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Students' Perception of Blended Learning in CLIL Classes: A Survey on Freshmen at Chubu University

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Introduction

THE RAPID ADVANCEMENT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES HAS FOUND its way into higher education and changed the ways of learning and teaching over the years. Even in the most traditional classroom settings, at least one component of learning or teaching is most likely to rely on information and communication technology. Most students are expected to have digital literacy and on the flip side they expect the use of information and communication technology as part of the educational environment. Many universities have adopted different types of online learning to foster learning to meet a diversity of needs by both students and educators (Levy, 2017). Online management systems (LMS) such as Moodle and Blackboard have been readily available to support a variety of educational activities for teachers (Naido, 2006). Reed (2020) explains on the website, World Wide Technology, the distinction between "blended learning" and "hybrid learning". "Blended learning" is comprised of traditional face-to-face learning complemented with either online or offline technology, while "hybrid learning" is comprised of both online and offline but online instruction is used in place of traditional face-to-face instruction. Reed lists the benefits of blended learning and hybrid learning for students as flexible scheduling, content engagement, the ability to track learning, learning at a student's own pace, and encouragement of own learning (Reed, 2020). Many studies have also indicated the effectiveness of both types of online learning, especially blended learning. Besides the benefits listed above, implementing blended learning allow

students to tap into the world of knowledge while acquiring the skillset necessary for communication and interactions within the educational community; thereby provides satisfaction for both students and teachers. (Vaksalla, et al., 2019). Some of the challenges have been also observed, for example the financial burden of technology on the educational institutions, infrastructure, educators, and technological competency (Park, 2009). In the study of learners' perception toward hybrid learning, adult students were found to be more suitable for hybrid learning because they are aware that self-discipline and appropriate time management plays a role in successful learning (Kuuhang & Durante, 2003). In their study Kuuhang and Durante investigate the relationship between the learner's demographic factors including experience with the Internet and their perception toward hybrid learning and recommend that, "various and appropriate learning principles and theories that meet the specific needs of the learners should be included in the design of Web-based distance learning activities/assignment to promote learning" (p.111).

Unfortunately, Covid-19 accelerated the implementation of technologies forcing teachers to rethink and redesign tasks and activities suitable for the platforms that were available regardless of the technological readiness of both learners and educators. In order to maintain the high level of education while ensuring the safety of their entire community, many universities needed to adopt some degree of online learning. Between April and May 2020, 97% of universities in Japan introduced online learning, an increase by 93.7% from the previous month (Digital Knowledge Co., Ltd., 2020). The Department of English Language and Culture at Chubu University also implemented e-learning, replacing its traditional face-to-face classes, following a short preparation period to allow for systematic changes including a choice of platform and technical training and support for students and teachers in the first semester of 2020; however, the classes were conducted in a face-to-face setting in the second semester. In this unprecedented circumstance the students, having experienced both modes of learning and proving themselves very responsive and highly adaptable to the changes technically and psychologically as language learners, provide valuable input that leads to insights which can help us improve language learning and teaching.

Course Background

One of the core English language learning courses offered in the department is Integrated English A, B, C, and D which is described by Campbell and King (Forthcoming) as a course in which,

> Students are learning about English-speaking countries—primarily the United States and the United Kingdom—in English. That is the content learning, and they are assessed on that learning via multiple-choice tests and the preparation of and implementation of presentations based on research. Language learning is done through the study and testing of vocabulary, reading, and presentations. (p.3)

Integrated English A and B are first-year courses offered for freshmen, and Integrated English C and D are listed as the second-year courses.

Before Covid-19

Before the implementation of full online learning in the first semester of 2020, some of the tasks and activities, specifically vocabulary learning and research tasks were done online. For vocabulary learning, the students used a platform called Quizlet, which is available both web-based and as an app for mobile phones and other tablets. Students were responsible for studying assigned vocabulary mainly outside class as homework and preparation for the in-class tests. Researching, however, was a part of the in-class assignments. Students were required to bring their own computers to class and use them to conduct Internet research and collect information on their chosen topic in order to prepare a script and a poster for their presentations. The teachers oversaw this work, offering suggestions on how to find information, or responding to any other inquiries the students had.

