

The Role of CCDL in the EFL Classroom

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The purpose of this project is to introduce a new way of enhancing the English proficiency of university students by making their learning environments enjoyable and fruitful. This study emphasizes the role of CCDL(Cross-Cultural Distance Learning) in the EFL classroom by discussing (1) how to create the situations where students get to know and understand each other through modern technologies, (2) how to encourage the students work closely together through VC (video conferencing, TeleMeet), chat systems, and e-mail, and (3) how to provide a new style of learning and teaching L2.

1. Introduction

This study explains a cooperative project between Kangwon National University (KNU) and Waseda University (WU), so-called CCDLP (Cross-Cultural Distance Learning Project). The purpose of this project is to enhance the English proficiency of students at both universities by making their learning environments enjoyable and fruitful.

The application of multimedia and internet technologies into the classroom helps our students develop mutual understanding and friendship between students from different cultural backgrounds and motivates them to use and learn English as a communication tool by lowering their affective filter. Students also learn how to negotiate with people from other cultural backgrounds and realize how to appreciate their own cultures and traditions. In fact, CCDLP plays a very significant role in helping students to become global citizens.

This study emphasizes the role of CCDL in the EFL classroom by discussing (1) how to create the situations where students at both universities get to know and understand each other through modern technologies, (2) how to encourage the students work closely together through VC (video conferencing, TeleMeet), chat systems, and e-mail, and (3) how to provide a new style of learning and teaching L2.

The results from a questionnaire show that students have a sense of satisfaction and achievement in the English proficiency at the end of the project. The result of this

project will be of great importance for future works in the use of communication systems in L2 learning and teaching.

2. Background of CCDLP

The CCDLP was inaugurated in February 1999 between Korea University and WU. The following year the CCDLP between KNU and WU was begun. CCDLP is an example of a “digital campus consortium” and is part of the flow of educational reform at WU. The goal of the reforms is to create an open campus without the restrictions of time and distance. CCDL was established in 1999 by WU with the support of more than 20 private companies in order to create open education environments worldwide.

Both graduate and undergraduate students have participated in CCDLP between KNU and WU. In 2002, one graduate course (American literature seminar course) and two undergraduate courses (Freshman English course and Understanding English course) were engaged in CCDLP. In these courses more emphasis was given on interactions between KNU and WU students via TeleMeet, chatting and e-mails.

3. Theoretical Background

Researchers have focused on the fact that interactions between NSs (native speakers) and NNSs (non-native speakers) can facilitate TL (target language) learning because NNSs can learn from NSs during interactions (Optimal input) and NNSs adjust their language when they communicate with NSs (Long, 1981; Gass & Varonis, 1994). Here the focus or distinctive feature was on interactions between NSs and NNSs. As a result, studies on interactions between NNSs are few and have been ignored. Language learning, however, evolves out of learning how to carry on conversation (Hatch, 1978).

Thus the following assumptions can be made:

- (1) If language acquisition is associated with social development, interactions can facilitate language learning, and then interactions between NNSs also have a role to play.
- (2) If we accept the Chomskian view that language is genetic, then there must be something for L2 learners to learn from other L2 learners as they have to make themselves understood.
- (3) Just as interactions among children facilitate their L1 development, interactions among adults can facilitate their L2 development.
- (4) The application of multimedia and internet technologies into the classroom helps our students develop mutual understanding and friendship between students from different L1s by closely interacting with each other.
- (5) CCDL is an ideal model for optimal input of cross-cultural interactions.

4. Methodology

Based on those five assumptions in mind, a questionnaire was given to the KNU participants of CCDL both at the beginning (September) and the end of the second semester (December) of 2002. The object was to determine how they feel about learning English and CCDL, and how they evaluate their English proficiency both in September and in December to see if there is any difference.

The subjects of this study were 33 undergraduate students (8 females and 25 males) enrolled in “**Understanding English**” course. This is an elective course open to any student at KNU. The age ranges from 19 to 28.

Out of 33 students, only one student has been abroad and 87% of them started learning English in middle school. Thus, it is most likely that they have been educated under traditional teaching methods (grammar translation methods) from the first time they have been introduced to English. It is interesting that although most of the students realize the necessity and importance of learning English, 65 % of the students have never read a British or American novel.

In order to facilitate students’ learning of English as L2, the following procedures were taken for the course of **Understanding English** whose goals are to enhance students’ competence of how to discuss given topics via chatting. Students are requested to take the following:

(1) Pre-test(September, 2002) & Post-test(December, 2002)

(A) Grammaticality judgment test (This won’t be discussed in this paper.)

(B) Questionnaire on backgrounds of participants with learning English

All students in this course participate in the CCDL. Students attend orientation (via VC) in the CCDL room. A schedule of weekly sessions with their WU partners is established for students through e-mail. Carefully devised lesson plan was observed for every class period by strictly following up the following class procedure (interaction-emphasized and student-oriented class):

(A) materials for class discussions are selected by the teacher and by the students

(B) Criteria for material selections are students’ interest, appropriateness of current issues, sound contents of educationally appropriate materials

(C) Students’ opinions are reflected in the classroom regarding teaching method, selection of course materials: student-oriented class + teacher guided class
(eg. An article about Kimchi was selected for class discussion)

(D) Interactions are encouraged in class.

(E) Specific class schedule for the second semester, 2002:

(F) Each class is conducted according to the following 5 steps:

a. reports from students regarding information on each selection

- b. discussion of the selection (summary and contents)
- c. difficult words and phrases
- d. reading comprehension through interactive discussions
- e. Q and A session

Activities to stimulate students' interactions are diverse. With the view that motivation is very important in language learning, all class activities are focused on encouraging interactions among students in class. Moreover, each class follows the lesson plan with three important points to be noted: (1) students are encouraged to participate in class activities, (2) activities are conducted first in groups and then independently, and (3) in order to lower students' defense mechanism, interesting anecdotes regarding English learning are shared in class.

To facilitate chatting interactions, co-work activities are assigned. Each KNU participant is paired with a WU participant to form a co-work chatting group. Each group selects the topic they want to talk about. Participants are required to research, investigate, and discuss the topic with their group. Topics must be facilitative to the goal of establishing mutual understanding of different cultures, manners and customs, social system, traditional values, and so forth. Before starting the project participants must get to know each other by using various communication tools available at the CCDL Homepage (<http://ccdl.srv.project.mnc.waseda.ac.jp/ccdl>). Moreover, a summary of 200 words of each discussion must be posted on the "My Notebook" section of the homepage within 48 hours of completion. Students are to pay particular attention to the summary writing guidelines posted on the homepage. In addition, students' participations in discussions are conducted voluntarily and positively. Students are supposed to exchange views on their topics as well as establish friendship and mutual understanding with each other, which is the ultimate goal. Class participation, the number of sessions completed, quality of the online reports, mid-term presentation, and final exam will be reflected in students' grades.

