

[Articles]

Active Learning in the Japanese EFL Classroom

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1 Introduction

Many Japanese higher education institutions, including us, have introduced or are introducing active learning (AL) approaches, following a worldwide trend towards student-centered or learning-centered education.⁽¹⁾

Putting the definition aside, the idea of active learning is not at all new to language teachers. You cannot learn skills without actively practicing the skills you want to learn, as learning skills involves developing some physical coordination and experiential learning. In the context of language learning, learners need to be actively engaged in spoken production and spoken interaction to acquire language skills. Numerous active learning strategies have been suggested, since the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in 1970s, to promote students' interaction and participation.

However, CLT does not seem to have taken root in English Education in Japan. So, at the moment, university students tend to lack previous experience and training in spoken production/interaction, which can pose a challenge to English language teachers hoping to promote students' interaction and participation in their classroom. For example, Think-Pair-Share (TPS) should be a simple and effective AL technique, but if TPS is introduced without appropriate preparation, students could take forever to put their thoughts together and write them down and might end up just reading aloud what they have written.

What can we, language teachers, do to help those students who lack experience and training to be actively engaged in spoken production and interaction? This paper discusses how AL approaches were implemented in the Basic English 2: English for Homestay (in fall 2019) and assess how they worked to facilitate active student participation by triggering student interest in what they were learning and practicing.

2 Interest-Driven, Active Learning

There can be many different ways of defining "active learning", and many different active learning models and approaches have been proposed and adopted according to

(1) Yamada & Yamada (2018)

different learning objectives,⁽²⁾ but when students are engaged with the material, participating in the class, and collaborating with each other, they should be learning more actively than when they are simply listening (and trying to memorizing what they hear).⁽³⁾ Active learning matters since that is how we learn effectively: we learn more when we participate in our learning process.⁽⁴⁾

One of the key factors in higher learner engagement is their interest.⁽⁵⁾ When learners are interested in what they are learning, they “pay closer attention and process the information more efficiently”,⁽⁶⁾ and their “engagement deepens as they willingly spend time thinking, dialoguing, and creating ideas in meaningful ways”.⁽⁷⁾

Interest is an intrinsic motivator,⁽⁸⁾ for sure, but as we cannot assume all the students are always interested in what they are going to learn, motivational interventions will be needed in any educational context. Harackiewicz et al. (2018) identifies four types of interest intervention, including (i) attention-getting (using such structural features as novelty, complexity, surprisingness, hands-on activities, group work, choice, social involvement, etc.), (ii) context personalization (providing context evoking prior individual interest), (iii) problem-based learning (highlighting a lack of needed knowledge, promoting self-generated questions), and (iv) enhancing utility value (helping students find meaning and value in their courses).

As Harackiewicz et al. (2018) notes, however, none of those interest intervention is versatile. Context personalization for a large classes or a heterogeneous group of students can be challenging, for example. If there are topics of common interest, levels of competence to carry out given activities may vary. Selection of an intervention depends on specific instructional settings.

3 Active Learning in the English Language Classroom

In our institution, the Basic Education Center has been established recently, and it has started to offer new foreign language programs. The newly-launched language courses are all elective and topic-based, which is totally different from the language courses that have been offered by the Faculty of Commerce and Economics. In addition to this change, we will have 105-minute class periods, starting in the academic year of 2020.

Given these new, elective and topic-based language courses, it is now easier for

(2) Yamada & Yamada (2018), Pesavento, et al. (2015), Edelson & Joseph (2001)

(3) Promoting Active Learning.

(4) Grunert O'Brien, Millis, & Cohen (2009)

(5) Harackiewicz et al. (2018), McCarthy, (2014), Paul (2013), Edelson & Joseph (2001)

(6) Paul (2013)

(7) McCarthy (2014)

(8) Edelson & Joseph (2001)

students to choose a language (or more) and a topic (or more) that they want to learn. This is beneficial to promoting active learning since the students are, assumedly, interested in learning in the course they chose to take. One apparent challenge to the instructors, on the other hand, is that the students' proficiency levels can vary widely since no placement test is required. So, the language instructors in charge of these new courses are now (being) prepared to increase or maintain their pre-existing interest, and to take care of varied levels of proficiency, while they should get prepared for the longer class period.

I am among them, who taught one of the new course in 2019. Looking back, the 2019 course can be seen as a case of incorporating active learning into a topic-based English language classroom. In the following sections, what activities and what technology tools were used for what purposes and how (well) they worked will be shown. It will also be discussed that the longer class period can be beneficial to further promote active learning.

4 2019 Fall Class

In this section, the student needs and interest, at an initial stage, will be discussed based on the results of a pre-test and a pre-survey (§ 4.1), and some of the selected learning activities will be illustrated (§ 4.2).

4.1 Student Profile

The class I taught in 2019 fall was Basic English 2: English for Study Abroad. As mentioned above (§ 3), the course was elective and no placement test was required. It was expected that the enrolled students would share common interest in study abroad but their proficiency levels could vary.