Integrated English A and C in 2020

After transitioning to full online learning, Integrated English A and C was partially synchronous but mostly asynchronous using Google Classroom as a platform for the delivery of materials, instructional videos and meetings, and students' production and tests. Asynchronously assigned tasks had about a three-to-five-day period for submission deadline, and tests were done synchronously. The very first instructions and

demonstrations for assignments that required technical support were also done synchronously using Google Meet. The majority of the assignments and in-class tasks and activities were compatible with technology-based instruction and were redesigned. However, the challenges remained in integrating collaborative activities such as in-group reading, pair-work presentation practices, and in-group presentations as part of the online components. Except for the last presentation of the three, those tasks and activities had to be abandoned to lessen the burden of technical difficulties while students and teachers were still in the process of familiarizing themselves with the platform and online learning and teaching experiences. All the presentations were created and filmed by the students at home, and they were uploaded online for the teachers to evaluate.

Integrated B and D in 2020

The face-to-face classroom settings did not entail the return of all the components of the learning process. It was partly because of the pandemic related restrictions posed on classroom teaching, such as seating apart from each other and staying in the assigned seat for the whole semester, which in turn limited collaborative work to its minimum and immobilized the students at the time of presentations; thereby the audience was always the same. Submission of posters and video clips of the presentations also remained as online assignments based on the fact that all the students were comfortable using the platform and the technical procedure. Hence, the classes became something that could be called blended learning with more online tasks and activities than before 2020.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate students' perception of technology-based language learning compared to traditional face-to-face learning with respect to delivery of materials, ease of assignment, and self-assessment of the skills they improved in the specific language learning context of the course detailed below by conducting a survey to the students in question. It is also to describe possible implications for task- and skill-specific effectiveness and challenges of online language learning and teaching. Thus, the current research seeks to answer the questions: What are the students' perceived overall attitudes, perceived ease of specific tasks and activities in online learning and perceived self-assessment of the skills in both online and face-to-face learning?

Method

Participants

Out of 78 students who were registered in Integrated B, 54 of them voluntarily participated in the survey. There were 27 male students and 25 female students with 2 students with gender unanswered, and the composite of the year is 47 freshman, 3 sophomores, and 4 juniors. There were three sections for the course, based on overall English proficiency, Section 1 being the top. There were 24 students from Section 1, 13 from Section 2, and 13 from Section 3 in Integrated A; 25 from Section 1, 16 from Section 2, and 13 from Section 3 in Integrated B. Table 1 indicates the time the students felt they took to become familiar with the use of the platform.

Table 1. Time Taken to Become Familiar with the Platform

1 to 2 weeks	24
1 month	20
2 months	3
1 semester	5
Unanswered	2

Materials

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using Google Forms (See Appendix A). In the first section of the survey, there are questions pertaining to the identification of the participants' demographic attributes as shown in the participant section above, such as gender, academic year, sections of the course, and the time that it took them to feel comfortable using the platform. In the second part, I constructed the questions about overall use of online learning such as time that it took to study the course, focus on the study, pace of the study, delivery of materials, plan of study, ease of asking questions to the teachers, and feedback from the teacher. The third part contains questions in search for perceived ease of the specific tasks and activities and self-assessment of the specific tasks and activities. The final sections contain open ended qualitative questions about Integrated A and Integrated B. The questions were all given in Japanese to ensure understanding.

Procedure

In the last class period of Integrated English B, the participants were asked to voluntarily fill out the survey at their convenience. The survey was posted on the classroom's Google Classroom.

Results

The results of the questionnaire are indicated in the Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4. They respectively indicate: Responses to overall online learning, Perceived ease of specific tasks and activities, and Perceived improvement of the skills and knowledge.

Table 2. Responses to Overall Online Learning ($N = 54$)

Question	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	No Answer
I spent more time studying for Integrated English A in the first semester.	13	20	15	5	1
I could concentrate on doing assignments online in the first semester.	13	20	16	4	1
I was able to study at my own pace more in the first semester.	21	19	11	2	1
The instructions were clearer in the first semester.	5	12	24	12	1
It was easier to keep track of tasks and deadlines in the first semester.	19	12	12	10	1
It was easier to ask questions to the teacher in the first semester.	5	7	20	21	1
I received more feedback from the teacher in the first semester.	3	15	24	10	2
It was more effective in learning to receive feedback from the classmates in the second semester.	12	27	13	2	0

The most selected statement for the "Agree" response is "I was able to study at my own pace more in the first semester" with 21 "Agree" responses (40 combined with "Somewhat Agree"). The second most selected statement was "It was easier to keep track of tasks and deadlines in the first semester" with 19 "Agree" responses (31 combined with "Somewhat Agree"). The statements about the time spent studying and concentration both received 13 "Agree" responses (33 combined with "Somewhat Agree" responses). The statement about the classmates' feedback has 12 "Agree" responses and the total of 39 when combined with "Somewhat Agree", it also received the most "Somewhat Agree" responses.

