

To integrate or to not integrate the YeStudy CMS

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Abstract

This report serves to draw attention to how e-learning can act as a complement to more traditional methods of language education. It postulates that by integrating IT or e-learning into a course which stems from the educational pedagogies of CALL (including iCALL, CMC and CBT) and task-based language learning and teaching; the learning quality and experience of any one student can be improved. Practical examples will be documented by showing some of the teacher's piloted activities, which were conducted via an open source, CMS software offered at Komazawa University, called YeStudy ("Moodle"). In addition, the merits and demerits of doing so will be discussed. Moreover, argument from the related literature in the fields of CALL, and related sub-fields of iCALL, CMC and CBT is explored. From this preliminary investigation, YeStudy is evaluated to be an effective learning material, which has the potential, if integrated correctly into classroom practice, to make gains in language learning.

Key words: CALL, iCALL, CMC, CBT, task-based language learning and teaching, YeStudy, CMS

Introduction

It is considered important in this report to work towards a final conclusion which provides some impetus for future discussion among teachers regarding whether YeStudy should be integrated as a standard feature into language courses at Komazawa University or not. In

order to address this, several areas will be covered. They are: 1) a basic introduction of simpler features of YeStudy, 2) the literature which enshrouds computer integration, 3) some practical examples of how YeStudy has been used for task-based language learning and teaching, 4) various merits and demerits of YeStudy and 5) student attitudes towards this resource.

In this report, it is put forward that once the field of CALL and related sub-fields of iCALL, CMC and CBT are understood, language educators are better able to consider more appropriate task-based language learning activities for students that: a) utilize the YeStudy CMS and are b) based on the aforementioned CALL and related sub-fields. Once enumerated, the remainder of this report will draw on the author's personal experiences of piloting several activities, which stem from CALL and its related fields, yet will be readdressed in terms of a task-based language teaching and learning framework based on Ellis' (2003) book of the same name.

Hence, overall arguing that the merits of implementing a CMS like YeStudy into one's courses are believed to outweigh the demerits from not only a student but also a teacher perspective. Furthermore, this report aims to present YeStudy in the manner which could bring CALL into language education at Komazawa university, providing a better quality educational experience for students.

1. What is YeStudy?

1.1 Moodle

YeStudy is a Course Management System (CMS¹) adapted from Moodle which is used worldwide. Moodle self describes itself on its website (found at <http://moodle.org/>) as a CMS which is "a free, open source software package designed using sound pedagogical

1 The term Learner Management System (LMS) is interchangeably used with CMS.

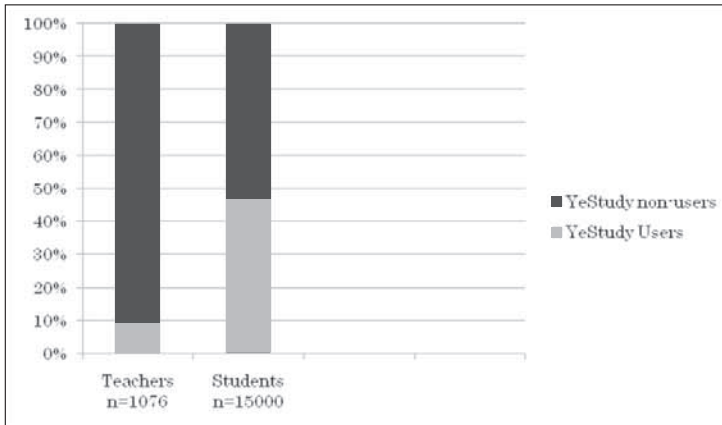
principles, to help educators create effective online learning communities” (Moodle, 2008). In short, internet based courses and websites can be made from this system. Statistics on the Moodle website record that over 200 countries worldwide use the CMS, with an estimated, and growing number of websites developed from this system to be 46,953 (Moodle, 2008).

