

# Readiness quizzes for a moodle environment

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### [Abstract]

Moodle has been in use at a university in Japan over the last five years. Its purpose has been to assist first-year language learners to have more frequent contact with the salient material. It was noticed that student and teacher participation waned within a program of nearly 600 students and 20 instructors. Subsequently, reports of some students “harvesting” answers from preparation and review quizzes seemed to have a cheapening effect on the overall intent. This article sets off to ask the question, what constitutes genuine cheating and where one can delineate the separation between a preferred learning style and cheating, report about the introduction of unit tests, and introduce readiness quizzes at the beginning of the academic year to reinforce syllabus goals. It is hoped that students will apply themselves to moodle on more of a weekly rather than a monthly or less frequent basis and that teachers will track student progress with greater regularity. Movement to these two ends needs to happen if compliance to curricular goals is to be met more fully. Findings indicate that Readiness Quizzes can perform effectively in keeping students informed and on schedule with curricular expectations.

### Research Statement

A sizeable moodle application has been in constant use and development at a small private liberal arts university in northern Japan over the last five years. Its purpose is to assist language learners of the general English language program to have more frequent contact with the target language by way of salient online material. It is well accepted that the more frequent the contact with the target language, the greater the likelihood that acquisition will be lasting.

Teachers were required to follow a complex syllabus that emphasizes a flipped learning environment. Such includes namely Preparation Quizzes that need to be done before Review Quizzes and then Unit Tests.

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Key words : Curriculum Design, Curriculum Implementation, Moodle, e-learning, Esl/efl, Compliance

Syllabus Plan for English 1 & 2
Unit 1 (授業 In-class · 復習 Review)
Unit 2 (準備学習 Preparation · 授業 In-class · 復習 Review)
Unit 3 (準備学習 Preparation · 授業 In-class · 復習 Review)
Mid-term 1 (中間テスト1 Mid-term 1)

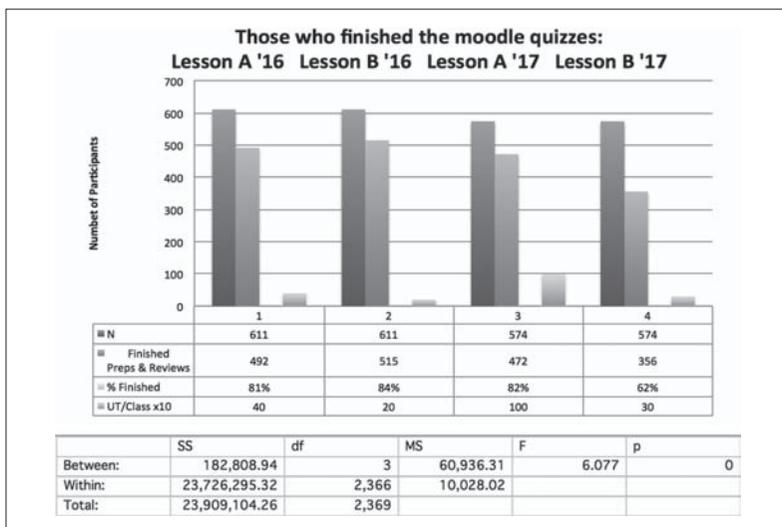
### The Problem: High-Sounding Words

The LMS used is moodle and is easy for any administrator to see how students are progressing both individually and at the class level. It was noticed, however, that not all classes were showing compliance with the syllabus in a timely manner. While the syllabus may say one thing, actual practice showed something else: such is the recurring problem of having high-sounding words in print, yet action shown to the contrary.

### The Plan: Getting the requisite traction through compliance

Not only were students not following plans for moodle, teachers were distancing themselves from it as well. Student and teacher participation waned recently from one year to the next within a program of approximately 600 students and roughly 20 instructors. Having a highly structured syllabus that clearly mentions the moodle adjunct and its purpose is no longer enough to inspire everyone into compliance.

Changes were needed but first recent trends needed to be identified. It was decided to employ a One-way Anova to ask the question if flipped learning was being evenly utilized? The short answer is no. It was hoped that the null hypothesis would be confirmed. Such was not the case.



