

EFL Lecture Courses for Study Abroad Preparation: An Action Research Project

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Abstract

This paper describes a two-year action research project at a Japanese university which investigated the implementation of two EFL lecture courses. It outlines some of the challenges of conducting EFL lectures and offers suggestions about how they may be overcome. These lecture courses aimed to help prepare students for study abroad at English-medium universities. The courses were designed to be accessible and engaging for students and considered factors including lecturer talk-time, guided note-taking, and opportunities for review. The first cycle of the study, using a researcher journal and questionnaire, identified issues including a lack of active participation, and a near absence of revision between classes. Measures were taken to address these shortcomings in the second cycle, including the introduction of participation extra-credits and supplementary reading materials with weekly assessment. Peer observations and questionnaires were used to assess the relative success of the new interventions. It was found that while students responded positively to the courses overall, they were less enthusiastic about the guided note-taking and the pace of the classes, and issues remained with both participation and reaction to the further readings. The findings suggest promising avenues for further investigation and future course development.

Keywords: EFL lectures; study abroad; action research; classroom research

Introduction

As English-medium instruction (EMI) has seen rapid growth through Asia in recent years, the number of students taking lecture style classes in English as an L2 has also increased. Despite this, in most journals focusing on language teaching, articles discussing or investigating L2 lectures are relatively rare. Indeed, many language teachers may not consider lecturing as part of their instructional repertoire, and may have little or no experience in conducting such classes. However, there may still be occasions when EFL practitioners are required to teach such courses as part of an institution's move towards EMI or more specifically to help learners prepare for attending lectures during a period of study abroad.

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Upon taking up the current teaching position, I was informed that I would be responsible for two lecture courses. These classes would contain approximately 50 first- and second-year university students, with the primary aim of preparing those whom were to study abroad for the challenge of attending lectures in US and UK universities. It is probably true that lecturing is not the most fashionable instructional approach or research topic today, and to teach lecture courses may present a number of challenges at the design and preparation stages as well as during the actual lesson time. However, as well as preparing those students who will take English-medium lecture courses while studying abroad, there are a number of other benefits for motivated students wishing to develop their academic skills while learning worthwhile and stimulating content.

This paper describes two cycles of an action research project which evaluated the implementation and development of these lecture courses. It aims to show options available to EFL teachers who are asked to teach such courses and add to the relatively sparse pedagogically-focused literature on the topic.

Lectures in Tertiary Education

The lecture is a type of instruction where, typically, a lecturer delivers a formal talk in a hall filled with a large group of students. While most EFL or ESL teachers — if they are fortunate — may be used to small or medium-sized classes, lectures delivered in large halls are still the primary form of instruction in many universities around the world (Lynch, 2011). The simple reason for this may be the cost effectiveness of the lecture format. One lecturer can teach many students simultaneously, thus allowing universities to accept more fee-paying students per faculty member. While there may be some truth in this, there are also some intrinsic properties of the lecture format which has allowed it to stand the test of time. As Jones (2007) pointed out, lectures are an efficient means to disseminate information to large groups and may even be the preferred format for students that have a non-participatory learning style.

It is probably true that the instructional genre of the lecture is often viewed and discussed somewhat negatively. Indeed, lecturing has its critics, bemoaning that little has changed in lecturing since medieval times (Badger & Sutherland, 2007). It has been claimed that lecturing negatively impacts students' enthusiasm for learning (Han, 2014), that it is boring, does little to promote deeper learning, and is insensitive to individual learner differences (Jones, 2007). Jones (2007) also pointed out that some have claimed that lectures are irrelevant in the multi-media age (although see Friesen (2011) who sees the lecture as continually evolving and as a format that embraces new technologies).

EFL Lectures

As long as lectures remain an important part of the mix of classes for which second language speakers enrol while studying at an overseas university, it is important that they are properly prepared for them. However, anybody who has had the experience of attending a lecture in a second language will understand the various challenges that

present themselves. For instance, because concentrating for a sustained period of time can be tiring, the lecture content and delivery needs to be stimulating for students. Also, specific academic listening skills which differ from those needed for everyday conversation are required to follow a lecture (Flowerdew, 1995), and the rapid pace at which lecturers often speak can have a negative impact on listening comprehension (Brunfaut & Révész, 2015; Graham, 2006; Griffiths, 1992; Zhao, 1997). These factors combine to make EFL lectures difficult to conduct.