1.2 Komazawa University’s version of Moodle: YeStudy

The version of Moodle that Komazawa University has tailored is called YeStudy. The name is derived from the Japanese word *ie*, implying that e-learning can take place at home, or even outside class hours. The Media Section of the Information Technology Centre, located in Building 1 on the 3rd floor, handles enquiries regarding this CMS. Alternatively, if once a minimum of 1 course is set-up on YeStudy, online access to a teacher’s discussion forum for sharing information by other users called ToDay (To talk about YeStudy) is a service provided on behalf of this section for teachers.

1.3 YeStudy Usage, Student and Teacher: Media Section of the Information Technology Centre

Data collected by the Media Information Centre, Komazawa University, demonstrates that as of 12th November 2008, there are 100 teachers who actively use YeStudy (on a regular basis). Since there were 1,076 teachers employed at Komazawa (351 full time and 725 parttime) in the academic year finishing 2008, approximately one tenth, or 10% as Graph 1 shows in light grey, of teachers use the system. The number of registered students on YeStudy is 7,050. Although, it does remain to be seen whether these students are active or inactive users. Nonetheless, they are familiar enough with the system to have registered of their own accord - teachers cannot register students, only unregister them. Since the number of students who attend Komazawa is 15,000, about half of the students are familiar with the system, or imperative to under 50%, which is again shown in light grey by Graph 1. In sum, it is imperative to note that while 50% of students are aware of YeStudy, only 10% of teachers use it.



Graph 1. Teacher and Student User and Non-users of YeStudy (Media Section of the Information Technology Section, Komazawa University, 2008)

1.4. Adaptability of YeStudy

The large number of functions or operations available through this CMS insinuates that when teachers integrate the CMS YeStudy into their curriculum, not every teacher will do so in a similar fashion. That is, through YeStudy, any one teacher can tailor their course to be managed so as to achieve their desired learner outcomes and the essence of their course (practical examples will be given in Section 3).

2. Literature: Future directions in CALL

Blake (2007:76) states that the field of CALL has “greatly diversified its scope in the last decade.” For example, under the umbrella of this research field, related sub-fields such as Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), CBT (Computer Based Testing) and Intelligent CALL (iCALL) are gaining or have gained much ground (further explained in Section 2.1). However, in order to normalize CALL into the classroom, that is, a computer which is every part as accepted as a whiteboard or a pen, Bax and Chambers (2006) identify several issues which become significant. They are: a) the logistics

involved, for example: a teacher in the classroom to move comfortably between CALL and non-CALL activities; b) stakeholders' conceptions, knowledge and abilities; c) syllabus and software integration, and d) training development and support (Bax and Chambers, 2006).

2.1 Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

CMC refers to the communication which takes place between humans through the mode of a computer such as email, video-conferencing, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and etcetera (Herring, 1996 as quoted in Harrington & Levy, 2001; Harrington and Levy, 2001). According to Paramaskas (1999: 14), which was quoted by Harrington and Levy, (2001:21), "the field arose as a response to the perceived need to distinguish between the contexts of natural/oral language interaction and those which occur in a computerized context." Harrington and Levy (2001:21) state that: "Drawing on methods from the field of discourse analysis, CMC investigates the nature of communication via text, audio, and video on the computer. Interactions can be synchronous or asynchronous, and they may be one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many."

In his article, Blake (2007) introduces *chatterbot* programs which are considered interactive and provide L2 feedback. However, criticizes that, in general, they are a bank of clichéd, key phrases, nouns, verbs and adverbs. That is, not parsed linguistic structures, rather character strings which respond to normal conversation cues such as: "How are you feeling?" or "Why are you feeling tired?" At a slightly more interactive level Blake (2007) gives the example of *BodoBot*. In fact, creator, Payne, has included an instant messenger (IM) function on the interface which German L2 learners can log into for coordinated access to a variety of online learning resources (2007). In more detail:

"*BodoBot* simultaneously tracks students' learning behavior in order to provide reading recommendations and quizzes tailored to the learner's skill level. Students send messages in either English or German to request translations to or from German, additional words in context, related links to authentic German texts at the

same level of difficulty, a German word-of-the-day, and vocabulary quizzes.”

Blake (2007) advocates further research into such programs due to the sources of student behavior data that they are able to record and document from student requests and actions. Certainly, CMC has its advantages.