For negative responses, the most selected statement, receiving 21 "Disagree" responses (41 combined with "Somewhat disagree" responses), is about the perceived ease of asking questions to the teacher. Other notable statements receiving negative responses are about the delivery of materials with clear instructions with the total of 36

when "Disagree" and "Somewhat Disagree" were combined and about the teachers' feedback with the total of 34 when "Disagree" and "Somewhat Disagree" are combined.

Table 3. Perceived Ease of Tasks and Activities

Tasks/Activities	Ease of tasks and activities in Integrated A n=49	Difficulty of tasks and activities in Integrated A n=51	Ease of tasks and activities in Integrated B n=51	Difficulty of tasks and activities in Integrated B n=44
Studying vocabulary	25(51)	16(31.4)	11(21.6)	15(34.1)
Watching video clips and working on a worksheet	34 (69.4)	15(29.4)	14(27.5)	14(31.8)
Reading and understanding the content materials in the textbook	22(44.9)	19(37.3)	24(47.1)	12(27.3)
Researching for a presentation	18(36.7)	17(33.3)	24(47.1)	7(15.9)
Constructing the content of a presentation	16(32.8)	20(39.2)	24(47.1)	5(11.4)
Making a poster for a presentation	12(24.5)	21(41.2)	26(51)	7(15.9)
Presenting in a group on Google Meet	9(18.4)	32(62.7)	Not asked	Not asked
Presenting in a group and writing a reflection paper	Not asked	Not asked	11(21.6)	13(29.5)
Making a video of the presentation	Not asked	14(27.5)	11(21.6)	8(18.2)
Others: Respondants' description	Not applicable 1(2)	Not applicable 1(2)	None 1(2.3)	

Note. The numbers in parentheses represent percentage within the number of respondents for the question.

The respondents found that watching video clips and working on a worksheet to be the easiest activity while presenting in a group on Google Meet was the most difficult in the online learning in the first semester. In the second semester, they found making a poster for a presentation the easiest; however, reading and understanding the context, researching for a presentation, and constructing the content of a presentation were all rated the second easiest. The respondents found studying vocabulary to be the most difficult task followed by watching a video clip with a worksheet and presenting in a group and writing a reflection paper by one response less. The notable result here is that the range of the number for the difficult tasks and activities is substantially low. Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicate the comparison of perceived ease of tasks and activities of Integrated A and B next to each other to visualize the differences.

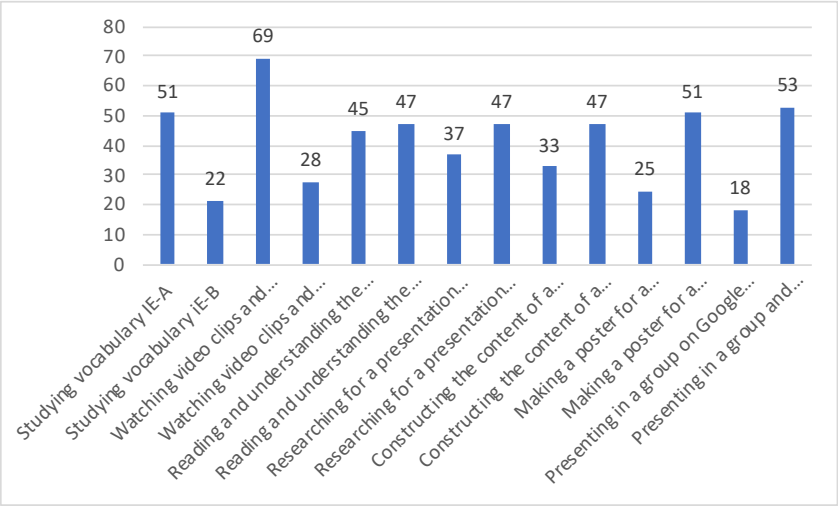

Figure 1. Ease of Tasks and Activities in Percentage

The outstanding differences over 30% gap exist in watching a video clip and working on a worksheet and making a presentation in a group. Working on the video/worksheet task was easier online than in classroom settings, while making a presentation in a group was found to be easier in the face-to-face classroom setting.

