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Use of Reading Aloud Method in a Formal College-Level English Reading Classroom

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the possibility of the use of reading aloud as a way of teaching English reading in a formal college-level English reading classroom. The study tried to examine the effects of reading aloud on the development of English reading ability in terms of comprehension and speed and the students' perceptions of the use of reading aloud in an English reading classroom. The participants of the study were 36 third year students at a college. The results of the cloze test and reading speed test showed that reading aloud had a positive effect on the improvement of English reading ability. The students received higher scores in the cloze test after the course and read a text faster than before the course. The analysis of the course evaluation questionnaire indicated that the students in the study showed positive attitudes toward the use of reading aloud in an English reading classroom. Most of the students reported that reading aloud was an effective way of improving their English reading comprehension and speed. However, the students were not fully satisfied with the reading materials used in the study. The results of the present study indicated that reading aloud may be incorporated into a formal English reading classroom effectively.

[reading aloud/English reading ability/formal English reading class]

I. INTRODUCTION

With the rise of the importance of English conversation skills, the significance of English reading ability has been getting less attention in Korea. However, English reading ability is one of the most important language skills, in that it provides important means to achieve success in an academic field where most of the textbooks and articles are written in English (Kyung Ja Kim, 2008; Eun-Mi, Yang, 2009). A great deal of information is also available in English, so the ability to read in English is important to obtain useful

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information. In addition, as Bernhardt (1998) points out, written language is one of the most easily accessible and effective tools to learn English in English as a foreign language (EFL) context.

Despite the importance of English reading ability and the great deal of weight placed upon it in college-level curricular in Korea, a traditional method of English reading education, an intensive reading approach, is still dominant in English reading classrooms (Heshim Song, 2000). Even though English learners can improve their grammar and vocabulary knowledge through intensive reading, it is unlikely that they can develop English reading fluency with such an approach, which features translation-centered instruction focusing on grammar and vocabulary with only a small amount of reading. Oryang Kwon (1995) argues that an intensive reading approach is the main obstacle for the development of English reading ability.

The present study took the form of an action research[1] which tried to find an alternative approach to teaching English reading. The problems of the current English teaching approach were identified with the preliminary survey and the experience of the researcher of the present study as an English instructor. The students expressed that English reading courses were boring and meaningless because they were teacher-oriented and were not very helpful for their English reading abilities. Then, an alternative way of teaching English reading, namely the use of reading aloud, was derived from the literature review. Even though reading aloud has not been implemented frequently in English reading classrooms, the possible benefits of the activity are promising. Finally, the effects of reading aloud on the development of students' English reading abilities were evaluated.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the feasibility of an alternative approach of English reading instruction into a formal English reading class. To this end, a read-aloud session was conducted with 36 students. In order to examine the effectiveness of this alternative method, the following two research questions were formulated:

1. Is reading aloud effective for the development of English reading ability in terms of reading comprehension and speed?
2. How do students react to the use of reading aloud in a formal English reading class?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In a language classroom, reading can be conducted either orally or silently (Brown,

[1] According to Mertler (2006), an action research can be defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers to improve the quality or effectiveness of their own instructional methods

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2001). Reading aloud can be described as a classroom activity conducted by a teacher or students. A teacher usually reads a text aloud to students for the development of reading comprehension, speaking, and pronunciation. As Gabrielatos (2002) points out, reading aloud is one of the basic techniques used in first-language teaching at the beginning phase of reading instruction to help learners match sounds with the symbols of written language. But as silent reading has received a great deal of attention in the field of a foreign language teaching, reading aloud has been de-emphasized and used less frequently in language classrooms (Amer, 1997). Especially, reading aloud has been considered as a less important classroom activity in foreign language reading classrooms

The main reason that reading aloud has not been facilitated in foreign language reading classrooms is related to the assumption that reading is usually an individual activity during which the reader interacts with the text to extract meaning from it. Thus, interactive reading approaches support silent reading as an important reading practice (Eskey, 1988). Furthermore, from a psycholinguistic perspective of reading, reading aloud can be considered as an interruption between the reader and the text. Reading aloud can draw the readers' attention to the pronunciation of each word and lead to negative effects on reading comprehension (Gabrielatos, 2002). In addition, reading aloud can slow down reading by forcing the readers to focus on each word (Dwyer, 1983).