5. Results and Discussions

The student questionnaire indicates that participants are much more motivated to study English and, in fact, are spending more time studying English in December compared with September. Moreover, students' self-rated degree of difficulty of the four language skills have changed greatly.

Figure 1 illustrates time spent studying English per day both in September and in December. Generally speaking, almost 50 percent of the participants end up studying English more than one hour per day in December, which is a great increase in percentage compared with that of the beginning of the semester. It is interesting to note that females appear to spend much more time learning English per day than males (Figure 2). Moreover, time spent studying English per day depends on students' major

fields. Students in business administration spend more time than those in liberal arts and engineering (Figure 3). This reflects that students majoring in business administration keenly feel the necessity of learning English, especially practical English. One important point to be noted is that the older the students are, the more time they spend studying English (Figure 4).

Figure 1 Time spent studying English per day

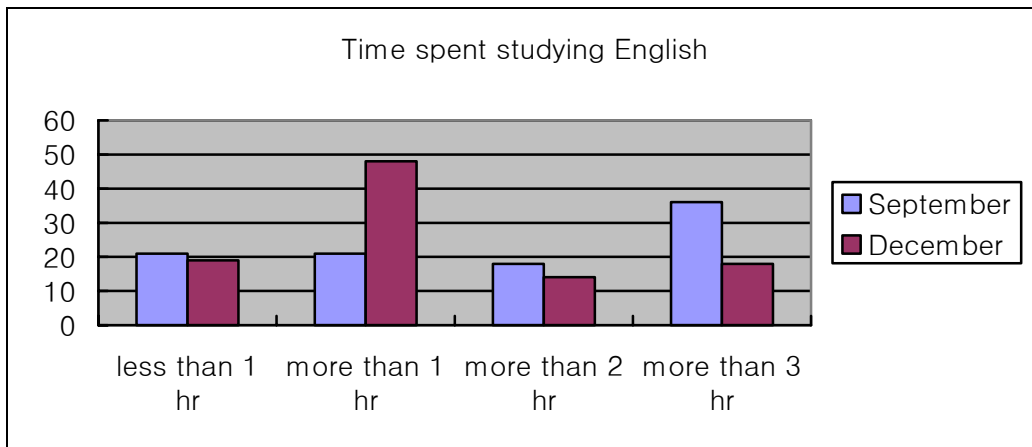


Figure 2 Time spent studying English by gender

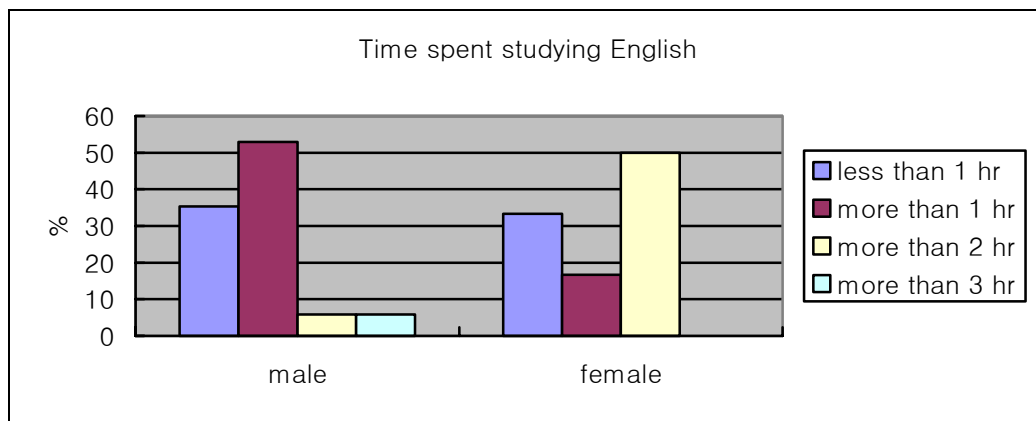


Figure 3 Time spent studying English by majors

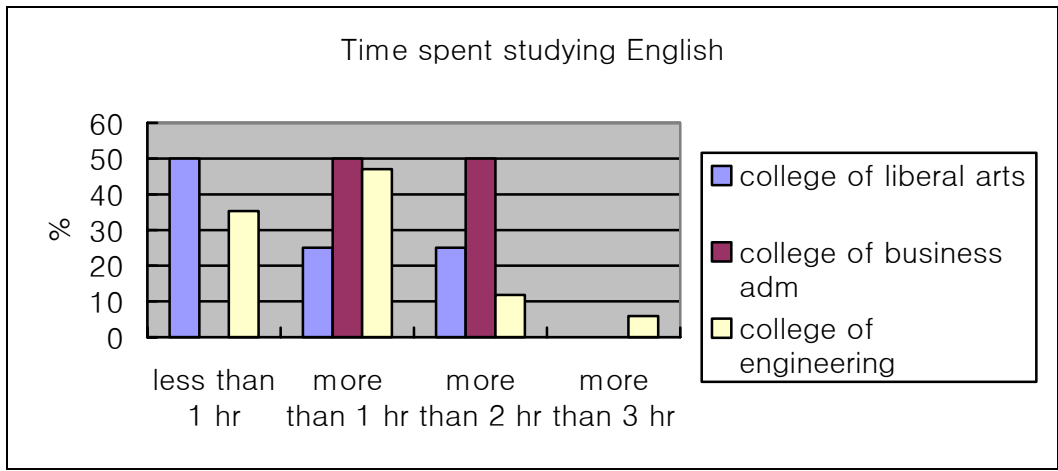
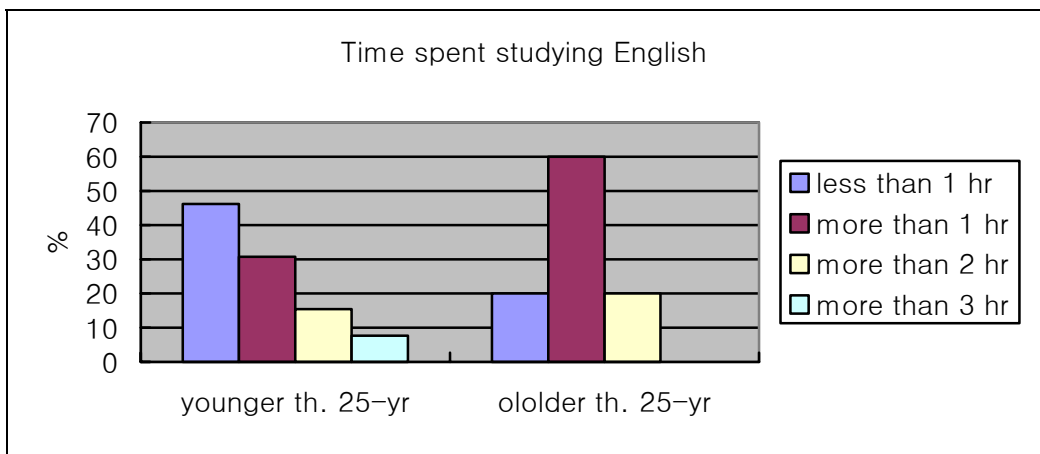


Figure 4 Time spent studying English by age



There is an increase voluntary classroom participation in December compared with that in September (Figure 5). The reason for low voluntary class participation is the anxiety of speaking English in public. However, having had chatting sessions for a semester, KNU students must have felt much more at ease speaking in public. This is an important finding on what CCDLP can contribute to students: low affective filter and high motivation. It is very interesting to note that teaching methodology is by no means the first priority that teachers should be concerned about because it doesn't seem to affect students greatly (Figure 6). As students become involved in CCDLP, they become more aware of their lack of knowledge.