One of the first things the instructor of such a class should do is to know the students, and technology helps here. I conducted online surveys, using Survey Monkey (a paid plan), to know student learning attitudes and interest. Also in order to get a rough understanding of their needs, I had them take an online English proficiency test⁽⁹⁾ and report the test result via Google Form. All the online materials were shared in the LINE group for the class (Fig. 1).⁽¹⁰⁾

The proficiency test consists of only 15 questions that measure receptive skills. The students were told that the scores were not going to be part of their grades. They took the test as a homework assignment, so it was possible for them to take as much time as they liked. 23 out of 26 enrolled students reported their test results. As Fig. 2 shows,

(9) NHK Textbook English Proficiency Test [英語力測定テスト] 2019.

(10) "Notes" are used for the announcement. And when posting a "Note" I mostly use the LINE app for Mac because otherwise it would be troublesome (to me) to create an announcement with relevant links.

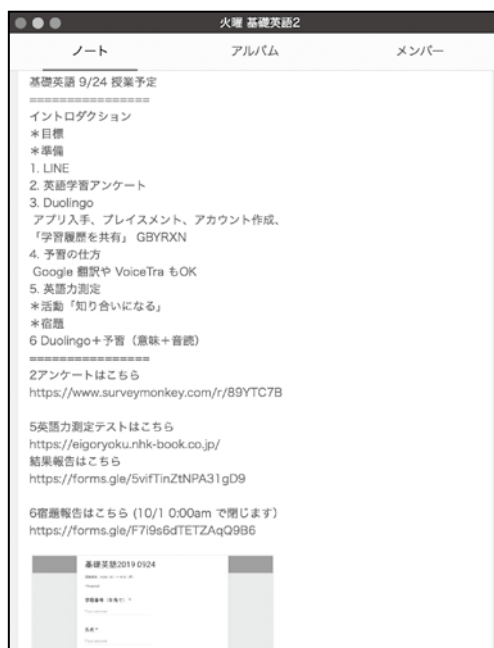


Fig. 1 A class announcement shared in the LINE group

over 90 % of them (22 out of 23) were estimated to have a Beginner/Basic level of receptive skills (A1, A1-A2, or A2). As for receptive skills, their proficiency levels did not vary as much as expected (See also Table 1).

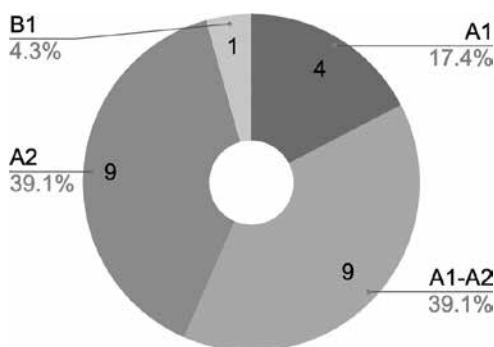


Fig. 2 Pre-Test: English Proficiency Test (October, 2019; N=23)

Table 1 CEFR Self-Assessment Grid⁽¹¹⁾ for Receptive Skills: A1 to B2

	Listening	Reading
A1	- I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	- I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.
A2	- I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). - I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements	- I can read very short, simple texts. - I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables - I can understand short simple personal letters.
B1	- I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. - I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear	- I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. - I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.
B2	- I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. - I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. - I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	- I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. - I can understand contemporary literary prose.

Along with the test, the students were asked, in a pre-survey conducted in October, to self-assess their proficiency level in each of the 5 skill areas of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing, referring to the CEFR self-assessment grid (Table 1)⁽¹²⁾. As Table 2 shows, about 76% self-assessed their listening skills as A2 or higher, and about 86% self-assessed their reading skills as A2 or higher. Their self assessment of receptive skills largely corresponded to the the test results (Fig. 2).

As for the productive/interactive skills, about half the students assessed their proficiency as A1 (Table 2), thinking that they were NOT capable of using very simple phrases (See Table 3). Assuming that they had hardly ever practiced speaking, communicating, or writing in English to express themselves, as is the case with most Japanese students I have met, their low self-assessed proficiency in productive/interactive skills seemed reasonable.

The low self-assessed proficiency in productive and interactive skills appeared to be correlated to their high foreign language (FL) anxiety level. In the same pre-survey, they were asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale (1: not at all true of me, 3: halfway

(11) Council of Europe. See Appendix for C1 and C2.

(12) They used a Japanese version of the Self-Assessment Grid.

Table 2 Self-Assessed Proficiency Levels (October, 2019; N=21)

		A1	A2	B1	B2
Understanding	Listening	5 (23.8%)	12 (57.1%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)
	Reading	3 (14.3%)	14 (66.7%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)
Speaking	Spoken Interaction	11 (52.4%)	7 (33.3%)	2 (9.52%)	1 (4.8%)
	Spoken Production	11 (52.4%)	6 (28.6%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)
Writing	Writing	10 (47.6%)	6 (28.6%)	4 (19.1%)	1 (4.8%)

Table 3 CEFR Self-Assessment Grid for Productive/Interactive Skills: A1 to B2

	Spoken Interaction	Spoken Production	Writing
A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. - I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics. 	<p>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. - I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. - I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. - I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.
B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. - I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. - I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. - I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. - If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. - I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. - I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. - I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. - I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works

true of me, 5: totally true of me). As Table 4 shows, 62 % of the students were very worried about their pronunciation; 57% felt nervous when they had to speak in English in class; 52 % thought they would feel uncomfortable or nervous if they have to communicate in English.