Despite the arguments against reading aloud in foreign language reading classrooms, the possible benefits of this practice should be pointed out. Reading aloud can be used as a reading practice which would help students read larger chunks of texts and not attempt to understand individual words. Pegolo (1985) claims that prosody such as rhythm and intonation helps the readers understand the organization of language structure. Reading aloud can be a useful tool to acquire prosody of English language. Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes (1991) also point out that through reading aloud EFL readers can find out meaning units that should be read as phrases instead of word by word. Thus, English readers can discover the syntax of English sentences with reading aloud practices.

In addition, reading aloud can be used as a technique to make students read fast and help them become more fluent readers. According to Grabe (2009), reading must be done fast in order to understand the meaning of a text. Fast reading can be achieved by sufficient oral reading practice (Kailani, 1998). Grabe and Stoller (2002) also suggest reading aloud as one of the re-reading activities that can encourage students trying to speed up their reading by reading the same text aloud several times. On the other hand, it does not seem that an intensive reading approach helps students develop their reading speed because it draws too much attention to the accurate analysis of English sentences and words.

Autonomous learning is one of the benefits which can be achieved by reading aloud

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(Gibson, 2008). Unlike in an intensive reading classroom, where students spend most of the class time listening to a teacher's explanation, students can participate in the reading process more actively. It means that reading aloud can make an English reading classroom more student-oriented while intensive reading leads to a teacher-oriented language classroom.

The present study was initiated from the assumption that reading aloud can help English learners understand English sentence structures and comprehend the meaning of texts when it is used as a reading practice to reinforce their textual understanding. In most of the reading aloud related studies, passages were read aloud by a teacher and not by students. The subjects were those who were at the beginning stage of language learning. In addition, the focus of the studies was the effects of reading aloud on the learners' reading attitude or interests. In the present study, reading aloud refers to students' activity and not the reading aloud of texts by a teacher. The main focus of the study is the effects of reading aloud on the development of English reading ability in terms of reading comprehension and speed. Finally, the present study deals with college-level English learners and tries to implement reading aloud as a main classroom activity.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Participants

The participants of the present study were 36 third year students at a college. According to the curriculum of the college, they had already taken two English reading courses, which were conducted with an intensive reading approach, prior to the present study. Most of them were not interested in English reading courses and their English reading abilities had not improved greatly. Most of the students, however, were aware of the importance of English reading for their academic success and future career. An English reading course, on which the present study was based, was offered to the students as an extra-curriculum activity during the winter of 2011. Students' English proficiency was intermediate – their TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) scores ranged from 700 to 800.

2. Procedures

The English reading course was conducted over 14 days. The class met each weekday for a 90 minute class. The first and the last days were used for course orientation and data collection for the study. For the reading materials, 10 English speeches by famous

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American figures such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Martin Luther King Jr., were chosen. The speeches used in the present study were parts of the original speeches taken from a textbook edited for educational purposes. The speeches might have been difficult for the students because they were unfamiliar with them and the structures and the words of the speeches were fairly complex. The average word count for the speeches was 363.1 and the average Flesch Reading Ease Score[2] was 67.69, which means that most of the speeches used in the study were easily understandable by 13 to 15 years old native English students. One of the criticisms against the use of reading aloud in foreign language classrooms is that reading is usually a silent activity and reading aloud is not often performed by many people (Gibson, 2008). Therefore, speeches were considered appropriate for reading aloud since they were supposed to be read aloud by public speakers. Both the written texts and the recorded forms of the speeches were used. Table 1 shows the speeches used in the present study.