2.2 Computer Based Testing (CBT)

When computers are introduced into testing, the extent to which the construct being measured changes and violations to validity should be investigated (Douglas and Hegelheimer, 2007). Douglas and Hegelheimer (2007) argue that making the switch from paper based tests (PBT) to CBT in the name of efficiency and accuracy should not override the potential for computers to measure a better construct through “computerized tasks which better represent authentic language use” (Jamieson, 2005:23, as cited in Douglas and Hegelheimer, 2007:117). Despite maintaining that the change is more complex, the “ability to use information technology, including e-mail, word processing, data handling, and computer presentation graphics (PowerPoint), is a necessary part of what it means to be literate in professional and social life today” (117).

A major advantage highlighted by Douglas and Hegelheimer (2007) of integrating computers and authentic language use, is that contextualization cues can be presented via images, audio, video, animation and video. The TOEFLiBT test, run by ETS, and accepted by 6,000 universities, colleges and licensing agencies worldwide in 136 countries (TOEFLiBT, 2008), is a classic example. Students are given images and audio from which they are expected to respond to in various ways such speaking. This is a highstakes, standardized test which measures the skills of potential candidates for universities where English is spoken in the classroom. However, the downside of including multimedia is due to its rich nature, students may be overloaded and concentrate on, for example a video’s images rather than listening to dialogue (Douglas and Hegelheimer, 2007). CBT can be easily executed via YeStudy.

2.3 Intelligent CALL (iCALL)

Blake (2007) upholds that language learners have become apt at the simple definitions or translations which programs like *Word Champ* can aid a teacher to execute. He refers to Hubbard and Bradin Siskin (2004) who claim that CALL drills have not focused on the learner as an L2 learner; due to feedback only at the grammatical or sentence level and are further limited to spell checkers, grammar checkers, and discrete string or keyword matching. Hence, Blake (2007) emphasizes that the CALL applications of the future need to become more context sensitive, and address semantic domains when reacting to student input. Such progressions point to the realm of intelligence CALL (iCALL) which includes the concept of tutoring the student from a parser-based approach which identifies morpho-syntactic errors (Blake, 2007).

iCALL is a relatively new CALL related sub-field of which there has been limited success in to date. Therefore, it will not be further explored in this report. Nevertheless, Blake (2007) has identified two operational Web-based iCALL programs of reference for interests' sake: *E-Tutor* for German and *Robo-Sensei* for Japanese.

3. Practical ways that YeStudy can be integrated into a course: Via CALL, CMC, & CBT

How can the educational pedagogies of CALL, CMC and CBT be integrated into a language course? The answer is via a CMS, such as YeStudy (Moodle), which is specifically tailored to the education industry. A CMS enables teachers to design language learning tasks, which draw on functions derived from CALL, CMC, and CBT pedagogies, into e-learning applications. In general, task-based lessons which adopt a task-based framework contain three phases, in the following order: 1) pre-task, 2) during task, and 3) post task (see Table 1). This framework, proposed by Rod Ellis (2003), is part of a prolific number of his publications in the area of task-

Phase	Examples of options
A Pre-task	framing the activity, e.g. establishing the outcome of the task -planning time -doing a similar task
B During task	-time pressure -number of participants
C Post-task	-learner report -conscious raising -repeat task

Table 1. A framework for designing task-based lessons (Ellis, 2003:244)

based language learning and teaching.

Based on the three phases of this framework for designing task-based lessons, this report will address six different approaches which utilize the functions of the YeStudy CMS system to effect CALL, CMC and CBT. The teacher used these approaches in three different English courses at Komazawa University. These were: a level 2 English elective conversation class, a pre-requisite 1st year English class, and three 2nd year repeat classes.