To prepare students for L2 lectures, one option is to focus specifically on listening skills, and there are a number of academic listening textbook series which aim to do this. Other published materials that focus specifically on lectures are also available, such as the *Lecture Ready* series (e.g. Sarosy & Sherak, 2013). There has also been growth in recent years in different forms of content-based learning, which incorporates lectures during part or throughout the whole class, and various proposals have been made concerning the best way to approach such classes.

There have been a number of other suggestions about how EFL lectures can be conducted. Miller (2002) claimed that it is crucial to begin a lecture class (or series of classes) with a clear outline of the content and goals. Gaffield-Vile (1996) recommended allocating the first 20 minutes of a class for reviewing previous lecture content and introducing new language and participation strategies for the forthcoming session. One concern for L2 learners is simply the length of concentration time that a typical lecture demands. In many countries, a lecture may be an hour or more. It is quite a demand to ask learners to follow a lecture for such a length of time, therefore, for EFL lectures, dividing the class in one or more mini-lectures seems to be a common way to tackle the issue (Nevara & Greisamer, 2012; Nunn & Lingley, 2004). Gaffield-Vile (1996) suggested that lecturing time should be limited to around 15 minutes before beginning a new activity such as having students summarize or share the contents of their notes with each other. The use of pair or group interactions has been seen as beneficial by others. For instance, Miller (2002) suggested using student “buzz groups” to stimulate discussion of the lecture content. Interactive lectures more generally — involving exchanges both between students and between the lecturer and students — have been seen as a positive attribute of a lecture. Morell (2007) recommended the use of anecdotes and humour, alongside elicitations of students’ opinions and answers to a given question. Further, it has been proposed that interactive lectures can provide more opportunities for learning (MacDonald, Badger, & White, 2000).

The way in which the lecturer actually delivers a lecture will naturally impact students’ comprehension. Sueyoshi and Hardison (2005) demonstrated that gestures and facial expressions improved comprehension, while Giménez-Moreno (2012) showed repetition strategies to be crucial for successful delivery, reporting that 38% of the lecture content in their study was, in fact, repeated information. As stated above, speaking speed has been identified as a potential obstacle for L2 learners. Morell (2007) pointed out that lecturers should endeavour to use clear and slow speech, with a questioning tone to encourage participation. Lecturers may also consider using more

referential and/or open questions with reformulations, while allowing plenty of time for students to give an answer (Morell 2009, cited in Lynch, 2011). In an empirical study with Korean students, Jung (2006) found that the use of contextualized markers such as topic shifters and summarizers helped to avoid misunderstanding of the lecture content.

As well as features of delivery, the medium used to convey information has also been investigated. The use of presentation software such as Powerpoint or Keynote is ubiquitous in lecture halls around the globe. It is not difficult to see the benefits that such audiovisual resources can bring (Nevara & Greisamer, 2012). Nunn and Lingley (2004) suggested using visuals to reduce the number of words needed to convey a given piece of information, and Miller (2002) found that students appreciated lectures which incorporated technology (although some found it difficult to focus on both the lecturer and visual aids simultaneously). However, Craig and Amernic (2006) warned of the over-reliance on presentation software, describing how lecturers sometimes focus more on aesthetics rather than content. They also argued that communication is “less human” and “less direct” as lecturers focus on the screen, which decreases interaction.

L2 lectures can also be the perfect format to develop note-taking skills, vital when studying at an English-medium university. Thorough, well-organized notes can help students retain knowledge in itself, as well as prepare for assignments and exams. A lecturer can choose to have students freely take notes using their own strategies and style, or they can provide some kind of guidance. Austin, Lee, and Carr (2004) found that guided note-taking led to improved quality of notes, while Nunn and Lingley (2004) suggested that note-taking prints be distributed for each lecture and that time be allocated to allow students to compare and revise their notes. These notes could then be submitted for assessment purposes or used as a springboard to start new activities.

