

---

# Brown's approach to language curricula applied to English communication courses

Jonathan J. Harrison

jon.harrison@nihon-u.ac.jp

*Nihon University, College of Science and Technology*

Ruth Vanbaelen

ruth.vanbaelen@nihon-u.ac.jp

*Nihon University, College of Science and Technology*

---

## Abstract

Brown's approach to designing and maintaining language curricula consists of six processes: needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials, teaching, and evaluation. This flexible approach was adapted for use in a program involving learners with a variety of needs and with various proficiencies. This systematic approach to curriculum design and how it was applied to English Communication courses between the 2009 and 2011 academic years at a private university in Japan are summarized. Results from the online testing program and the online surveys are given and how the course evolved is discussed. Results from 2010 indicate 3-24% achievement gains, student satisfaction at 98%, and student perceptions of learning on the rise. Brown's approach was useful for this two-course program.

**Keywords:** curriculum design, English, perception, systematic approach

## Introduction

Language educators have an abundance of teaching methods from which to choose; well-known examples include grammar-translation, situational, functional, topical, skills, and tasks. Brown (1995) organized these into four categories of language teaching activities: approaches, syllabi, techniques, and exercises. Approaches, based on theories of language and language learning, are the ways of defining what and how the students need to learn, examples include the grammar-translation approach and the communicative approach. Syllabi are ways of organizing the course materials, including structural, topical, skills, and tasks. Techniques are the ways of presenting the materials and teaching. These include grammar demonstration dialogues, lectures on rules of language, and discussions. Exercises, for instance, fill-in, cloze, copying, and restatement, are the ways of practicing what has been presented. Teachers' approaches and theories may differ, and many teachers tend to use multiple approaches, different types of syllabi, and various techniques and exercises simultaneously based on the perceived needs of the learners in their classrooms in order to effectively and efficiently help them learn.

Brown's approach to designing and maintaining a language curriculum draws from various models and is a systems approach which allows for logical program development. Brown's view is that curriculum development is ongoing as it is "a series of activities that contribute to the growth of consensus among the staff, faculty, administration, and students" (p.19). The approach consists of six interconnected processes: needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials, teaching, and evaluation. Briefly stated needs analysis for a particular institution is the systematic collection and analysis of information regarding what is necessary to satisfy the students' language learning requirements. Objectives, meaning precise statements regarding the skills and content the students should master to reach larger goals, must be set. From the objectives criterion-referenced tests should be made to measure learning, and norm-referenced tests should be used to compare student performance. With the needs analysis, objectives, and tests in mind, materials can be adopted, developed, or adapted. Decisions regarding teaching should be made by the teachers, and it is best if the teachers are part of the curriculum design process and that they are

supported by the administration. Evaluation, meaning program evaluation, is an ongoing, systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information, gathered through all of the other processes, which is necessary to improve the curriculum and to assess its effectiveness.

Brown's approach is a framework within which the English Communication (EC) courses could be systematically evaluated and evolve based on learner needs. Although EC is not a curriculum but merely two similar course titles with eight subtitled course options, Brown's approach provides a framework with defined processes for information gathering, goal setting, evaluation of learning, materials development, teaching and learning, and overall program evaluation. This approach considers a curriculum to be a process which can change and adapt to new conditions. What follows is a discussion of how the authors adapted this curriculum model to EC courses.

This approach was chosen as it is flexible and allows for evolution and maturation through a systematic process. The authors were first year employees creating a program for implementation during their second year, and the learners involved had a range of needs and language proficiencies. The approach was applied to English Communication courses from 2009 to 2011 academic years at a science and technology university in Japan. In 2009 EC courses replaced English Conversation courses, broadening the focus to include communication in English through not only speaking but also through writing and nonverbal communications. These courses are required for students seeking teacher certification and elective courses for other second through fourth year students who must acquire ten foreign language credits for graduation, six of which must come from English courses. EC courses may account for up to two credits of the required ten credit curriculum. These new EC courses consist of four subtitled optional courses with two levels each, and the courses were implemented in two stages. Typically, multiple courses with related contents that support each other would be called a program; however, as students can only take a maximum of two of the eight subtitled courses, the term "course" will be used throughout this paper. The subtitles are as follows:

- Public Speaking 1 (PS1) provides students with practical experience to learn basic presentation skills and to write and give structured speeches.
- Public Speaking 2 (PS2) introduces students to scientific research presentation skills and focuses on learning to ask and respond well to questions.
- Traveling Abroad 1 (TA1) allows students to learn and practice basic survival English skills for communicating in different travel and home stay situations and to introduce aspects of Japan.
- Traveling Abroad 2 (TA2) gives students practice with language learning strategies and test-taking strategies for the TOEFL to prepare them for possible future study abroad.
- Business 1 (BU1) focuses on basic business communication skills.
- Business 2 (BU2) builds business communication, presentation and discussion skills.
- Cultural Appreciation 1 (CA1) focuses on learning to introduce aspects of Japan and researching basic information on other cultures.
- Cultural Appreciation 2 (CA2) explores cultural, social, and economical differences between Japan and various countries.

Implementation began in 2009 with two subtitled courses with two levels each, and in 2010, two more subtitled courses with two levels each began (Table 1): From the second semester of 2010, all of the subtitled EC courses were offered. These eight subtitled courses are divided into thirty-four EC course

time slots which are spread across two campuses. Each semester between 650 and 850 students registered for these EC courses (Office of Educational Affairs, 2009-2011).

**Table 1. Schedule of Implementation of the Courses**

	First Semester	Second Semester
Until 2008	English Conversation I	English Conversation II
2009	English Communication I: <i>Public Speaking 1</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 1</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 2</i>	English Communication II: <i>Public Speaking 1</i> <i>Public Speaking 2</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 1</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 2</i>
2010	English Communication I: <i>Public Speaking 1</i> <i>Public Speaking 2</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 1</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 2</i> <i>Business 1</i> <i>Cultural Appreciation 1</i>	English Communication II: <i>Public Speaking 1</i> <i>Public Speaking 2</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 1</i> <i>Traveling Abroad 2</i> <i>Business 1</i> <i>Business 2</i> <i>Cultural Appreciation 1</i> <i>Cultural Appreciation 2</i>
2011	English Communication I: All	English Communication II: All

## Methods of Design and Implementation

### Methods of Needs Analysis

A needs analysis, as defined by Brown, is “the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context.” (p.36) He prescribes three systematic steps: Making basic decisions about the needs analysis, gathering information, and using the information. In short, the initial needs analysis information was gathered in 2008 through informal student surveys, conversations with students, and meetings with teachers and administrators. One merit of Brown’s approach which the authors kept in mind was how the flexibility of the framework allows for continual data gathering and use. The EC course subtitles and basic descriptions had been set by administration, and the authors of this paper were given the task of establishing guidelines and administering these new courses with assistance from a third full-time EC teacher.

### Methods of Objectives

Student language output expectations, general skill objectives for all courses and course-specific content objectives for each subtitled course, specifically topics and vocabulary were detailed by early 2009 by the three full-time native English-speaking teachers. In this paper, the term “Guidelines” will be used to refer to the output expectations and the objectives. The guidelines were provided to all EC teachers as a minimum of what should be taught in the courses, and they were updated annually.

Expected minimums of graded student output for writing were set at 300 words and 400 words for levels 1 and 2, respectively. Minimums for graded oral communications were 200 and 300 words for the respective levels. The 2011 goals and objectives for the eight subtitled courses were as follows.