By considering how many students finished the Preparation and Review Quizzes by semester's end, one can see that 2017 was worse than 2016. With an F of 6.077, the probability of this being a random occurrence is 0. This may be explained by two variables that may have had a moderating effect. 1) Unit Tests and 2) A New Format.

## **Unit Tests**

Unit Tests were introduced in 2016 as a way to encourage completion of Preparation and Review Quizzes. As has been the case since its availability, access to Review Quizzes have been restricted to those who achieved the requisite score of 60% on the corresponding Preparation Quiz. In 2016, a similar restriction was applied to all Unit Tests, with the gateway score being 60% needed on all corresponding Review Quizzes. Such was optional in that teachers were free to use or not use. As one can see the Lesson A teachers made more use of the Unit Tests in 2017 than any other group. Curiously enough, Preparation and Review Quiz completion did not improve markedly. An explanation for that can be offered by an internal change, a change in question formatting.

## **A New Format**

The question format for the Preparation and Review Quizzes were in Cloze format in 2016. In 2017, Cloze formatting was no longer used in favor of mainly stock moodle Matching and Multiple Choice formats. With these two formats, it became possible to randomized questions in addition to shuffling distractors. In short, whatever print outs that students may have made in 2016 as cheat sheets did not really apply in 2017. These two variables may have contributed to the drop in participation in 2017.

To summarize thus far, having a large moodle adjunct shows a commitment to a flipped learning environment, albeit with problems. Not all teachers were on board and harvesting of answers from Preparation and Review quizzes de-scaffolds the intent of the assignments. By customizing the flipped learning experience more to that of the learner, cloze formats with questions in fixed positions were changed to multiple choice and matching formats where shuffling was used more effectively.

**Old Cloze Format**

Closez format – Easy to share and answer for friends. Everything is set in place.

**New Format**

Multiple Choice – The shuffle of questions and distractors ensure tasks are not identical.

## Part Two – Preferred Learning Style or Cheating?

Social Constructivism states: One can infer that those who benefit most are those invest in it to the maximum. As for those who chose not to take such seriously, they were left with two choices, non-participation or cheating. What is a preferred learning style and what is cheating?

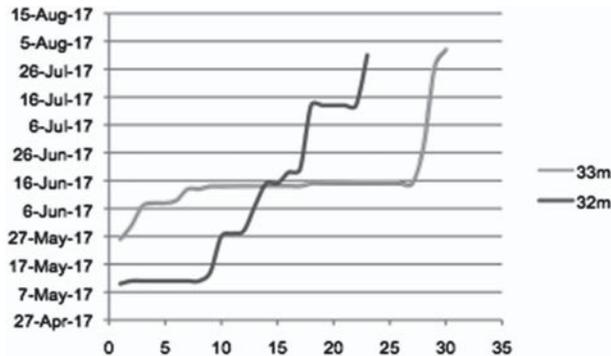
Cheating is a moral and developmental issue, and, according to Watson, Sottile and Liang, (2014) in which there are two views, the perpetrator and the observer. As for the perpetrator, it is moral: the act is worth the reward. As for the observer, however, cheating is worth drawing attention to or ignoring. One is forced into a dichotomy.

How to reconcile cheating is not ignoring it, it is eliminating it from the environment. With regard to the Preparation and Review quizzes, answers are intentionally provided as feedback within an unmonitored flipped environment. The rationale is that if answers are not provided, and the learning environment is unmonitored, flipped or not, it will be just a matter of time before they are readily available. Where the difference between learning style and cheating is depends upon the attitude and motivation of the learner. If the learner wants to see after task completion, it is a learning style. If the learner sees prior to any attempt and or shares, it is cheating.

## Moderating cheating behavior with restricted access to Unit Tests

Unit Tests can only be accessed if prior preparation and review materials are properly done. Such were introduced on a voluntary basis to teachers. The rationale is to promote steady access to Preparation and Review Quizzes throughout the semester in a timely manner.

### Use and non-use of Unit Tests



Class 33m used the Unit Tests. Class 32m didn't. The lines refer to when students in both classes got their highest score on the Unit 3 Review quiz. The first midterm came shortly after June 16, 2017. Class 32m saw a more distributed behavior. What one can infer is that students were taking the Unit 3 Review Quiz when they felt like it without much regard to where the teacher had them in the textbook.