A final issue that is especially relevant to university lectures in Japan (and arguably other East Asian contexts) is the passive nature of the student body. It has been well documented how Japanese learners are reluctant to actively participate in classrooms (e.g. Greer, 2000; Kriukow & Galloway, 2018; McVeigh, 2002). King (2013) proposed that this “silence” does not have a single cause but is partly the result of general disengagement, teaching methods, and a lack of understanding. While these may be overcome by various teacher interventions, one remaining cause that is less easily dispelled is Japanese learners’ hypersensitivity to others. As King elucidates, “Many learners are simply unwilling to engage in the potentially embarrassing behaviour of active oral participation for fear of being negatively judged by their peers” (King, 2013, p. 339).

The Current Study

This study reports on two cycles of an action research project looking at the best way to implement L2 lecture courses for EFL learners. Owing to the general lack of practitioner-focused literature in this area, the purpose was a) to evaluate the initial

implementation of two EFL lecture courses, and b) to analyse the issues that arose and the responses devised to overcome them.

Setting

The data reported here was collected over four consecutive semesters at a public university in Japan. The learners that participated in the data collection were mostly first- and second-year Japanese students, of whom more than three quarters were to embark on study abroad trips from the second semester of their second year. One of the lecture courses under discussion was held during the second semester of the first year (Course A), and the other was in the first semester of the second year (Course B). The first cycle of data collection followed one cohort of students through these two courses (although not all students took both classes consecutively for a variety of reasons). The second cycle followed a new cohort the following year.

Course A was held in a lecture hall, with between 70 to 80 students typically enrolled. Course B was held in a large classroom and attracted between 45 and 50 student registrations. Each course ran for 15 weeks, with each session lasting 90 minutes. The theme, content, activities, and assessment were all controlled by the author, who was also the teacher of the classes. Students were informed at the beginning of the courses that data would be gathered for course development and research purposes, and if they agreed for their data to be used for the latter, they signed informed consent papers. In the first research cycle, there were 53 and 45 volunteer participants for courses A and B respectively. In the second cycle, these numbers stood at 60 and 44.

Procedures

In order to understand and assess the success of the new lecture courses, this investigation followed the procedures and conventions of action research. Action research has been the form of practitioner research most associated with second language classrooms (Mitchell, 2011), and it has proved to be an important approach for teachers researching their own environments (Burns, 2011). Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p.276) described the classic action research sequence as follows:

- Planning a change
- Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change
- Reflecting on these processes and consequences
- Replanning again, and so on...

This investigation is an example of an action research project which follows the Kemmis and McTaggart model, containing the typical characteristics of cyclical reflection and action. While details of the data collection and analysis are given in the next section, Figure 1 shows the chronology of the study with regard to Kemmis and McTaggart's model. In Cycle 1, data was collected with researcher notes throughout

the course and a questionnaire at the end. In Cycle 2, peer observations were conducted along with two questionnaires.

