesson".

Q 3. How do you recognize the Active Learning? What do you think of Active Learning?

As a whole, the students seemed not to have heard of the term Active Learning and not to
have had a clear recognition of the concept until they were asked the question. Actually, four
students stated the fact explicitly by answering with such responses as "I don't know what it is."
(22; F)[2], "I don't really know what you mean by Active Learning." (25; M), "I do not know what it is
exactly." (22; F), and "I don't know what is your idea of Active Learning." (22; M). The last student
even followed the statement by frankly expressing his thoughts and attitude toward answering
the question with "I could try to guess but I don't think that would be right." His words might
provide evidence that some other students who did not know the term even answered the
following part of the question by guessing at the meaning of it. This observation can be supported
by a kind of conceded answer as "I'm not an expert, but I . . ." (25; F). Other grounds for this
observation come from their use of the verbs "guess" and "imagine" as exemplified by such
sentences as "I **guess** it's about learning practical kills in order to communicate efficiently." (25; F),
and "I **imagine** it as student-oriented learning (teaching) which emphasizes students' activity and is
more efficient than teacher-oriented." (21; F).

In spite of the fact that the term Active Learning itself had not been well known by the
students, it is noteworthy that most of the students could state their thoughts about the method
in their own words fluently and rather appropriately. Actually, in answering this question among
the seven questions, the students wrote the most number of words, 474, and the second most
number of sentences, 34 (cf. Table 1). The following examples may also support this observation:
"It means probably implicit learning or even a task-based one in which students are focused on

doing tasks . . .", "AL is simply involving all of yourself in the process of learning.", "It focuses on students, they speak, write, act, etc.. They use English, they do not only listen to it.". All of these statements included crucial words related to the concept of Active Learning.

Q 4. Do you think you need to adopt a method of Active Learning so that your students can become able to speak English?

As seen in the previous question, some students in their answers to this question also expressed they had not known the term nor the concept of Active Learning. This is illustrated by responses such as "I am not sure what this method is about." and "I am not sure what it really is.". Moreover, many of the students showed the extent of their understanding of the concept by stating: "Yes, students learn best while being active. It's impossible to be able to speak any foreign language without active participation in the process of learning.", and "Yes, being an active learner is crucial. A passive learner may have problems with acquiring knowledge.". Furthermore, a certain number of students indicated a sedate attitude toward the new method without being agitated by stating: "Not really, Active Learning is a good method but not every teacher feels comfortable with this technique. So, I think that a teacher should find a teaching technique that suits him as well as the students and in that way, encourage using English.", and "It is very helpful but probably not the only way to teach them how to speak.".

Q 5. If you think Active Learning is useful, how do you use Active Learning to improve your students' English skills, especially speaking ability?

In answering how to use the AL method concretely for improving English speaking ability, some students gave their ideas to incorporate the method appropriately into their classes, as seen in "A lot of writing tasks so they can be aware of the proper way which is a key to good speaking skills.", "Students should be involved in the task. They should be given some group or pair work to be done. They should do a role play and try to play real life situations.", and "I encourage them to speak a lot in communicative activities, e.g. role playing, simulations." Some students also stated frankly they were not sure of their understanding of the concept: "I have no insight into Active Learning yet.", and "I am not sure what it is exactly.".

Q 6. What do you think about English education from the lower grades? What things do you regard as important when teaching English to children?

Education based on the AL method was considered to be important specifically in English education for young children as expressed in the following responses: "I think lessons for children should be more active. They only sit behind desks but children benefit from learning while

moving.", "Students in lower grades shouldn't be taught just the grammatical rules. They should learn through speaking.", and "It can encourage students to learn by themselves.".

Q 7. What devices/technologies do you think are more effective to use when using an Active Learning method?

An interactive tool was mentioned by seven students to be used when conducting classes based on Active Learning, as shown in the phrases like "Games, and interactive board", and "interactive white board.". A game was mentioned by four students: "board games as well as modern devices", and "Games, apps, videos, interactive boards, Quislets or other pages for collecting vocabulary". Both an interactive tool and a game may provide learners with an environment or a situation in which they are involved in individually doing something active by themselves. One student (25; M) demonstrated his deep understanding of how these tools should be used in learning by stating "Any devices and technologies can be useful when it's used right.".

Corpus analysis

The results given below were gained by corpus analyses regarding the profile of corpora and keywords.

 Profile of the Corpora

Table 1 shows the data profile of the students' answers.

