

Flipped Classrooms and their Implications for English Education in Japan

*LEIS Adrian

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the benefits of implementing the flipped learning approach into Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The paper begins with a review of previous research related to the passiveness of Japanese students in EFL classes, followed by an introduction to flipped learning. After describing the steps of how to flip a classroom, the paper concludes with suggestions of how the flipped learning approach to teaching can be beneficial for Japanese learners of English by promoting autonomy as well as increasing the amount of production on students' behalf.

Key words : Flipped Learning (反転学習)
Bended Learning (ブレンド型学習)
Computer Assisted Language Learning (コンピューター支援語学学習)
EFL in Japan (日本における英語教育)
Education Technology (教育工学)

1. Introduction

One of the oldest proverbs still commonly used in the English language is “You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink” (The Phrase Finder, 2015). This is especially true for teachers looking to increase the motivation of their students. I believe, however, a further clause can be added to this proverb for teachers: “You have to make the water look delicious.” Although it is often challenging for teachers, especially language teachers, to increase the motivation of their students to learn and produce language, there are many ways this can be achieved. In recent years, the area of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has received much attention as a possibility of providing the recipes to make English as a foreign language (EFL)

classes tastier for students. The field of CALL is broad, covering many approaches such as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), digital textbooks, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and the use of applications for computer tablets in language learning. In the present paper, I discuss the use of flipped learning - an approach to teaching that has existed for several years but has recently become more prominent with the use of computer technology in a large variety of subjects - and the benefits it brings to the EFL environment in Japan.

2. The Japanese EFL Environment

The hesitation for many Japanese learners of English to produce language has been the center of discussions among teachers and researchers for

* Department of English Education

several years. Some researchers have put this down to students' lack of confidence (e.g., Anderson, 1986), whereas others (e.g., Donahue, 1998; Harumi, 2011) have explained silence in the Japanese EFL classroom as a face-saving act. In Harumi's study, British nationals viewed videos of typical Japanese EFL classes. The silence of the students was perceived as an indication that they were bored, lazy, or simply had no interest in the subject. On the other hand, Japanese nationals regarded the silence as a way of averting difficult situations in which they may make mistakes (Harumi, 2011). Wilson and Leis (2015) suggested the lack of output by Japanese students could be due to students protecting their self-worth; when faced with situations in which they may fail, students would rather attribute their failure to laziness than to inadequate ability. See Covington (1992, 1998) for more about the Self-worth Theory.

Further studies have also revealed shifting patterns in Japanese students' motivation as possible reasons for the reluctance to produce language in Japanese EFL classrooms. Tachibana, Matsukawa, and Zhong (1996) and Matsukawa and Tachibana (1996), for example, conducted surveys to compare the motivations and attitudes of Japanese and Chinese junior high school students towards learning English. The results suggested that the Chinese students generally displayed more positive attitudes towards learning English over the entire sample as the levels of motivation of the Japanese students tended to wane as they studied the language more. Furthermore, in comparison to the Chinese students, whose motivation appeared to be purely instrumental, the motivational patterns of the Japanese sample were apt to be not so salient, being a mix of both instrumental and integrative. Similar findings were reported in a study of 389 Japanese university students by Yashima (2000), who concluded that the participants identified both instrumental reasons and the goal of building intercultural friendships as the drives behind

their will to learn. Japanese students "feel vaguely it will become a necessity to use English in the 'internationalized' society, but they do not have a clear idea of how they are going to use it" (Yashima, 2000, p. 131). The confusion with which Japanese students appear to feel regarding the directions their English studies are heading may be factors contributing to the lack of output from those studying in the Japanese EFL environment.

Other studies have discussed a lack of authentic language in Japanese EFL classrooms for students' hesitation to actively communicate with others in English. In surveys conducted at Japanese universities by Osterman (2014) and Kikuchi and Browne (2009), for example, students reported that because grammar was concentrated upon too much in many Japanese EFL classes, the language did not reflect what students would use in communication in an all-English environment. Very few students (i.e., 6% in Kikuchi and Browne's study) actually believed that the English they had previously learned would be useful in verbally communicating with others. Due to the focus on grammar in many Japanese EFL classrooms, according to research by Mack (2012), as many as 66% of students remarked that there were not enough opportunities to interact with other students using English. Experience of interaction among students is vital for the Japanese EFL environment, as many students struggle to initiate conversations with other students in their first language, let alone a foreign language (Osterman, 2014).