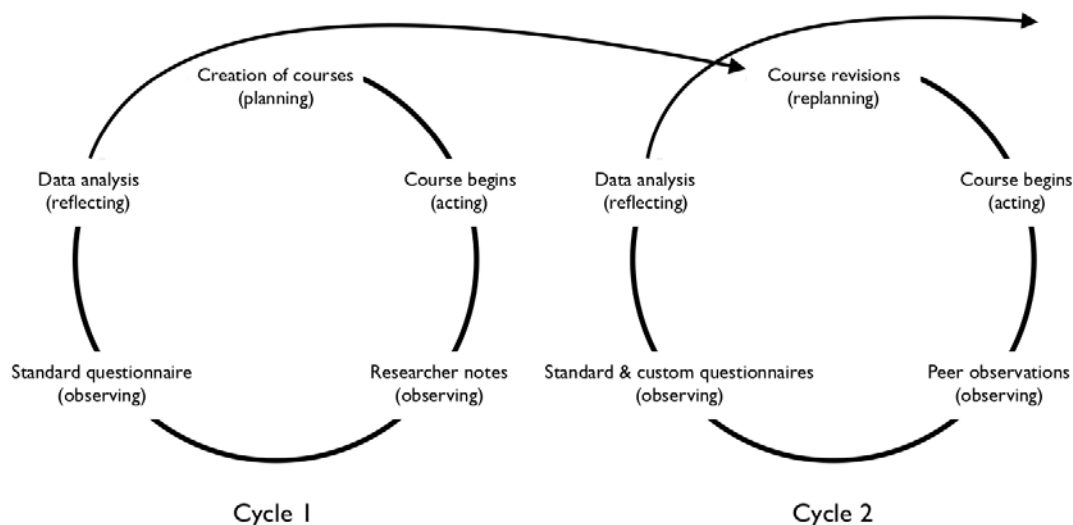


Figure 1: An overview of the project, with reference to the action research sequence proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005)

Data Collection and Findings

Cycle 1

The first step of *planning a change* was the creation of the new lecture courses. Based on reading of the literature, along with my own pedagogical experience, the two courses were planned with the titles of *Introduction to Second Language Acquisition* (Course A) and *The History of English* (Course B). Some of the key features of the courses were as follows:

- Lecture time: In each 90-minute class, a maximum of 60 minutes was allocated to actual lecture time. This was then broken up into smaller periods by discussion activities.
- Weekly quizzes: Each week began with a short multiple choice quiz on the previous week's content. Students were encouraged to use their notes to complete the quiz. The intention was that if students had taken thorough notes, the quiz should be relatively straightforward.
- Guided note-taking: At the beginning of each lecture, note-taking sheets were distributed to students to use if they wished (see Appendix 1).
- Review time: Each class closed with a 10-minute period during which students were encouraged to share their notes and add any information they had missed.
- Homework: Students were asked to revise and expand on their notes. These were to be used for the following week's quiz as well as for the end-of-course examination.
- Presentation software: Each lecture was conducted using presentation software. The slides contained minimal text and followed the design principles set out by Reynolds (2011).

- Vocabulary: As key words and/or phrases appeared on the presentation slides, they were underlined as a form of input enhancement (Loewen, 2015).
- Final examination: In the final class of the course, students sat an exam which consisted of three questions each requiring a long answer of around 150 words.

In order to *observe the process and consequences of the change*, two initial data collection methods were used: researcher notes and the university's standardized end-of-term course questionnaires.

Researcher Notes

At the end of each class, I made a written record of how it had gone, what issues had arisen, and what parts were successful. Throughout the course, observation and comments that were considered to be significant were highlighted and coded, and certain themes repeatedly emerged from the data. One theme that consistently appeared in the researcher notes was the question of engagement. According to Philp and Duchesne (2016), engagement is a multi-faceted construct, but tangible signs of learner engagement include questioning, gestures, and facial expressions. While in any lecture class there are inevitably some students who are not especially engaged by proceedings, there were more instances of noticeable disengagement than would be desirable. Unsurprisingly, this often seemed to be the case during longer periods of teacher-talk time. A second theme that arose concerned the use of the L1 Japanese during pair and group work activities. In my experiences as both a second language learner (of Japanese) and an EFL teacher, I have not found many occasions where L1 use has been necessary during class, and have usually insisted on the sole use of English (bar the occasional short peer to peer grammatical explanation or translation). However, this finding was perhaps unsurprising in the type of monolingual classroom used in this study, which does not provide an authentic space for L2 use (Hino, 2018). A third issue that arose was the lack of active participation during lecture time. Most students were fairly passive and reticent when asked to share their opinions with the class. In fact, student initiated questions were almost completely absent. During activity time, students were much more willing to both share ideas with their peers and even direct some questions to me. This finding was not unexpected, given the propensity for Japanese learners to be passive participants in class (King, 2014; Kriukow & Galloway, 2019). A fourth observation was the lack of revision seen in the students' notes. It was hoped, perhaps optimistically, that students would take some time to improve their notes between classes for homework. However, without specific guidance, this was not apparently being done.

