

Practical Studies on the Use of Information Communication Technology Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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It is likely that institutions of higher education will accept a greater variety of students more than ever. In general, when it comes to diversity, what comes first is that faculty members deal with an increased variety of students. However, students themselves must find the present society diverse, and understand that collaborating with other people plays an important role in such a society. In this paper, we will first take a closer look at how we managed the first-year seminar during the pandemic. In the midst of the chaos, ICT technologies are a key to this predicament. Then, the collaborative program between Hijiya University and California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM) made in order for students to develop college skills will be discussed. What is important to note is that we put a great focus on life skills in the class as well as academic skills. Since a growing number of first generation students in college are coming to higher education, we have to be more aware of diversity in class.

1. Aims of this paper

It is likely that institutions of higher education will accept a greater variety of students more than ever. In general, when it comes to diversity, what comes first is that faculty members deal with a great variety of students. However, students themselves must find the present society diverse and collaborating with other people plays an important role. With an awareness of the presence of such an issue, we sought cooperation with our affiliated institutions in Korea, Taiwan and the United States of America, and have been doing research on first-year programs. Along with what was found in the research, we have attempted to develop bridge programs which cultivate human resources with independence, diversity and collaborativeness.¹

College and universities in the United States have started to educate first-year students within first-year seminars since the early 20th century. Japanese universities, on the other hand, introduced first-year seminars in the late 1990s. According to Yamada (2009), first-year programs had been introduced to institutions of higher education such as national universities and liberal arts colleges right after the 1970s, when massification to higher education developed and the transformation of students' academic ability and values was conspicuous.

In this paper, we will first take a closer look at how we managed first-year seminars during the

¹ See Cabrera, Miner and Milem (2013) and Cooper, Ashley and Brownell (2017) for details of bridge programs from secondary education to higher education.

pandemic. Then, the collaborative program between Hijiya University and California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM) will be discussed. CSUSM is located in northern San Diego County, California. Over 16,000 students were enrolled in fall, 2020, and as of fall semester 2019, almost half of the population (47%) was Latino/a and 27% was Caucasian. The rest was African-American, Asian and Pacific Islander, and so on. Thus, the population of students is reflective of the community in a way. What is interesting to point out here is that 53% of graduates were the first in their families to earn a BA degree. They are called “first generation students.”² In particular, bridging from secondary education to higher education has become an issue to the first generation. In Japan, the bridging will also become an issue along with massification and free higher education. Therefore, first-year programs of CSUSM, which deal with the bridging from secondary education to higher education, are suggestive to our programs.

Bearing the above issue in mind, we attempted to build a bridge program to develop students' independence, diversity and collaborativeness, and implemented it in the first-year seminar 1 & 2. In the end, we are going to develop future Hijiya bridge programs by shedding light on the problems in our first-year seminar and looking at the students' performance.

2. Research plan and its method

In 2020's first-year seminar 1, we employed a textbook, which CSUSM uses in GEL 101. The GEL 101 program is a comprehensive college course that helps first-year students with developing skills, motivation, and self-understanding in order to meet the demands of the undergraduate curriculum. Thus, the attempt to use the textbook seems to lead to a college success. In this seminar, students kept presenting their own opinions and the instructors wanted them to be aware of other people's opinions, that is, diversity. Besides, our goal was to cultivate a mind in which people pay attention to others and live with a wide viewpoint by sharpening the ability to listen attentively.

2020's first-year seminar 2, on the other hand, employed virtual programs of the American Language and Culture Institute at CSUSM. We wanted first-year students to develop an understanding of diversity in the world. In addition, the aims of the activities in class were to improve students' communication abilities through collaborating with other people and to cultivate an innovative capability. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, our school started one month late. Furthermore, most of the classes turned out to be online. In the midst of the chaos, in which the relationships between students themselves as well as instructors and students were poor, a new problem of how to confront diversity came up. We attempted to attack the problem by making full use of Google Workspace and applications of SNS. For instance, we made a Line group and took immediate action to solve students' questions and offered counseling to them. Even with such a difficulty, we could start the first-year seminar 1 along with a homeroom activity right away. What is more important is that we modified the class contents of first-year seminar 1, putting more focus on life

² First-generation college students are “students who enrolled in postsecondary education and whose parents do not have any postsecondary education experience” (Redford, J., John R. and Kathleen M. H. (2017: 3).

skills than academic skills. This is because in the midst of the pandemic, life skills are more important rather than academic skills.