### *Public Speaking 1 (Basic Presentations)*

- Identify the parts of a speech: introduction, body, and conclusion. Many teachers use a basic five-paragraph presentation format with an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.
- Take notes on speeches and lectures to obtain the thesis, main points, and important details.
- Use notes to answer questions, write responses or opinions, ask questions, or have discussions.
- Write and present one or two structured speeches, including an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- Ask questions to presenters and answer questions regarding their own presentations.
- Presentation basics: proper posture, natural gestures, eye contact, and voice inflection (word stress, varied pace of speech, pausing, etc.)
- Understand and use styles of presentation introduction (a.k.a. attention grabbers, hooks), including a question, a statistic, an anecdote (story), a quote, humor/a joke, or a definition.
- Understand and use important vocabulary: introduction, body, conclusion, paragraph, sentence, attention grabber, thesis, topic sentence, primary and secondary support, transition, restate(ment), opinion, example.
- Write emails in a proper format, with a subject line, greeting + receiver's title and name, body (message), salutation, and sender's name in the proper order (e.g. for communications with the teacher about speech preparation, for peer review of other students' speeches, to thank a presenter, or to ask for more information).

### *Public Speaking 2 (Academic Presentations)*

- Identify the parts of an academic speech: title, author, abstract, introduction, methods, results, conclusion, and references. Optional teaching points include: discussion, acknowledgements
- Choose, research, and present a topic.
- Quote and paraphrase sources and properly cite them.
- Take notes on speeches, the main points, and important details.
- Ask questions about others' research and respond to questions about their own research (e.g. expressing opinions, building an argument, etc.).
- Write emails in a proper format, with a subject line, greeting and receiver's title and name, body (message), salutation, and sender's name in the proper order (e.g. for communications with other students, researchers, presentation proposal submissions, etc.).
- Understand and use important vocabulary: research, quote, paraphrase, source, cite, title, author, presenter, introduction, abstract, methods, materials, results, discussion, conclusion, references

### *Traveling Abroad 1*

- Communicate in English in different situations, specifically survival English for airports, hotels, restaurants, and shopping. Other situations are the decisions of the teacher.
- Learn to use vocabulary for speaking, listening, writing, and reading tasks in the following situations:

Daily, basic conversations (possibly including greetings, introductions, classroom English, days of the week, months, numbers, and exchanging contact information.)

Airports - important vocabulary: immigration, documents, visa, customs, gate, passport, declare, boarding, fasten/seat belt, embark, return, depart, tray/upright position, take off, land.

Hotels - important vocabulary: reception(ist), reservation, check-in/out, luggage/baggage, smoking, non-smoking, wake up call, tip, room service, continental breakfast, complimentary, buffet, concierge, cost.

Restaurants - important vocabulary: reservation, check, bill, credit (card), cash, pay, order, smoking, non-smoking, waiter, waitress, appetizer, anything else, bills, coins, change, total, receipt.

Shopping- important vocabulary: price, cash, credit card, purchase, refund, exchange, discount, shoplifting, cashier, salesperson, fitting room, try on, take off, put on, window shopping, just looking, receipt, (currencies).

- Write emails in a proper format, with a subject line, greeting + receiver's title and name, body (message), salutation, and sender's name in the proper order.
- Focus on asking and answering basic questions: who, what, when, where, why, how, how much.

### *Traveling Abroad 2 (TOEFL)*

- Practice skills for academic classes in English when studying abroad, specifically:
  - a. listening to lectures
  - b. taking notes
  - c. expressing opinions
  - d. participating in group discussions
  - e. summarizing
  - f. integrating ideas from multiple sources
- Write emails in a proper format, with a subject line, greeting and receiver's title and name, body (message), salutation, and sender's name in the proper order.
- Increase knowledge of and fluency with vocabulary. Focus on study skills and methods to build student vocabularies by 50 to 200 words used in academic settings.
- Learn at least two note taking skills and strategies, possibly including use of graphic organizers and outlining.
- Learn speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills for the TOEFL focusing on giving opinions, comparison/contrast, and cause and effect (as specified by ETS in a comparison of the old and new TOEFL tests at [http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/TOEFL\\_at\\_a\\_Glance.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/TOEFL_at_a_Glance.pdf). Retrieved on Jan. 29, 2009.