Figure 5 The rate of students' voluntary participation in class

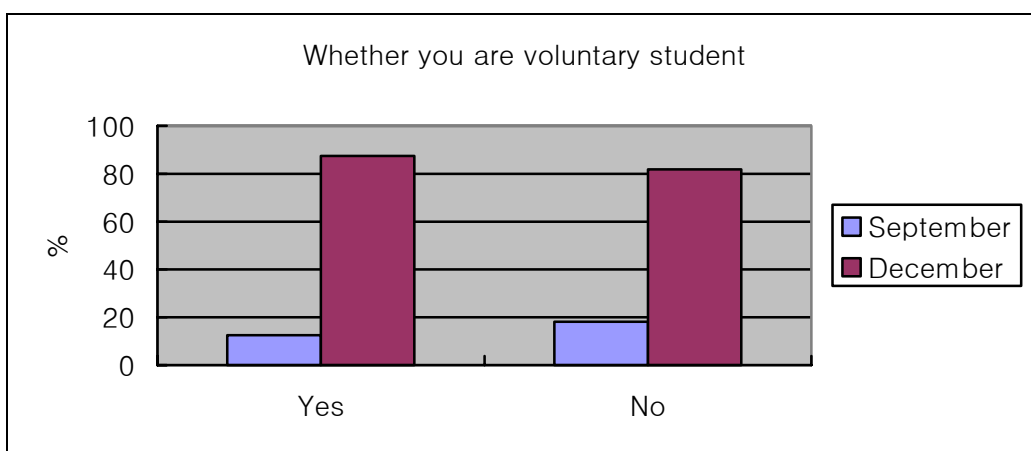
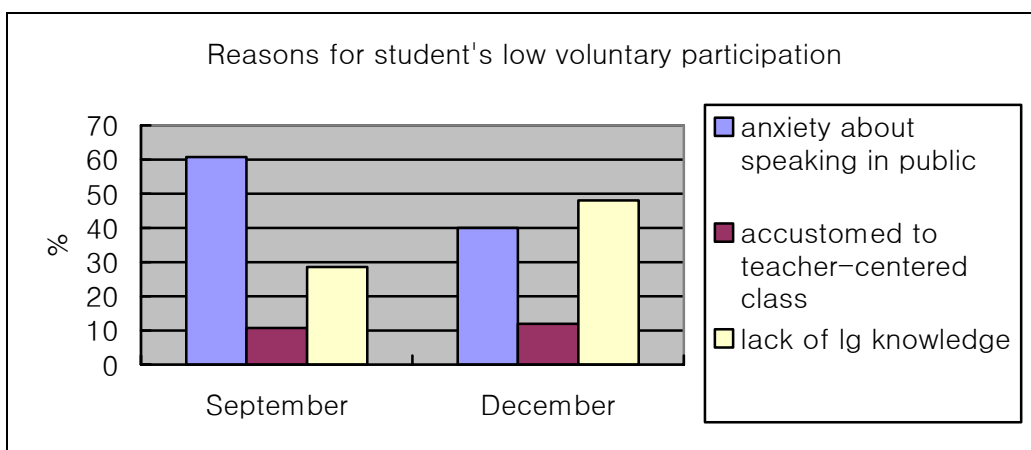


Figure 6 Reasons for students' low voluntary participation



The result (Figure 7) indicates that most students feel great difficulties in active skill of speaking>listening>reading>writing in the order of difficulty in September. However, the order of difficulty is speaking>listening>writing>reading in December. It is clear that they feel less at ease with oral language than written language both in September and in December. However, in December students feel more difficulties in writing than in September, which indicates that they began to realize that productive skills of speaking and writing are not easier than the receptive skills. From this result we can assume the followings:

- (1) Although speaking is the skill students find most difficult both before and after chatting, ten percent decrease in the number of students from September to December shows the contribution of CCDLP(chatting).

(2) Students who did not realize the difficulty of writing before chatting began to realize its importance and difficulty after chatting. There is an increase in the number of students who have difficulty in writing after chatting. In chatting they have to think first before writing their opinions. Unless they have an idea or opinion to be written, they can not chat.

Reasons for feeling difficulties include lack of practice, knowledge, listening speed, pronunciation, and anxiety to speak in public (Figure 8). However, in December practice and lack of knowledge turn out to be the two most important factors. This indicates that students become aware of the fact that foreign language learning is a process of practice and of learning, experiencing L2 knowledge.

Figure 7 Learner’s self assessed difficulty of language skills

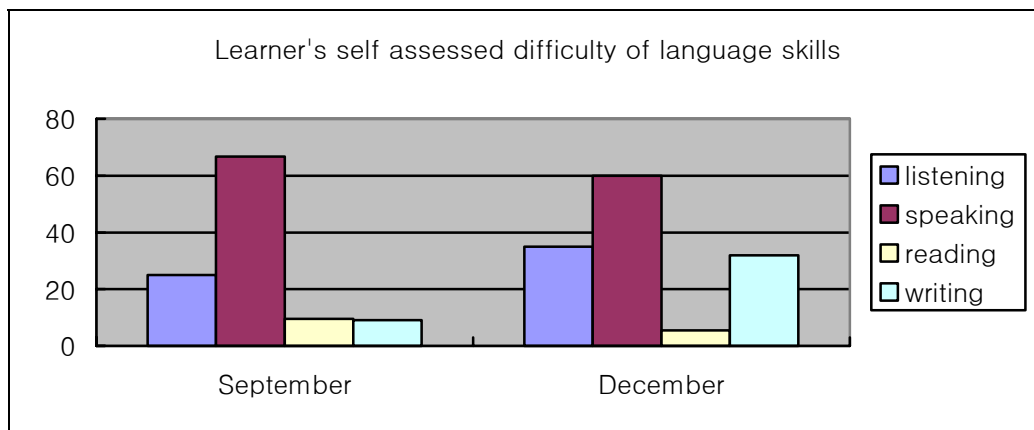
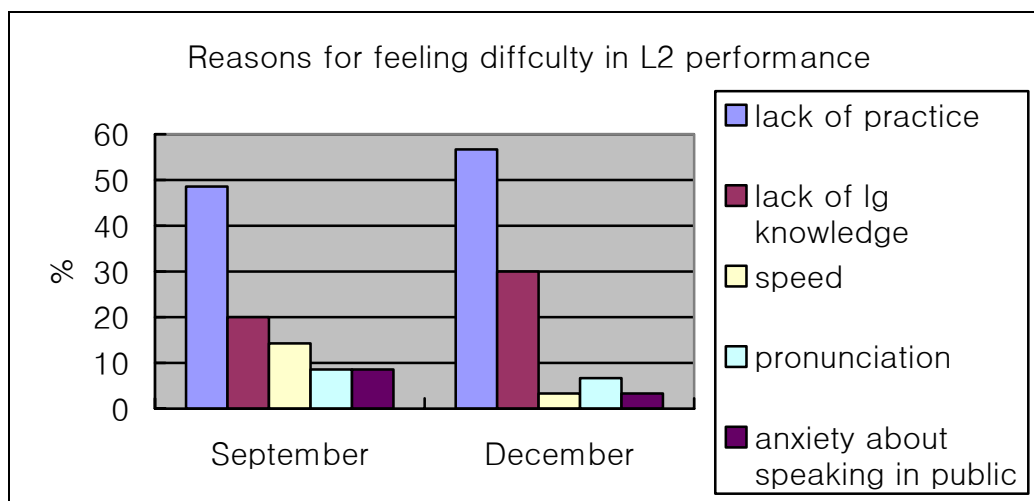