Table 4 Foreign Language Anxiety (October, 2019; N=21)

	1*	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I wouldn't like it if my English sounds strange to English-speaking people.	9 (42.9%)	4 (19.1%)	7 (33.3%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2.00	1.00
I feel nervous when I have to speak in English in class.	7 (33.3%)	5 (23.8%)	8 (38.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	2.19	1.08
I would feel uncomfortable if I have to talk to native speakers of English.	5 (23.8%)	6 (28.6%)	9 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	2.33	1.02
I would feel nervous if someone asks me for directions in English.	7 (33.3%)	4 (19.1%)	10 (47.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2.14	0.91

*1: Totally true of me - 2 - 3: Halfway true of me - 4 - 5: Not at all true of me

Also, it was found that using their mouth and ears to learn words or phrases was less common than using their hands (See Table 5). Writing down words helps you memorize them for sure, but if you do not practice saying them aloud you never gain automaticity of language production process. And if you do not try to imitate what you hear, phonological representations you form when you use (read, listen to, write, or speak) English might be quite different from acceptable ones, which is again the case with almost all the Japanese students I have taught^{(13), (14)}. Those students, naturally, have difficulty in processing spoken English even if they can easily read and understand the same phrases or sentences.

Finally, Table 6 shows their interest in intercultural communication and willingness to communicate with non-Japanese speakers, which informed me that there were a few who had no interest in intercultural experience or homestay/study abroad with a few exceptions, they were generally interested in intercultural experience, but not in international jobs; and their willingness to communicate with non-Japanese speakers were relatively weak.

In sum, the pre-course test and survey revealed that the enrolled students were more homogeneous than expected: their receptive skills were roughly estimated as A1 to A2,

(13) See 山内 [Yamauchi] (2002) and Greer & Yamauchi (2008) for how Japanese EFL learners tend to mishear English because their phonological representations are too different from acceptable pronunciations.

(14) They have formed some phonological representations of lexical units they learned, since otherwise you cannot rehearse them, vocally or subvocally, in the phonological loop, and hence you cannot remember them (the units will decay before they can be stored in long-term memory). But unfortunately those representations are too different from acceptable pronunciation in many cases. It is crucial to learning foreign words or phrases that learners can form acceptable phonological representations and rehearse them (Baddeley et al.,1998; Fallahcha, 2011, 角田 [Kadota], 2006; 角田 [Kadota], 2015).

Table 5 Study methods they use (October, 2019; N=21)

	5*	4	3	2	1	Mean	SD
I remember words or grammar examples by saying them out loud.	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	14 (66.7%)	3 (14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	2.81	0.87
I remember words by writing them.	11 (52.4%)	1 (4.8%)	7 (33.3%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	3.95	1.24
I say useful phrases over and over until I can say them smoothly.	1 (4.8%)	2 (9.5%)	13 (61.9%)	4 (19.1%)	1 (4.8%)	2.90	0.83
I learn grammar with gap-fill or scrambled sentence exercises.	3 (14.3%)	4 (19.1%)	13 (61.9%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3.43	0.81

*5: Totally true of me - 4 - 3: Halfway true of me - 2 - 1: Not at all true of me

Table 6 Interest in Intercultural/International Contact (October, 2019; N=21)

	5*	4	3	2	1	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I want (like) to go abroad and experience different cultures.	7 (33.3%)	4 (19.1%)	8 (38.1%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	3.71	1.33
I'm interested in homestay or study abroad.	6 (28.6%)	4 (19.1%)	8 (38.1%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (14.3%)	3.48	1.16
I'm willing to serve foreign customers at my workplace.	3 (14.3%)	3 (14.3%)	9 (42.9%)	4 (19.1%)	2 (9.5%)	3.05	1.06
I'm willing to help foreigners in trouble at a restaurant or a station.	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	10 (47.6%)	5 (23.8%)	2 (9.5%)	2.86	1.24
I'm interested in international jobs.	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	9 (42.9%)	4 (19.1%)	4 (19.1%)	2.71	1.19

*5: Totally true of me - 4 - 3: Halfway true of me - 2 - 1: Not at all true of me

and their productive/interactive skills were self-assessed as A1 to A2; they had lacked sufficient basic practice of saying out loud; they had relatively high levels of FL anxiety; their willingness to communicate with non-Japanese speakers were relatively weak; With a few exceptions, they were generally interested in intercultural experience, but not in international jobs.

