

The Popularity of Using Facebook in EFL and ESL Writing Classes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how POPULAR utilizing Facebook is in English writing classes. Each of 4 university classes totaling 81 first-year students in Japan, were matched up with one of 4 classes totaling 79 students in Taiwan, the US, Indonesia and Vietnam. The students engaged in a “cross-culture discussion” for 10 weeks. The popularity of using Facebook was measured by A) A review of the literature, B) Counting the number of words students wrote, and C) Student-teacher questionnaires. It was found that 80% of ESL & English majors enjoyed using Facebook, but 60% of non-English majors did not like the activity.

Related Studies

A lot of evidence says Facebook is effective and popular in promoting English writing skills.

- THEORY—Constructivism says learning is a social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998. And collaborative writing is the best writing (Storch, 2005).
- TEST SCORES—Many studies have concluded that Facebook leads to higher scores on writing and grammar tests: Shih (2011, 2013) in Taiwan, Al-Haj (2015) in Gaza, Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012) in Taiwan (2012), Faggosa (2015) and Hussain et al. (2015) in Jordan, Shukor and Noordin (2014) in Malaysia, El Fatah & Ahmed (2016) in Saudi Arabia, Sim & Pop (2014) in Romania, and Rifai (2010) in Indonesia.
- STUDENT ATTITUDES—Many studies say students have “moderately favorable views” toward Facebook, including Dizon (2015) in Japan.

However, some researchers say there are students who do not like to use Facebook at school, the writing can be too superficial, and there may be privacy/bullying problems. (See for example, Selwyn, 2009)

Method

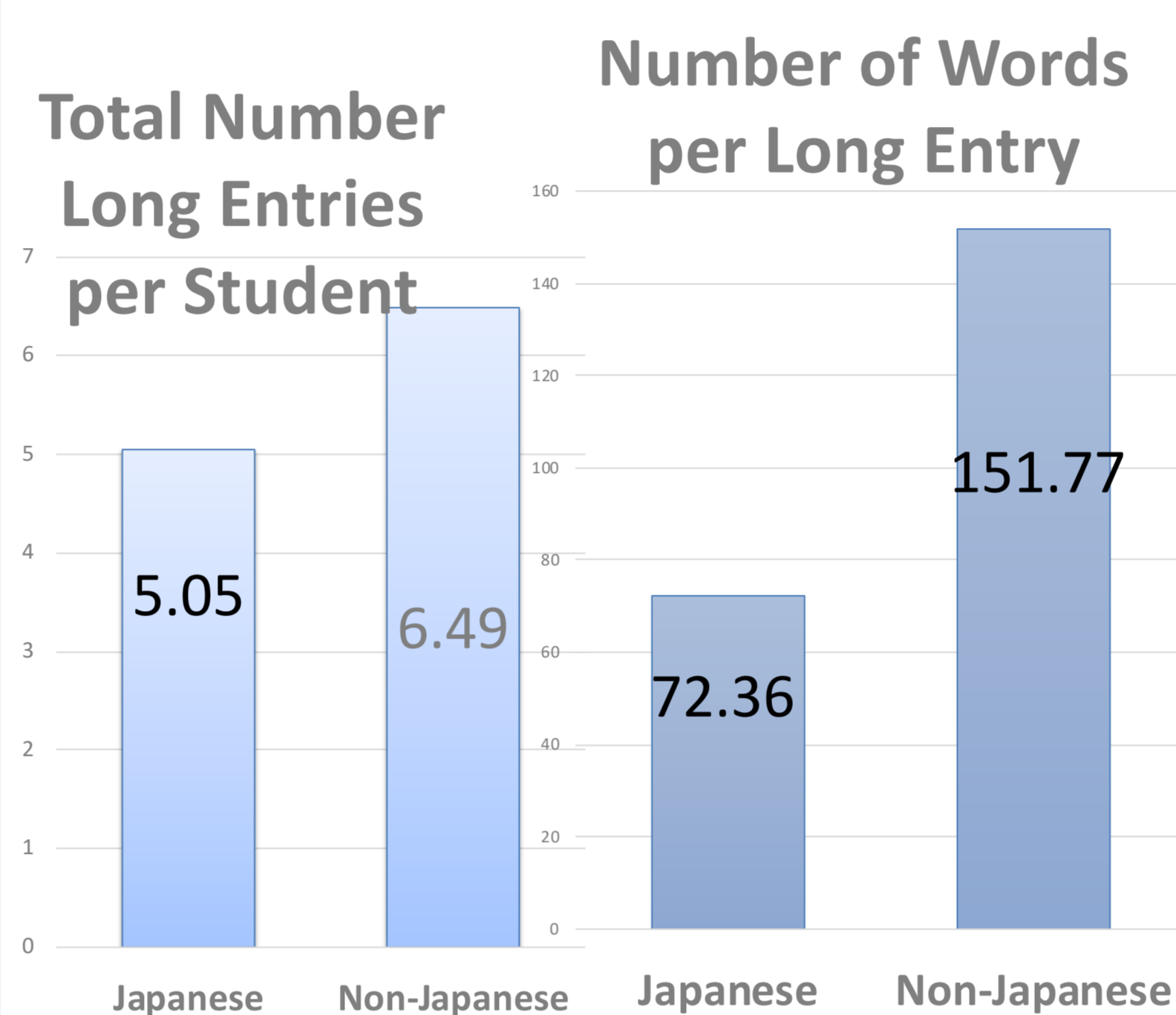
Four 1st-year non-English major classes in Japan, totaling 81 students (55 males), had TOEIC scores averaging 537.88 (SD=72.21). The classes were each matched with mostly English major classes in Taiwan, the US, Indonesia and Vietnam, totaling 79 students (22 males). The classes were found by using the TESOL Assoc. Blog.

