

# Making Discussion of Global Topics Accessible to L2 Students through Performance-Based Assessment

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## Abstract

In an increasingly globalizing world, language instructors strive to teach students the communicative and academic skills necessary to engage in research and discussion on current issues. In order to improve students' confidence and abilities in discussing global topics in an integrated English language skills program, the researchers employ a curriculum design in which performance-based assessment is a key component. This report describes in detail two performance tasks created from the intended learning outcomes to the task procedure and evaluation methods.

## 1. Introduction

This report is part of longitudinal study which investigates the effectiveness of a performance-based approach to curriculum design in an integrated English language skills program for first and second year university students. In this report, examples of two performance tasks are given in detail in hope that they will be useful examples for language instructors applying similar approaches in their own contexts.

First, global discussion topics are defined for the purposes of this report. This is followed by a brief description of the integrated English language skills program in question. Then, the learning outcomes are explained and the two example performance tasks are described in detail.

## 2. Background Information

As evident from standardized language assessments such as EIKEN and TOEFL, university students must be able to discuss and exchange opinions on a number of global topics. These include, but are not limited to: energy use, the environment and sustainable development, immigration, education, technology and the future, government policy, and gender and equality. Thus, language instructors must teach both language and content in the classroom.

The integrated English language skills program was redesigned to identify clear language and content goals that would enable students to engage in meaningful discussion and research on global topics. Emphasis was placed on developing students' opinion-stating and discussion skills as well as the abilities to research and think critically. In order to have students practice the language skills and to make the content more accessible, we chose a performance-based assessment approach as one of the foundations of the program. This teaching report shows two examples of how students can move from learning outcomes (language and content) to a final performance successfully.

### 3. Global Topic 1, Immigration: Welcome to Japan Performance Task

Immigration and migration, the flow of people across borders, are topics of immense discussion and policy worldwide. Students leaving university and entering the workforce should understand the impact immigration and migration have on societies. In Japan, the depopulation that many prefectures face and the increase of foreign workers is an issue that is currently being grappled with by policymakers. This generation of students will be impacted the most by the results of the policies put in place and it is essential that students understand the factors that surround the issue.

#### 3.1 Language and Content Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students will be able to research about a prefecture and then present a logical and persuasive argument for foreigners to relocate to that prefecture. Students must research various prefectural and NPO websites, summarize key information and then provide at least 5 detailed reasons using appropriate language functions (e.g., The first reason is..., Another reason is...). Students will be able to answer questions about their chosen prefecture in a discussion format. At the same time, students will also role play a foreign worker and in that role consider social, economic and other factors that will affect their decision.

#### 3.2 Performance Task Description

As the textbook unit (CEFR B1+) is designed around human migration, the reasons people choose to leave their countries and the influence such communities can have in their newly adopted countries, by the time task day arrives, students have been well primed in the topic. For the task, students are asked to design a poster representing a prefecture facing depopulation that seeks to recruit foreign workers. Below is a step-by-step process to set up the task.

Step 1: As a warm up, the instructor can have students stand up. One by one, each student names one of Japan's prefectures. If someone names a prefecture already stated or cannot name a prefecture in five seconds, they have to sit down. Once the warm up is over, the instructor explains that students have to choose one prefecture facing depopulation. Their job is to be a recruiter for that prefecture with the goal of encouraging foreign workers to settle there.

Step 2: After students have chosen a prefecture they must research. Students need to understand the basics of the prefecture, such as current population, economy and geography. Students are encouraged to research what support each prefecture offers to foreign workers. Based on their research, students must choose five points to attract foreign workers to their prefecture. Points can include things such as, housing, public transportation, education, childcare support, employment and even lifestyle and cultural benefits.

Step 3: Each student is given one A3 blank paper to create a poster (Appendix A) for their prefecture. Ideally, the poster should be attractive and informative. On the poster, students must indicate through words and pictures or illustrations five points that make their prefecture attractive to foreign workers. Students are encouraged to make their poster colorful. Students are discouraged from writing too much on the poster, which leads to students reading information rather than explaining.