Standardised Questionnaires

Like many universities in Japan, at the institution where this study was carried out, a standardized end-of-course questionnaire was completed by students. These questionnaires have a limited number of generic four-point scale items, and teachers

are later shown the mean scores for their classes, as well as comparative data for other classes in the university. There is also a voluntary open response box, which can sometimes provide some useful feedback for teachers, although the number of such responses tends to be low. My own feeling is that these questionnaires are unduly influenced by student-teacher relations; in classes where teachers have a good relationship with students, the scores tend to be high across all categories. Further, the response rate was quite low; students were supposed to complete the questionnaire in their own time but many did not do so. These caveats notwithstanding, the results of the questionnaires indicated an overall positive response, with little variation, to both Course A and B, as shown in Table 1. This may be in part due to providing a clear agenda for each lecture at the beginning of class (item 1), as suggested by Miller (2002). Also, the concerns about listening comprehension raised in previous research (Graham, 2006; Zhao, 1997) were not reflected in the responses given to items 2 and 3. However, perhaps the most interesting finding from the questionnaire is the result for item 7, which showed — as speculated upon in the researcher notes — that students did very little revision and preparation for the lectures. In fact, as the mode for this item shows, 12 of the 22 respondents stated that they did almost none whatsoever.

Table 1

Results of the Standardized University Questionnaire in Cycle 1

Item	Course A (n=19)			Course B (n=24)		
	Mode	Mean	SD	Mode	Mean	SD
1 Did the teacher explain the lecture contents and flow at the start of each class?	4	3.89	0.32	4	3.75	0.44
2 Did the classes progress at an appropriate speed?	4	3.74	0.45	4	3.67	0.48
3 Was the teacher's voice and way of speaking easy to follow?	4	3.95	0.23	4	3.88	0.34
4 Were the visual aids easy to see, and of good quality and quantity?	4	3.74	0.56	4	3.67	0.48
5 Were the lecture materials useful to help you understand the content?	4	3.76	0.44	4	3.79*	0.41
6 Overall, was the teaching approach appropriate?	4	3.74	0.45	4	3.71	0.69
7 How much homework/revision did you do each week?	2	1.84	0.69	1	1.67	0.87

8	Overall, were you satisfied with this class?	4	3.74	0.45	4	3.67	0.70
9	Do you think you'd like to continue studying this field?	4	3.42	0.61	3	3.08	0.58

Notes. Items were translated from the original Japanese by the author; responses were made on a four-point scale to show agreement with each question; the response choices for item 7 for as follows: (4) more than 1 hour, (3) 30 minutes to 1 hour, (2) up to 30 minutes, (1) almost zero; *N=17.

Overall, the data collected in the first year of the study indicated that students generally responded favourably to the new courses, but there were a few key issues that arose. These included insufficient self-study between classes, an apparent lack of engagement by some students, and low levels of active participation. In the second cycle of data collection and analysis, changes were made to the courses to address these problems.

Cycle 2

The final stage of Kemmis and McTaggart's (2005) action research model involves replanning of interventions and then proceeding to a new cycle of enquiry. Based on the findings from Cycle 1, the following course revisions were made:

- To provide opportunities for revision and further reading, a graded reader *The History of the English Language* (Viney, 2008) was introduced for Course B. Each week, pages were assigned for homework, and the following week's quiz would contain some questions for which it was necessary to have done the reading. For Course B, a level appropriate SLA book was simply not available, so original texts were written which not only reviewed the lecture content but also provided further examples and/or interpretations of SLA theories and research.
- To enhance engagement, activities were deployed more frequently throughout the lecture time. As a rule of thumb, a discussion or other task was set after a maximum of ten minutes of lecturer talk time.
- To encourage more active participation, I added an extra credit portion to the assessment criteria. By answering and asking questions during lecture time, students could receive up to a further 5% on their final grade.

To investigate these new interventions, three data collection methods were used: peer observations and two types of questionnaire — the same standardized questionnaire used previously and one designed to address the specific issues highlighted in Cycle 1.