It is important to note that these six approaches do not exhaustively cover all the YeStudy functions, nor are these all of the approaches that the teacher has used in her course. Rather they are the approaches that were found to be simple, yet effective and believed useful to other teachers who may be interested in implementing this CMS. These approaches range from simple and relatively efficient to execute from a teacher's perspective, such as teacher-to-student conveyance of information; to those functions which are part of a task-based framework and therefore require more time to design, integrate, and achieve student awareness and competence in. They are:

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- 3.1) Teacher to student conveyance of information
- 3.2) Storage of teacher materials
- 3.3) Assignments
- 3.4) Assessment (CBT)
- 3.5) CMC
- 3.6) Video and audio for SLA
- 3.7) Summary and tie in to a task-based framework of language learning

3.1 Teacher to student conveyance of information

Teachers can use the system for teacher to student communication. If students change their Activemail email account profiles to receive emails simultaneously to their mobile phones, teachers can communicate directly to students' mobile phones through one email, administered from YeStudy. Once logged into the desired Yestudy course, the teacher can, through course "Participants" (see Figure 1), check the particular student boxes (see Figure 2), then send a message to those checked students after the "add/send message function" has been selected (see Figure 3). Alternatively, students can be asked from the start of semester to check YeStudy regularly (for example, once a week) for any in-class



Figure 1. Click on Participants

ex7284 志田 真	学生 経済学部	2 hours 4 mins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
eg8079 中村 勇貴	学生 経済学部	1 day 12 hours	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
eg8066 小林 さくら	学生 経済学部	1 day 23 hours	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 2. Check the boxes of the students to email



Figure 3. Select the add/send message function



Figure 4. Topic 16: Conveying important dates to students

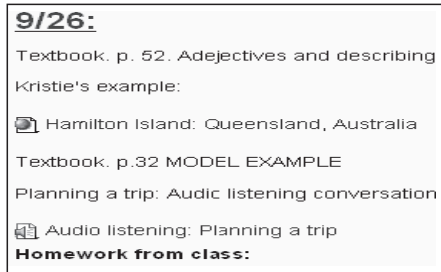


Figure 5. Brief in-class summaries

information about dates for assessment, materials/resources and so on (see Figure 4). Brief in-class summaries of classes and textbook and/or in-class material references ensure that students keep up-to-date even if they miss a class (see Figure 5). In this way, YeStudy can be used as a virtual noticeboard, able to be updated at anytime by the teacher.

3.2 Storage of teacher materials

YeStudy provides teachers with a virtual storage space for a multitude of materials. In essence, this CMS provides a platform from which materials can be managed online, such as scanned material, PDFs, the Microsoft suite (word, excel, power point), CDs, DVDs, mp3s, wmv, online internet links and so on. In addition, any documents or materials/resources can be saved, uploaded (provided it is within 16mb) or imported (It goes without saying that copyright should be observed²). Plus, web resources (online newspaper articles, online video, audio-authentic materials and etcetera), and other CMS programs, can be directly linked to the YeStudy CMS (see Figure 5). Teachers can store

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and transfer these to the following academic year if they wish through the Files function (see Figures 7-8). More immediate, is the ability to prepare these materials in advance and hide them from students until they are ready to show them to students by clicking on the eye icon (see Figure 9).

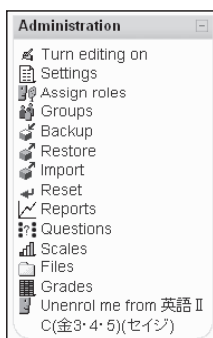


Figure 7. All Files

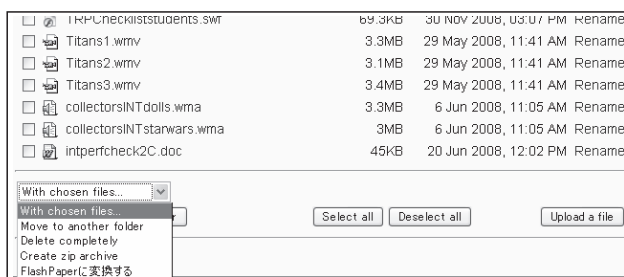


Figure 8. Storage for teachers



Figure 9. Hide function: click on the eye icon to close the eye

3.3 Assignments

There are many types of assignment functions available; however, a particularly useful one is online text (see Figure 10). The student is able to type their assignment directly online and edit as they please until the due date - which is formatted by the teacher (see Figure 11). The teacher is able to provide feedback or correct it at anytime. Then, the student can work from the teacher feedback or corrections right up until the due date and time (see Figure 11). Moreover, teachers and students always have a virtual online copy

2 Heffernan and Wang (2008) published an article, “Copyrighting and multimedia classroom material: A study from Japan.” They recommend that educators must be aware of the doctrine of “fair use”. Despite the parameters being uncertain it may cover copying, scanning, downloading, uploading and using materials for classroom use.