Previous literature on the current attitudes of Japanese students of English, as mentioned above, strongly suggests a need for more opportunities for interaction between students in English or whatever the target language might be. However, much assessment at Japanese academic institutions tends to focus upon reading comprehension and grammatical features of language (Sasaki, 2008; Forsythe, 2015), which appear to have a backwash

effect on the attitudes of students as described above. One way of achieving a balance of both explicit instruction of the target language and opportunities for increased production, whether it be through the spoken or written form, is flipped learning. This paper will now describe flipped learning, discussing research to date, as well the implications of this relatively new approach to teaching in the Japanese EFL context.

3. Introduction to Flipped Learning

Put simply, flipped learning is an approach to teaching, in which explanations of a textbook done during class time in a traditional learning environment are provided to students before the lesson time. Then, activities and practice normally completed by students as homework in a regular classroom are done under the direct supervision of the teacher during class time. See Table 1 for an example of the structure of a lesson and extra-curricula activities comparing a traditional and flipped classroom.

One theory of how the idea of flipped learning came about can be branched back to research related to peer instruction by Mazur (1997) and later Crouch and Mazur (2001). At the request of

his students, Mazur (1997) handed out copies of his lectures notes before class, rather than after class, in order to allow them to concentrate more on what he was saying during the lesson instead of trying to write down the main points. The students then discovered, however, that Mazur was unconsciously simply reading from his notes, which seemed to be a waste of time for both the students and Mazur himself. After attempting several teaching approaches, Mazur settled on a way that required his students to study the lecture notes before class, which they would then be tested on at the beginning of the lecture. Then, during the lecture time, after confirming students' understanding of the content of the pre-class reading, Mazur had his students participate in discussions. This resulted in the active involvement and participation of all students, even in large classes (i.e., up to 250 students), which would otherwise be a very passive learning environment. Although Mazur's approach to overcoming the traditional passive way of learning was based on science classes, it is valid for all subjects and as Mazur concludes, "we can no longer afford to ignore the inefficiency of the traditional lecture method" (Mazur, 1997, p. 983).

In the early years of the twentieth century, Bergmann and Sams (2012) integrated the idea

Table1 Structure of Lesson and Extra-curricula Activities in Traditional and Flipped Classrooms

Time	Traditional Classrooms	Time	Lesson warm up activity
Before class	Lesson preview on own	Before class	Watching videoed textbook explanations via the Internet
10	Warm up activity	10	Warm up activity
60	Explanation of the textbook conducted by the teacher	10	Checking content of the videoed textbook explanations
10	Practice using the focus point of the lesson	60	Discussions or tasks based on the goal of the lesson
10	Summarizing the main points and explanation of homework	10	Summarizing the main points and comments on class performance
After class	Students do homework, review, and prepare for next lesson	After class	Students review and prepare for next lesson

Note. Time is based on a 90-minute university lesson.

of providing lesson content as preparation for class with the convenience of online video sharing websites, such as YouTube. Bergmann and Sams argue that in comparison to a traditional classroom environment, a flipped classroom allows more time for personalized learning, an aspect of learning which teachers must prioritize in order to draw the most potential out of their students (Keefe, 2007). According to Bergmann and Sams, the use of flipped classrooms as a part of blended learning—described by Garrison and Kanuka as “the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (2004, p. 96)—is essential for teachers and students, listing several benefits to even suggest “we could never go back to a more traditional model of teaching” (Bergmann & Sams, 2012, p. 59). These benefits will be discussed in a latter section of this paper.