*The Unit Tests were successful in ensuring regular and periodic performance with all required Preparation and Review Quizzes.*

## Implication for a more effective plan: Introduction of Readiness Quizzes

A Readiness Quiz was placed at the top of 2017 Lesson A Quiz Centers at beginning of the semester to reinforce syllabus goals and inform students of what an e-learning environment has to offer and how they can best benefit. Students were not required to take it unless teachers instructed otherwise.

World Link Workbook 2 Your progress ?

News forum

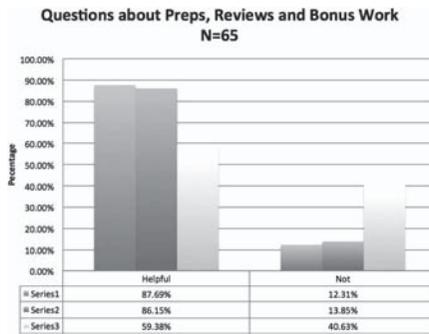
Students: Are You Ready for Midterms?

みなさん、  
学期の途中に近づき、教員は中期試験の準備をしているので、適切な学業成績のために学生の準備状況を強化する必要があります。このクイズをしてください。クイズの得点はあなたの成績を変えるのではなく、むしろCEPポリシーの見直しを助けます。  
協力、ありがとうございます！

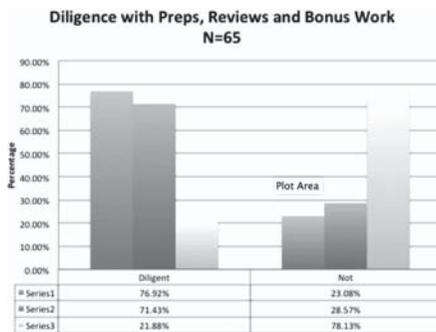
## Results among Students

Those who took the Readiness quiz applied themselves to moodle on more of a weekly rather than a monthly or less frequent basis. They were more diligent throughout the semester in learning at pace, rather than waiting until the end, which, arguably, can be a time when cheating behaviors become the preferred learning method.

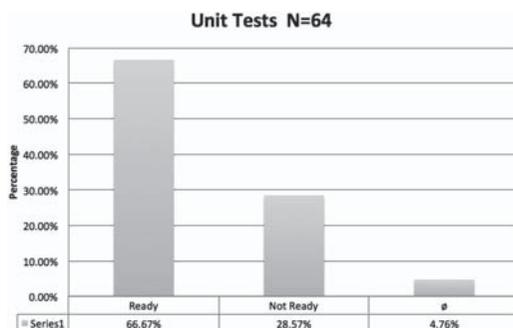
Weinstein and Wu, (2009) noted similar results.

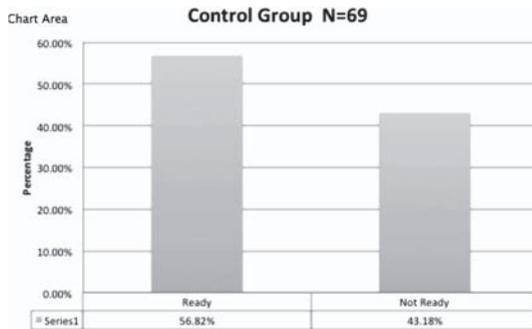


2017 Students who took the Readiness Quiz found it helpful. They were also diligent and ready for Midterms.



Together with Readiness Quizzes, the quiz reforms worked.





As the graph shows, the students were ready for Midterms. During the fall semester, different students, no such Readiness Quizzes were made available, and the results show that non-readiness was much more prevalent than the classes that took the Readiness Quizzes.

The Readiness Quizzes made for a difference in positive and desired directions, namely, that students interacted with material as outlined in the syllabus over an intended period rather than all at once, usually at semester's end.

## Discussion

If it works for students, how about teachers? Why are teachers often left out of the curricular improvement equation is a question that persistently defies metaphorical gravity. One explanation could be that colleagues have the freedom to ignore requests, especially such requests, which ask for more of their time. In light of this, a teacher only Readiness quiz was made available. Its content overlapped with the Student Readiness Quiz and included other matters strictly related to teachers, for example: grading, fluency with syllabus content, and conditional gateways linking the Preparation Quizzes, Review Quizzes, and Unit Tests.