Since this course, English for Homestay, aims to prepare students for homestay situations, A2 level proficiency in English was an appropriate (minimum) goal: they need at least to be able to understand, describe and communicate about things of immediate relevance and matters of immediate needs, to do simple and routine tasks (See Table 1 and Table 3). That also appeared to be a realistic short-term goal to all, as it could be safely assumed that those estimated to have A2 or higher levels of proficiency in receptive skills would be quite weak in productive and interactive skills. Another common issue was FL anxiety, which I planned to address by providing less intimidating opportunities to practice using English. Also, explicit instruction seemed to be desirable to help the students realize the importance of oral and aural practice for beginner language learners.

4.2 Activities and Use of Student Devices

This section will show how some of the language activities and tools were selected to trigger student interest in what they were learning and practicing. Table 7 summarizes the language activities used in the class: regular activities include song listening, dialogue practice in pairs, word-by-word chorus reading, and Duolingo given as a homework assignment; activities using student devices (mostly smartphones) include Kahoot! quizzes,⁽¹⁵⁾ Duolingo, sharing writing and video in the class LINE. In addition to those activities, the students were allowed to use their device during the class time to look up vocabulary items new to them via Weblio dictionary⁽¹⁶⁾ or Google Translate, and to search information on the Internet.

Most activities listed here (Table 7) were expected to serve as “interest triggers” for the enrolled students: they involved “new” challenges (they were asked to speak out loud, re-tune their phonological representations and access their knowledge as quickly as possible); the content and/or ways of learning were relevant to their needs (§ 3); and purposes and reasons for the activity were made explicit. One activity or a segment of an activity lasted 10 to 20 minutes, which was also expected to keep their attention level.

Table 7 Summary of Activities Used in the 2019 Fall Class

Activity	Regular	Use of Student Device	Interest Triggers			
			Attention Getting	Context Personalization	Problem Solving	Enhancing Utility Value
Song Listening	✓		✓	✓	NA*	✓
Dialogue Practice in Pair	✓		✓	✓	NA	✓
Word-by-Word Reading	✓		✓	✓	NA	✓
Kahoot!		✓	✓		NA	
Interview & Survey			✓	✓	NA	✓
Duolingo	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA	✓
Sharing Writing		✓	✓	✓	NA	✓
Sharing Video		✓	✓	✓	NA	✓

*NA=Not applicable here.

Kahoot! Quizzes

Kahoot! is a game-based classroom response system (Fig. 3), which can be used free

(15) For those interested, one of the Kahoot! quizzes can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/2R7OXqc>

(16) Weblio 英和辞典・和英辞典 [English-Japanese & Japanese-English dictionary]
<https://ejje.weblio.jp/>

of charge. A projector and a front screen, a teacher's device, and students' devices are all you need. Kahoot! is an extremely powerful attention getter (Table 7), and encourages students to think aloud and teach each other.^{(17), (18)} It worked successfully to spice up an introductory or a review session. The results can be saved in a spreadsheet if you like. It can be used in the “team mode”, where a group of students sharing one device compete with other groups. Although students were willing to do Kahoot! every time, it was used only occasionally for this semester, mainly due to a time constraint.



Fig. 3 A question on the front screen & the answer choices on the student device

Duolingo Assignments

Duolingo is a self-access language learning program, available on computers and mobile devices.⁽¹⁹⁾ Duolingo is designed to help language learners to continue their study using a variety of game-like features, like login bonus, daily goals, visible progress, unlocking a next stage as reward of completing a stage, etc.

The materials might be too easy for learners at a B1 or higher proficiency level, but the issues of automaticity of access to linguistic knowledge and appropriate phonological representations were relevant to all the students in the class, where Duolingo could help a lot. This should be made clear to the students: Duolingo's curriculum offers just the right difficulty level of learning materials to students at an A1 to A2 level, and when they find something too easy, they should use “Check-Point Test” or “Skip Test” to reach the stage that they find challenging enough.

As mentioned above, Duolingo was used for homework. In the Duolingo for Schools

(17) See 山内 [Yamauchi] (2017) for more detailed discussion on Kahoot! quizzes.

(18) See Mork (2014) for discussion about benefits of student response systems (like Clicker) in the Japanese context where students tend to take long before speaking up or even making a simple response.

(19) See Yamauchi (2019)'s presentation slides for more detailed discussion on Duolingo: <https://bit.ly/3asTwD6>

section, you can create and announce assignments and view their course progress (Fig. 4).