Figure 8 Reasons for feeling difficulty in L2 performance



Students feel that they have improved their listening, speaking and reading

proficiencies (Figures 9 through 12).

Figure 9 Learner's self rated proficiency of listening

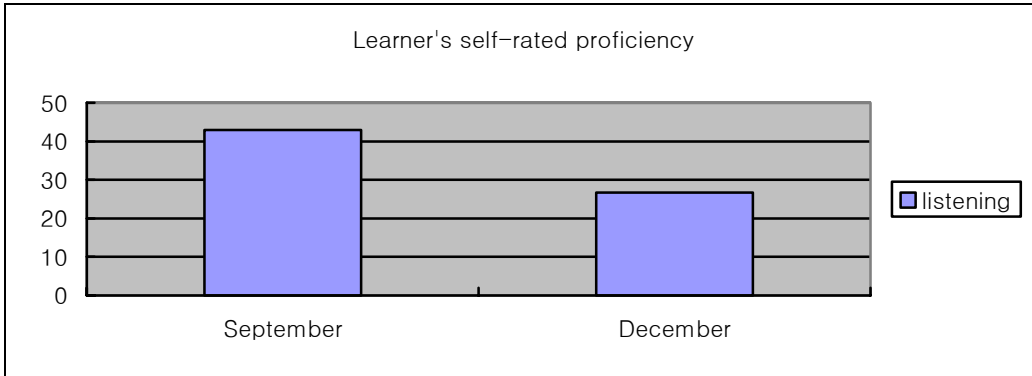


Figure 10 Learner's self rated difficulty of speaking

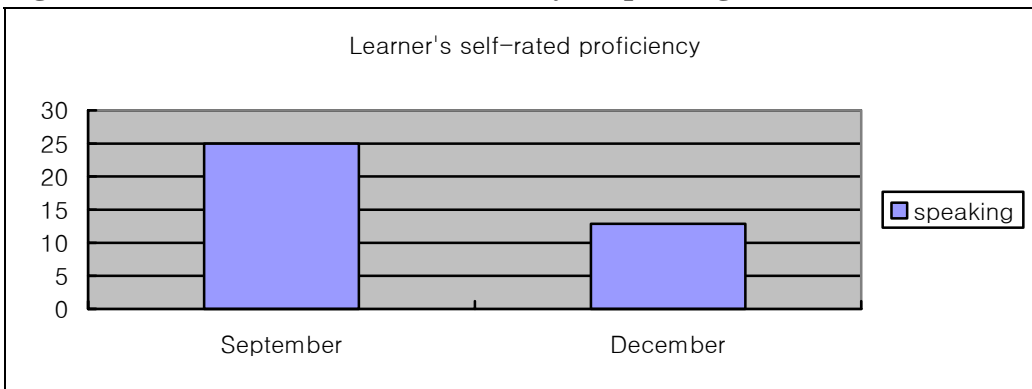


Figure 11 Learner's self rated proficiency of reading

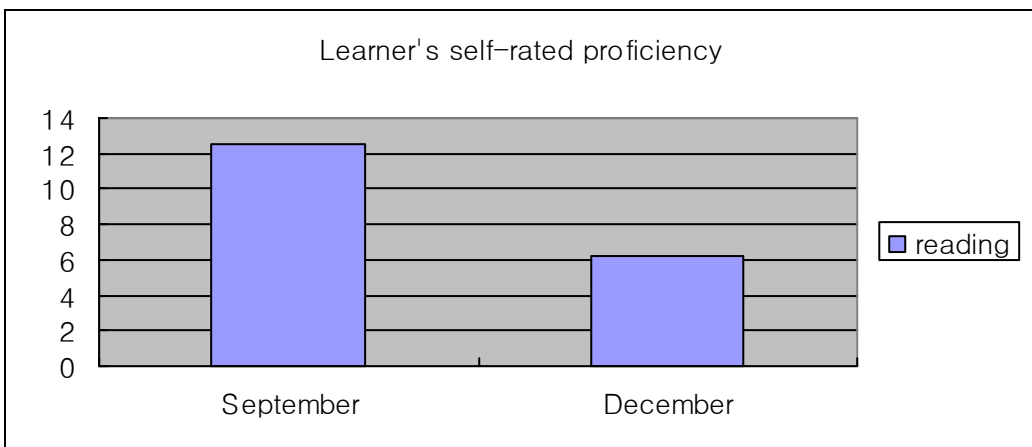
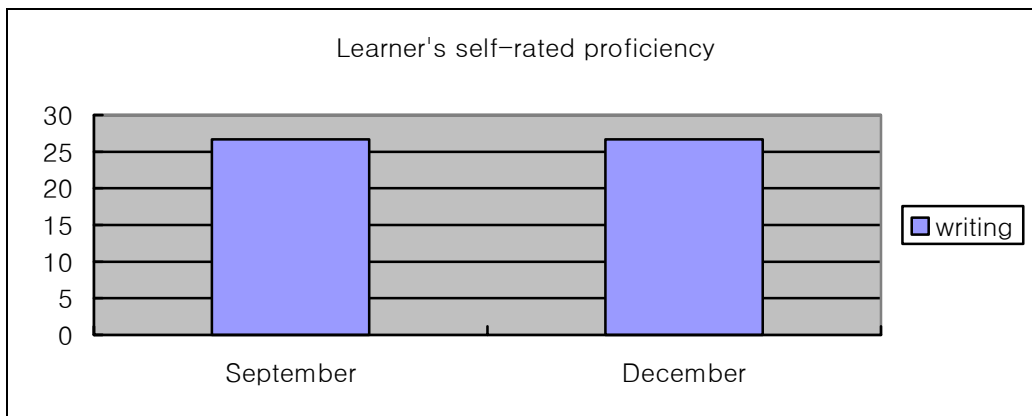
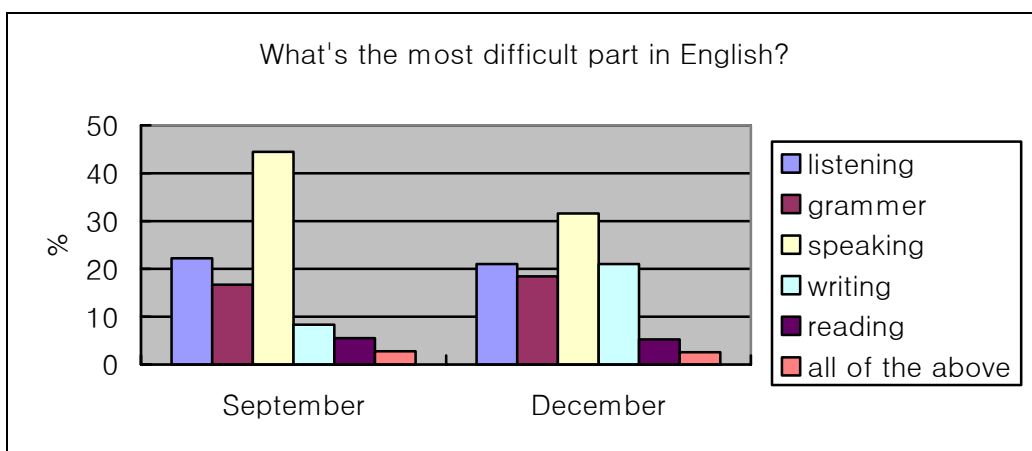


