

Integrating CALL into a New EFL Program¹⁾

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[Synopsis]

A new web-based CALL program was added into the revised EFL curriculum for freshmen and sophomores of two Colleges at Ritsumeikan University Biwako-Kusatsu Campus (BKC). This paper reports its general view with some samples of the web-based program and discusses the pros and cons in relation with the computer-network literacy.

Keywords: Ritsumeikan University, BKC, Foreign Language Program, CALL, CAELL, web-based, computer literacy

1. Introduction

Ritsumeikan University, a leading progressive and private university in Japan, has totally eight Colleges (Law, Economics, Business Administration, Social Sciences, International Relations, Policy Science, Letters, and Science and Engineering) in two different campuses (Kinugasa Campus in Kyoto and Biwako Kusatsu Campus in Kusatsu, Shiga) with 788 faculty members, 441 administrative staffs, and the grand total of 30,549 students.²⁾ Based on the Ritsumeikan's basic educational principle - "Peace and Democracy", the "Internationalization, Information-oriented, humanization, and openness-oriented" are the fundamental policies. Following the move of the College of Science and Engineering to BKC in 1994, two Colleges of Economics and Business Administration also moved and restarted with newly revised curricula in April 1998 to meet the needs for the twenty-first century under the fifth long-term planning.

This paper mainly reports the pros and cons of integrating a web-based CALL in a foreign language education program focusing on CAELL (Computer Assisted English Language Learning) for Colleges of Economics and Business Administration and discusses the future of ideal CALL.

2. Brief Summary of the 1998 Revision of the Foreign Language Education at Colleges of Economics and Business Administration

After a series of reviews on the 1987, 1991, and 1994 revisions for the foreign language education curricula, Communicative Language Education Center (CLEC) was established at BKC in 1998. CLEC led two Colleges to introduce a new program collaboratively to enhance students' communicative competence, computer literacy, and intercultural ability respectively in a new environment.³⁾ The English program in particular here was the main concern and the following things were carried out:

- 1) Establishment of three selective courses:⁴⁾ (1) English-only course (4 + 4 + 4 = 12 credit hours); (2) Course of greater importance in English plus another foreign language course (8 in English + 4 in another foreign language - German, French, or Chinese); (3) Bilingual course of English and another foreign language (4 in English + 8 |4 + 4| in another foreign language - German, French, Chinese, or Spanish).
- 2) Offering a series of lectures on "World Languages and Cultures" in the first semester to help students understand a variety of languages and cultures in the world.⁵⁾
- 3) For the first semester students are divided into five graded classes (Super-Advanced, Advanced, Upper-Intermediate, Intermediate and Basic) according to the results of the original placement test.⁶⁾
- 4) For the second semester all of the students who enroll in the above 1)-(1) and 1)-(2) are required to take TOEFL-ITP (Test of English as a Foreign Language - Institutional Testing Program) as the placement and they select one of two programs - Liberal Arts Program with three levels (Advanced, Upper-Intermediate and Intermediate) and Business Career Program with two levels (Advanced and Upper-Intermediate).
- 5) The core curriculum for the first semester is introduced: Four classes (English 1-4) per week to enhance the basics of four skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and computer/network literacy using the unified texts and team-teaching methodology. They are related each other in contents.