4. Flipping a Class

Although it may be possible to flip a classroom without the use of multimedia by, for example, giving students papers with reading material and topics to be discussed during class time based on that reading material, with a great majority of university students owning smartphones (Shearon & Leis, 2015) and these devices proving to be effective in increasing the motivation of students to learn (Leis, Cooke, & Tohei, 2014; Leis, Tohei, & Cook, 2015), it may be more beneficial for teachers and students to flip the class using online video sharing websites (e.g., YouTube). This also brings an added advantage of listening practice for students, especially with availability of closed captions proving to be beneficial for improving learners' listening proficiency (Chung, 1999; Huang & Eskey, 2000; Jones & Plass, 2002; Winke, Gass & Sydorenko, 2010; Yang & Chang, 2014) as well as their vocabulary banks (Garza, 1991; Markum, 1999; Huang & Eskey, 2000; Yuksel & Tanriverdi,

2009). A further advantage of using a video-style flipped learning approach comes in the ability to use closed captions in combination with annotated keywords (e.g., using colors or other effects to highlight keywords), which, according to Yang and Chang's (2014) study, enable students to catch the reduced forms of language in addition to clarifying the main points the instructor wants to make in the videoed lesson explanation. Although there are several ways of creating videos to use in a flipped classroom through various online applications or software, one suggestion is as follows:

1. Create a lesson presentation using software such as Keynote or PowerPoint. When creating the presentation, using animation and colors helps make the main points clearer for students.
2. For each slide in the presentation, type a script of what you want to say on a separate document.
3. Use audio recording software such as GarageBand to record your voice as you read the scripts prepared in Step 2.
4. Add the audio to the appropriate slides. When doing this, be careful of the timing of the animation suggestion in Step 1 to be synchronized with the audio.
5. Convert each individual slide into its own short movie using software such as Quicktime.
6. Add each movie created on Quicktime to movie-making software, such as iMovie or Windows Movie Maker.
7. Once all the short one-slide videos have been combined to one longer video, upload it to a video sharing website such as YouTube.
8. Using the closed captions option in YouTube, copy and paste the script written in Step 2 and automate the timing. It is important that instructors be aware that the timing of the captions will need to be manually adjusted to that of the audio recording in the videos.

9. Finally, share the link with students via email or classroom management systems (e.g., Edmodo, Moodle or Google Classroom).

The length of videos can vary from short videos at less than five minutes to longer ones at 20 minutes or more. One report discussing the length of videos uploaded to YouTube suggests that, although shorter videos will engage viewers more, there seems to be no salient difference between 4-minute videos and 10-minute videos (Ruedlinger, 2012). Therefore, it is recommended that instructors aim to keep videoed lessons for their flipped classroom less than 10 minutes. Similar guidelines of making videos no longer than 15 minutes are made by Bergmann and Sams (2012) in their book *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*, one of the most well-known sources of information related to approaches to flipping a classroom. For longer explanations, Bergmann and Sams (2012) suggest creating segments with videos being chunked, for example, into five-minute segments.

The idea of flipped learning has many implications for foreign language learners, in particular those studying English in Japanese classrooms. This paper will now discuss the benefits and possible challenges of converting a traditional EFL classroom into a flipped one.

5. Implications of Flipped Learning for Japanese EFL Students

Bergmann and Sams suggest flipped learning

“has completely transformed our classrooms, how we think about education, and how we interact with students” (2012, p. 59). To support their claim, Bergmann and Sams list several benefits flipped learning brings to the classroom. For example, such an approach allows students to take charge of their own learning, a responsibility reflecting the definition of autonomy given by Benson (2001): “I prefer to define autonomy as the capacity to take control of one's learning, largely because the contrast of control appears to be more open to investigation than the constructs of charge or responsibility (p. 47).” With the idea of *Promote Learner Autonomy* appearing as one of the major roles of teachers aiming to increase the motivation of their students (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998), this is an obvious positive point for flipped learning. Due to textbook explanations being made available online, they are accessible by students at anytime and any place they wish to do their class preparation, allowing them to control and regulate their study. This may be especially valid for Japanese learners, many of whom use public transport such as buses and trains in order to attend the school of their choice. The availability of lesson explanations online would enable such students to use their commuting time efficiently.

It is, however, important for instructors to beware of the dangers related to the convenience for students of having access to lesson content at anytime and anyplace they wish. Because of the flexibility that comes with flipped learning, students may feel they do not have to watch the videos to prepare for class at a particular time.