Step 4: On task day, half the class is assigned the role of prefecture recruitment officer. The other half of the class is given a role card on which is written the name of a foreigner, the gender, age, marital status, and job background. Anything not on the role card is left to students' imagination and creativity. Recruiters

sit in a line facing the foreign workers. Each recruiter is given five minutes to make their pitch using their poster as a visual aid. Recruiters should begin by introducing themselves and their prefecture. They should ask the foreign worker's name and try to elicit some of their background. Recruiters then proceed to sell their prefecture to the foreign worker. Students posing as foreign workers should ask questions relevant to their role and display "active listening," by which is meant reactions, such as, "I see," "How interesting," "Really?," and so on, to the recruiter's explanation. Moreover, if the role states the foreign worker has children, there should be questions about and interest in education and childcare. At the end of five minutes, the instructor calls "Time," and the foreign worker moves to the next recruiter and the five-minute clock starts again. Foreign workers should visit at least five recruiters. At this point, the instructor has the students switch roles. Now the foreign workers become recruiters and the recruiters are given a foreign worker role card. Again, foreign workers must visit five prefectures and each prefecture has 5 minutes to make their pitch.

Step 5: To close the activity, the instructor asks each student to choose which prefecture they would settle in based on their role card and to explain why. This enables students to employ critical thinking by tying the needs of their foreign worker persona with the qualities of life offered by the prefectural recruiter.

Instructors' Comments: For this task, some students chose their home prefecture, such as Ibaraki or Fukushima, while others chose a prefecture in which they were interested. Research can be conducted during class time or can be assigned for homework. Instructors should check on which five points students choose for their prefecture and ensure that there is enough information to support each point. Instructors were pleased to see students look at prefecture websites to learn about actual childcare support and education for foreign children, as well as learn about industries offering employment opportunities. By adopting the role of a foreign worker, students are able to think about the specific needs of their role. Students were encouraged to ask questions and to have a dialogue between the recruiter and foreign worker rather than a one-sided presentation. In the close of the activity, it was clear that students were able to identify the qualities that would appeal to their foreign worker role in deciding which prefecture to settle in and provide clear, logical reasons for their choice. Overall, this proved to be a highly successful integrated task.

Task Assessment: The task was worth ten percent of the students' final grade, i.e., ten points. The task rubric (Appendix B) is a three by three rubric with Excellent, Competent, and Needs Work across the top, while the areas of evaluation along the left side are Mini-Presentation and Discussion Skills (3 points), Language Use (3 points) and Content (4 points). To achieve an excellent score, students needed to speak in a loud, clear voice, make excellent eye contact, and actively listen to others. They had to use proper forms for giving reasons, such as "The first reason is...." or "Another reason is...." Students needed to ask and answer at least one question about a prefecture. Finally, they had to provide interesting and informative information about the prefecture, as well as five reasons for a foreign worker to move there. A comprehensive rubric enables instructors to evaluate students fairly and efficiently. Instructors should also include a comment of something students did well and an area for improvement.

#### **4. Global Topic 2, Technology and the Future: Future Survey**

The current incoming class of first-year university students was born at the dawn of the new millennium. They are digital natives, growing up in a world where technology has always been at their fingertips. Technology has shaped society and every sector of industry. Students are graduating into a world where automation and AI will increasingly affect their career path. Talking about the future and thinking about the possibilities ahead stimulates their thinking and expands their English language skills.

## 4.1 Language and Content Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students will be able to use the future tense question form appropriately (e.g., Do you think ... will ...?, Will ...?) to survey their classmates' opinions about the future in regards to a particular theme such as robotics, health, jobs, transportation, education, etc. Students will graph their results, write a semi-structured summary, and report to their classmates.

## 4.2 Performance Task Description

This unit of the textbook (CEFR A2) focuses on technology and the changes it brings to society. Students study various examples of how people's lives and jobs are changing due to innovations in industry. By the end of the unit, students are expected to be able to discuss the good points and bad points technology can have on society with reasons and examples to support their opinions. For this task, students create a short survey on technology in which they must ask their questions to ten students. They then must write up and graph their results. Details of the task can be found below.

Step 1: First, students are given the task worksheet which includes an instruction sheet (see Appendix C), followed by worksheet pages with space to write their questions, a table to note down survey responses, space to write a paragraph of their results and space to graph their results. Next, the instructor should model the activity. The example on the task instruction sheet focuses on jobs as a theme. Three questions are created that are related to the future. For example: 1) Will fast food restaurants only use robots in the future?; 2) Will taxis in Tokyo be driverless in the next ten years?; and, 3) Will people work in the future? The instructor calls on one student and asks these three questions. The student should answer yes or no. The instructor then asks follow-up questions, such as why or why not? The instructor notes the responses on the board in a table format as is on the task worksheet given to the students. The instructor repeats the example with another student.

Step 2: Once students understand the first part of the task, they should begin creating three questions centered on their theme (e.g., robotics, health, jobs, transportation, homes, etc.). The instructor should check with each student to assist where necessary and to check their English.