### *Business 1*

- Take and make phone calls. Students learn to make a simple call and take a simple message. This includes learning expressions, as well as structure of a company. Prepositions of time and place need to be reviewed.
- Write emails in a proper format, with a subject line, greeting and receiver's title and name, body (message), salutation, and sender's name in the proper order.
- Both form and answer questions about personality, studies, and the future in a job interview situation.
- Describe a product or a process. Students should learn vocabulary (verbs describing change) and transitions. Students could do simple descriptions/comparisons of products (e.g. cell phone functions, PC, cars, etc.)
- Take notes on speeches or mini-business meetings to obtain the gist and the most important information.

### *Business 2*

- Take and make phone calls. Students learn to make a detailed call and take a detailed message. This includes learning expressions, as well as structure of a company. Prepositions of time and place need to be reviewed.
- Write emails in a proper format, with a subject line, greeting and receiver's title and name, body (message), salutation, and sender's name in the proper order. Classroom tasks could include: Suggesting a meeting and including an agenda, writing one's own opinion, replying to the received email.
- Both form and answer detailed questions about personality, studies, and the future in a job interview situation.
- Give a detailed description of a product or a process using graphs and data. Students should learn vocabulary (verbs describing change) and transitions. Students could do simple descriptions/comparisons of products (e.g. cell phone functions, PC, cars, etc.)
- Take notes on speeches or mini-business meetings to obtain important information and specific details. The study of inferred meanings could also be part of this course.

### *Cultural Appreciation 1*

- Describe aspects of culture or cultural items.
- Give and ask for opinions with a focus on cultures and countries.
- Integrate information obtained from listening and reading into spoken or written product.

### *Cultural Appreciation 2*

- Describe aspects of culture or cultural items.
- Give and ask for opinions with a focus on cultures and countries.
- Summarize listenings and readings.

- Integrate information obtained from listening and reading into spoken or written product.

### **Methods of Testing**

Testing was implemented online using a Moodle Content Management System (CMS) on university servers. From the objectives, pre-test and post-test items were created for each subtitled course. For the most part, the pre-test and post-test items per subtitled course were identical, the exceptions being some of the subtitled course tests contained items which required the students to input their opinions as short answer responses. Test items and answer choices within the items were randomized either automatically through the CMS or manually, to create randomized test sections on particular tests.

Students were directed via a paper handout written in Japanese with instructions to access the online tests during the first three weeks of the course (the pre-test period) which coincides with the student registration period for classes. The post-test period spanned the last two weeks of the courses. The majority of tests were completed outside of class as computer rooms were not available during the majority of course time slots; however, when facilities were available, some full-time teachers allowed time for tests to be taken during class time. The time limit for each subtitled course test was set between 30 and 40 minutes and each test was composed of 35 to 45 items. The majority of items were multiple-choice; however, cloze items and short answer writing items were used on some subtitled course tests. Completing all items on both of the pre-course and the post-course tests allowed students to receive 10% toward their course grades.

### **Methods of Materials and Teaching**

The selection of materials and teaching to the course objectives were the responsibilities of the individual teachers. Some teachers taught from commercial textbooks while others used teacher created materials. Teachers were responsible for 90% of the students' course grades, including but not limited to in-class assignments, homework, quizzes, tests, presentations, effort, and participation.

### **Methods of Course Evaluation**

To gather feedback in the first and second semesters of 2009, a voluntarily online post-course survey was available for students to complete before or after the tests. However, in 2010 both pre-course and post-course surveys were made available online to students for voluntary submission after completion of the online pre-tests and post-tests. The pre-course survey focused mainly on the students' interests, such as their reasons for taking the course and what extra-curricular English language activities they may be interested in. The post-course survey focused on course feedback. Post-course teacher surveys, which consisted of questions which mirrored those on the students' post-course surveys, were distributed and collected by postal mail and email at the conclusion of each course.