Figure 12 Learner's self rated proficiency of writing



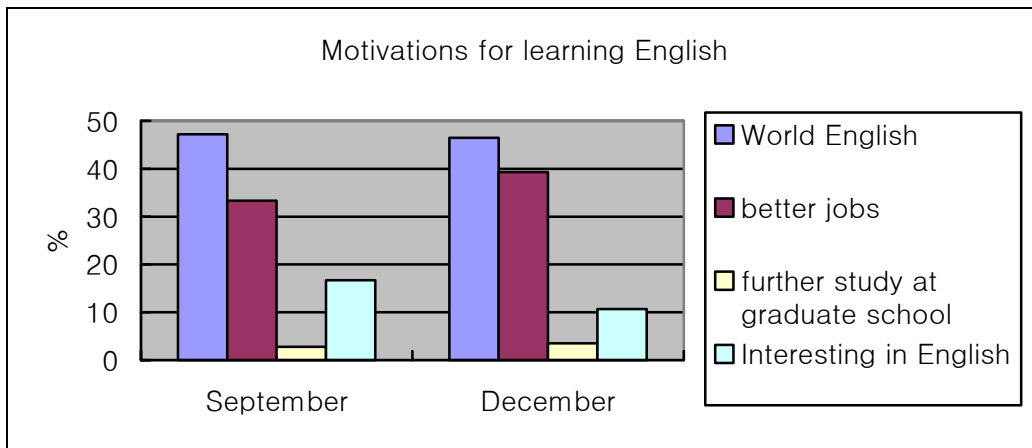
Since students feel that they have the most difficulty in speaking in September, we wanted to investigate whether they felt the same way in December. Figure 13 illustrates that most still feel difficulties in speaking but less so in December than in September.

Figure 13 The most difficult skill of English



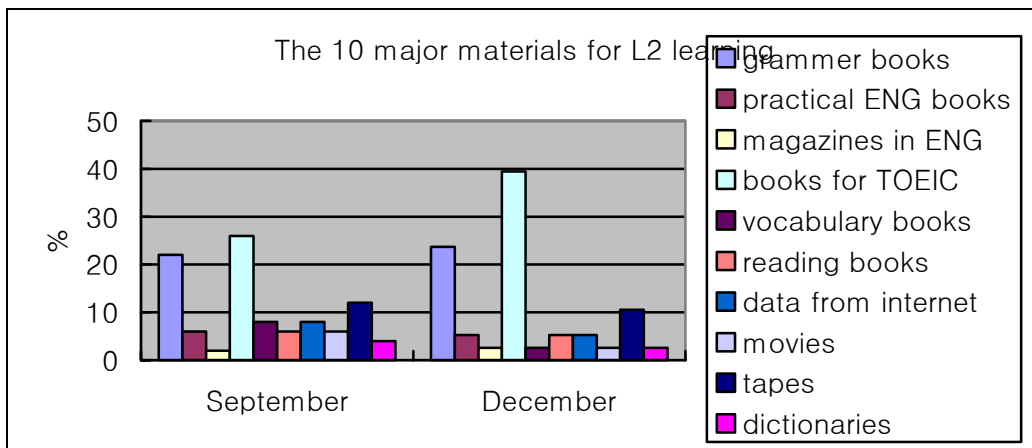
As for the motivation for learning English, most students learn English mostly to understand the world language, a language of wider communication and to get better jobs. Very few are interested in learning English per se (Figure 14).

Figure 14 Motivations for learning English



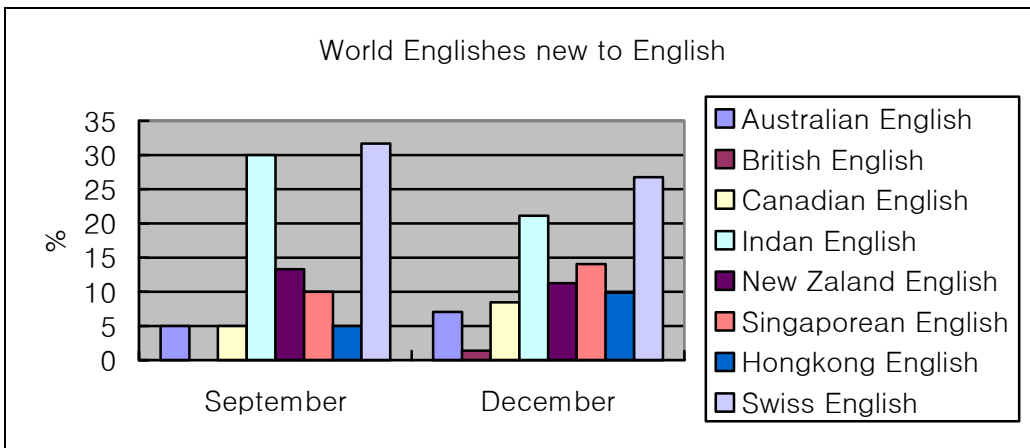
As for the types of English materials they are using, materials on TOEIC and grammar outnumber others (Figure 15). This clearly indicates that most are interested in getting a better job that requires English.

Figure 15 Ten materials for English learning



Most students don't appear to be familiar with world Englishes (Figure 16). Swiss English, Indian English, Singaporean English are very new to them. They tend to define English in terms of the countries or the people who use English as L1.