TABLE 1

Speeches for the Course

Title	Speaker	Words	Readability
All men are created equal	Thomas Jefferson	329	48.7
The Great Spirit does right	Red Jacket	521	84.2
What to the American slave is your fourth of July?	Frederick Douglass	340	68.5
Government of the people, by the people, for the people	Abraham Lincoln	276	73.7
Are women persons?	Susan B. Anthony	324	63.2
A date which will live in infamy	Franklin D. Roosevelt	336	58.1
Ask what you can do for your country	John F. Kennedy	411	69
I have a dream	Martin Luther King Jr.	399	79
The war is not only unwise but unjust	William Sloane Coffin Jr.	360	71.2
Axis of evil	George W. Bush	335	61.3

Each speech was explained briefly for general understanding, not focusing on grammar and words[3]. In order to help the students understand the context of the speech, the historical background of each speech was introduced. Each sentence was read by the researcher and explained in Korean. After each paragraph, the main topic of it was summarized. Then, the students were given a chance to listen to the speech twice. After listening, the whole class had an activity of reading the speech aloud while listening to the recorded form of the speech twice. Then, the students were instructed to read the speech aloud twice without listening to the recorded form of the speech. After a 10 to 20 minutes'

[2] Flesch Reading Ease Score is calculated by Flesch-Kincaid readability test, which is one of the tests that are designed to indicate comprehension difficulty of an English passage.

[3] Kailani (1998) suggests that the students' understanding of texts is important before a reading aloud activity.

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break, the students listened to the speech again with the written form of the speech and had a period of 10 or 20 minutes to practice individually. Then, the whole class had an opportunity to read the text aloud three times. The number of times reading each speech aloud differed slightly depending on the difficulty and length of the speech. Each class started with reading the speech aloud which was practiced the day before. To sum up, each speech was explained briefly before the reading aloud activity and the student had an opportunity to read each speech aloud at least 6-7 times. Thus, the class attempted to provide the students with as many opportunities as possible to read the speeches aloud on their own and discover the structures of English sentence and comprehend the meaning of the speeches. Most of the class time was devoted to reading aloud practice.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

In order to investigate whether reading aloud was effective for the improvement of English reading ability, two types of reading tests, cloze and reading speed test, were conducted. A course evaluation questionnaire was executed to examine the students' response to reading aloud for reading practice.

1) Cloze Test

A cloze test is used to measure reading comprehension level as well as overall language proficiency (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). A cloze test can take two forms on depending on how some words are deleted from the original text. The first one is called *rational deletion*. For example, prepositions may be left out to assess students' knowledge of preposition. The second type is *nth word deletion*. In this type of cloze test, every nth word is deleted. There are two kinds of scoring methods. *Exact word method* requires students to fill in the exact word that was missing from the original passage. On the other hand, any word that is acceptable in the context can be scored correctly in *acceptable word method*. Since the use of a cloze test in the present study was to measure general English reading ability, *every nth word deletion* and *acceptable word method* were used.

A cloze test was conducted in order to investigate whether the students' understanding of English texts improved or not. Specific procedure for making a cloze test form and administering the test was based on Bamford and Day's (2004) suggestions. A reading passage, which contained 504 words, was selected for the cloze test from the book, *Cover to Cover 2* (Day & Harsch, 2008). The first and last sentences were left intact to help students understand the context. And every ninth word was deleted and the blanks were

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underlined. A number in parentheses was inserted at the beginning of each blank. There were 50 blanks in total and each blank was worth 2 points. A word that is acceptable in the context was scored as correct, even if it was not the word that was originally deleted. Partial score was given when a proper word was given but if the form of the word was incorrect. For instance, 1 point was given when *arrive* was given instead of the correct form *arrived*. The test was administered both at the beginning and end of the course. Students were instructed to fill in each blank with one word and given 25 minutes to complete the test. Pre- and post-tests were compared to examine the development of English reading ability. See Appendix A for the form of the cloze test used in the study.