Overall EC course evaluation was done after each semester. The evaluation phase took into account feedback from tests, student surveys, teacher surveys, and other communications with students and teachers. After each semester, item analyses of the online tests were done for each subtitled course test to improve test items. Also, after each semester, feedback from the student and teacher surveys and direct feedback from teachers and students were analyzed. Using the results from the online achievement tests and the student and teacher surveys, the objectives were adjusted annually.

## Results

### Results from Online Tests

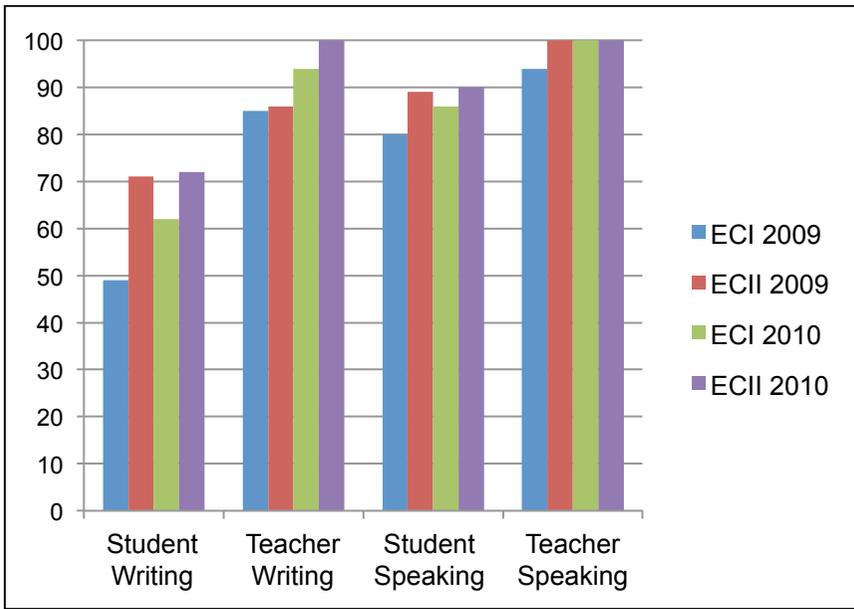
Between ECI 2009 and ECII 2010, student achievement for each course ranged between -1% and 24% (Table 2). Please note that the subtitled courses were implemented over a two-year period with all courses being offered in ECII 2010. The ECII 2010 CA2 results were incalculable due to sample size ( $n = 2$ ). In 2011 online testing and surveys were suspended due to rolling blackouts and to conserve energy after the Great Tohoku Earthquake, yet the teachers still taught according to the guidelines.

**Table 2. Average Student Achievement**

	ECI 2009	ECII 2009	ECI 2010	ECII 2010
TA1	1% ( $n = 243$ )	6% ( $n = 64$ )	3% ( $n = 169$ )	3% ( $n = 91$ )
TA2	-1% ( $n = 48$ )	12% ( $n = 94$ )	24% ( $n = 49$ )	18% ( $n = 14$ )
PS1	5% ( $n = 151$ )	1% ( $n = 86$ )	4% ( $n = 100$ )	5% ( $n = 91$ )
PS2	-	5% ( $n = 38$ )	12% ( $n = 15$ )	9% ( $n = 33$ )
BU1	-	-	7% ( $n = 151$ )	5% ( $n = 62$ )
BU2	-	-	-	5% ( $n = 51$ )
CA1	-	-	0% ( $n = 21$ )	4% ( $n = 17$ )
CA2	-	-	-	NA

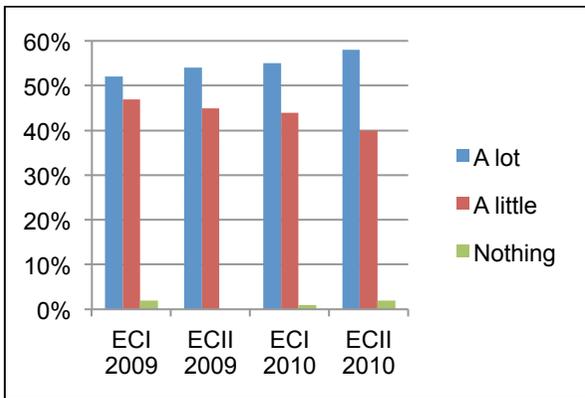
### Results from Surveys regarding Expectations, Enjoyment and Learning