In Japanese universities and colleges, first-year programs put a focus on academic skills, while in universities and colleges in the States, first-year programs consist of both academic skills and life skills. In fact, since the textbook that we used in our first-year seminar covers both, life as well as academic skills, it was easy for us to modify the class contents.³

3. The outline of the first-year seminar

In first-year seminar of 2020, two groups of 38 students worked together. We selected five contents from Gore, Wade and Metz (2016); organization and time management; information literacy and communication; thinking critically and setting goals; reading for college success; taking effective notes. The students had to read English passages, make a 150-word summary in Japanese, watch a class video, give a presentation and write a report. As mentioned above, the first-year seminar 1 focused on adaptation of college life and led students to be more aware of diversity. We planned as follows, and except for week 12, all the lessons were kept online:

Week 1	Orientation, Reading and Summarizing Topic 1 "Organization and Time Management"
Week 2	Explaining Topic 1 video and Online Presentation
Week 3	Making TO-DO List and Logging Your Time Schedule
Week 4	Reading and Summarizing Topic 2 "Information Literacy and Communication"
Week 5	Explaining Topic 2 Video and Online Presentation
Week 6	Reading and Summarizing Topic 3 "Thinking Critically and Setting Goals"
Week 7	Explaining Topic 3 video and Online Presentation
Week 8	Prepare to Write about Nine Important Things that Enhance My College Life
Week 9	Reading and Summarizing Topic 4 "Reading for College Success"
Week 10	Explaining Topic 4 video and Online Presentation
Week 11	Write a Report of a Reading Strategy
Week 12	Preparation of Report, Making Mandala Chart, Retrieving Documents, How to Quote
Week 13	Explaining and Summarizing Topic 5 "Taking Effective Notes"
Week 14	Explaining Topic 5 video and Online Presentation
Week 15	Summary, Write about Important Things that Enhance My College Life

Chart 1

In online classes, we utilized Hi! Way (our university system), Google Workspace and SNS applications like Line. Among them, we mainly used Line, which most of the students use, Google Classroom and Forms. With these digital tools, we distributed handouts and gave assignments, and students exchanged their opinions. Along with these activities, the instructors employed Google Jamboard. This application is a digital whiteboard that lets the users collaborate in real time. Working together in real time, we can share a jam session with collaborators. We can draw, put sticky notes and

³ See Sasaki and Kunai (2021) for aspects of first-year programs of CSUSM.

add pictures. We set one student onto one sheet in Jamboard so that other students can see what is going on in other sheets. In order for students to improve their understanding, we distributed digital contents. This is because students got more interested than when they just took online courses.

As a final report of first-year seminar 1, the students had to write about a topic, "The important things that enhance my college life." What is interesting is that students described the necessity of communication and collaboration with diverse people. This shows that our aims of first-year seminar were somewhat understood among students.

Let us proceed to first-year seminar 2 now. In this class, we selected three materials, "San Diego's Historic Old Town," "California History" and "California Immigration and the Border." The class conducted research on those three topics in advance, completed reading assignments, took online lessons and finished writing assignments. We planned as follows and weeks 7 and 9-15 had to be online because of COVID-19.

Week 1	Orientation, Campus Walking Tour
Week 2	Test on College Basis Skills
Week 3	Preparation for Virtual Program 1
Week 4	Reading the Material of Virtual Program 1
Week 5	Considering Questions of Virtual Program 1
Week 6	Virtual Program 1 "San Diego's Historic Old Town"
Week 7	Researching for Writing Assignment 1
Week 8	Follow-up of Test on College Basic Skills
Week 9	How to Write a Report
Week 10	Finish a Writing Assignment
Week 11	Talking about Writing Assignment
Week 12	Preparation for Virtual Program 2 and Explanation (Online Distribution)
Week 13	Virtual Program 2 "California History"
Week 14	The Class Presentation
Week 15	Virtual Program 3 "California Immigration and the Border"

Chart 2

In week 1, our aim was to get the students to know each other by walking around the campus. They had not been familiar to the campus at that time, since they had to stay off campus right after school started. This activity was counted as an icebreaker. This is similar to a scavenger hunt.⁴

The main part of first-year seminar 2 had three virtual programs, which was organized by the American Culture and Language Institute (ALCI) of CSUSM. Those three 60-minute sessions were held on Zoom. The class activities included showing slides with videos and using applications such as Kahoot! and Poll Everywhere. Those applications made the participants feel more active in the class than usual.