3. CALL as an Essential Part of the English as a Foreign Language Program

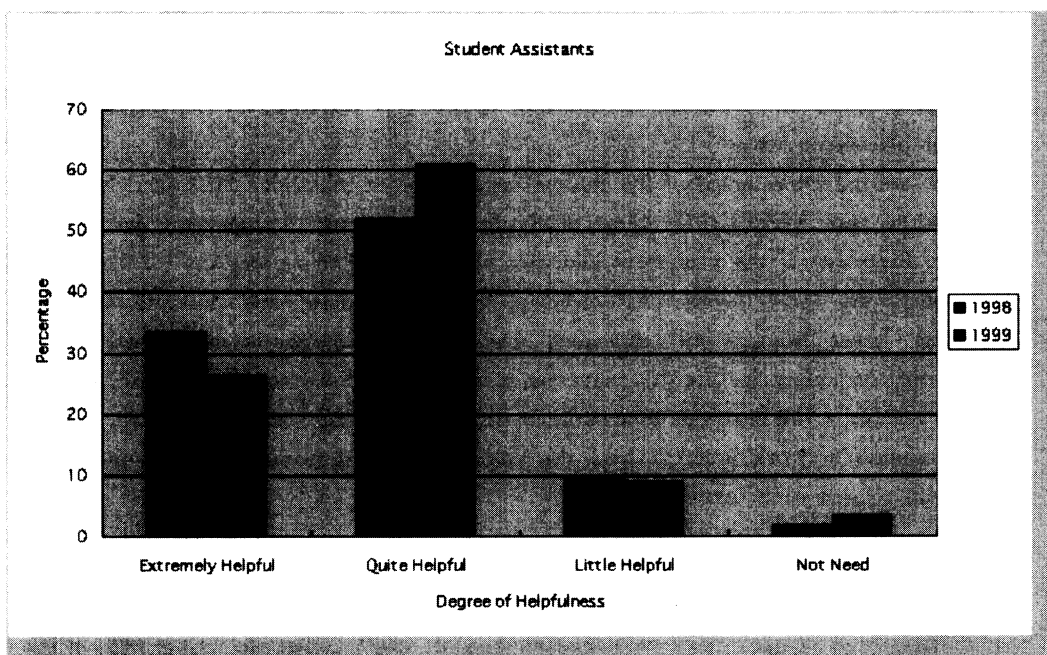
English 4, English 8 and English 12 are CALL classes and the key vocabulary for the vocabulary drills and the texts for the speed reading program are taken from English 1, English 7, and English 11 text book respectively. Therefore, students in CALL classes can relearn them in different styles. In addition, they can learn the computer/network literacy such as keyboarding (typing), e-mailing using "ATSON-1" or "Netscape Messenger", information exchange room using BBS (Bulletin Board System), information search using a

web browser called "Netscape Navigator", creating web pages, learning about a presentation software called "MS-PowerPoint" and its presentation style, writing a composition using a word-processor called "MS-Word," etc.⁷⁾

Students can receive "Students' Book" of their own level for their class work and weekly homework assignments. The instructors can carry out each class accordingly based upon the contents of the book using the web-based program.⁸⁾ This program is not open for non-Ritsumeikan students.

In addition, for each CALL class a more tech-experienced student assistant (SA) is assigned to help the enrolled students and the less-tech-experienced instructor.⁹⁾ These SAs receive a few-day workshop prior to each semester and meet once a month to discuss the problems and exchange information. SAs, CLEC staff and the CALL coordinator often exchange information through the mailing list. The following graph shows the degree of satisfaction to those student assistants in both 1998 and 1999 questionnaires which were given in some selected classes. 85.5% and 87.3% of the freshmen found them "extremely helpful" or "quite helpful" respectively. Therefore, without those student assistants CALL classes can not be successfully carried out.

[Degree of Satisfaction for English 4 in 1998-99]



All the full-timers and part-timers who teach CALL classes are also required to participate in some intensive workshops (1-2 days) prior to each semester. The CALL coordinator also issue irregular newsletters in paper-format called "BKC CALL News" to inform the changes or request for cooperation in the pre-set assignments of the Students' Book. They can, however, have their freedom to expand these assignments with their own

materials.

4. The Independent Programs in CALL classes

The CALL program consists of both the independent programs and the web-based program that run on Windows NT computers. The former consists of: (1) two typing programs - "K's Blind Touch" and "Gold Finger" that are Windows NT versions; (2) a groupware for communication called "ATSON-1"; (3) a text editor - "Hidemaru"; (4) a word-processor - "MS-Word"; (5) a presentation software - "MS-PowerPoint."

In 1998 "K's Blind Touch" was used for keyboarding practices because it was only appropriately available one for Windows NT computers. However, in 1999 a new site-licensed "Gold Finger" was purchased and installed to replace. It still has a minor language problem of the menu that is written in Japanese and it's far from ideal for EFL learners because only one English text is given for the practice.