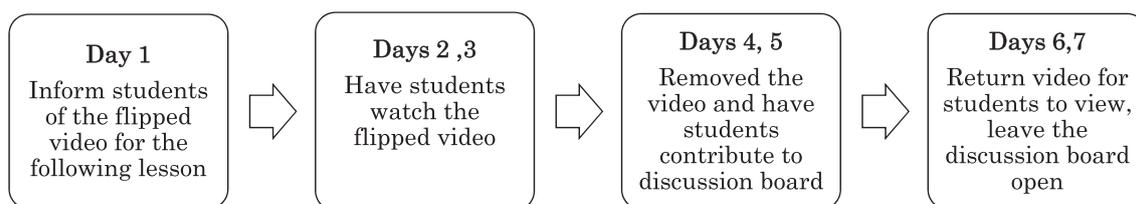


Figure 1. An example of a one-week program for guiding students to watch the video explanation in a flipped classroom.

As a result, they may end up not taking the opportunity to watch the lesson, or watch it at the very last minute, just before class begins, thus defeating the purpose of conducting a flipped classroom. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers implementing flipped learning to give students guidance to overcome this possible weakness.

In order to meet this challenge, it may be advisable for teachers to set a program (e.g., Figure 1) for students to follow, in which they must watch the video, take notes based on issues and discussion points that appear in the video and will be touched upon in class, and contribute to a class discussion board. Using learning management systems (e.g., Edmodo and Moodle) or other management systems (e.g., Google Classroom) will help the teacher easily add and remove videos according to the designated plan. Learners will need to be encouraged to possess strong self-control and self-regulation for flipped learning to be successful. The necessity for learners to develop learning strategies and display self-regulation has been well documented in previous studies. See Zimmerman (2008), for example, for further reading on self-regulation in learning.

A further advantage of using a flipped learning approach in the Japanese EFL environment centers around the importance put upon grammar instruction. As discussed earlier in the present paper and in previous studies (Sasaki, 2008; Forsythe, 2015), much of English education in Japanese schools tends to focus upon grammatical accuracy, often resulting in a passive learning environment in which students are provided with few opportunities to produce language. As Bergmann and Sams (2012) opine, using flipped learning in foreign language classes, however, enables students to view the grammatical explanation that will be focused upon in class before the lesson starts. For example, by having students watch a short video made available online related to the second conditional

before class (e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8veS1kKtBE>), which includes closed captions for ease of understanding, the teacher could use actual class time centered on practicing this grammatical form in a communicative way. In short, the “Presentation” of the popular PPP (i.e., Presentation–Practice–Produce) approach could be reduced to a minimum amount of time, allowing more expenditure on production, an aspect of the PPP approach often neglected in class due to lack of time (Hosseini, 2015).

In one of the few studies focusing on the effects of flipped learning for EFL instruction in the Japanese environment, Mehring (2015) reported on the experiences Japanese university students had while studying an EFL flipped classroom. Mehring concentrated on students' opinions and impressions in addition to self-perceived changes in their study habits. The findings included increased active learning among students, answering the calls to overcome the passiveness of education in Japanese academic institutions discussed earlier in this paper and by other researchers (e.g., Aspinall, 2006; Nakata, 2006). Mehring also reported on his students' opinions that the use of flipped learning increased opportunities for collaboration and interaction with other students in comparison to a traditional classroom environment. This interaction allowed for more peer-evaluation, which in turn encouraged self-reflection and the use of meta-cognitive skills among students, helping improve the confidence with which they approached their language learning.

One other study (Leis, Cooke, & Tohei, 2015) discussed the benefits of using flipped classrooms in English composition classes conducted with university students. The study concluded that the use of flipped learning in such classes resulted in more production by the students (i.e., number of hours studied and length of compositions) in comparison to the students being taught in a traditional classroom. There is, however, still

much room for research into the effects of flipped learning on overcoming the passiveness of Japanese students in their EFL classes, especially in subjects encouraging student output, such as composition writing and speaking classes.