Standardized Questionnaires

The one item of interest from the standardized questionnaire concerned the amount of revision that students did between classes. This result, along with a comparison with the previous year, is shown in Table 2. The mean scores for both courses were now

closer to three (30 minutes to one hour of extra study) rather than two (up to 30 minutes) in the previous cycle. Moreover, these scores both slightly exceeded the university mean of 2.6, indicating that the extra reading opportunities provided had the desired impact on self-study time.

Table 2

A comparison of self-study time from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2

Cycle	Course A				Course B			
	n	Mode	Mean	SD	n	Mode	Mean	SD
1	19	2	1.84	0.69	24	1	1.67	0.87
2	60	3	2.95	0.62	43	3	2.72	0.70

Notes. The notable increases in respondents in Cycle 2 was due to the questionnaire being carried out after the final test in the 15th class, rather than in the students' free time.

Peer Observations

During Course B, the opportunity arose to invite three experienced colleagues to observe and critique a lecture. Two observers, one Japanese and one American professor with over 25 years of teaching experience each, visited one lecture together, and the third, a Japanese assistant professor with over 15 years of experience, came on another day. Although I distributed an observation guide (see Appendix 2), all three teachers chose to freely take notes based on their impressions of the class.

The feedback I received was largely positive, with comments about the quality of visual aids and speaking style (delivery speed and repetition of key concepts and/or terms). However, one interesting observation came from the American professor, who was concerned about the amount of L1 being used during discussion activities. Another point raised by all three observers was the lack of student participation. In order to make the class more active, it was suggested that more opportunities for pair work be built in to the lesson plans, and, to encourage participation, a 'participation checklist' be used. This would take the form of a weekly self-assessment where students rate their participation performance in terms of how much they volunteered answers in response to teacher questions, in addition to asking their own questions to the teacher.

Custom-Made Questionnaire

A six-point Likert scale questionnaire was constructed to collect feedback on the following six aspects of course B: content, class activities, the use of videos, motivation, note-taking guides, participation, presentation slides, and the extra reading materials. The questionnaire also contained open response boxes for each of these categories. It was completed by 38 of the 43 students present during the 15th and final class. The scale

data collected is shown in Table 3, and notable themes which emerged from the open responses are presented in Table 4.

The Likert scale responses showed that with regard to overall impressions (item 1), students responded positively, while content was deemed interesting (item 4) but perhaps a little difficult (item 5). The open responses indicated that many students (n=20) found the delivery of the lecture easy to follow. While this at first seems a welcome finding, it is possible that I was, in fact, simplifying too much, which could have been doing some students a disservice in their preparations for taking lectures overseas.

Table 3

Likert scale data from the questionnaire (n=38)

Item	Mode	Mean	SD
<i>Overall impression</i>			
1 I enjoyed taking this course.	6	5.47	0.69
<i>Content</i>			
2 The content was easy for me to understand.	4	3.74	0.98
3 The information was difficult to follow.	1	2.82	1.57
4 The content was interesting.	5	4.13	1.28
5 The lecture topics were quite difficult.	6	4.70	1.31
<i>Activities</i>			
6 I enjoyed the class activities.	4	4.34	1.21
7 The class activities helped me to understand the content.	1	1.92	1.36
<i>Videos</i>			
8 I would like the teacher to use more videos.	1	2.16	1.24
9 The videos helped me understand the content.	4	4.21	1.28
10 The videos were interesting.	5	3.89	1.43
<i>Note-taking sheets</i>			
11 The note-taking sheets helped me develop my note-taking skills.	5	4.84	1.17
12 The note-taking sheets helped me to organise my notes.	5	4.61	1.15
13 The note-taking sheets were useful for studying for the quizzes.	6	5.21	0.96
<i>Quizzes</i>			
14 The quizzes helped me understand the lesson content.	6	4.97	1.09
15 The quizzes motivated me to keep good notes.	4	4.18	1.52
16 With the lectures notes, the quizzes were easy.	5	5.08	0.94
17 Without the lecture notes, the quizzes were/would be difficult.	6	5.21	0.99
<i>Lecture slides</i>			
18 The presentation slides helped me follow the lecture.	6	5.18	0.93
19 The presentation slides helped me take good notes.	3	2.82	1.25
20 The presentation slides helped me understand the content.	2	2.55	1.48
21 The presentation slides made the lectures more interesting.	6	5.24	0.85
<i>Book</i>			