Figure 16 World Englishes new to learners



As for chatting time, females spend more time than males (Figure17). In terms of student’s majors, those in business administration spend more time (Figure 18).This is probably because of their need. Students younger than 25 tend to spend more time than one hour for chatting compared with those over 25 (Figure 19).

Figure 17 Chatting time by sex

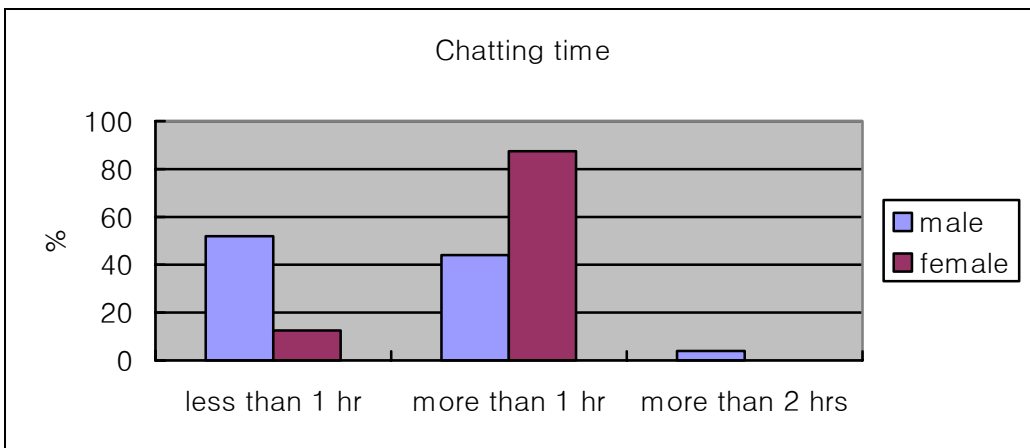


Figure 18 Chatting time by major

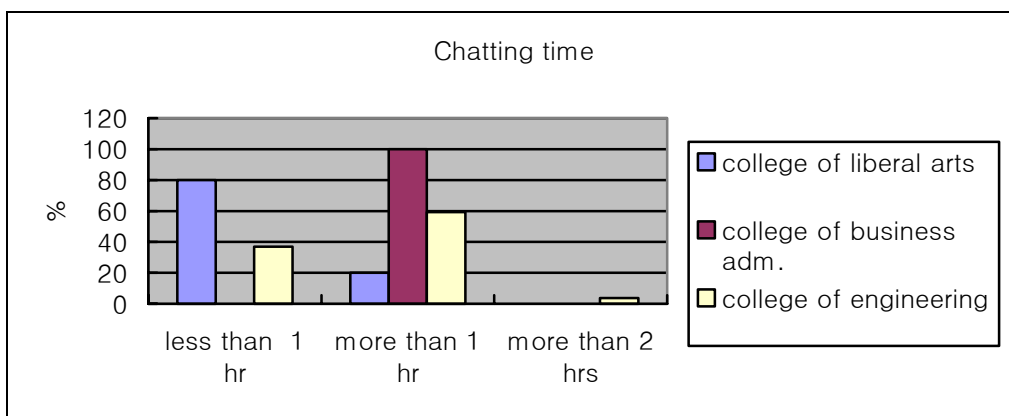
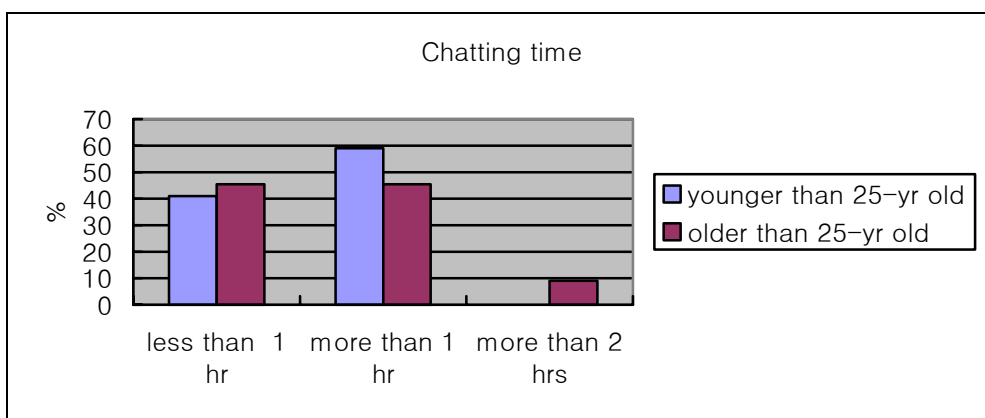


Figure 19 Chatting time by age



Most students like chatting because they have opportunities to listen to other people (Figures 21 and 22). They came to understand that there are varieties of English and they do not have to speak and act like those whose L1 is English. This encourages them to keep on learning Global English with their identities. Moreover, they are provided with benefits by chatting. That is, by chatting with someone from a different cultural background, they get accustomed to speaking in public, thereby lowering their anxiety in speaking English. Besides understanding other cultures and traditions leads to mutual understanding, not to mention checking one’s English proficiency (Figure 23). It is evident that CCDLP gives the students the chance to practice and improve their English (Figures 24 and 25).

As for the difficulties they have while chatting, the lack English proficiency and lack of practice outweigh other problems such as CMC or technical difficulties. Overall, the majority of the students who have participated in CCDLP have clearly understood the importance of chatting and exchanges between teachers vs. students as well as that between students from different cultural backgrounds whose L1 is not English(Figures 26 and 27).