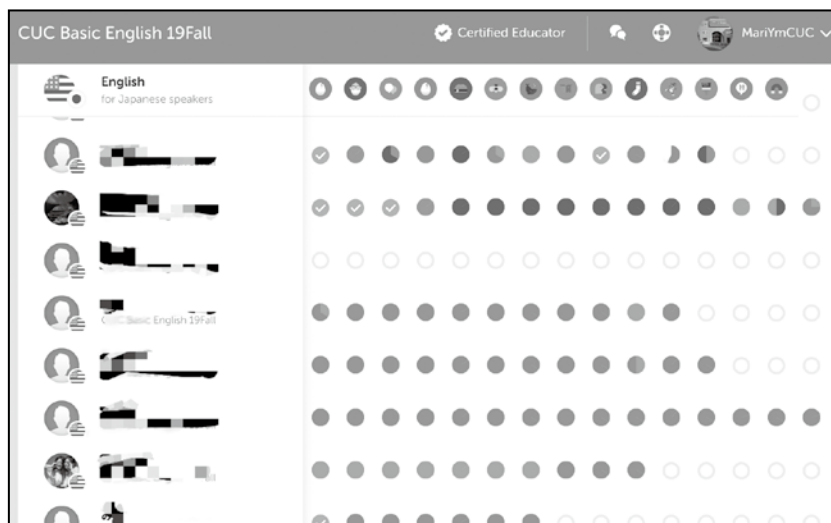


Fig. 4 Duolingo for Schools: Students' Course Progress

Sharing Video/Writing in the LINE group

Sharing their video and writing was used to provide the opportunity of “real” interactions, where they were asked to talk about themselves in response to my questions (Fig. 5). This activity can serve to facilitate personalization as well as attention getting.

Although LINE was used as the platform in this semester because I did not want to introduce another new tool or app to them, a better platform for sharing and interacting should be looked for.

Phonological Training: Song Listening & Chorus Reading

As mentioned in 4.1, many or most of the students in the class first needed to get exposure to acceptable spoken English and to learn to imitate what they hear to retune their phonological representations. Song listening was used as a routine phonological training as well as a warm-up. Students listen to the song of the week and fill in the blanks in the worksheet like the one shown in Fig. 6. The target strings usually contain features of connected speech, i.e., linking, elision, assimilation, /t/ allophones, etc., and sometimes problematic vowels and consonants, e.g., *began* vs *begun*, *play* vs. *pray*, etc.

The instructor pauses the music after each line containing a set of blanks and check if they identify the missing words, providing necessary scaffolding, e.g., repeating the portions they find difficult to identify and explaining why Japanese learners tend to find them hard to recognize. Through the process, they understood, for example, why they missed the word “too” in the string “just too” in Fig. 6 (i.e., if your representation of



Fig. 5 Sharing Video in the Class LINE

Can't Take My Eyes Off You By Boys Town Gang

*You're (1 just)(too) good to be true
 Can't take my eyes off of you
 You'd be (2 like) heaven to touch
 Oh I wanna (3 hold)(you) so much
 At long last love has arrived
 And I thank God I'm alive
 You're (1 just)(too) good to be true
 I can't take my eyes off of you

Fig. 6 A part of a song listening worksheet

“just” is [dʒʌstə] or [dʒʌstʉ], not [dʒʌst] or [dʒʌsʔ], then when you hear [dʒʌsʔtu:] you tend to think you’ve heard only “just”), and that they needed to retune their phonological representations.

Also, they were given a couple of dialogues every time so that they (re-)learn and practice some target vocabulary and structures in context (see Fig. 7). Chunk-by-chunk reading was a regular component intended to help them to (re-)form acceptable phonological representations and to match English phrases and their meanings. If some students appeared to find it too easy, they were told to try “Read, Look up and Say”. On

the other hand, word-by-word reading was used when the text contained words that many of the students seemed to be unfamiliar with, or just to help them refresh themselves by standing up and repeating out loud in a rhythmic manner.

The problems of wrong phonological representations and slow access to linguistic knowledge served as a topic of common interest and they were always explained why they needed to do those activities, to help enhance utility value.

Date _____ Name _____	
<p>A: How was your winter vacation? B: It was great. I went out to many places and had a lot of fun. A: Cool! Where did you go? B: I traveled to Osaka and Kyoto and enjoyed their local foods, like Kushikatsu and Yatsunashi. A: How nice! How much does it cost to take the Shinkansen? B: Actually, I took local trains. A: To Osaka and Kyoto? Wow, how long did it take?</p>	<p>A: 冬休みはどうだった? B: よかったよ。いろいろ出かけてすごい楽しかった。 A: いいねえ!どこに行ったの? B: 京都と大阪に旅行して地元料理を食べてきたんだ、串カツとか八つ橋とか。 A: いいなあ! 新幹線代どのくらいかかる? B: 実はローカル線で行ったんだ。 A: 大阪と京都まで? うわ、どのくらいかかった?</p>

Fig. 7 A part of a dialogue practice worksheet

Dialogue Practice in Pairs & Interview or Survey

The same dialogues (like the one in Fig. 7) were used for another speaking practice focusing on quicker access to English phrases and structures. Students were paired up and asked to decide which would first play which role (A or B). One of them should work as a helper who looked at both English and Japanese and help the other, who only had to look at Japanese, when they had hard time retrieving a right English phrase. During the pair work meaningful interactions often occurred (like “No, you need a past tense here” or “We can say ‘eat’ here, right, instead of ‘enjoy’?”), which sometimes brought up a topic of common interest to be discussed in the class.

The dialogue practice in pairs were sometimes followed by an interview or survey activity, where they were encouraged to use the target language to express themselves and interact with each other in a specific context.