22	I could review the lesson content using the book.	5	4.97	0.79
23	The book gave me extra information for the course.	6	5.13	1.12
24	The book helped me to understand the content.	5	4.58	1.27
25	The book helped me with the quizzes.	5	4.76	1.15
<i>Participation</i>				
26	I actively participated in group discussions.	6	5.55	0.60
27	I asked questions to the teacher during lectures.	5	4.08	1.51
28	I hope to be able to participate more in the future.	4	4.21	1.42
29	I volunteered to answer the teacher's questions during lectures.	5	5.08	0.82

Notes. The six-point Likert scale ranged from to *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6).

For class activities, while students reported enjoying them (item 6), they did not seem to attach the same value to them (item 7) as was intended. There were no negative comments recorded in the open responses, so it was not possible to see the reasons for the lack of enthusiasm, but it seems activities may not be as important to students as hitherto claimed (Miller, 2002). While the responses towards the use of video were largely favourable (items 9 and 10), there was little desire to have more (item 8). The note-taking sheets were accepted well (items 11 to 13), as were the quizzes (items 14 to 17), which were closely connected with the note-taking practice. However, although the open responses supported the scale data to some extent, they also revealed a number of students who expressed specific concerns with the note-taking sheets.

The reaction to the class slides demonstrated some apparent reservations about whether they fostered deeper learning of content (items 19 and 20). Less ambiguous were the responses to the book which was used for extra reading (items 22 to 25). Students seemed to appreciate the chance to have accessible further reading, which would explain the increase in reported self-study in the standardized questionnaire. However, these largely positive scores for the book were contradicted somewhat by the open responses, which revealed a significant minority who actually avoided the book and felt it to be unnecessary.

Finally, students generally claimed that they were active participants during lectures (items 26, 27, and 29). This is an interesting finding as it contradicts the comments made by the peer observers, as well as my own observations, and demonstrates a discrepancy between teacher and students' expectations of participation. Lecturers would most likely feel that actions such as voluntarily asking questions, making comments, and responding to teacher questions made to the class as examples of active participation. These were notably lacking in the classes investigated in this study. It is possible that students considered behaviours such as being attentive, making eye contact, and being active during group discussions to be significant and sufficient facets of participation. While these are no doubt important, teachers may think that without direct teacher-student interaction, participation cannot be considered as particularly active or strong.

Table 4

Open response data from the questionnaire (n=38)

Category	Common themes	Example comments
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The activities were enjoyable (n=19). The sharing of ideas during activities helped to deepen content knowledge (n=6). 	<p><i>“It was exciting. I enjoyed it.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was a good chance to think about the topic deeply.”</i></p>
Note-taking sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sheets were helpful for organizing notes (n=15). Connecting the talk to the correct point on the note-taking sheets was difficult (n=8). The allocated space for each section was sometimes insufficient (n=6). 	<p><i>“In order to make my note, it is very useful.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s not so helpful for me because I don’t know where I should I take a note.”</i></p> <p><i>“Blank was not good for size of topic.”</i></p>
Quizzes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quizzes were useful to encourage the reviewing of notes (n=11). 	<p><i>“I tried to take good notes for the quizzes.”</i></p>
Presentation slides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More text should be used on slides (n=3). More time should be given for note-taking (n=8). 	<p><i>“I would you to explain with full sentences instead of words only.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes too quick to take note.”</i></p>
Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The book was useful for deepening knowledge of the topics (n=8). It was not necessary, and the course could be followed without it (n=6). The book was actually quite difficult (n=6). 	<p><i>“It was useful to deep my understanding.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t need it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some topics were difficult to read and understand.”</i></p>
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lectures were delivered with a slow speech rate and simplified grammar (n=20). 	<p><i>“Your slow-speaking and repeating help me to understand lecture easily.”</i></p>

Notes. Student comments were recorded verbatim; therefore, some language errors and/or non-standard usage is present.