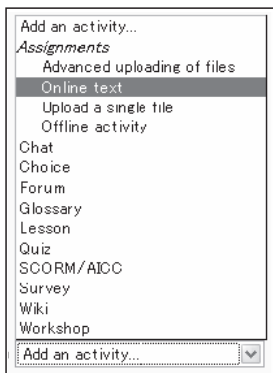


Figure 10. Online text

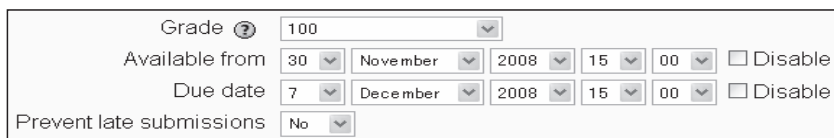


Figure 11. Due date

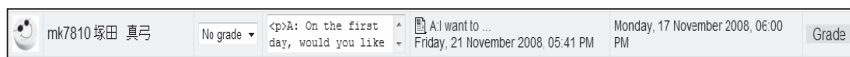


Figure 12. Students can receive feedback online, plus both teachers and students can always view an up-to-date version

and both parties can view the most up-to-date version as they wish.

3.3 CBT: Using the system for testing purposes

Conducting testing using YeStudy requires a bank of questions to be made first, which can be easily previewed and edited prior to, during and after, indicating it can be efficiently modified for future adaptations (see Figure 13). The choice of items that can be constructed are: calculated, description, essay, matching, embedded answers (cloze), multiple choice, short answers, random answer matching and true/false. Tracking of students' attempts at the quiz, options such as timing the test and instantaneous scoring, make this an incredibly efficient function for teachers in terms of time, potential data

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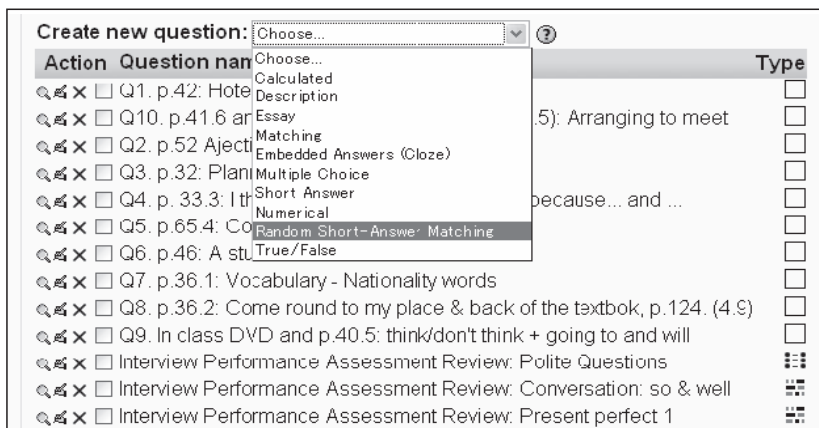


Figure 13. Question bank

mk6804 鈴木 義正	13 June 2008, 01:11 PM	13 June 2008, 01:36 PM	25 mins 44 secs	3	Good!
mk7062 柳橋 歩	13 June 2008, 01:11 PM	13 June 2008, 01:36 PM	25 mins 43 secs	5	Superstar!

Figure 14. Keeping track of students' grades

analysis research projects, and etcetera (see Figure 14). Furthermore, there are options to re-grade, download results into excel, and simultaneous item analysis is also available.