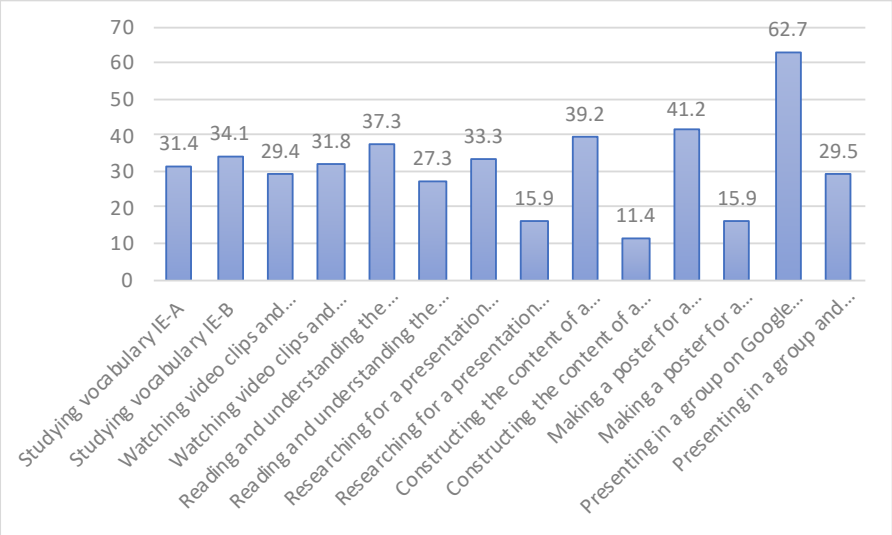

Figure 2. Difficulty of Tasks and Activities in Percentage

A remarkable drop of the perceived difficulty is observed in the group presentation marking 33.2 points difference. Also, constructing the content of the presentations and making a poster have a relatively huge gap.

Table 4. Perceived Improvement of Skills and Knowledge

Skills and knowledge	Inproved in Integrated English A n=51	Inproved in Integrated English B n=50
Vocabulary	22(43.1)	20(40)
Reading	18(35.3)	26(52)
Listening	15(29.4)	37(74)
Writing	5(9.8)	16(32)
Speaking	8(15.7)	27(54)
Researching	22(43.1)	20(40)
Constructing a presentation	21(41.2)	18(36)
Giving a presentation	15(29.4)	27(54)
Knowledge about the content	14(27.5)	14((28)
Not applicable	1(2)	

In the online settings, vocabulary learning, researching, and constructing a presentation are over 40% whereas in the face-to-face classroom settings, vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking, researching, and giving a presentation are over 40%. The most outstanding figure is the 74% of listening.

In the third part of the questionnaire, the responses (See Appendix B) were mainly in alignment with the questions asked in the first part. For the advantages of online classroom settings, there are 17 statements all described in their own words. 11 statements are related to time management and 4 are related to concentration. Others included delivery of the materials, plan of study, and ease of keeping records of assignments. For the advantages of face-to-face classroom setting, there are 24 statements. 13 statements are about asking questions whether to the classmates or the teacher, 6 statements are related to classroom interactions and communication other than asking questions, for example, "I can look at other people's reactions" and "I can communicate with other classmates and work on the assignments". Others include statements about concentration, plan of study, delivery of materials, class atmosphere, and attitudes towards assignments. The last two points were not mentioned in the previous sections of the questionnaire. The statements regarding class atmosphere read, "I felt like I was in class" and "It felt like a university class". The statement regarding the attitude toward the assignments is "I felt that the class method of the second semester made the assignments less of a burden". Another statement, "I learned more in the face-to-face class setting", which was not mentioned in the first part of the questionnaire, indicates perceived competency.

Discussion and Implication

The results relevant to the future instructional methods and delivery modes of classroom tasks and activities are discussed here.