Table 1: The Profile of Corpus by Question and by Item

text file	Overall	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7
file size	15,288	2,437	2,424	2,916	1,961	1,830	2,504	1,216
tokens in text	2,461	360	389	474	357	314	404	163
types (distinct words)	702	196	208	200	152	172	224	119
type/token ratio (TTR)	28.56	54.44	53.75	42.19	42.58	54.95	55.45	73.01
standardised TTR basis	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
mean word length	4.88	5.39	4.92	4.91	4.24	4.52	4.87	5.72
word length std. dev.	2.71	2.88	2.76	2.72	2.35	2.68	2.5	3.05
sentences	2,632	25	30	34	26	24	36	14
mean (in words)	14.18	14.4	12.9	13.94	13.73	13.04	11.22	11.64
std. dev.	2.43	11.18	8.02	8.22	10.07	8.26	8.18	10.65
paragraphs	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
mean (in words)	351.14	360	387	474	357	313	404	163
std. dev.	96.73							

 Keywords of the Corpora

The keywords of the overall corpus and each sub corpus are as follows, arranged by question order. The resulting keywords were adopted either when their frequency was three or more or

the keyness was higher than five or more, as to each sub-corpus. The keywords of content words are marked in bold type fonts in each table.

(1) Keywords in the Overall Corpus

Table 2: Keywords in the Overall Corpus

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword	Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	60	559.199	**student**	20	9	61.94	**listen**
2	54	496.046	**learn**	21	9	61.261	**video**
3	121	311.841	be	22	8	60.26	**skill**
4	32	252.108	**active**	23	17	56.547	**think**
5	28	226.125	**speak**	24	7	56.216	**lesson**
6	11	135.813	**interactive**	25	14	53.159	**important**
7	19	135.256	**method**	26	12	51.58	**play**
8	29	131.571	**use**	27	4	49.386	**motivate**
9	19	100.193	**language**	28	17	47.698	**make**
10	18	92.814	**class**	29	10	47.268	**lot**
11	31	90.149	do	30	6	46.073	**teach**
12	18	87.355	**english**	31	4	44.387	**communicative**
13	62	82.942	i	32	7	43.917	**encourage**
14	11	77.678	**teacher**	33	7	43.917	**involve**
15	26	77.453	should	34	12	42.386	**group**
16	11	72.037	**teaching**	35	7	41.597	**focus**
17	45	66.032	not	36	15	40.041	**know**
18	11	62.737	**game**	37	10	38.867	**interest**
19	26	62.359	them	38	7	38.73	**exercise**

(2) Keywords in the Answers to Q 1

Table 3: Keywords in the Answers to Q 1

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword	Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	13	33.003	**student**	12	2	7.739	**patient**
2	7	18.177	**thing**	13	3	7.422	**interest**
3	7	15.806	**most**	14	3	7.422	**making**
4	4	15.478	**material**	15	5	7.045	**teacher**
5	4	15.478	**motivate**	16	7	5.823	**use**
6	7	9.863	**important**	17	22	5.528	to
7	10	9.042	them	18	2	4.232	**activity**
8	14	8.048	be	19	2	4.232	**atmosphere**
9	2	7.739	**busy**	20	2	4.232	**comfortable**
10	2	7.739	**contact**	21	2	4.232	**pair**
11	2	7.739	**feel**	22	3	4.227	**time**

(3) Keywords in the Answers to Q 2

Table 4: Keywords in the Answers to Q 2

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	15	40.017	**student**
2	13	30.673	**class**
3	6	22.08	**ideal**
4	5	18.4	**interest**
5	18	12.525	be
6	3	11.04	**small**
7	3	11.04	**talk**
8	8	10.026	**learn**
9	2	7.36	**course**
10	3	6.887	**each**
11	3	6.887	**exercise**
12	6	6.556	**more**
13	3	5.002	**lesson**
14	2	3.887	**question**
15	2	3.887	**willing**
16	15	3.767	and
17	3	3.76	**time**

(4) Keywords in the Answers to Q 3

Table 5: Keywords in the Answers to Q 3

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	26	42.879	**learn**
2	18	39.771	**student**
3	27	20.845	be
4	5	16.361	**mean**
5	16	14.925	**active**
6	4	13.089	**skill**
7	5	11.388	**involve**
8	3	9.817	**actively**
9	3	9.817	**activity**
10	8	8.482	do
11	5	7.076	about
12	2	6.545	**exercise**
13	2	6.545	**guess**
14	2	6.545	**implicit**
15	2	6.545	**orient**
16	2	6.545	than
17	7	4.874	**speak**
18	3	3.953	**new**
19	3	3.953	**when**

(5) Keywords in the Answers to Q 4

Table 6: Keywords in the Answers to Q 4

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	27	36.089	be
2	9	34.876	yes
3	8	15.233	method
4	6	14.876	this
5	7	12.381	do
6	4	10.808	really
7	11	9.73	not
8	9	9.153	learn
9	2	7.75	able
10	2	7.75	everybody
11	2	7.75	helpful
12	2	7.75	problem
13	2	7.75	suit
14	6	6.618	what
15	4	5.655	would
16	13	5.521	it
17	16	5.506	i
18	6	5.192	think
19	4	4.691	student
20	2	4.242	choose
21	2	4.242	technique