2) Reading Speed Test

A reading speed test was administered in order to see the students' fluency development in English reading. Other studies, which tried to assess students' reading speed, made them read the given passage for one or two minutes and measured how many words they read. In this way, however, it is not easy to determine how well they understand what they read. So, the present study used a different way of measuring reading speed. A relatively easy passage concerning the participants of this study was selected and the change of reading speed was measured. The first two paragraphs, which contained 141 words, were selected from a reading passage of the book, *Cover to Cover 1*(Day & Yamanaka, 2007). Each student was asked to read the selected passage aloud and their readings were recorded. The time of reading was counted in terms of seconds. Reading speed tests were conducted both at the beginning and the end of the course and the time of pre- and post-readings were compared. See Appendix B for the passage of the reading speed test used in the study.

3) Course Evaluation Questionnaire

In order to see the students' response to the alternative method of teaching English reading, a course evaluation questionnaire was given at the end of the course. There were questions about the effectiveness of reading aloud for the improvement of English reading ability in terms of reading comprehension and speed. A question about their interests in the reading materials used in the study was also included. Finally, students were asked to write down any additional comments about the course.

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Students' Reading Performance

1) Cloze Test[4]

The results of the cloze test show that the students in the course obtained higher scores after the course than before the course. The mean score of the cloze test was about 40 out of 100 points before the course and it went up to about 50 points after the course. All but 4 students got higher scores after the course compared with their scores before the course. The result of the paired t-test indicates that the difference was statistically significant. The strength of association[5] was .61, which means that 61% of the variances in post-test scores can be explained by the instruction method of the present study. The result of the cloze test clearly shows that the students in the course benefited from the reading aloud activity for improving English reading comprehension. Table 2 and 3 show the descriptive statistics and the paired t-test summary for the cloze tests respectively.

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics for Cloze Test

	N	M	SD
Pre-test	35	40.37	11.54
Post-test	35	49.94	11.99

TABLE 3

Paired t-test Summary for Cloze Test

Mean Difference	t	df	Sig
9.57	7.27	34	.000*

P*<.05

2) Reading Speed Test[6]

The analysis of the reading speed test also shows that the students in the course read the

[4] One student did not take the post-cloze test, so the scores of 35 students were analyzed.

[5] Strength of association is the term used to show how much of the difference is due to the independent variable (Gass, 2005). The most commonly used form of strength of association after a t-test is eta2 which is represented as follow:

$$\eta^2 = t^2 / (t^2+df)$$

[6] One student did not take the pre-reading test and one student did not take the post-reading test, so the scores of 34 students were analyzed.

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test material given to them faster after the course than before the course. The mean time of the reading speed test was about 65 seconds before the course and it decreased to about 61 seconds after the course. All but 6 students read the passage faster than before the course. The result of the paired t-test indicates that the difference was statistically significant. The strength of association was .45, which means that 45% of the variances in post-test reading time can be accounted for by the instruction type of the course. The analysis of the reading speed tests shows that reading aloud was effective for the development of English reading ability. Table 4 and 5 indicate the descriptive statistics and the paired t-test summary for the reading speed tests respectively.

TABLE 4

Descriptive Statistics for Reading Speed Test

	N	M	SD
Pre-test	34	65.06	7.27
Post-test	34	61.26	7.20

TABLE 5

Paired t-test Summary for Reading Speed Test

Mean Difference	t	df	Sig
3.82	5.17	33	.000*

P*<.05

Thus, concerning the development of English reading ability, it can be said that reading aloud as a classroom activity can be considered as an alternative method of teaching English reading.

2. Students' Response to the Reading Aloud Method

In order for an English reading teaching method to be effective, students who participate in an English reading course should consider it helpful and meaningful for language learning. The analysis of the course evaluation questionnaire shows that reading aloud had a positive effect on students' language learning and their motivation to read in English.

First of all, 27 students responded that reading aloud was helpful for the understanding of English sentences. And 28 students indicated that reading aloud was effective for comprehending the meaning of texts. In addition, 35 students were confident that they benefited from reading aloud with regards to the improvement of reading speed. The analysis of data also shows that the students were willing to use the reading aloud method after the course for language learning - 33 students said that they wanted to use reading aloud after the course. Thus, the students' responses to the questions of reading aloud

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indicate that they had positive attitudes toward the use of reading aloud for the development of English reading abilities.