Step 3: When everyone has finished creating their questions, it's time to do the survey. Students must speak to ten classmates and mark down their answers on the task worksheet. Students are reminded to ask follow-up questions, although they are not required to write down the answers. This part of the activity can take the majority of class time and instructors should budget time accordingly.

Step 4: The instructor should once more model how to do a write up of the results and how to graph them. The instructor should teach the expression: "out of," as in 4 out of 10 students. Using the initial questions on jobs, the instructor should write up on the board an example that includes the question, the results, and a reaction. For example, "8 out of 10 students said they believe that fast food restaurants will use only robots in the future. One student believes it will happen in ten years! I cannot believe that." As for the graph, the instructor should draw a simple bar graph showing yes and no answers, with the x and y axes properly identified. This part of the task can be assigned as homework.

Instructors' Comments: Students should be encouraged to be creative in their questions and to think deeper about the theme they have chosen. During the survey portion, it is important for instructors to monitor the activity and to assist students in expressing their opinions with reasons and examples in the L2, where necessary. This integrated task required 1.5 periods of a ninety-minute class. Based on student engagement

during the survey portion of the activity and the written results, this task has proven to be very successful with a range of students.

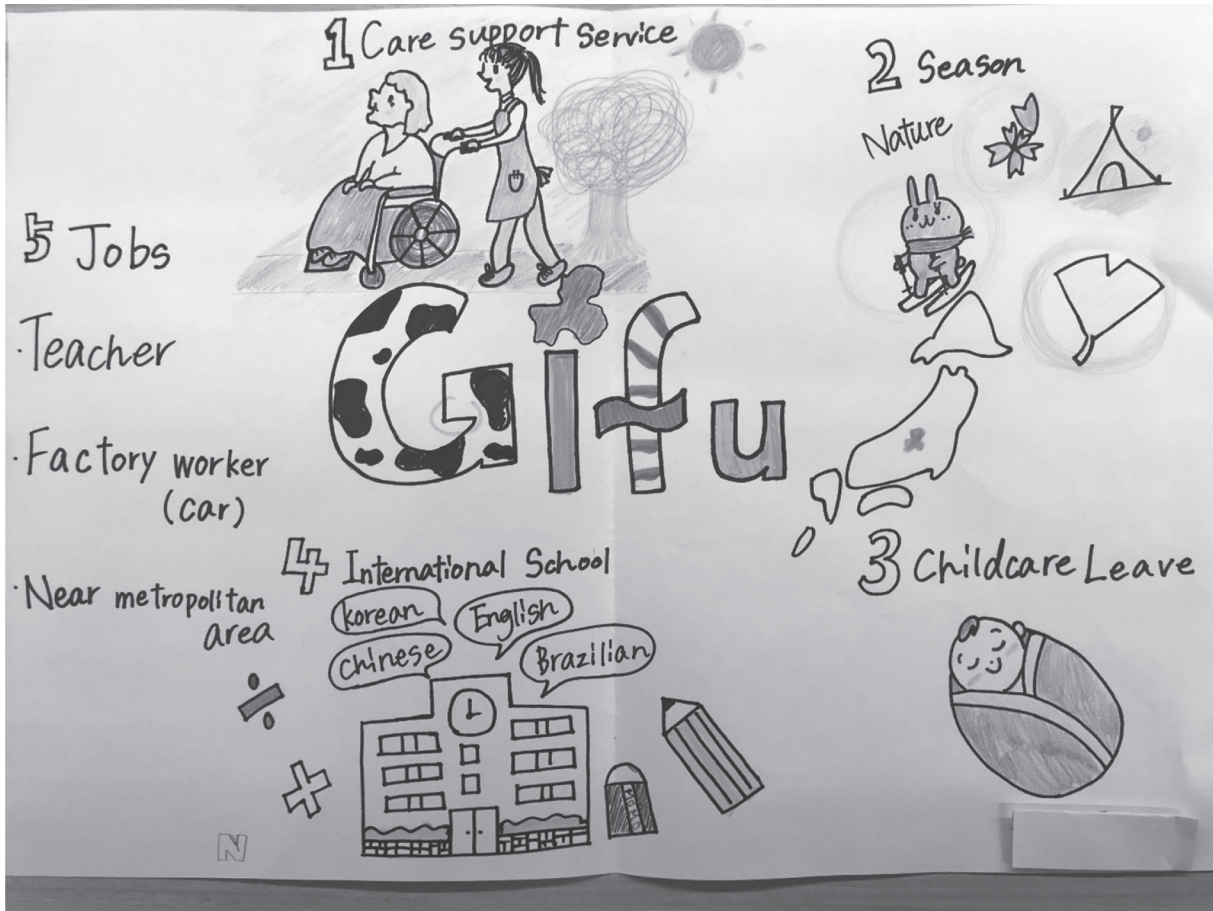
Task Assessment: Similar to the above task assessment. However, the rubric is revised to reflect the goals of the unit (Appendix D).

## **5. Conclusion**

Instructors constantly endeavor to provide their students with stimulating ways to develop their English language skills. Performance tasks which integrate language and content outcomes with research and critical thinking skills are one such way to challenge students as well as to assess their performance. However, it is necessary that instructors have established clear learning goals that students understand, and that the task and assessment are appropriate measures of their performance. Through performance-based assessment, instructors are able to join the learning outcomes together with the unit content and thereby offer students greater opportunity to engage with the material. As with any class activity, it is important to be flexible and adapt to the level of the students. Nonetheless, the movement towards more performance-based assessment indicates an awareness for more real world content integration into school curriculums.

Appendix A

Example Welcome to Japan Performance Task Poster





Appendix B

Welcome to Japan Performance Task Rubric

**Immigration Mini-Presentation and Discussion Rubric**

**What you need to do:**

- Explain about your chosen prefecture (location, population, industry, famous things).
- Think about 5 reasons for a foreigner to move there to live (housing, jobs, education, environment, support for foreigners, medical care, transportation, and quality of life).
- You will present your information to several foreigners. Be enthusiastic and be prepared to answer questions. Use your poster as a visual aid to help you explain about your prefecture.

	EXCELLENT	COMPETENT	NEEDS WORK
<b>Mini-Presentation and Discussion Skills (3 points)</b>	Made excellent eye contact. Spoke in a loud, clear voice and actively listened to others.	Made eye contact some of the time. Voice was audible, but could be louder and clearer for the audience. Actively listened to others some of the time.	Did not make eye contact. It was difficult to hear or understand the speakers. Did not actively listen to others.
<b>Language Use (3 Points)</b>	Used proper language for giving reasons. For example: The first reason is... Another reason is...  Also, was able to ask and/or answer at least one question about a prefecture.	Used proper language for giving reasons some of the time.  Also, was mostly able to ask and/or answer at least one question about a prefecture.	Was unable to use proper language for giving reasons.  Also, was not able to ask and/or answer at least one question about a prefecture.
<b>Content (4 Points)</b>	Provided interesting and informative information about the prefecture and at least 5 reasons for foreigners to move there to live.	Provided adequate information about the prefecture and at least 3-4 reasons for foreigners to move there to live.	Did not provide enough information about the prefecture and only 1-2 reasons for foreigners to move there to live.

## Appendix C

### Future Survey Performance Task Instructions Sheet

#### ***Task 4 Instructions: Future Survey (Unit 8)***

You will make a survey about the future. First, choose a theme from below or ask your instructor if you have another idea:

Robotics

Health

Jobs

Transportation

Education

Homes (Inside and Out)

Once you know your theme, create three original questions to ask. For example, if my theme is jobs, my questions could be these:

1. Will fast food restaurants only use robots in the future?
2. Will taxis in Tokyo be driverless in the next ten years?
3. Will people work in the future?

Next, you will speak to ten people. Ask your questions. Be sure to ask a follow-up question, such as "Why do you think so?"

Finally, you will write up a short paragraph and graph your results.



Appendix D

Future Survey Performance Task Rubric

**Future Survey Task Rubric**

	<b>EXCELLENT</b>	<b>COMPETENT</b>	<b>NEEDS WORK</b>
<b>Communication Skills (3 points)</b>	Asked questions in a loud, clear voice. Communicated only in English.	Voice was audible, but could be louder and clearer for the audience. Communicated mostly in English.	It was difficult for the listener to hear or understand the speaker. The speaker did not use much English.
<b>Language Use (3 Points)</b>	Made interesting and creative questions using the future tense question form appropriately. <i>Do you think...will...? Will...?</i>	Made somewhat interesting and creative questions using the future tense question form.	Needs more work in creating interesting and creative questions using the future tense question form.
<b>Content Summary (4 Points)</b>	Provided a clear graph and summary of each question's results.	Provided adequate graph and summary of each question's results.	The graph and summary of each question's results needs work.