The overall attitudes toward the asynchronous online learning indicate its strength in 1) Self-managed time that gives leeway as to what time of the day the students can start the assignment and the duration of time they can spend on the assignments, which is consistent with the findings of Koohag and Durante (2003). That is an asset to both students whose speed of learning and working differ and educators who need to adjust the expected time of completion for each task and activity at the average leaving the slow learners behind and fast leaners extra time "to kill" in class and 2) Concentration on the task at hand, which is inconsistent with the findings of Dontre (2020) who states that in the home environment family members and social media platforms are disruptive to study. However, the data collected indicated otherwise. Even though the high rate of the students confirming the effectiveness of classmates' feedback in the face-to-face class settings, the result of concentration might be indicative of classmates being a source of some distraction in class.

Taking those two advantages of online learning into consideration, the reasons for perceived ease of watching a video clip with a worksheet in online class settings being the top are most likely that the assignment requires concentration and time. Once those elements are removed in the face-to-face environment, the perceived ease did not hold true. Playing the video clips for the class does not ensure time to complete the task for every student. Any type of tasks and activities involving video clips or perhaps audio recordings seem appropriate for synchronous e-learning.

Perceived advantages of face-to-face learning displayed in the easy completion of specific tasks and the students' statements are largely based on interactions among classmates and between the students and the teacher. Social interactions and building a learning community was a significant part of the students' comfort in completing the tasks. Gillett-Swan (2017) states that every process of making a presentation using a self-made poster requires high cognitive abilities and critical thinking along with a set of technical skills for making a poster. The processes are complex and clear instructions are vital to the project. However, clear and carefully detailed delivery of materials alone did not facilitate the processes. Although explanation and demonstration videos were available to the students in the first semester, the presentation related tasks and activities were

considered difficult. In contrast, the availability and immediacy of a teacher's or classmate's answers to the questions they had in the second semester seem to have played a significant role in judging whether the tasks were easy or not.

The significant difference in the perceived improvement of listening skills reveals that listening activities per se do not necessarily improve listening skills. The video clip activities involve mainly listening skills. The time spent on them is very limited compared to the time spent in the first semester based on the discussion of time in the attitude towards the overall online learning part of the survey. Communication and interactions within the class community including class instructions and discussions could have contributed to providing meaningful language input for the students, which in turn improved or at least made the students believe they had improved their listening ability.

On one hand, the results in this study reveal valuable implication in integrating various modes of technologies and classroom instructions; however, the sample of the participants and courses are too specific to apply its implication to other courses or any other language settings without resignation. Uncontrolled variables in the sample, namely leaners' familiarity with handling technological operation, English proficiency, and the actual amount of English language used in class communication, would affect the outcome of the results. In-depth studies controlling those variables are recommended.

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APPENDIX A

Google Form Survey

The purpose of this survey is to find out what you think about the differences of learning through remote instructions and the one through face-to-face instructions in Integrated English A-B. Taking part in this survey is strictly voluntary. Your answers will be used only for the purpose of the research. Any information obtained in this survey will NOT affect your grades in any way in this course if you decide to participate in the survey, so your frank opinions are greatly appreciated.
If you decide to participate, please go on to the next section.

Please answer the questions about yourself.

Choose your sex: Male, Female, Others

Which year are you in? 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, 4th year

Choose your class: 1st semester King, Campbell, Sandy

2nd semester King, Campbell, Sandy

Please compare the on-demand classes in the first semester and face-to-face classes in the second semester of Integrated English.

- ✓ **Agree–Somewhat agree–Somewhat disagree–Disagree**

I spent more time studying for Integrated English A in the first semester.

I could concentrate on doing assignments online in the first semester.

I was able to study at my own pace more in the first semester.

The instructions were clearer in the first semester.

It was easier to keep track of tasks and deadlines in the first semester.

It was easier to ask questions to the teacher in the first semester.

I received more feedback from the teacher in the first semester.

It was more effective in learning to receive feedback from the classmates in the second semester.

Which tasks were easier to do in the first semester because it was online?

Studying vocabulary
Watching video clips and working on a worksheet
Reading and understanding the content materials in the textbook
Researching for a presentation
Constructing the content of a presentation
Making a poster for a presentation
Presenting in a group on Google Meet
Others

Which tasks were harder to do in the first semester because it was online?