Other activities

In addition to the activities discussed above, several other activities were used. For example, writing and speaking activities to have them practice target structures were given when needed, e.g., when confusion among students was observed. Dictogloss was introduced at a later stage, when they gained more phonological awareness. Working in

groups worked quite well to help all the students, including weaker ones, to stay engaged. Short class discussions (in Japanese) were done from time to time when we came across interesting cultural things, like “Do you think 5 minutes is enough for you to take a shower?” One of the activities that could be interesting and engaging but I chose to give up due to lack of time was writing in combination with some research and a small group discussion.

A balance between what can interest them and what they can do should always be taken into consideration, but the longer class period could allow for activities that are a little more time-consuming.

5 Results and discussion

From my observation, the students appeared to be actively engaged in learning in the class. They seemed to be more comfortable using whatever English they could use and being talked to (by me) in English (sometimes replying in Japanese). So, were they satisfied with the learning experience? Did they find it useful and meaningful? How did they assess their productive/interactive skills in English now? Did their learning experience have some impact on their ways of learning English, foreign language anxiety, and interest in intercultural or international contact?

Student Feedback on the Activities

Based on the post-survey conducted in the 2nd week of December (N=25), the students were largely satisfied with the activities used as regular and/or major components of a lesson (Table 8): Kahoot! quizzes were the most satisfying (M=4.52, SD=0.82), and song listening and word-by-word reading were also very popular. The least satisfying was sharing video, suggesting that I might have pushed them too far out of their comfort zone or too early.⁽²⁰⁾

Those satisfying activities, Kahoot!, dialogue practice, and song listening were also what the students found helpful to improve their English. Many students found Duolingo helpful (M=3.96, SD=0.98) though they were only moderately satisfied with Duolingo (M=3.60, SD=0.87).⁽²¹⁾

As seen in Table 9, most of the students (except one) were also happy about the level of English used and learned in the class, which helped them to stay engaged. As for Duolingo as well, English used there suited 86 % of the students. To provide more personalized homework assignments using the student device, however, other learning programs available on their devices should be offered as well to give students choices.

(20) See 山内 [Yamauchi] (2018, 2019) for implementing video-based communication.

(21) I can understand their complaints about Duolingo English for Japanese learners. Exercises including English to Japanese translation can be really frustrating when they give too many words to choose from.

Table 8 Satisfaction and Perceived Usefulness (2019.12; N=25)

Activity	I'm very satisfied with it.		It helped me a lot to improve my English	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Song Listening	4.32	0.90	3.92	0.91
Dialogue Practice in Pair	3.92	0.81	4.00	0.82
Word-by-Word Reading	4.20	0.82	3.88	0.83
Kahoot!	4.52	0.82	4.24	0.83
Interview & Survey	3.76	1.05	3.80	0.87
Duolingo	3.60	0.87	3.96	0.98
Sharing Writing	3.56	1.19	3.64	1.11
Sharing Video	2.96	1.31	3.16	1.25

*5: Totally true of me - 4 - 3: Halfway true of me - 2 - 1: Not at all true of me

Table 9 Level of English Used in the Class & in Duolingo

	Just the right level for me.	Easy enough to quickly proceed.	Moderately challenging.	Too easy to stay motivated.	Too hard to stay motivated.
English in the class	7 (28.0%)	9 (36.0%)	8 (32.0%)	1 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)
English in Duolingo	5 (20.0%)	12 (48.0%)	4 (16.0%)	4 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Self-Assessed Proficiency

Compared to the pre-survey in October, their self-assessed proficiency levels improved after 8-9 weeks. 3 to 5 times as many students self-assessed their proficiency level as B1 in all the 5 skills, and less than half of the students self-assessed their productive/interactive skills as A1 (Table 10). The improved self-assessed proficiency levels and the perceived usefulness of the activities (Table 8) can be seen to be correlated to each other.

Impact on Learning Methods

The activities had a favorable impact on the students' learning methods. As Table 11 shows, on average, more students now practiced saying out loud ($M=3.64$, $SD=0.76$) than before ($M=2.81$, $SD=0.87$), and this difference was significant ($t(40.12)=3.41$, $p<.05$) and presented a medium sized effect ($r=.45$)⁽²²⁾; more students now rehearse phrases to gain fluency ($M=3.20$, $SD=1.12$) than before ($M=2.90$, $SD=0.83$), and this difference presented a small sized effect ($r=.10$) though not significant ($t(43.39)=1.04$, $p>.05$); more students

(22) Mizumoto's Effect Size Calculator 1 was used to calculate each effect size: <http://langtest.jp/> For the notion of Effect Size, see Cohen (1988), Cohen (1994), 水本・竹内 [Mizumoto & Takeuchi] (2010), 村井・橋本 [Murai & Hashimoto] (2018).