Figure 20 Chatting time per session

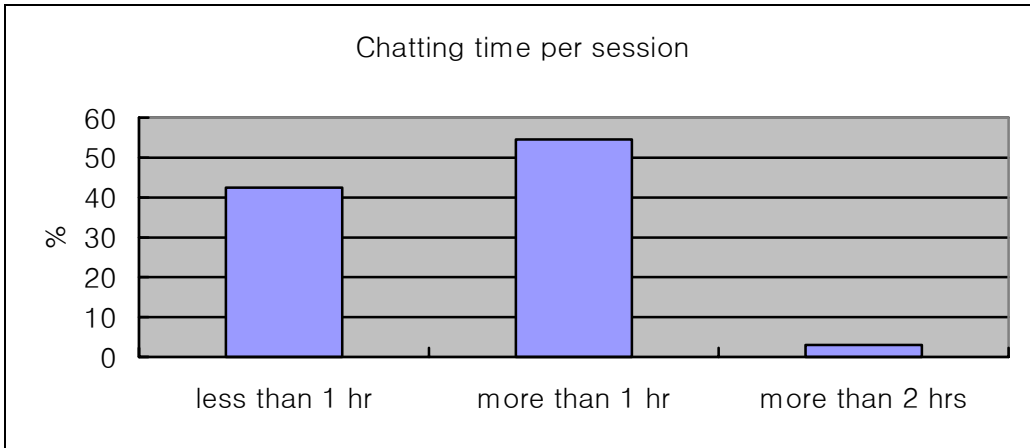


Figure 21 Percentage of students who enjoyed chatting

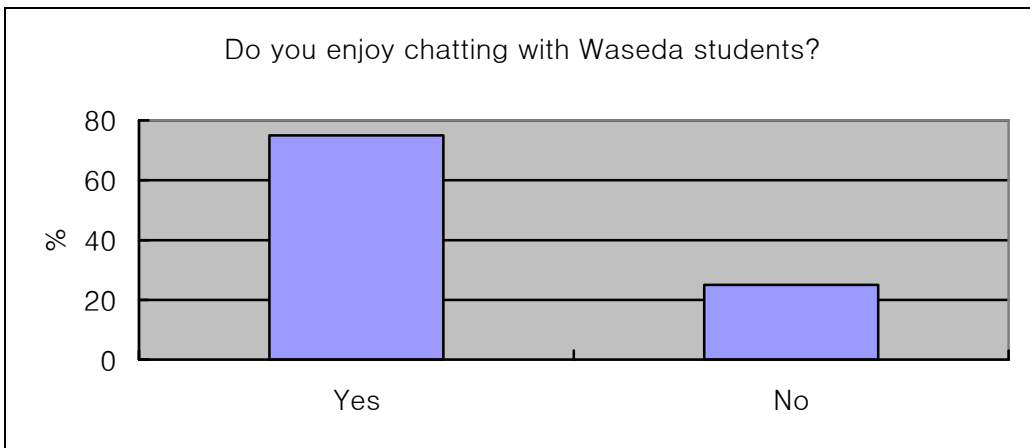


Figure 22 Reasons for enjoying chatting session

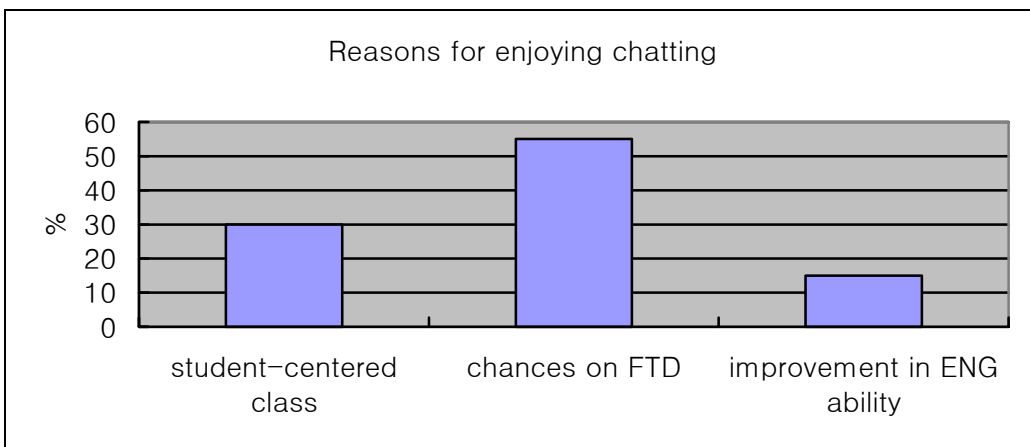


Figure 23 Benefits of chatting

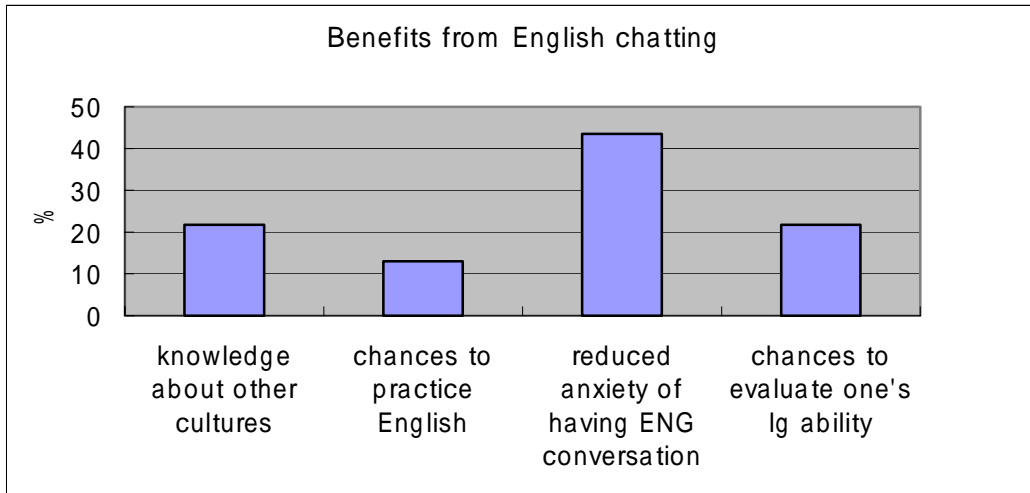


Figure 24 Advantages of Chatting

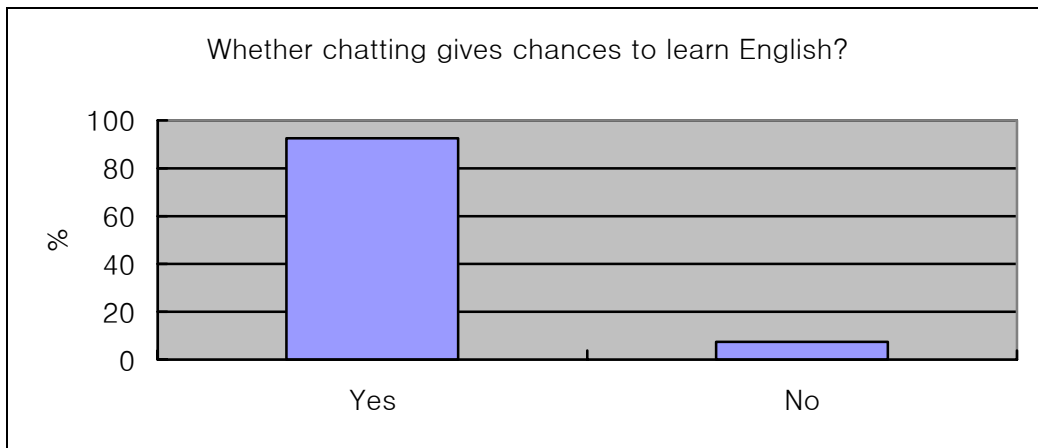


Figure 25 Contributions of chatting to English language learning in general

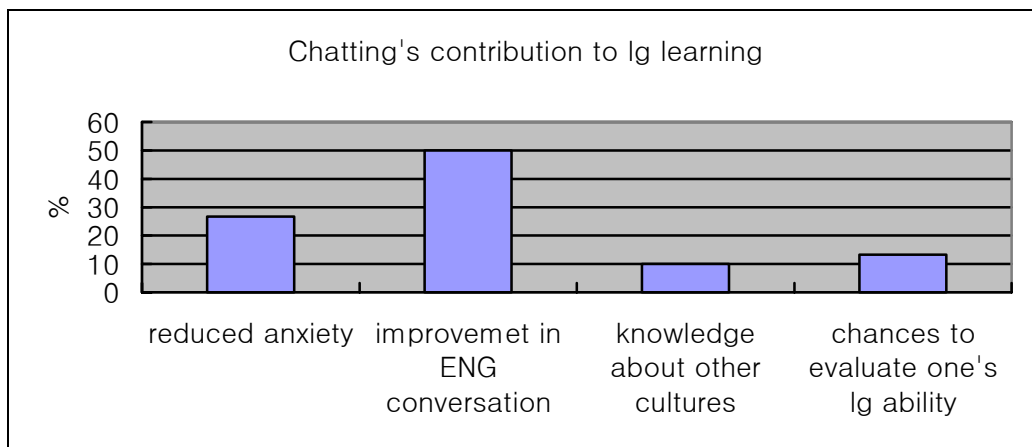


Figure 26 Difficulties in chatting

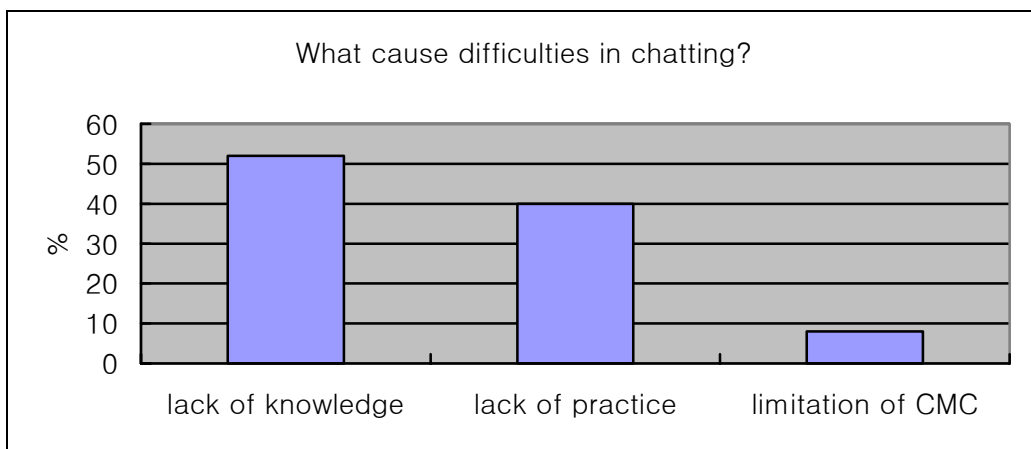
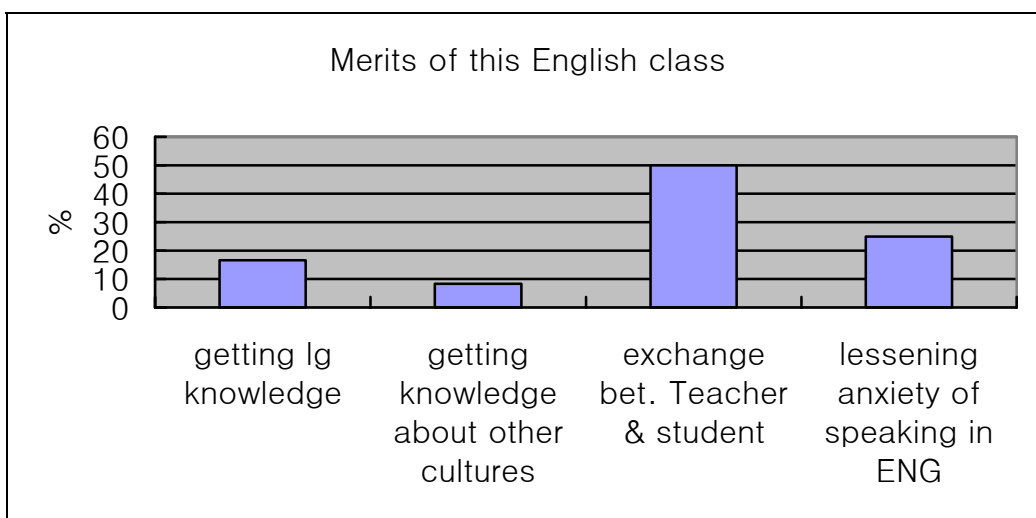


Figure 27 Merits of English chatting class



6. What has the CCDL Project accomplished for students of KNU?

Having participated in the CCDLP, all of the participants showed a significant increase in motivation and responsibility-taking as opposed to non-participants. The participants became more independent, confident and motivated in language learning. In the beginning, students were reluctant to get involved in the project. Moreover, they had high levels of foreign language anxiety, which led to mental blocks, similar to that experienced by students studying math and physics. Foreign language anxiety acts as an affective filter leading to avoidance behaviors such as missing classes, the postponing homework, and a reluctant/unreceptive attitude to language input (Krashen, 1980).

The CCDLP makes it possible for participants to get to know and understand each other better so they no longer feel foreign language anxiety as they become more

involved in the project. Moreover, students began to realize that their overseas partners have the same kind of foreign language problems, which motivated them to work closely together to solve their common problems and to learn from each other. Thus, the CCDLP creates situations where students of both universities get to know and understand each other in the target language.