Studying vocabulary
Watching video clips and working on a worksheet
Reading and understanding the content materials in the textbook
Researching for a presentation
Constructing the content of a presentation
Making a poster
Presenting in a group on Google Meet
Making a video of the presentation
None

Which items did you feel you improved in the first semester?

Vocabulary
Reading
Listening
Writing
Speaking
Researching
Constructing a presentation
Giving a presentation
Knowledge about the content

Which tasks were easier to do in the second semester because it was face-to-face?

Studying vocabulary
Watching video clips and working on a worksheet
Reading and understanding the content materials in the textbook
Researching for a presentation
Constructing the content of a presentation
Making a poster
Presenting in a group and writing a reflection paper
Making a video of the presentation
Others

Which tasks were easier to do in the second semester?

Studying vocabulary
Watching video clips and working on a worksheet
Reading and understanding the content materials in the textbook
Researching for a presentation
Constructing the content of a presentation
Making a poster
Presenting in a group and writing a reflection paper
Making a video of the presentation
Others

Which items did you feel you improved in the first semester?

Vocabulary
Reading
Listening
Writing
Speaking
Researching
Constructing a presentation
Giving a presentation
Knowledge about the content

If you have a comment on the advantages of class style in the first semester, please write it here.

If you have a comment on the advantages of class style in the second semester, please write it here.

APPENDIX B

Original Responses to the question, "If you have a comment on the advantages of class style in the first semester, please write it here."

- ✓ 自分のペースで出来た
- ✓ オンデマンドだから好きな時間に勉強することが出来る。記録として残る
- ✓ 課題がわかりやすかった。いつまでになにをすればいいかがはっきりとしていた。一人で受けているような物なので集中できてよかった。
- ✓ 自分ものペースで勉強時間が取りやすい。
- ✓ わからない
- ✓ なし
- ✓ 時間に縛られずに自分のペースで学習できた
- ✓ 宿題をやる時間がたくさんあった。
- ✓ 自分のいい時間に課題ができる
- ✓ 前期の授業形態の方が集中してできた良かった
- ✓ 自分の好きな時間帯に授業を受けることが出来た。
- ✓ 提出期限はあるがあまり時間に縛りがなかったこと
- ✓ 自分しか頼る人がいなくて、勉強も集中力が続いた。
- ✓ 分からなかった時に、長時間ゆっくり考えられた。
- ✓ 自分の時間を多く持てた。
- ✓ プレゼンテーション作成に集中できた
- ✓ 体調が悪い時でもオンラインなら自宅で受けることができるので非常に助かる

Original Responses to the question," If you have a comment on the advantages of class style in the second semester, please write it here."

- ✓ 楽だった
- ✓ 分からないところを友達に聞ける
- ✓ 授業をしているって感じがあった
- ✓ 積極的に周りの人とコミュニケーションが取れる。
- ✓ 生徒同士で助け合えること
- ✓ 周りの反応がわかる。
- ✓ 先生に質問しやすかった。
- ✓ 大学生の授業という感じがする
- ✓ 宿題の提出期限など、先生が最後に黒板に書いて LINE のグループに送って下さるのでわかりやすかった。
- ✓ 質問をしやすかった
- ✓ 直接話せること。オンラインだと話しにくい。
- ✓ 対面で、気軽に質問しやすかった。
- ✓ 先生に質問しやすい。
- ✓ 先生の教え方と理解度が一致した
- ✓ すぐ先生に聞ける
- ✓ 後期の授業形態の方が課題が重く感じることがなかったところ良かった
- ✓ 対面だったので質問などもしやすかったし、内容の答え合わせなどもその場でやってくれたのでコンテンツテストなどの勉強もしやすかった。
- ✓ 質問がすぐにできること
- ✓ 対面のほうが、身に入っていると思う。
- ✓ 対面でのコミュニケーションを取ることによってルームメイトと課題に取り組むことができた。
- ✓ 直接質問など聞けるところ

About the Author

Mie Sandy holds a master's degree in TESOL from West Virginia University and has over thirty years of classroom teaching experience in both the US and Japan. She's taught English in a variety of settings including intensive English programs, junior colleges, and universities. Mie specializes in teaching academic writing, communication skills, TOEIC preparation, and communicative grammar. She's especially interested in content-based teaching and CLIL. Over the years Mie has taught a wide range of courses at Chubu University where she's been on faculty since 2001.