Table 10 What level do you think you are at now? (Pre: N=21; Post: N=25)

		A1	A2	B1	B2
L	Pre	5 (23.8%)	12 (57.1%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)
	Post	4 (16.0%)	9 (36.0%)	11 (44.0%)	1 (4.0%)
R	Pre	3 (14.3%)	14 (66.7%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)
	Post	2 (8.0%)	7 (28.0%)	15 (60.0%)	1 (4.0%)
SI	Pre	11 (52.4%)	7 (33.3%)	2 (9.5%)	1 (4.8%)
	Post	5 (20.0%)	10 (40.0%)	10 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)
SP	Pre	11 (52.4%)	6 (28.6%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)
	Post	4 (16.0%)	7 (28.0%)	12 (48.0%)	2 (8.0%)
W	Pre	10 (47.6%)	6 (28.6%)	4 (19.1%)	1 (4.8%)
	Post	3 (12.0%)	11 (44.0%)	11 (44.0%)	0 (0.0%)

L: Listening, R: Reading, SI: Spoken Interaction, SP: Spoken Production, W: Writing

now used English songs for oral/aural training ($M=3.76$, $SD=1.36$) than before ($M=3.00$, $SD=1.52$), and this difference presented a small sized effect ($r=.26$) though not significant ($t(40.63)=1.77$, $p>.05$); and more students now watched English movies and dramas with subtitles ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.35$) than before ($M=2.81$, $SD=1.44$), and this difference presented a small sized effect ($r=.21$) though not significant ($t(41.58)=1.42$, $p>.05$).

Thus, training with oral practice and exposure to spoken English increased to some extent after 8-9 weeks. Since these activities are fundamental to acquiring basic skills of any language, it can be said that these students have learned to better learn a foreign language.

Table 11 How do you study English? (Pre: N=21; Post: N=25)

	Pre/Post	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t, df, p</i>	ES (<i>r</i>) [95% CI]
I practice saying words or phrases.	Pre	2.81	0.87	3.41, 40.12, .001	.45 Medium
	Post	3.64	0.76		
I repeat useful phrases until I can say them smoothly.	Pre	2.90	0.83	1.04, 43.39, .30	.15 Small
	Post	3.20	1.12		
I listen to English songs while looking at the lyrics and sing along.	Pre	3.00	1.52	1.77, 40.63, .08	.26 Small
	Post	3.76	1.36		
I watch English movies and dramas with subtitles	Pre	2.81	1.44	1.42, 41.58, .16	.21 Small
	Post	3.40	1.35		

*5: Totally true of me - 4 - 3: Halfway true of me - 2 - 1: Not at all true of me

Impact on Foreign Language Anxiety

As Table 12 shows, the learning experience in this course seemed to have had a small but positive impact of on the students' FL anxiety, which was still low though. On

average, the students were a little less worried now about their speech or pronunciation ($M=2.32$, $SD=1.07$) than before ($M=2.00$, $SD=1.00$), and this difference presented a small sized effect ($r=.15$) though not significant ($t(43.47)=1.05$, $p>.05$); they were a little less nervous when speaking in class now ($M=2.64$, $SD=1.29$) than before ($M=2.19$, $SD=0.89$), and this difference presented a small sized effect ($r=.20$) though not significant ($t(42.52)=1.39$, $p>.05$); and they would feel less uncomfortable about speaking to native speakers of English now ($M=2.72$, $SD=1.28$) than before ($M=2.33$, $SD=0.85$), and this difference presented a small sized effect ($r=.17$) though not significant ($t(41.94)=1.23$, $p>.05$). However, they said they would still feel nervous if asked for directions in English like before.

Table 12 Foreign Language Anxiety (Pre: N=21, Post: N=25)

	Pre/Post	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t, df, p</i>	ES (<i>r</i>) [95% CI]
I wouldn't like it if my English sounds strange to Englishspeaking people.	Pre	2.00	1.00	1.05, 43.47, .30	.15 Small
	Post	2.32	1.07		
I feel nervous when I have to speak in English in class.	Pre	2.19	0.89	1.39, 42.52, .17	.20 Small
	Post	2.64	1.29		
I would feel uncomfortable if I have to talk to native speakers of English.	Pre	2.33	0.85	1.23, 41.94, .22	.17 Small
	Post	2.72	1.28		
I would feel nervous if someone asks me for directions in English.	Pre	2.14	0.91	0.56, 43.20, .57	.08
	Post	2.32	1.25		

*1: Totally true of me - 2 - 3: Halfway true of me - 4 - 5: Not at all true of me

Impact on Interest in Intercultural/International Contact

Finally, a small but positive impact was observed on the students' interest in intercultural or international contact and their willingness to communicate (WTC) using English. As summarized in Table 13, on average, no change was observed in their interest in experiencing different cultures abroad (which was moderately high in the first place: $M=3.71$, $SD=1.24$), but some increase was noted in their interest in homestay or study abroad (Pre: $M=3.48$, $SD=1.33$; Post: $M=3.84$, $SD=1.25$), which presented a small sized effect ($r=.14$) though not significant ($t(41.69)=0.94$, $p>.05$). Some increase was also noted in their interest in international jobs (Pre: $M=2.71$, $SD=1.19$; Post: $M=3.16$, $SD=1.14$), which presented a small sized effect ($r=.19$) though not significant ($t(42.01)=1.30$, $p>.05$). Also they were more willing to interact with foreign people at their workplace ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.35$) than before ($M=3.05$, $SD=1.16$), and this difference presented a small sized effect ($r=.14$) though not significant ($t(43.97)=0.94$, $p>.05$). Similarly, they were more willing to help foreign people in trouble in a public place ($M=3.52$, $SD=1.33$) than before ($M=2.86$, $SD=1.06$), and this difference presented a small

sized effect ($r=.26$) though not significant ($t(43.69)=1.88, p>.05$).