"ATSON-1" has been used for a while but it has capacity problem, that is, if more than 800 users access to it at the same time, it becomes out of control. "ATSON-1" will be replaced with the web-based system - "Netscape Communicator" - in the future.

"Hidemaru" is a kind of the text editor with limited functions, but it's useful to learn the basic use of it when students handle the text-only documents.

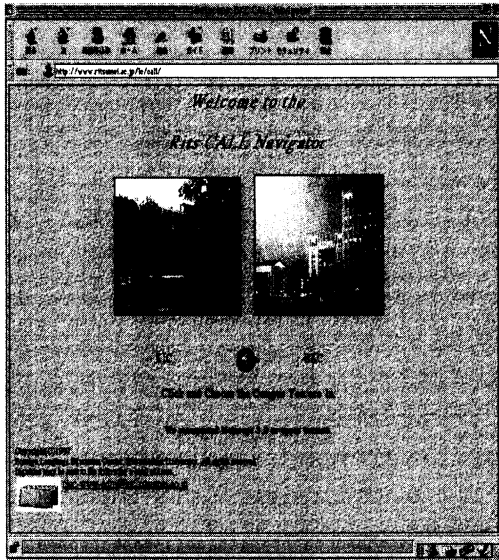
"MS-Word" has been the world-standard word-processor for personal computers and the current version has many functions other than the word-processing itself such as HTMLization of the files. Students can conveniently create web pages using "MS-Word," though some of the instructors prefer to use "Composer" - a part of "Netscape Communicator" instead of "MS-Word". Either one can be acceptable. However, we would use "Composer" extensively from the second semester of 1999 because of the advantages of its functions over the "MS-Word." The instructors are required to ask students to use a spelling/grammar checker of "MS-Word" before sending their assignments, but the students are not consistent enough and always requested to follow the instruction.

"MS-PowerPoint" is only used for a limited number of CALL classes and some additional selective foreign language related classes for sophomores or juniors or seniors. It's not so difficult to create "MS-PowerPoint" files if the students use some templates.

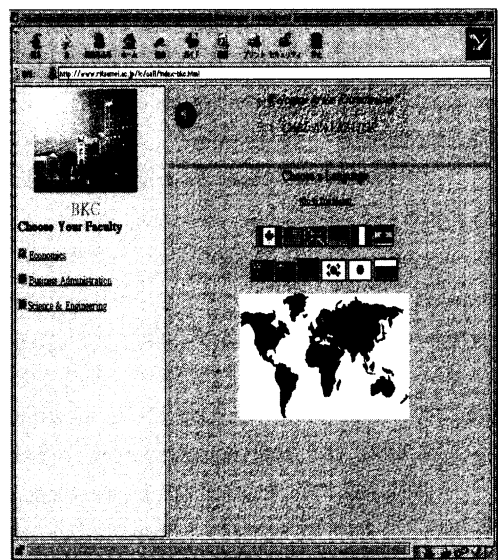
5. The Web-based CALL Program

The web-based CALL program at BKC is still under development and only a part of the originally designed program is running. The followings are sample screens that students always access and work on a variety of exercises on-line.

[Rits CALL Navigator - Main]



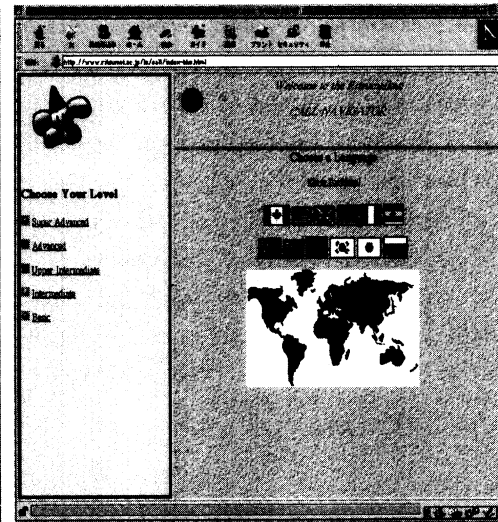
[Rits CALL Navigator - 1]