Regarding expectations, student and teacher survey data (Figure 1) indicated that the majority of students felt that they were achieving the spoken and written expectations, except in the first semester of 2009. Respectively, from 2009 in each of the four semesters, 49%, 71%, 62%, and 72% of the students who completed the survey thought that they had achieved the writing expectations for the course. Regarding the speaking expectations, in semester order from ECI 2009, 80%, 89%, 86%, and 90% of the students surveyed perceived that they had achieved the expectations. Teacher perception of achieving the expectations advanced each semester in regard to writing, 85%, 86%, 94%, and 100%. The speaking expectations were perceived to be achieved 94% in ECI 2009 and 100% in all semesters following by all teachers. These data indicated that as the EC courses were further developed, both students and teachers more often felt that both the writing and speaking expectations were achieved.

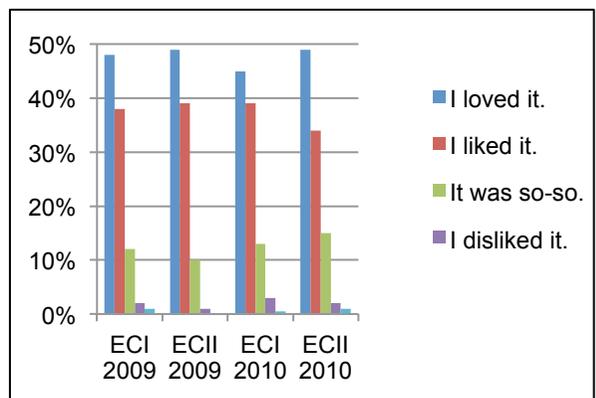


**Figure 1. Perceptions of speaking and writing expectation achievement**

Regarding enjoyment and learning, data from 2009 and 2010 pre-course and post-course student surveys gave some indication of student satisfaction. Figures 2 and 3 compare students' perceptions regarding pleasure and learning over four semesters. It is important to note that the majority of students, approximately 85% each semester, consistently enjoyed the courses, 10 – 15% were undecided, and 1 – 4% disliked the courses. While enjoyment of the courses has been steady at 85%, a noteworthy trend in the data is that each semester between ECI 2009 and ECII 2010 the students who learned “a little” has decreased, and the students who indicated they learned “a lot” has steadily increased.



**Figure 2. Student perceptions on learning**



**Figure 3. Student perceptions on enjoyment**

**Results regarding Participation and Overall EC Evaluation**

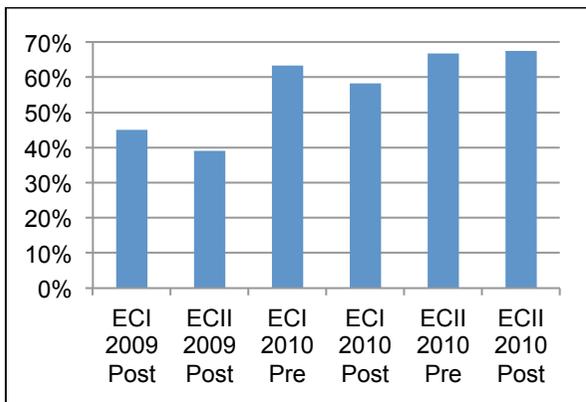
Between 650 and 850 students register for EC each semester, but for a more accurate picture of enrollment, test and survey participation was summarized (Table 3). The number of students who were given credit for completing the online tests and the number of voluntary surveys completed are compared with the number of students who attended class in the third week, which was the last week to register for the course. The third week attendance data most accurately reflects the actual number of enrolled students

who attended the courses as official registration statistics tend to run high and post-test completion numbers tend to run low. Please note that ECII attendance is lower than ECI attendance due to schedule conflicts with required second semester major-specific courses.