(6) Keywords in the Answers to Q 5

Table 7: Keywords in the Answers to Q 5

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword	Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	8	14.028	do	12	2	8.208	usually
2	3	12.311	discussion	13	2	8.208	yet
3	18	11.268	i	14	3	8.088	task
4	4	9.327	play	15	13	8.047	be
5	6	8.603	speak	16	6	7.702	use
6	2	8.208	ask	17	4	7.68	answer
7	2	8.208	create	18	4	7.68	role
8	2	8.208	game	19	4	6.425	no
9	2	8.208	meaningful	20	3	6.131	question
10	2	8.208	see	21	9	6.058	not
11	2	8.208	skill	22	4	5.425	student

(7) Keywords in the Answers to Q 6

Table 8: Keywords in the Answers to Q 6

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	9	32.454	**child**
2	20	18.5	be
3	4	14.424	**game**
4	4	14.424	**grade**
5	4	14.424	**lower**
6	4	14.424	**song**
7	12	14.323	should
8	5	12.983	from
9	4	9.78	**fun**
10	6	9.616	**student**
11	2	7.212	**early**
12	2	7.212	**stage**
13	5	7.105	**play**
14	3	6.679	**different**
15	3	6.679	**very**

(8) Keywords in the Answers to Q 7

Table 9: Keywords in the Answers to Q 7

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	6	32.866	**video**
2	8	31.332	**interactive**
3	5	22.115	**board**
4	4	21.911	**game**
5	3	16.433	**device**
6	3	16.433	**presentation**
7	3	16.433	**whiteboard**
8	3	12.068	**computer**
9	2	10.955	**film**
10	2	10.955	**online**
11	2	10.955	**radio**
12	2	10.955	**song**
13	2	10.955	**such**
14	2	10.955	**youtube**
15	2	7.27	any
16	2	7.27	**material**
17	1	5.478	**application**
18	1	5.478	**apps**

Overviewing the results of the keywords in each sub corpus, it could be said that the students answered each question focusing on the point after properly understanding the meaning

of each question. Therefore, no words irrelevant to the topic were found for each question's results. This shows at least the reliability of the data for study.

Conclusion and Discussion

As a whole, it can be concluded that the students could state their own ideas fluently using some amount of words with varied vocabulary. The contents of their statements might be interpreted as rather appropriate to discuss the English language teaching itself besides the understanding of the concept of Active Learning in spite of the fact that they had not necessarily heard of the term Active Learning. This interpretation was supported by the observations and supported by objective corpus analyses.

Another finding is that the researchers could learn what kind of class or teaching might be more ideal as viewed particularly from the perspective of student teachers of a younger generation using the keywords as clues. Such words as *interactive, motivate, encourage, involvement, patient, interest, activity, atmosphere, comfortable, willingness, everybody, presentation, discussion,* and *create* may provide an image of their ideal class, especially when considered collectively.

In addition, this study has further led to the long-discussed but significant theme of the role of language for developing a concept/recognition. In other words, "which comes first, the language or the concept", or the more general theme of the relationship between language and conceptualization (J. Nuyts & E. Pederson). In the case of this study, at least, the responding Polish students seem to have first understood the content or concept of Active Learning even before knowing the term or language of it. This in turn may suggest or act as a warning that the Japanese students and teachers of the English language education should not abuse the term without fully understanding its aim and concept.

Notes

1) The examples are given as written by the Polish respondents who answered the questions in English. However, for the sake of clarity a few minor corrections have been made by the authors.

2) The number in each parenthesis after an example sentence/phrase represents the respondent's age, and the letter shows the gender (F for female and M for male).

Acknowledgements

References

Anthony, Laurence. (n.d.). AntConc. 3.2.4 w. *Laurence Anthony's website*. Retrieved from http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html

Kobari, Makoto. (2018). *Akutivu Raaningu: Gakkou Kyouiku no Riso to Genjitsu (Active Learning: Ideals and Realities of School Education)*. Tokyo: Koudansha.

Maire, Christian (1999). *The Freiburg−LOB Corpus of British English ('FLOB')*. Freiburg: Department of English. Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg.

Mizogami, Shinichi. (2014). *Akutivu Raaningu to Kyoju Gakushu Paradaimu no Tenkan (Active Learning and a Paradigm Shift of Teaching and Learning)*. Tokyo: Toshin Do.

Nuyts, Jan & E. Pederson. (1997). *Language and Conceptualization*. Cambridge University.

Onishi, Toshihiro. (2015). "'Akutivu Raaningu' to Nihon no Kyoiku ('Active Learning' and Education in Japan)". *Ryukoku Kyoshoku (Ryukoku University Teacher Training Journal)*, No. 3. 73-82.

Scott, Mike. (2009). *Lexical Analysis Software: WordSmith Tools*. Lexical Analysis Software Ltd.