3.5 CMC

As for CMC functions such as forums, chat rooms and blogs, they can all be administered through YeStudy. The first of which, forums, has been piloted successfully by the teacher and will be focused on. The forum is an online written dialogue (encouraging productive skills) carried out among all class members and the teacher (see Figure 15). This function worked particularly well with the level 2 elective English conversation course. Students involved in a forum activity can respond to the topic which the teacher poses, or post their own topics; either way, other students are expected to comment on them. When the main topic of discussion gets commented on by another student, it becomes a thread (a virtual written conversation) and further comments by students or teachers can



Figure 15. The forum function

be made on any of the threads. The teacher has the ability to moderate or not as they see fit.

3.6 Using YeStudy for uploading SLA: Audio and video

According to McNamara (2000), communicative language tests have two features: 1) performance: assessment is carried out when the learner is engaged in the act of communication (receptive, productive or both); and 2) attention is given to the social roles and demands of such roles which test takers are likely to take on in “real world settings” (16-17). Thus, in communication classes, when students undertake performance tests, a handy tool can be an IC recorder (Mp3 audio file – see Figure 16) or a Video camera (Wmv video file – see Figure 17) so that the teacher can record the performances and then upload to YeStudy for the teacher and students to review their



Figure 16. Mp3 audio file example



Figure 17. Wmv video file example

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performance. How mp3 and wmv files on YeStudy were incorporated into a task-based language learning and teaching methodology fits into Phase B & C of Ellis' (2003) task based framework in relation to time pressure and conscious raising (see Section 3.7, Table 2).

3.7 Summary and tie into task-based framework of language learning and teaching

By re-introducing Ellis' task-based framework from Table1, we can see how its pre, during and post-task phases can provide appropriate methodology to draw together sections 3.1-3.6 of this report. In Table 2, Table 1 has been merged with suggestions made in 3.1-3.6.

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Examples of options</u>	<u>3.1) Teacher to student conveyance of information</u> <u>3.2) Storage of teacher materials</u> <u>3.3) Assignments</u> <u>3.4) Assessment (CBT)</u> <u>3.5) CMC</u> <u>3.6) Video & audio</u>
A Pre-task	framing the activity, e.g. establishing the outcome of the task -planning time -doing a similar task	3.1 e.g. Virtual notice boards 3.4 e.g. Review quizzes 3.5 e.g. Forums
B During task	-time pressure -number of participants	3.4 e.g. Tests 3.6 e.g. Video and Audio: Performance tests 3.4 e.g. Access to stored materials e.g. audio
C Post-task	-learner report -conscious raising -repeat task	3.3 e.g. Assignments

Table 2. Adopted from Ellis' framework for designing task-based lessons (Ellis, 2003:244)

4. Summary: Merits and demerits of the YeStudy CMS

4.1 Merits of the YeStudy CMS

<u>Teacher perspective:</u>	<p><u>Complete CMS:</u> Equips teachers with a centrally manageable, online platform for students and teaching resources/materials.</p>
	<p><u>Resources and materials can be stored, preserved, updated and edited on a daily to yearly basis:</u> For example: tests, PDF, scanned material, audio, video, word, power point, excel, and etcetera.</p>
	<p><u>Communication with students:</u> Via bulletin boards, CMC and email messaging alike.</p>
	<p><u>Student tracking:</u> Any time a student logs into the course, looks at a particular material, takes a test, or does any activity etcetera it is recorded on YeStudy</p>
	<p><u>Marking:</u> Tests can be simultaneously graded, with all student attempts, at each question, able to be recorded with item analysis and excel.</p>
	<p><u>Assignments:</u> Students can hand assignments in online, and correction and feedback can also be given online by the teacher. Access by teacher or student, anytime.</p>
	<p><u>Tailor to needs:</u> Teachers can tailor YeStudy to their courses' intended learner outcomes. Level of integration into the course is dependent on the teacher.</p>
	<p><u>Eco-friendly:</u> Less print-outs are needed and virtual copies can be kept.</p>
<u>Student perspective:</u>	<p><u>Convenience of self-study:</u> Students can access the materials and activities at home or when convenient. If there was difficult material in class, they can spend more time on it at home etcetera.</p>
	<p><u>Missed classes or materials:</u> Students are able to keep track of what was studied in class and the resources that were provided by the teacher.</p>
	<p><u>Provides a richer learning environment:</u> Not only can students have class contact with the teacher, and use a textbook, but students also have e-learning educational options.</p>