6. Conclusion

In the present paper, I have discussed the use of flipped learning and the benefits this teaching approach appears to bring to the Japanese EFL classroom. Despite flipped learning being possible without the use of mobile devices, such technology appears to bring several advantages, such as the convenience of being able to access lesson content at the students' discretion and the possibility of using closed captions to assist learners' listening proficiency and understanding of lesson content. The use of computer technology in the foreign language classroom has been receiving much attention in the past two decades, and especially with the surge of tablet computers and smartphones since 2010. Although some weaknesses have been discussed by researchers, for example, limited screen sizes and attitudes among students that such devices should be used for fun and entertainment, not study (see Stockwell, 2008), their use has still brought about changes in the way foreign languages are taught.

Although there is an abundance of research related to the use of computer technology for language learning, the number of empirical studies focused on flipped learning, especially in the Japanese context, is very limited. Therefore, there is a clear need for an increase in such studies to provide strong statistical evidence to support the use of this approach for teaching.

Acknowledgements

This paper was supported in part by Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists B (N.o. 25770200).

Much appreciation goes to Sachiko Nakao and Matthew Wilson for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. All remaining errors are the responsibility of the author.

References

- Anderson, J. (1986). *Taking charge: responsibility for one's own learning*. Unpublished MA Thesis. The School for International Training, Brattleboro, VT.
- Aspinall, R. W. (2006). Using the paradigm of 'small cultures' to explain policy failure in the case of foreign language education in Japan. In *Japan Forum* (Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 255-274). Taylor & Francis Group. doi 10.1080/09555800600731197
- Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*. International Society for Technology in Education.
- Chung, J. M. (1999). The effects of using video texts supported with advance organizers and captions on Chinese college students' listening comprehension: An empirical study. *Foreign Language Annals*, 32(3), 295-308. doi 10.1111/j.1944-9720.1999.tb01342.x
- Covington, M. (1992). *Making the grade: A self-worth perspective on motivation and school reform*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Covington, M. (1998). *The will to learn*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Crouch, C. H., & Mazur, E. (2001). Peer instruction: Ten years of experience and results. *American Journal of Physics*, 69(9), 970-977. doi: 10.1119/1.1374249
- Donahue, R. T. (1998). *Japanese Culture and Communication*. Lanahan, MD: University Press of America.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Csizér, K. (1998). Ten commandments for motivating language learners: Results of an empirical study. *Language Teaching Research*, 2(3), 203-229. doi: 10.1177/136216889800200303
- Forsythe, E. (2015). Improving assessment in Japanese university EFL classes: A model for implementing research-based language assessment practices. *21st Century Education Forum*, 10, 65-73. Retrieved from http://repository.ul.hirosaki-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10129/5526/1/21SeikiForum_10_65.pdf
- Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 7(2), 95-105. doi: 10.1016/j.iheduc.2004.02.001
- Garza, T. J. (1991). Evaluating the use of captioned video materials in advanced foreign language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 24(3), 239-258. doi: 10.1111/