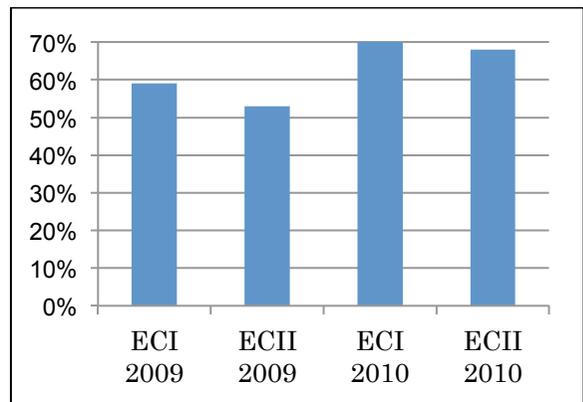
**Table 3. Test and Survey Completion Compared with Attendance**

Semester & Test	3rd Week Attendance	Tests Completed	Surveys Completed	Credit Given
ECI 2009 Pre	768	739	345	456
ECI 2009 Post		598		
ECII 2009 Pre	615	611	237	326
ECII 2009 Post		513		
ECI 2010 Pre	739	700	468	519
ECI 2010 Post		622	430	
ECII 2010 Pre	561	567	375	384
ECII 2010 Post		512	379	

Illustrated in Figures 4 and 5, the data from Table 3 show that from ECI 2009 to ECII 2010 completion of both pre-course and post-course tests increased from 45% to nearly 70% and completion of the voluntary surveys increased approximately 10% from below 60% to approximately 70%.



**Figure 4. Survey participation**



**Figure 5. Test participation**

## Discussion of Course Evaluation and Improvements

Since its inception in 2009, EC has been evaluated and updated after each semester. The results from the online tests, online student surveys, teacher surveys, communications with students and teachers were all used to evaluate EC and update aspects of the courses. To improve the guidelines, the objectives were better defined each year. General skills objectives for note-taking and paragraph writing were added. Also, an objective for email writing was implemented as an early-on needs analysis regarding technology use indicated that students were using mobile technology and had access to personal computers (Harrison, 2009), yet teachers noted email communications with students were impolite and not easily understood. For results regarding email learning, see Harrison & Vanbaelen, 2011. Also, the expected amount of spoken and written output for Level 1 and Level 2 courses was raised. Open email communication with students and teachers has been promoted, and annual faculty development sessions have been held. The above improvements are believed to have raised achievement and participation.

## Conclusion

Overall, Brown's approach is flexible and effective in promoting education. Results on achievement tests and feedback from surveys were increasingly positive through 2009 and 2010. The students' and teachers' perceptions of spoken and written output goal achievement increased each semester, with the students' perception of goal achievement rising to 72% for writing and 90% for speaking. Achievement test results for 2010 showed 3% to 24% achievement for subtitled courses. Data also indicated more than 85% of learners enjoyed the courses and 98% of the students perceived they were learning with the percentage of those who felt they were learning "a lot" on the rise.

## References

- Brown, J. D. (1995). *The Elements of Language Curriculum: A Systematic Approach to Program Design*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Harrison, J. (2009). A needs analysis for incorporation of technology into English courses. *Nihon University, College of Science and Technology Bulletin of the Department of General Education*, College of Science and Technology, Nihon University, 86, 23-32.
- Harrison, J., & Vanbaelen, R. (2011). Learning and retention of English email writing skills by students at an engineering university in Japan. *Professional Communication Conference (IPCC), 2011 IEEE International*, 1-7. doi: 10.1109/IPCC.2011.6087197
- Nihon University, College of Science and Technology, Office of Educational Affairs. (2009-2011). Personal communications by Jonathan Harrison.