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	<p><u>Learner autonomy:</u> YeStudy means that students are able to assume more responsibility and keep track of their own learning. This may be even more relevant in a class which is conducted in English, as students may need to follow up what they heard in class to clarify whether they have understood correctly.</p>
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Table 3. Merits of using YeStudy

4.2 Demerits of using theYeStudy

<p><u>Teachers’ perspective:</u></p>	<p><u>Time consuming:</u> A major demerit of YeStudy is whether you can maximize students’ educational experience with the CMS, considering a teacher’s enormous efforts to integrate YeStudy in one’s course.</p>
<p><u>Students’ perspective:</u></p>	<p><u>Familiarization, discipline/motivation and competence:</u> Students may have difficulty dealing initially with familiarizing themselves with a new educational resource, disciplining or motivating themselves to login in outside of class and building competences. These issues can be even more pronounced when YeStudy is conducted in English.</p>

Table 4. Demerits of using YeStudy

4.3 YeStudy inside or outside the classroom

Ultimately, while the best case scenario may be to use YeStudy activities in class, rather than pen and paper activities; this is neither necessarily logistical nor feasible, unless each teacher is assigned a computer room for the year or all students are required to have laptops. Since students’ activity on YeStudy can be tracked in detail, it is certainly plausible that students could be motivated or disciplined to login in out-of-class hours, if they receive a percentage of their marks for their activity on YeStudy. Putting this into the rubric could be considered in a similar vein to marks students receive for attendance. For instance, in TOEIC courses, students could be expected to complete tests on a regular basis outside of class (CBT). While in communicative courses, students could be expected to give their opinion and comment on others’ opinions in

a forum (CMC). These activities do not necessarily need to be done in class. Thus, whether in a computer class or not, Yestudy can benefit all courses.

4.4 Feedback from the students

Taking into consideration that this was the first year that the author piloted YeStudy in her course; and moreover, students may not have had any significant competencies in YeStudy as it was inaugurated university wide in the 2007/2008 academic year. Plus, the language function had been changed to English, and students were also required to type answers in English which can at times be quite laborious. Nonetheless, student feedback from the 5 survey questions (see Figure 18) overall seems to favor the implementation into class of YeStudy. In total, 58 students replied (for actual results see Appendix). For questions 1, 2 and 5 the response formats were: Always (80-100%), Sometimes (50-70%) and Never (0-40%). Of the 58 students who responded for these three questions, more than half replied “Always”, with a maximum “Never” reply only for question 2. It may be worthwhile to conduct more YeStudy student surveys in the future.

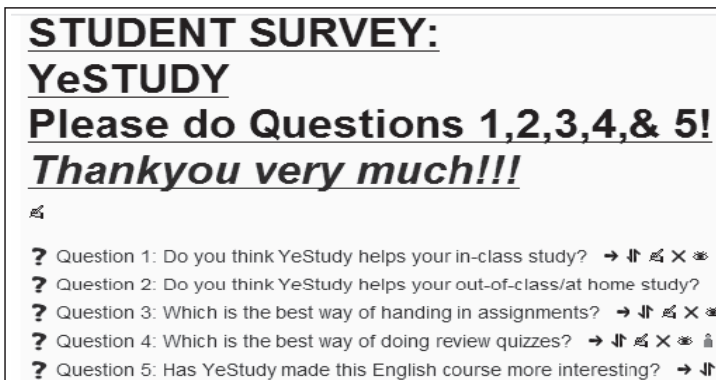


Figure 18. Student response questions (See the Appendix for responses)

5. Conclusion

The major demerit to integrate a CMS such as YeStudy into a course is the amount of time that a teacher may need to put into running it without the guarantee that students will be as enthusiastic about its educational benefits as they are. Since at one end YeStudy can act as an “add-on” to a course, while at the other, demands what seems like full-scale redesigning of a course in order to “take advantage of the new communication technologies” (Ayres, 2002: 242). Irrespective of which stance is taken, it is essential for teachers to at least consider the possibility of implementing YeStudy. This is mainly due to the fact that students these days come to higher education with endemic skills in IT that they did not in the past (Polding, 2007). While in many cases it is not possible for teachers to match these skills; nonetheless, adopting a flexible CMS system in their course, like YeStudy, equips them with a tool by which they can begin to educate themselves. with, and use in ways congruent with their ability. In this way, teachers have the chance to meet students halfway.