- j.1944-9720.1991.tb00469.x
- Harumi, S. (2011). Classroom silence: Voices from Japanese EFL learners. *ETL Journal*, 65, 260-269. doi:10.1093/elt/ccq046
- Hosseini, N. (2015, April). *How to focus on grammar in task-based instruction: Issues and options*. Lecture presented at Miyagi University of Education.
- Huang, H. C., & Eskey, D. E. (2000). The effects of closed-captioned television on the listening comprehension of intermediate English as a second language (ESL) students. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 28(1), 75-96. doi: 10.2190/rg06-lywb-216y-r27g
- Jones, L. C., & Plass, J. L. (2002). Supporting listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition in French with multimedia annotations. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86(4), 546-561. doi: 10.1111/1540-4781.00160
- Keefe, J. (2007). What is personalization? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(6), 440-448. doi: 10.1177/003172170208300609
- Leis, A., Cooke, S. & Tohei, A. (2014). A Report on the use of mobile phones in EFL classes. *Bulletin of Miyagi University of Education*, 48. 211-220. Retrieved from <http://id.nii.ac.jp/1138/00000268/>
- Leis, A., Cooke, S. & Tohei, A. (2015). The effects of flipped classrooms on English composition writing in an EFL environment. *International Journal of Computer Assisted Language Learning and Teaching*, 5(4). 37-51. doi: 10.4018/IJCALLT.2015100103
- Leis, A., Tohei, A., & Cooke, S. (2015). Smartphone assisted language learning and autonomy. *International Journal of Computer Assisted Language Learning and Teaching*, 5(3). 75-88. doi: 10.4018/IJCALLT.2015070105
- Kikuchi, K., & Browne, C. (2009). English educational policy for high schools in Japan: Ideals vs. reality. *RELC Journal*, 40, 172-191. doi:10.1177/0033688209105865
- Mack, L. (2012). Does every student have a voice? Critical action research on equitable classroom participation practices. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(3), 417-434. doi:10.1177/1362168812436922
- Markham, P. (1999). Captioned Videotapes and Second Language Listening Word Recognition. *Foreign Language Annals*, 32(3), 321-328. doi: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.1999.tb01344.x
- Matsukawa, R., & Tachibana, Y. (1996). Junior high school students' motivation towards English learning: A cross-national comparison between Japan and China. *ARELE: Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan*, 7, 49-58. Retrieved from http://ci.nii.ac.jp/els/110008512132.pdf?id=ART0009706857&type=pdf&lang=en&host=cinii&order_no=&ppv_type=0&lang_sw=&no=1448408773&cp=
- Mazur, E. (1997). Peer instruction: getting students to think in class. *AIP Conference Proceedings*. 981-988.
- Mehring, J. G. (2015). *An exploratory study of the lived experiences of Japanese undergraduate EFL students in the flipped classroom*. (Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University).
- Nakata, Y. (2006). *Motivation and experience in foreign language learning*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Osterman, G. L. (2014). Experiences of Japanese University Students' Willingness to Speak English in Class. *SAGE Open*, 4(3), 1-13. doi: 10.1177/2158244014543779
- Ruedlinger, B. (2012, May). Does length matter? *Wistia*. Retrieved from <http://wistia.com/blog/does-length-matter-it-does-for-video-2k12-edition>
- Sasaki, M. (2008). The 150-year history of English language assessment in Japanese education. *Language Testing*, 25(1), 63-83. doi: 10.1177/0265532207083745
- Shearon, B., & Leis, A. (2015). [An investigation into access to technology among Japanese university students.] (Unpublished Raw Data).
- Stockwell, G. (2008). Investigating learner preparedness for and usage patterns of mobile learning. *ReCALL*, 20(3), 253-270. doi: 10.1017/s0958344008000232
- Tachibana, Y., Matsukawa, R., & Zhong, Q. X. (1996). Attitudes and motivation for learning English: A cross-national comparison of Japanese and Chinese high school students. *Psychological Reports*, 79(2), 691-70. doi: 10.2466/pr0.1996.79.2.691
- The Phrase Finder. (2015). *You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink*. Retrieved from <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/you-can-lead-a-horse-to-water.html>
- Wilson, M., & Leis, A. (August, 2015). *A Self-worth perspective on vocabulary acquisition*. Paper presented at the Japanese Society of English Language Education National Conference, Kumamoto, Japan.
- Winke, P., Gass, S., & Sydorenko, T. (2010). The effects of captioning videos used for foreign language listening activities. *Language Learning & Technology*, 14(1), 65-86. Retrieved from <http://llt.msu.edu/vol14num1/winkegasssydorenko.pdf>
- Yang, J. C., & Chang, P. (2014). Captions and reduced forms instruction: The impact on EFL students' listening comprehension. *ReCALL*, 26(1), 44-61. doi: 10.1017/s0958344013000219
- Yashima, T. (2000) Orientations and motivations in foreign language learning: A study of Japanese college students. *JACET Bulletin*, 31, 121-133. Retrieved from http://ci.nii.ac.jp/els/110003726709.pdf?id=ART004891483&type=pdf&lang=en&host=cinii&order_no=&ppv_type=0&lang_sw=&no=1448410841&cp=
- Yuksel, D., & Tanriverdi, B. (2009). Effects of watching captioned movie clip on vocabulary development of EFL learners. *Online Submission*, 8(2). Retrieved from <http://www.tojet.net/articles/v8i2/824.pdf>
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2008). Investigating self-regulation and motivation: Historical background, methodological developments, and future prospects. *American*

Educational Research Journal, 45(1), 166-183. doi:
10.3102/0002831207312909

(平成27年 9 月30日受理)