We held several meetings before the virtual programs started. First, we told ALCI about our

⁴ A scavenger hunt is a game in which the organizers prepare a certain list with specific items. In this game, the participants try to collect all the items on the list in small teams from all over campus.

students' English level and the contents of each session. It seemed that all English sessions were a burden on the first-year students, since they spent only six months on campus and most of the classes were online. Therefore, we asked ALCI to send class materials two weeks before the sessions started. In addition, we put students in small groups and conducted investigative learning.⁵ We sorted out class materials according to groups. Each group had to read and explain its own part. Besides that, the instructors gave a supplementary explanation to the class and kept asking them questions. Since the students were well prepared, they seemed to adapt successfully to the virtual programs. This was more than we expected. Following are some comments from students:

- (1) a. "I enjoyed taking lessons because I was well prepared, even if I sometimes did not understand what the lesson instructor said."
- b. "Studying vocabulary was useful to understand those lessons."

As shown in the above comments, it is important to note that a flipped classroom⁶ helps students understand lectures better than the traditional approach. Right after each session, we gave feedback based on those students' comments. Those comments helped to better the next sessions. As a result, we were able to manage each session effectively as it went on.

Whether face-to-face or online, we utilized Google Classroom, Meet, Forms and Line. As for writing assignments, students had to collaborate in small groups and write about Latino culture. Google Document was effectively employed in order for students to work together on and off campus. As mentioned above, students worked together in advance, so it was relatively easy for them to work together. Online lessons had a greater effect on students' communication than we expected. However, sometimes there were a few problems. For instance, poor communication led some students to have the assigned parts unfinished. Moreover, even though all the students in a group had the writing assignment done, they did not always work together. Accordingly, we had a meeting online and let them work together. Despite the online presentation, most of the students' comments were favorable.

4. Conclusion

The first-year seminar 1 and 2 in 2020 could give us the following insights. First, our student group could adapt themselves to a college life. Most of the students did not drop out of this course. Second, those students could acquire basic academic and life skills. Each of them worked out a solution to how to lead their college life through discussion and writing assignments. The third insight is related to understanding diversity. In writing assignments, there were several opinions in which good

⁵ Investigative learning is a research-based approach, which increases student motivation and engagement in a learning activity.

⁶ A flipped classroom "uses lecture capture to record the voice and screen activity of a professor delivering the lecture," and "[t]he students watch these recordings before coming to class, freeing up time in class for troubleshooting difficult concepts, answering student questions, engaging students in active learning." (Stone (2012: 1))

communication played an important role in a “diversified” college life. On the other hand, several problems came up. At the same time, it seemed to be difficult for students to work together in a diversified college life. For instance, each group had one or two students who could not work together. In that case, it was not easy to see if a given student was lazy or just couldn’t collaborate with other people. Indeed, there are a great variety of people in the world. However, the important thing is to see how we collaborate with diversified people.

Acquiring rapidly-advancing ICT skills will be necessary for the first-year seminar more than ever from now on. In our classes, we used digital applications such as Kahoot! and Poll Everywhere, which the instructor of ACLI employed, and those applications received a great deal of attention from students. This shows that we instructors should pay keen attention to various educational technologies and improve the quality of our classes.

We are in the middle of the project, in which we develop a bridge program between secondary education and higher education. Furthermore, the aim of our project is to develop human resources with independence, diversity and collaborativeness. Based on the research results in 2020, we intend to collaborate with students in Taiwan in 2021. However, the program is not still completed due to COVID-19. Instead, a pilot bridge program with Hijiya Girls’ High School has been underway. Moreover, the Department of Language and Culture, where we belong to, has started to reevaluate first-year programs. From now on, we will keep reevaluating and modifying programs in which students can develop independence, diversity and collaborativeness.

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