Furthermore, if a teacher’s methodology is based on a proven methodology or framework such as Ellis’ (1993) task-based language learning or teaching and is teaching in this manner by using say a main textbook, supplemented by authentic materials, and managed from a CMS system where CBT and CMC can be carried out; teachers must be adding value to the overall education quality of their students.

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<http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem.1488512ecfd5b8849a77b13bc3921509/?vgnextoid=f138af5e44df4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD&vgnnextchannel=b5f5197a484f4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD>

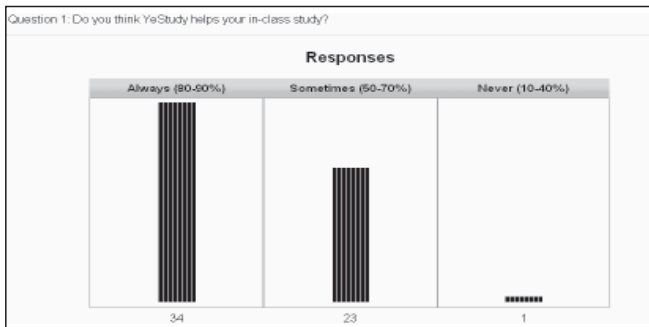
Word Champ (2008). Accessed 25 November, 2008 at

<http://www.wordchamp.com/lingua2/Home.do>

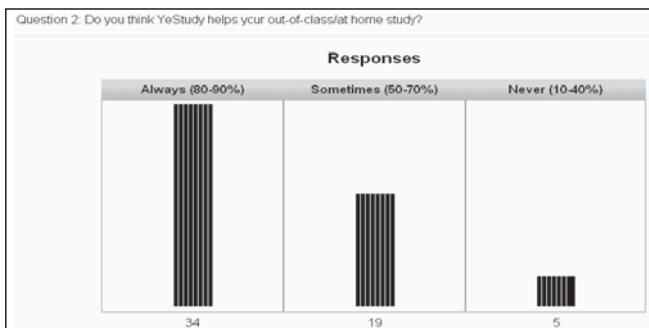
Appendix

Student response survey

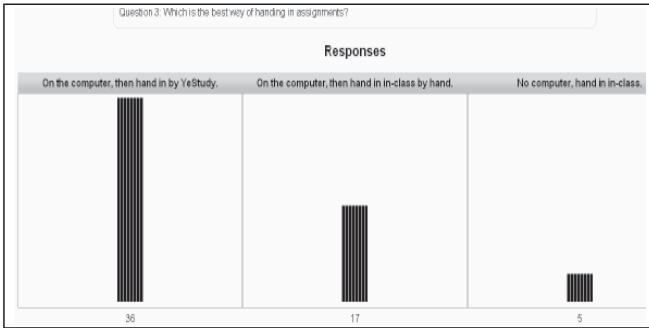
Question 1:



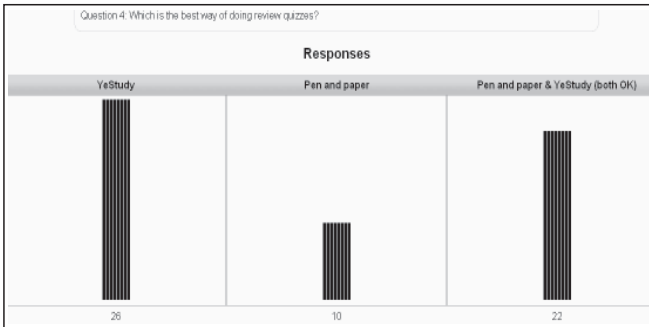
Question 2:



Question 3:



Question 4:



Question 5:

