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KINSELLA VALIES

JALT CUE SIG, Japan

BE OUR GUEST: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT V.S. PAPER MIDTERMS

Abstract:

Educators generally agree that despite years of study and testing, some college graduates lack the confidence and the ability to communicate effectively in English. The Be Our Guest Midterm Assessment Project aims to improve motivation and communicative ability by replacing paper midterms with classroom-based, formative assessment.

This action research paper introduces and evaluates a 3-session lesson plan that was implemented in a Japanese junior college EFL setting. A group of 30 multi-level students prepared to interact with a visiting Japanese professional in English. The guest functioned as a relatable example of students' future L2 self in the workforce. Scaffolded assignments required students to listen to a presentation, then process relevant information, next initiate communication and reflect.

This study took a mixed method approach in convergent strands where quantitative pre- and post-surveys provided numerical data for test v.s. project results comparison and qualitative self-reflection essays were used to discover what aspects students found valuable. The data from the above sources were triangulated to produce an evaluation of the potential for structural implementation of PBLT and assessment within junior college communicative English courses.

The project structure not only proved helpful in assessing students' ability, but surveys showed that students were generally satisfied with their performance. Pre-activity many insisted that they can't because they need more English. Post-task many had formed individual learning goals, wanting to use English better. Though both low- and high-level students were anxious about communicating with a stranger, their anxiety was largely mitigated by the collaborative structure, the predictability of assignments and the freedom to look back at previously studied strategies.

Future research could focus on cataloging approaches currently in use that allow for more student autonomy and mitigate performance anxiety within PBLT. The design, implementation, and evaluation of such an assessment project would be desirable as well.

Keywords:

Assessment, implementation instructional materials design, Japan.

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