Table 13 Interest in Intercultural/International Contact (Pre: N=21, Post: N=25)

	Pre/Post	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t, df, p</i>	ES (<i>r</i>) [95% CI]
I want (like) to go abroad and experience different cultures.	Pre	3.71	1.24	0.027, 43.04, .98	0
	Post	3.72	1.28		
I'm interested in homestay or study abroad.	Pre	3.48	1.33	0.94, 41.60, .35	.14 Small
	Post	3.84	1.25		
I'm interested in international jobs.	Pre	2.71	1.19	1.30, 42.01, .20	.19 Small
	Post	3.16	1.14		
I'm willing to serve foreign customers at my workplace.	Pre	3.05	1.16	0.94, 43.97, .35	.14 Small
	Post	3.40	1.35		
I'm willing to help foreigners in trouble at a restaurant or a station.	Pre	2.86	1.06	1.88, 43.89, .07	.26 Small
	Post	3.52	1.33		

*5: Totally true of me - 4 - 3: Halfway true of me - 2 - 1: Not at all true of me

To sum up, the students were largely satisfied with the learning activities and/or found them helpful to improve their English, and most of them were also happy about the level of English used and learned in the class, which helped them to stay engaged. After 8-9 weeks of learning experience in the class, their self-assessed proficiency levels improved, and training with oral practice and exposure to spoken English increased to some extent, and it can be said that they had become better learners of a foreign language. Their FL anxiety was still high, but they were a little less worried about their speech or pronunciation, a little less nervous when speaking in class, and less uncomfortable about speaking to native speakers of English. Also they were a little more interested in homestay or study abroad and international jobs, and they were more willing to help foreign people in trouble in Japan.

I believe they were now more prepared to build relationships with new people in a homestay situation and to continue or restart to learn English on their own.

6 Conclusions

This paper reflected on a new English course, Basic English 2: English for Homestay, offered by the Basic Education Center starting in 2019, as a case of incorporating active learning into a topic-based English language classroom.

As interest is a key to students' active engagement in their learning process (§ 2), topic-based, elective courses should go well with the idea of active learning in a sense, but courses open to all levels of proficiency can pose a challenge to finding common

learning needs that are also sources of interest (§ 3). However, at present, it can be assumed that most Japanese university students, especially non-English majors, are quite weak at spoken English due to lack of basic oral/aural training at an earlier stage and experience in using English to communicate or express themselves. As this was the case with the students enrolled in my 2019 course based on the pre-survey (§ 4.1), the needs were weighed in selecting those activities illustrated in § 4.2. The selected activities were expected to serve as “interest triggers” for novelty, relevance to the content of interest, relevance to learning needs, and/or perceived usefulness.

Based on the results of the post-survey (§ 5), the students were satisfied with the activities and/or found them helpful to improve their English. The level of English used and learned was neither too difficult nor too easy for almost all. Their self-assessed proficiency levels improved, and training with oral practice and exposure to spoken English increased when they knew that they needed them to learn a foreign language. Their FL anxiety was still high but getting lower, and they were a little more interested in intercultural or international contact. It can be said that they were now more prepared to interact with people in English in a homestay situation and to continue or restart to learn English on their own.

Those activities discussed here worked quite fine to facilitate active engagement, but some other activities that could interest them had to be given up considering what they could do in the class time. The longer class period could allow us to give a try to interesting but a little more complicated tasks.

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Appendix

Table 1 CEFR self-assessment grid: B1 and B2

		B1	B2
Understanding	Listening	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.
	Reading	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.
Speaking	Spoken Interaction	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.
	Spoken Production	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
Writing	Writing	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.

Table 2 CEFR self-assessment grid: C1 and C2

		C1	C2
UNDERSTANDING	Listening	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
SPEAKING	Spoken Interaction	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
WRITING	Writing	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works

—Abstract—

This paper discusses how AL approaches were implemented in the Basic English 2: English for Homestay, a new course offered by the Basic Education Center starting in 2019, as a case of incorporating active learning into a topic-based English language classroom, and assess how they worked to facilitate active student participation. As interest is a key to students' active engagement in their learning process (§ 2), learning activities were selected to serve as "interest triggers" for novelty, relevance to the content of interest (e.g., dialogues related to intercultural contact such as homestay situations), relevance to learning needs (e.g., weakness at spoken production and interaction), and/or perceived usefulness (e.g., how song listening can help them re-tune their phonological representations) (see § 4). by triggering student interest in what they were learning and practicing. Based on to the results of the post-survey (§ 5), it can be concluded that the students were satisfied with the activities and/or found them helpful to improve their English, and those activities worked quite fine to facilitate active engagement. As some other activities that could interest them had to be given up considering student competence, the longer class period starting the next academic year could help further promote active learning, allowing us, the teachers to give a try to interesting but a little more complicated tasks.