Overall, the interventions made for Cycle 2 saw mixed levels of success. The introduction of extra reading materials, and their content being used in quizzes, appeared to increase the amount of time students dedicated to self-study. On the other hand, the degree of participation did not noticeably improve, despite the perceptions of students. The data gathered from the class observations and questionnaires also raise more questions for further enquiry such as L2 use, excessive simplification, slide

content, the design of note-taking sheets, and the disparity between teacher and student perceptions of participation.

Future Interventions

As an ongoing project for curriculum development, there are several changes which I intend to make going forward. In order to address the concern about a lack of student participation, I plan to introduce weekly participation self-assessments. By having students carefully consider the rubric by which they award themselves a score, I hope to close the gap between students' perceptions of what qualifies as good participation with my own. Second, the use of note-taking sheets requires closer inspection. For some students, more detailed guided note-taking sheets, along with regular signals to indicate which section of the note-taking sheet corresponds to the current talk, appear to be necessary. A third area under consideration is the actual spoken delivery of the lectures. Although there were responses which indicated that the lecture discourse was easy to follow and understand, it would be illuminating to analyse recordings of lecture delivery to ascertain the reasons for this and show whether the balance between simplification and elaboration is being appropriately handled. Indeed, it has been argued that while simplified delivery may improve lecture comprehensibility, it will provide little of the necessary input for language learning (Long, 2015).

Conclusion

This paper described an action research project that set out to evaluate and better understand two lecture courses for EFL students. The triangulation of research methods carried out over the two cycles allowed the issues under investigation to be viewed from different angles and yielded profitable findings that has facilitated course development. The data suggested that lectures as an instructional medium for EFL students might be challenging to implement, but with enough planning and consideration for learners' needs and weaknesses, they can be a worthwhile addition to a tertiary-level language programme, especially when many of the students have aspirations to study abroad in an English-medium university. Indeed, while the idea of lecturing may seem old-fashioned and run counter to contemporary student-centred, active approaches to language teaching, the fact that many EFL students choose to study abroad in contexts where they will take such courses in the target L2 makes it imperative that they are properly prepared.

As pointed as by Talandis and Stout (2014), while small-scale action research projects such as the one described here may seem rather context specific, there is much teachers can learn by making comparisons with other classroom situations. It is hoped that practitioners may consider using lectures and carry out further classroom research to help understand the best way to conduct such courses to aid study abroad preparation.

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Appendix 1: Note taking sheets

English Lecture B	The Journey of English
Lecture Notes	
Meeting 4: The Vikings, Old Norse and Old English	
History	
<i>These days we say 'Vikings', but what did the Anglo-Saxons call the Scandinavian invaders?</i>	
<i>Where did the Vikings attack first? Why?</i>	
<i>When did the Vikings arrive in greater numbers? How had their purpose changed?</i>	
<i>Write as much as you can about Alfred the Great and the Vikings.</i>	
The Impact of Old Norse on English	
<i>About how many words entered English from Old Norse? How many remain?</i>	
1	

Appendix 2: Observation sheets

English Lecture: Observation scheme	
<p>Dear observers,</p> <p>Thank you for visiting my lecture. While any comments you may have will be very helpful, I am especially interested in your impressions on the following points.</p> <p>Content</p> <p><i>Was it easy to follow? Did students seem engaged?</i></p>	<p>Classroom activities</p> <p><i>Were they enjoyable/a welcome break/usable?</i></p>
<p>Teacher's delivery</p> <p><i>Speed, clarity, use of unfamiliar words/lack of explanation of likely unknown words, unnecessary speech</i></p>	<p>Percentage of teacher talk time</p> <p><i>How well were students following the talk time? What is the maximum length of time they can concentrate for?</i></p>
<p>Visual aids</p> <p><i>Keynote slides, use of whiteboard</i></p>	<p>Student participation</p> <p><i>How was participation today? Any tips to improve this?</i></p>
<p>Note sheets</p> <p><i>Do you think they help guide the students with their note taking? Did the students seem to taking plenty of notes?</i></p>	<p>Any other comments!</p>