The project also enables the students of both universities to work together through TeleMeet systems, VC systems, Chat systems, E-mail systems or in a joint seminar so that they gain confidence in performing autonomous self-instruction with the help of their group members and facilitators. As a result, students feel a sense of satisfaction with their target language proficiency. This type of learning situation is informal in nature and relatively new compared with traditional learning situations.

In this connection, the CCDLP can solve most of the problems target language teachers face today: motivation, satisfaction, learner-oriented learning environments, induction of learning processes, enjoyment in the learning process, reliance upon native speakers. The CCDLP can provide an ideal learning situation: self-instruction combined with teacher-led instruction.

In fact, all the participants report a growing interest in the project. They feel that the project can benefit them much more than mere Internet chatting and conferencing in terms of exchanging information and ideas to obtain a better understanding of foreign culture and tradition. They also felt that their English proficiency improved by reading, discussing, and presenting information obtained from up-to-date scholarly papers through TeleMeet. During their TeleMeet sessions, students began to learn how to appreciate and help others, and moreover, how to make their voices heard in this globalized world.

Moreover, the CCDLP participants began to understand that their use of English is somewhat different from that of their overseas partners. This means that when we speak a foreign language, our native culture and native language are inevitably reflected in it. The presence of L1 transfer in target language learning is undeniable. English is a global language. However, the global English that we are speaking is, in fact, a combination of global English plus local English. Once we understand what the global features are, then we will be in a better position to learn and teach English as a global language. The CCDLP has provided students and teachers with authentic data for learning global English. Particularly for Asian learners of English it is very important to understand cultural differences as well as linguistic differences to avoid miscommunication.

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