[Rits CALL Navigator - 2]



[Rits CALL Navigator - 3]

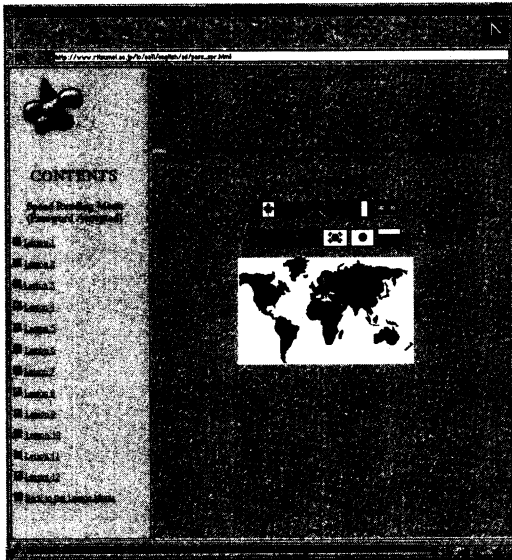


[Rits CALL Navigator - 4]

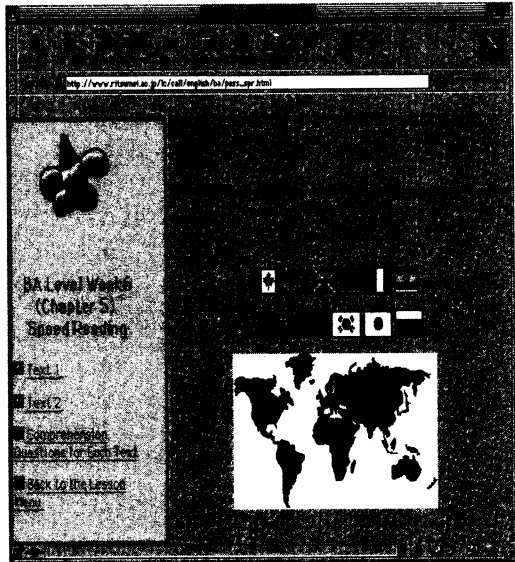
[Rits CALL Navigator - 5]



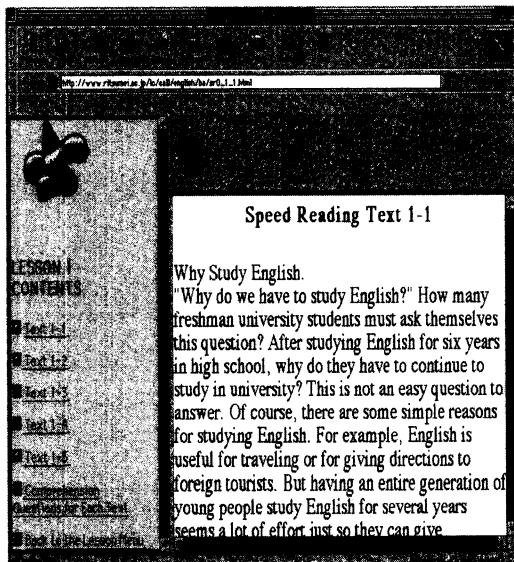
[Rits CALL Navigator - 8]



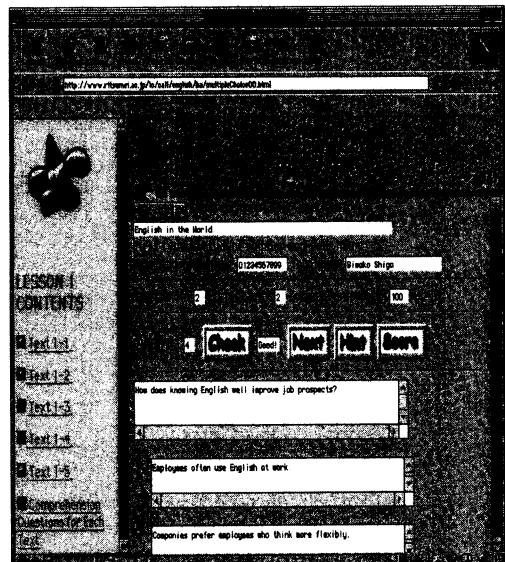
[Rits CALL Navigator - 9]