The students in Japan were required to have “culture discussions” for about 10 weeks in the autumn of 2018. Importantly, the Facebook project was only a small part of each course, resulting in about 15% of students’ course grades in Japan. The Japanese were evaluated two times: once in early Nov., and once in late Dec.

The main topics were: A) Introduce yourself, B) Tourist places, C) Sports, D) Food and family, E) Movies and music, F) Your best trip or holiday, G) Good books, H) Student life and work, I) Male-female relations, J) The best ways to learn English.

Results

1) A lot of students and teachers liked the activity.



Other facts:

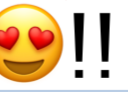
- The average student in Japan averaged 6.93 short comments during the project, and the average student outside Japan averaged 6.67 short comments. Thus, the non-majors kept up with the majors.
- Three of the five teachers said the activity was “very beneficial” for the students, and a fourth teacher said it was “rather beneficial.”
- On average, 13.55 photos were posted by each student.
- Students outside Japan generally said they liked the project. Questionnaire: How much did you ENJOY the activity?
A) Very much = 14%
B) Pretty much = 68%
C= Not much = 16%
D) Not at all = 3%
- 40% of all Japanese students stated that they liked the project, writing reasons such as “learning about other cultures” and “making friends.”

An Example of a Heartwarming Facebook Exchange

HueiLin: I want to introduce a famous holiday in Taiwan for you. It’s Moon Festival, which is also known as Mid-Autumn Festival, is celebrated on the 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar. It is a time for mainly members and loved ones to congregate and enjoy the full moon. (continue 65 more words)

Noda: There is also an event (not holiday) to enjoy the full moon on August 15th in Japan! In that day, Japanese offer sweet dumplings or rice cakes. Love of moon must be worldwide!

HueiLin: Oh~, maybe next time you can try to have barbecues with your family on 8/15.♥

Noda: It must be enjoyable !! I’ll have a try~

Results (Continued)

2) A lot of non-English major Japanese students did not like the activity.

Just 16% (13/81) of the students had nine long entries or more during the 10 weeks.

Questionnaire: How much did you ENJOY the activity?

- A) Very much = 10%:
- B) Pretty much = 30%
- C= Not much = 37%
- D) Not at all = 23%

Probable Main Reasons:

- In their hearts, they don’t like English.
- The task = Only 15% of course grade.
- Some resistance to using social media.

3) Other findings:

- The teacher in Taiwan said the activity was “not very beneficial” because most students did not write much.
- Japanese females had significantly more long entries (Ave = 5.96) than Japanese males (Ave = 4.62) ($p < 0.05$). Females also used more words per long entry (Ave. Female = 84.77; Ave Male = 67.77).
- Students everywhere generally preferred responding to their compatriots’ writings. Only 24% of Japanese short comments and 27% of non-Japanese short comments were addressed to people in the other country.
- Grammar errors were relatively rare.

Conclusions

Some students were active in using Facebook, so it can be assumed that they liked the activity and their writing skills improved. They put their emotions into writing relatively high-quality sentences.

However, over half of all the students in Japan stated that they did not really like the activity, so their English abilities probably did not improve.

Since a lot of research has found clear benefits, it is recommended that teachers use Facebook to improve students’ English writing abilities.



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