Out of the 2017 population of 23 teachers, the Teacher Readiness Quiz takers were 3 with 1 submission. From the population of 23 teachers, 7 are full time with 16 part time instructors. Teachers responded in two ways. When asked if a Teacher Readiness Quiz was a good idea, among part time teachers, there was an attitude of cooperation, at least in principle. Qualifications included that the quiz itself has to be "good" and not "too long." How the part time teachers regarded the notion of good is largely undefined, but nonetheless, undue attention spent on matters indifferent would undermine the quiz's purpose and intension. This was seen favorably since it is feedback from a first attempt.

Among full time teachers, resistance to the idea of teachers taking a Readiness Quiz was evident not only in the lack of participation but in comments. To remedy this, fulltime col-

leagues not only need to be involved in the planning and delivery of the salient Readiness quiz content but they also need an “I Got It” button as one of the distractors within each question. While an “I Got It” may appear to provide an exit from knowing whether or not someone truly knows the material, it does, however, establish a tacit level of trust that the guidelines set and agreed upon, are, in fact, being followed.

Within a moodle environment, the best question formats to use are Multiple Choice with a multiple correct format and Matching. The main point is that the function of any Readiness Quiz is to ensure a competent familiarity of the goals and expectations within any complex organizational structure. In short, it’s more about the content than it is about the participants.

### **Future Direction – A Flipped Orientation for teachers.**

With Readiness Quizzes in place for instructors, the annual orientation meeting can be recast into something more meaningful for everyone, with increased benefit for the students. When schedule cards for 2018 were circulated in July of 2017, all teachers were informed that the Annual Orientation meeting would be vastly different. Instead of being lead by the director, telling of new changes and reviewing what is not necessary, such would be flipped using an instructional video followed by a Readiness Quiz to be done in advance. Orientation, instead of being largely a passive experience will become a more dynamic time for sharing teaching ideas in groups or in pairs, enabling teachers both full time and part time to construct for themselves personal meaningful knowledge for immediate application use and benefit for the students.

It is hoped that in the future all teachers will adopt the Unit Tests, thus ensuring full student participation with Preparation and Review Quizzes. May we no longer see variation between groups.

### **Conclusion**

A sizeable moodle environment has been in constant use and development over the last five or so years. Its purpose has been to assist first year language learners of the general English language program to have more frequent contact with the target language and the salient material therein. It was noticed that student and teacher participation waned from one year to the next. Within a program of nearly 600 students and roughly 20 instructors, it was noticed that having a highly structured syllabus that clearly mentioned the moodle adjunct and its purpose was no longer was enough to inspire everyone into compliance. Subsequently, reports of some students “harvesting” answers from Preparation and Review Quizzes seemed to have a cheapening effect on the intent of not just the select assign-

ments, but the entire moodle adjunct. This presentation sets off to: 1) ask the question, what constitutes genuine cheating and where one can delineate the separation between a preferred learning style and cheating, 2) report about the introduction of unit tests that can only be accessed if prior preparation and review materials are properly done, and 3), introduce Readiness Quizzes at the beginning of the academic year to reinforce syllabus goals and inform both teachers and students of what an e-learning environment has to offer and how they can best benefit. It is hoped that students will apply themselves to moodle on more of a weekly rather than a monthly or less frequent basis, and that teachers will track student progress with greater regularity. In short, movement to these two ends needs to happen if compliance to curricular goals is to be met more fully. Findings indicate that Readiness Quizzes can perform effectively in keeping students informed and on schedule with curricular expectations. Additionally, Readiness Quizzes show promise when applied to the teaching staff. While this has not been done on a large scale, plans are in place to flip teacher orientation, opening up space for teachers to share what approaches work for them in the classroom, so that other teachers may benefit.

Is this an end, or a beginning?

Hopefully, teachers, both part time and fulltime may follow through with their presentations and submit them in an in house journal, one that can be mentioned in any research resume.

Is this the direction that a program director should be going?

As the population of Japan continues to contract, and the pool of available students shrinks accordingly, private liberal arts schools are finding themselves in newer situations that will require accountability. How this will actually work itself out remains to be seen. In the meantime, however, any program leader would do well to ensure compliance to curricular goals among all member teachers and a reliable method of reach to the students for the successful and meaningful delivery of the educational material as outlined in the syllabi.

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