[Rits CALL Navigator - 10]



[Rits CALL Navigator - 11]



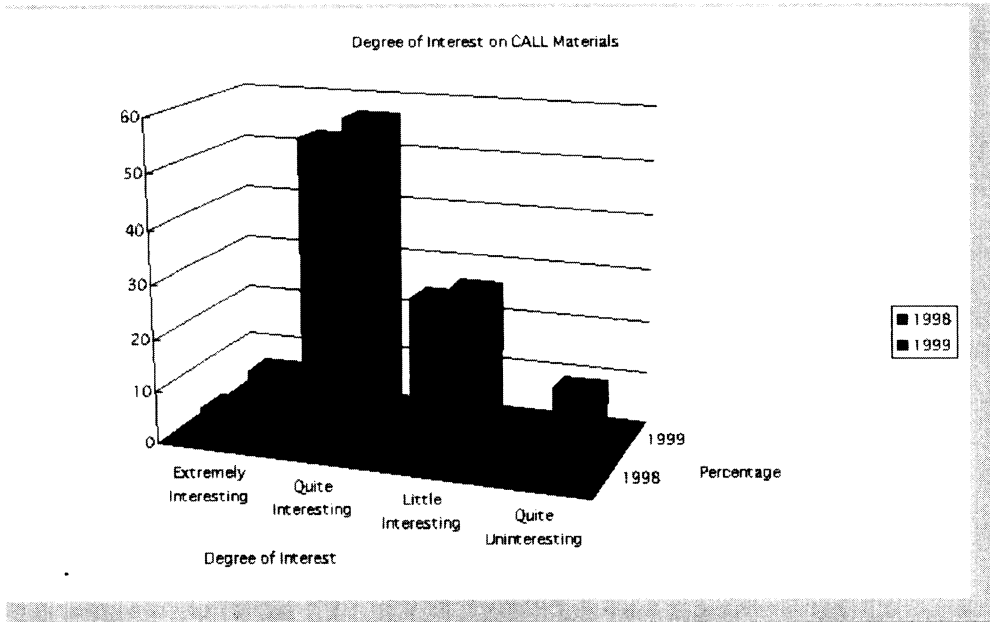
[Rits CALL Navigator - 12]

The screenshot displays the Rits CALL Navigator interface. At the top, it shows the completion time: "You finished at: 1999/05/21 19:43:08". Below this, the text details are: "Text Number: 0-1-1", "Text Title: English in the World", "Student Number: 01234567899", "Name: Biwako Shiga", "Number of Correct Answers: 2/2", and "Accuracy Percentage: 100%". On the right side, there is a "Status/Print" button. The main content area is divided into two sections. The left section contains a list of text items: "Text 1-2", "Text 1-3", "Text 1-4", and "Text 1-5", each with a radio button. Below this list are the options "Comprehension Questions for Each Text" and "Back to the Lesson Menu". The right section contains a question: "It is useful for students to learn English at university because". Below the question are two input fields, numbered 1 and 2, for the student's answer. At the top of the right section, there are buttons for "Answer:", "Check", "Next", "Hint", and "Score".