The analysis of the course evaluation questionnaire indicates that the reading materials were not attractive to many students – only 20 students said that they were interesting to read. This might result from the fact that the speeches mainly dealt with political issues and the students were not interested in such area. Also, the reading materials might have not been easy for the students since they included complicated sentence structures and difficult words. The response to the question of the reading materials shows that the selection of reading materials for reading aloud should be made carefully for effective implementation. Table 6 shows the results of course evaluation questionnaire for the present study.

TABLE 6

Results of Course Evaluation Questionnaire

Questions	Frequency(n=36)			
	1*	2	3	4
The course was helpful for understanding English sentence structures.	-	9	20	7
The course was helpful for comprehending English passages.	-	8	24	4
The course was helpful for the development of English reading speed.	-	1	18	17
I am willing to read English passages aloud after the course.	1	2	22	11
The reading materials were interesting.	6	10	14	6
The reading materials were appropriate for reading aloud.	3	6	22	5

*1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

The analysis of the students' perceptions of reading aloud indicates that reading aloud as a reading practice can be successfully used in a formal English reading classroom.

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to find an alternative to the intensive reading approach in the teaching of English reading. In order to see the feasibility of a reading aloud approach into a formal college-level English reading class, the present study investigated its effects on the improvement of students' English reading abilities and whether or not the students who took the course consider it a meaningful way for language learning. The participants of the study were 36 third year students at a college who took an English Reading course as an extra-curriculum activity. The course was conducted for 14 days, 90 minutes each day. The data used in this study was gathered from two reading ability tests and the course evaluation questionnaire.

The results of two reading ability tests reveal that the students' reading ability improved after the course compared to the scores they obtained before the course. The analysis of

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students' response to the reading aloud method indicates that most of the students considered reading aloud practice as helpful for the improvement of English reading. Based on the results of the two reading tests and their perceptions of the use of reading aloud, it can be assessed that a reading aloud approach could be implemented effectively in a formal college-level English reading course.

Reading aloud can make an English reading classroom more active and student-oriented unlike an intensive reading approach which leads to a teacher-oriented language classroom. Reading aloud can provide a learning environment in which English learners are encouraged to participate in the language learning process more actively. Intensive reading can help students understand the structures of English sentences and improve word knowledge. But, in an intensive reading classroom, students have less opportunity for language practice, which is an important component of language learning. On the other hand, reading aloud can be used as an effective language learning practice with which students read English texts by idea units and improve their understanding of them. Furthermore, it cannot be expected that language learners improve their English reading speed through intensive reading alone because it mainly draws attention to the analysis of English sentence structures. On the other hand, the present study shows that students can speed up their English reading by a re-reading activity of reading aloud. The results of the present study clearly indicate that reading aloud as a main language classroom activity can be effective in the improvement of English reading abilities.

Some suggestions can be made for a more successful use of reading aloud in a formal English reading classroom. First, reading materials for reading aloud should be interesting. Students commented that the reading materials used in this study were somewhat difficult and boring. News articles dealing with recent issues in which they could be interested would be preferable. In addition, reading materials at a level of students' language proficiencies need to be selected in order to provide students with more chances to read aloud.

In addition, reading aloud can be incorporated in an English reading classroom in two forms. The first form is to set up an independent reading aloud course. In this case, the most of the class time is to be used for reading aloud. Then, a great deal of language learning practice can be provided to students and they can fully benefit from reading aloud activity. The present study shows the feasibility of the use of reading aloud as a main classroom activity. The second one is to use reading aloud as one part of an English reading course. A certain amount of class time can be devoted to reading aloud. In this case, reading aloud can be used as a supplementary activity after intensive reading or extensive reading. In other words, reading activity can be used as a re-reading activity in order to give students chances to reinforce what they read. Reading aloud can be performed by the whole class, groups or an individual student.

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Some research areas can be suggested based on the results of the present study. First, the effects of reading aloud on the development of English reading ability should be strengthened in relation to other approaches. Since the present study was designed to improve the researcher's own classroom activity, there was no controlled group to which the group of the participants of the study was to be compared. Second, various proficiency levels of students need to be considered. The participants of this study were homogenous in terms of their English proficiency, so the results of the present study cannot indicate that reading aloud could be effective for either low-proficiency or high-proficiency level students. Studies with various proficiency level students will provide more information on the role of reading aloud for the development of English reading ability.

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APPENDIX A

Passage for Cloze Test

When I told my friends and family I was going to move to Hawaii, they thought I was crazy. They were worried that I would use up (1) (_____) my savings before I found a good job. (2) (_____) is, after all, one of the most expensive (3) (_____) to live in the United States. I got (4) (_____) tired of their negative comments that I decided (5) (_____) leave two weeks earlier. Two days after I (6) (_____) in Honolulu, the newspaper had an advertisement for (7) (_____) job at the university that was exactly what (8) (_____) had been dreaming of! I applied, interviewed, and (9) (_____) hired. Later I realized that if I hadn't (10) (_____) my flight, I never would have seen the (11) (_____) advertisement, and my life might have been different. (12) (_____) it fate? Or was it just pure luck (13) (_____) I "accidentally" changed my reservation?

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Recently, psychologists at some leading universities have looked (14) (_____) what "luck" really means. They found there are (15) (_____) types of situations that people usually associate with (16) (_____). The first is circumstance, such as being born (17) (_____) a wealthy family or inheriting athletic genes. Obviously, (18) (_____) type of situation is beyond anyone's control - people (19) (_____) change the circumstances of their birth. The second (20) (_____) random chance events, such as rolling dice, which (21) (_____) also beyond our control. Your chances of getting (22) (_____) seven when rolling two dices or of being (23) (_____) by a falling meteor are based on statistics. (24) (_____) third type of situation includes events such as (25) (_____) your dream job or meeting your ideal partner. (26) (_____) is in this third area that researchers say (27) (_____) may be able to have more control over (28) (_____) luck.

A professor from England, Robert Wiseman, believes that (29) (_____) can influence their own luck in good or (30) (_____) ways. Wiseman did a series of experiments with (31) (_____) who believed they were naturally lucky or unlucky. (32) (_____) found a clear connection between the attitude of (33) (_____) participants and the amount of "luck" they had. (34) (_____) found four important attitudes and actions of lucky (35) (_____). First, they are open to opportunities and make (36) (_____) most of situations that arise. Second, they trust (37) (_____) intuitions and often make decisions based on gut (38) (_____). Many meditate or do yoga to help keep (39) (_____) touch with their intuitive senses. Third, they think (40) (_____) and expect good things to happen. Having a (41) (_____) attitude means they smile and laugh more, which (42) (_____) others and may create opportunities. Fourth, lucky people (43) (_____) to focus on the good in each situation, (44) (_____) negative people tend to focus on the bad (45) (_____). Finally, lucky people typically don't give up easily.

Professor Wiseman also trained people to make themselves (46) (_____). He asked them to keep a journal and (47) (_____) down only the good things that happened each (48) (_____). After several days, people who used to feel

(49) (_____) began to see themselves as lucky, and those (50) (_____) originally felt lucky thought they were even luckier.

How lucky are you? And how lucky would you like to be?

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APPENDIX B

Passage for Reading Speed Test

I am an Australian teacher at a high school in Sydney. I teach English as a second language. A couple of years ago, I went to Japan to teach English at a high school for one year. I quickly realized that schools in the two countries are very different.

In my first class, I put the students in groups, and asked them to discuss the question on the blackboard, "Who has more advantages in society: men or women?" In my class in Australia, this topic would get everyone talking. Even though the students would make lots of mistakes with English, each one wanted to say what they thought. For me, this meant a successful lesson - everyone was speaking in English. So, when I tried the same lesson with my Japanese students, I was confident that the same thing would happen.

Examples in: English
Applicable Language: English
Applicable Levels: College

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