6. Brief Summary from the 1998-99 Questionnaires

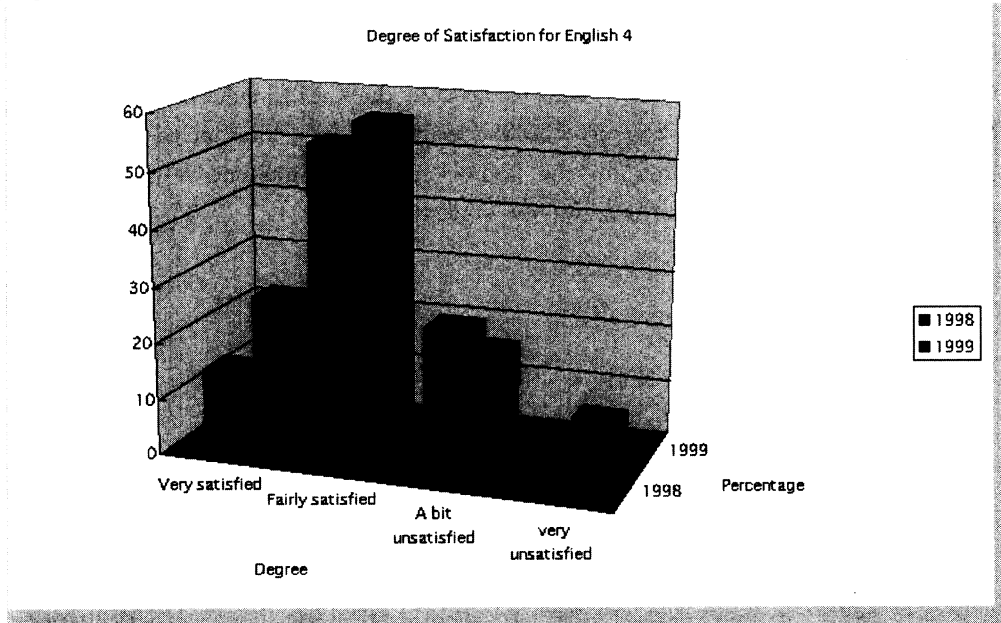
CLEC gave the questionnaires for some randomly selected foreign language classes every semester and the followings are some graphic forms of the summary results from English 4 (CALL) classes. The first graph shows the degree of interest on CALL materials in 1998 and 1999. 62.55% and 63.7% of the students found them either "Extremely interesting" or "Quite interesting" while 37.9% and 36.4% answered either "Little interesting" or "Quite uninteresting" respectively. This is because the CALL materials are text- and drill-oriented and still under development for the multimedia type that includes audio/video programs, so there is some room for the improvement as a multimedia program in an interactive style that is more attractive for the students.

[Degree of Interest on CALL Materials in 1998-99]



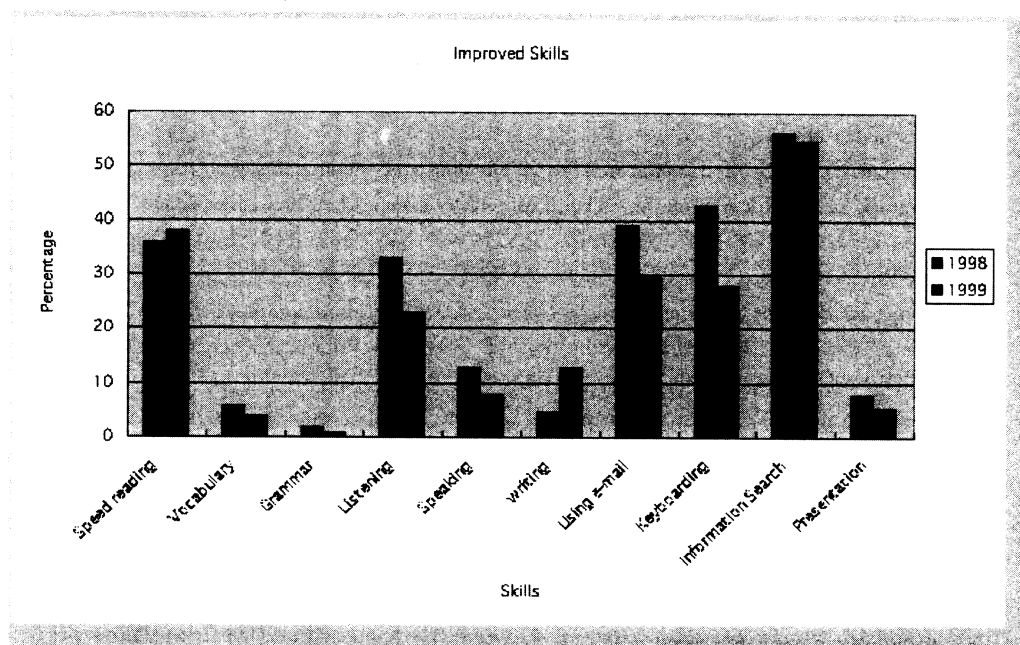
The next graph shows the degree of satisfaction of the students for English 4 class in 1998 and 1999. 70% and 78.3% of the students answered either “Very satisfied” or “Fairly satisfied” while 30.4% and 21.8% of them answered “A bit unsatisfied” or “Very unsatisfied” respectively. One of the reasons for the 8.3% satisfaction increase or the 8.6% decrease from 1998 to 1999 was probably caused by some revisions of the main programs (Vocabulary and speed reading programs) and a newly introduced site-licensed typing practice program (Gold Finger) that provided more enjoyable style of learning.

[Degree of Satisfaction for English 4 in 1998-99]



As the following graph shows, there are some characteristics regarding improved skills after taking the CALL classes in 1998 and 1999. First, 35.7% and 38.1% of the students answered that their speed reading ability improved respectively. Secondly, 33% and 23% of them also answered that their listening ability improved. Thirdly, 39.2% and 29.4% of them answered that their e-mail communication abilities in English improved. Fourthly, 42.7% and 27.8% of them mentioned that their typing/keyboarding abilities improved. Lastly, 56.4% and 54.8% of them replied that their information gathering abilities through the Internet improved.

[Improved Skills in 1998-99]



7. Results and the Future

The CALL program has been an essential part of a newly revised English language education curriculum at Ritsumeikan University Biwako Kusatsu Campus since the start of the 1998 academic year. It only passed over a year and half since then. The second cycle for the freshman program and the first cycle for the sophomore program have just finished, but it's too early to evaluate the whole CALL program at this stage. However, according to the results of the questionnaires given in 1998 and 1999, it seemed to be well-received by the students as well as the instructors. There are still problems of the JAVA Script programming itself for the web-based program and it is necessary to provide more variety of interactive exercises by adding streaming audio and video clips. One of the possible solutions is that we should include carefully chosen CNN news on video and the scripts from the CNN Newsroom and offer them on the web as a part of CALL. It's all up to the

multimedia materials development group's active involvement led by the writer himself even under the "all-year-round busy situation" to make the CALL program better and interactive.

Notes

- 1) This was originally written as the handout for CALLing Asia '99 co-sponsored by Computer Assisted Language Learning Special Interest Group of Japan Association for Language Teaching and Kansai Chapter of Language Laboratory Association of Japan that was held on May 22, 1999 at Kyoto Sangyo University, Kyoto.
- 2) These figures (May, 1998) are taken from Crossroads, 1998
- 3) BKC gaikokugo kyoiku gakushu shisutemu kaikaku kihon yoko (Basic Revision Policy of BKC Foreign Language Education), July 1997
- 4) In 2000 "Academic Career Program" is designed and planned to offer.
- 5) After a series of the lectures the students can decide which language other than English course they will enroll.
- 6) SA consists of 2% of the total number and is aimed at the students who have more than 530 in TOEFL or quasi-1st grade in STEP Test; AD consists of 15% with 500-530 in TOEFL or quasi-1 grade in STEP Test; UI consists of 37% with 450-500 in TOEFL or 2nd grade in STEP Test; IM consists of 37% with 420-450 in TOEFL; BA consists of 9% with 400-420 in TOEFL.
- 7) Giving such a very basic computer/network literacy education for the freshmen is not carried out forever because the secondary education officially starts information science classes at all the secondary schools throughout Japan in 2002.
- 8) Students also receive an information network booklet called RAINBOW (Ritsumeikan Academic Information Network Bridging Our World) Guide.
- 9) They were selected through application forms and the interview. Their 1999 average score for the original computer/network literacy test was 67.72 and they seemed to have fair knowledge.

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