

THE EFFECTS OF PROJECT-BASED ENGLISH LESSONS WITH *WE CAN! 2* ON SIXTH GRADERS

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1. Introduction

This paper explores the effects of integrating the “four skills,” the Project-Based Approach (PBA), and *We Can! 2* (MEXT, 2018b) in the English component of a Japanese sixth grade Foreign Language program during the transition period to the government’s new guidelines for elementary school curricula.

1.1. Background of the study

The new guidelines of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2017) for elementary schools have established that, as of 2020, fifth and sixth graders should learn English as a compulsory Foreign Language. The instruction is to take place over 70 lessons each year and must emphasize four key skills—listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The main objective of these new guidelines is to foster students’ basic knowledge and abilities to communicate in a foreign language (FL) through the four skills. In particular, reading activities are geared to teach students to pronounce the letters of the English alphabet and understand the meanings of English words and basic expressions, the sounds of which become familiar to them through listening and speaking. The writing activities are designed to encourage students to write the letters of English alphabet, copy English words and basic expressions, and write about themselves and things that happen in everyday lives (MEXT, 2017). The government advised that schools should transition to these new guidelines over the 2018 and 2019 academic years. During this transition period, fifth and sixth grade teachers can use the materials made by the government—*We*

Can! 1 (MEXT, 2018a) and *We Can! 2* (MEXT, 2018b)—as standard materials.

1.2. The aim of this study

This study investigates whether English lessons based on the PBA improved the four skills of sixth graders, who, as of 2018, did not learn how to read and write in English, in line with the new government guidelines (MEXT, 2017). The study took place over two terms, and the total duration was approximately eight months. Notably, this study evaluated students reading and writing in line with the government's objectives that students should be able to understand the meanings of the simple English words and basic expressions with which they become familiar by listening and speaking, and, moreover, should be able to copy these words. While this paper focuses on whether or not sixth grade students attained the target objectives during the transition period specified by the government, it remains crucial to determine the most effective ways of teaching English to sixth graders appropriately not only by listening and speaking but also by reading and writing, in order to ensure a smooth and successful transition to the new guidelines before fully implementing them. At the same time, although elementary school teachers are also expected to teach English as a compulsory subject with a government approved textbook, many teachers do not learn how to teach English before becoming elementary school teachers. Moreover, considering elementary school students' cognitive and English levels, it is not appropriate to simply apply the established approaches used for junior high school students to elementary school students. Hence, a specific approach will be imperative to introduce the four skills to sixth graders by using the approved textbook.

1.3. Literature review

The PBA is based on a theory developed by an American educational leader, John Dewey, in the early 20th century (Beckett, 2006). In general PBA is “a collection of sequenced and integrated tasks,” (Nunan, 2004, p. 133) all of which culminate in an end-product; as the project's core element. In the PBA process, “the route to the end-

product brings opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence and to work together in a real-world environment by collaborating on a task” (Fried-Booth, 2002, p. 6)—such a process can be realized in work to improve a student’s ability to communicate in a second language (L2) / FL. Based on the definition of the PBA in L2/FL education, empirical research on the PBA applied in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms indicates four main characteristics: (1) an appropriate balance between teachers’ guidance and students’ autonomy (Henry, 1994); (2) use of purposeful language (Fried-Booth, 1986, 2002); (3) multi-skill tasks (Haines, 1989); and (4) recycling known language (Haines, 1989). Along these lines, research advises that EFL students, who tend to have fewer opportunities to use English meaningfully, would do well to collaboratively complete a project that involves discussion, research, and a presentation (Tanaka, 2009). This is because these three aspects give students the opportunity to increase their self-involvement, an experience that nurtures feelings of self-accomplishment.

Adding to this previous research, Shirado (2019) examined the effects of implementing the PBA in teaching the four skills to Japanese sixth graders who, as of 2017, had not yet learned how to read and write in English. While the study showed that the students could develop these four skills, it did not use the material now standardized by the government, *We Can! 2*. To fill in this gap in the scholarly archive, this study investigates how integrating PBA and *We Can! 2* over two terms impacts the development of the four skills in a group of sixth graders during the transition period outlined by the government.

1.4. Research questions

To achieve this aim, this study addressed the following three research questions (RQs):

RQ-1: Do four-skill English lessons based on the PBA increase the interest and self-confidence of sixth graders in learning English during the transition period?

RQ-2: Do four-skill English lessons based on the PBA develop L2 self-confidence of sixth graders in speaking performance during the

transition period?

RQ-3: Do four-skill English lessons based on the PBA facilitate the sixth graders' understandings of the English alphabet and the written vocabulary during the transition period?

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants were 87 students who were sixth graders during academic year of 2018 in a public elementary school in a suburb of Tokyo. They learned English in school for 35 lessons in the fifth grade, each spanning 45 minutes, and four lessons in the third and fourth grades, through the PBA-based listening and speaking. Accordingly, these students had not yet learned how to read or write in English in school. In 2018, the participants were required to complete 70 English lessons a year. A preliminary survey conducted in April 2018 determined that about 28% of the participants were learning English outside of school.

2.2. Materials and design

To attain the Foreign Language objectives of the new guidelines, the four-skill English lessons based on the PBA were conducted using *We Can!* 2. Notably, this study explored the possibility of incorporating the PBA into Foreign Language teaching materials including the approved textbooks. At the start of the study, the participants had not used standard materials in English lessons at school. The use of book-based standard materials for learning English is a valuable pedagogy to examine because the government has advised that teachers will be required to use approved textbooks by 2020. Based on the existing research articulated above, this paper argues that English lessons based on the PBA may help teachers optimize their lessons. Along these lines, because English lessons rooted in PBA are designed to develop an end-product, individual vocabulary words and topics are not simply used for one lesson; rather, they are related to one another throughout a project's lessons. In other words, PBA enables students to learn English most effectively by repeatedly

encountering and using vocabularies and expressions related to a particular topic across different authentic contexts. This characteristic of the PBA—recycling known language—is also suitable for enabling students to meet the objectives of reading and writing in the Foreign Language. As Section 1.1 details, the government’s objectives specify that students must be able to understand and copy the English words and basic expressions made familiar to them through activities that involve listening and speaking (MEXT, 2017).

With regard to the project’s design, the researcher created a first-term project— “Let’s introduce Japan and our city to the international students!” –and a second-term project—“My dream.” These projects were designed to explore the effectiveness of the integration of the four skills. They were based on *We Can! 2*, and involved reading and writing. As mentioned above, Shirado (2019) confirmed that four-skill English lessons based on the PBA helped sixth graders to develop the four skills during the 2017 academic year.

The first project, “Let’s introduce Japan and our city to the international students!” consisted of 22 English lessons that took place between April and July of 2018 and included vocabulary and topics from Units 1, 2, and 4 of *We Can! 2*. The goal of the project was for the sixth graders to conduct research and deliver presentations with hand-made posters to nine international university students about the sixth grade students’ favorite Japanese events, foods, and traditional games as well as places in the city where the sixth graders and the international students live that the sixth graders recommend the international students visiting. These international students were from the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and the USA, and were studying at Tsuda University. After their presentations, the elementary school students received feedback from the international students. This project was activated by two goals: 1) the sixth graders wanted to share information they collected about Japan and their city with the international students and 2) the international students wanted to learn useful information about Japan and their city from the sixth graders.

The second project, “My dream,” consisted of 22 English lessons that took place between September and December of 2018 and included

vocabulary and topics from Units 3, 5, 6, and 8 of *We Can! 2*. The goal of the project was to make the students consider their future before graduation and deliver presentations with hand-made posters about their dreams to nine international university students, (these students were not the same students involved in the first-term project). These international students were from Germany, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and the USA, and were studying at Tsuda University. The elementary school students subsequently received feedback on their presentations from the international students. Moreover, the international students also shared their dreams with the elementary school students. This was the first time that the sixth graders all listened to the ideas of others and spoke about their own ideas of the future in English outside of their classroom. This was instrumental in giving the students a global and authentic experience.

2.3. Instructions

To examine the three RQs based on the new government guidelines, these two projects were mainly implemented with team-teaching. In the first term, ten team-teaching sessions were carried out by the homeroom teacher (HRT) and the assistant language teacher (ALT), eight team-teaching sessions by the HRT and the researcher as a Japanese teacher of English (JTE), and four solo-teaching sessions by the HRT. In the second term, ten team-teaching sessions were carried out by the HRT and the ALT, nine team-teaching sessions by the HRT and the JTE, and three solo-teaching sessions by the HRT. The instruction points of these projects were as follows:

(1) Use of *We Can! 2*

Three points must be noted regarding the teachers' use of the standard material, *We Can! 2*, with the sixth graders during the transition period. First, as detailed above, the project scheduled a meeting between the international students and the sixth graders, in which the sixth graders were to deliver English presentations, to create an authentic situation in which the sixth graders could use English. To realize this goal, the sixth graders studied three or four units of *We Can! 2*. Second, because these elementary school students were in the transition period, they encountered unknown words and expressions which, based on the

new government guidelines, they technically should have been already learned. The teachers carefully taught these words and expressions as new vocabulary. Third, because these students had not yet experienced the use of the standard materials, the teachers included activities with words and expressions used in the digital materials before and after the students used the digital materials of *We Can! 2*. Although *We Can! 2* included various digital materials to inform questions about listening and comprehension, these materials tended to require sixth graders to sit at their desks rather than giving them the opportunity to practice English in authentic situations—as Cameron (2001) notes, students need to experience meaningful, real-world deployments of the words and expressions to which they listen and with which they interact with their peers in the classroom.

(2) Application of the PBA's characteristics

All activities in the two projects, including task-based ones, were related to the main topic in a multilayered structure by creating a framework with the characteristics of PBA. First, the researcher connected the activities in the project to the four skills. Along these lines, the final presentation gave the students the opportunity to use key words and sentences repeatedly and meaningfully, using speech in an authentic context to deploy the knowledge they learned by listening, reading, and writing. This recycling of known language is one characteristic of the PBA (Haines, 1989). Second, the project employed different kinds of activities to engage the students across a variety of contexts: the students sang songs; created posters; moved their bodies; and discussed, researched, and used their knowledge of other subjects to achieve the project's final goal: their presentations. This is another characteristic of the PBA—multi-skill tasks—which increase students' self-confidence in learning (Ribé & Vidal, 1993). Third, while the students were given opportunities to make choices and decisions (Fried-Booth, 1986, 2002), the teachers provided linguistic and affective scaffolding through team-teaching when the students required it to facilitate such decision-making (Henry 1994). Such situations illustrated another characteristic noted above: establishing an appropriate balance between teachers guidance and students autonomy; a tenet that emerges with the theory that decision-making increases student

motivation and interest in learning (Haines, 1989). The final characteristic of the PBA—use of purposeful language—occurred when the students were personally involved in an authentic context or environment to accomplish a task (Fried-Booth, 1986, 2002). Along these lines, the sixth graders had opportunities to read English words and expressions related to the topic and to purposefully copy some of these English words and expressions for their presentations, the sounds of which were already familiar from listening and speaking activities. Thus, this project includes four PBA-based characteristics (see Section 1.3).

To realize instructions (1) and (2) (see Table 1), the researcher designed (a) activities of listening and speaking that used picture-and-letter cards, (b) activities that connected sounds and letters and that were conducted between the activities of listening and speaking and those of reading and writing, (c) activities that involved reading words and expressions related to the project's topic that would have been familiar to the students, (d) activities that included moving the body to increase familiarity with sounds and letters between reading and writing activities, and (e) activities that involved students copying the words and writing their names for their presentations.

2.4. Procedure

As the teaching plans detail (see Tables 1 & 2), the teachers first vertically connected every lesson in the project. During the time of the first-term project (see Table 1), the students spent Days 1 to 18 learning key words and expressions by completing the activities related to the topic using *We Can! 2*. On Day 19, the students in each group used the information they collected to decide on which Japanese events, food, and traditional games and which places in their city their presentations would discuss, and used the Memo Sheet (see Appendix 1) to orally practice for their presentations. On Day 20, each group of the students rehearsed both within their groups and to the class at large. On Day 21, the students delivered their presentations to the international students as end-products. On Day 22, the students discussed the results of their presentations based on the feedback received from their classmates and teachers.

Table 1: Outline of the First-term Project (Source: adapted from Shirado (2018))

Day	(a) listening and speaking with picture-and-letter cards	(b) connecting sounds and letters	(c) reading	(d) becoming familiar with sounds and letters	(e) writing
1 ~6	<p>Unit 1</p> <p>Season, 12 months</p> <p>When is your birthday?</p> <p>Self-introduction to ALT</p> <p>“I can ...”</p> <p>Subjects</p> <p>What subject do you like?</p> <p>“I like ...(subject).”</p> <p><i>Let’s Watch and Think</i></p>	<p><i>Twelve months</i></p> <p>(Chant: C)</p> <p><i>When is your birthday?</i> (C)</p> <p><i>I can run. I can swim</i> (C)</p> <p>Gesture Game</p> <p><i>Let’s Play-4</i></p> <p><i>Let’s Listen-1/3</i></p> <p><i>Let’s Play-1</i></p>	<p>12 months</p> <p>Seasons</p> <p>Sports</p> <p><i>Let’s Play-2</i></p> <p>Subjects</p>	<p>Air writing of big and small alphabets</p> <p>Small letters’ shape</p> <p>Hepburn Roman</p> <p>Bingo Game</p> <p>Copy of 12 months</p> <p>Interview Game</p> <p><i>Let’s Read and Write</i></p>	<p>[Name]</p> <p>Birth month</p> <p>Subject</p>
<p>Individual presentation : Self-introduction</p>					
7 ~12	<p>Unit 2</p> <p>Country names (review)</p> <p>“In (summer), we have (fireworks festival).”</p> <p>“You can enjoy (sumo).”</p> <p>“It is (delicious).”</p> <p>“It is (fun).”</p>	<p><i>Welcome to Japan</i></p> <p>(C)</p> <p>Matching Game</p> <p>(events and seasons)</p> <p><i>Let’s Watch and Think-1/2/3</i></p> <p><i>Let’s Listen-1/2/3</i></p>	<p>Country</p> <p>Seasons</p> <p>Tastes</p> <p>Feelings</p>	<p>Air writing of big and small alphabets</p> <p>Hepburn Roman</p> <p><i>Let’s Read and Write</i></p> <p>Fill in the blanks of the worksheet</p>	<p>[Name]</p> <p>Food and culture of Japan</p>
<p>Group presentation : Welcome to Japan</p>					
13 ~18	<p>Unit 4</p> <p>Names of facilities</p> <p>“We have/don’t have (a park).”</p> <p>“We can enjoy (shopping).”</p> <p><i>Let’s Watch and Think-1</i></p>	<p>I like my town (C)</p> <p>Key Words Game (facilities)</p> <p>Town Bingo</p> <p><i>Let’s Listen-2</i></p> <p><i>Let’s Play-2/3</i></p> <p>Matching Game</p>	<p>Facility</p> <p>Activity (reading, playing, etc)</p>	<p>Activity-1/2</p> <p><i>Let’s Watch and Think-2</i></p> <p>Copy of facilities for their presentations</p>	<p>[Name]</p> <p>Facilities</p>
<p>Group presentation : My Town</p>					
19	Preparation for the meeting				
20	Practice the presentations with the posters and Memo Sheet.				<p>Group presentation: Welcome to Our School</p>
21	Meeting with international students				
22	Feedback	<p>Let’s introduce Japan and our city!</p>			

Second, the teachers horizontally connected a lesson’s activities to create a multilayered structure that facilitated the completion of (a) through (e) (see Section 2.2 and Table 1). For example, during Days 1 to 6 the teachers introduced the students to the twelve months and the

expressions, “When is your birthday?” and “My birthday is ...,” using picture-and-letter cards. The students orally practiced these expressions by completing the activities in which they conveyed their feelings, as detailed in column (a) of Table 1. After sufficient practice, the students sang the chant, *When is your birthday?* and played the gesture game. After the gesture game, the students completed *Let’s Play-1 and 4* and *Let’s Listen-1 and 3*; as detailed in column (b) of Table 1. Then, students read the names of the twelve months, the four seasons, and the sports that they had used in the chants and gesture game and thus with which they were already familiar, as column (c) of Table 1 details. They practiced how to write the letters of the English alphabet in both uppercase and lowercase through an activity called “air writing”, in which they wrote the letters in the air with their fingers. After the air writing, the students discovered the differences between *Kunrei Roman* and *Hepburn Roman* letters and learned how to write their names in Hepburn Romanization, as column (d) of Table 1 details. They copied the names of their birth months and their favorite subjects and wrote down their own names, as column (e) of Table 1 details.

The second-term project is shown in Table 2. Like the first-term project, the teachers vertically connected every lesson in the project and horizontally connected each lesson’s activities. More specifically, such a vertical connection is evident in the fact that at the end of each unit, the students had the opportunity to deliver a presentation about the topic of the unit, such as “My Summer Vacation (Unit 5),” and “Olympic and Paralympic Games in Japan (Unit 6).” On Day 19, the students individually decided what to present about their dreams and used the Memo Sheet (see Appendix 2) to orally practice for their presentations. On Day 20, the students rehearsed in each group and as a class. On Day 21, the students delivered their presentations to the international students as end-products. On Day 22, the students discussed the results based on feedback received from their classmates and teachers.

Table 2: Outline of the Second-term Project

Day	(a) listening and speaking with picture-and-letter cards	(b) connecting sounds and letters	(c) reading	(d) becoming familiar with sounds and letters	(e) writing
1 ~5	<u>Unit 5</u> Summer events Small Talk (“I went to It was ... How about you?”) “I went to (the mountains).” “I enjoyed (camping).” “It was fun.”	<i>Summer Vacation</i> (Chant: C) Keyword Game Matching Game <i>Let's Listen-1/2/3</i> <i>Let's Watch and Think-1/2</i>	Summer events Places Activities Feelings	Make sentences with places, activities, food, and feelings <i>Activity</i> <i>Let's Read and Watch</i>	Name Activity Feelings
↓					
Individual presentation : My Summer Vacation					
6 ~10	<u>Unit 6</u> Olympic Games, Paralympic Games <i>Let's Watch and Think-1/2</i> Small Talk “What do you want to watch?” “I want to watch (swimming).”	Names of Olympic games <i>Let's Play-1/2</i> <i>Do you want to watch baseball?</i> (C) Gesture Game <i>Let's Talk</i>	Name of Olympic games Feelings 7 days Morning, afternoon, & evening	Copy names of the Olympic games <i>Let's Read and Write</i> Interview Game <i>Activity</i> <i>Let's Read and Write</i>	Olympic games 7 days Feelings
↓					
Individual presentation : Olympic and Paralympic Games in Japan					
11 ~13	<u>Unit 3</u> Fruits, food, animals, sports and subjects (review) “I like/want/have...” (review) “He is She is” <i>Let's Listen-1/2</i>	<i>Let's Play-2/3</i> <i>Let's Watch and Think-2/3</i> Who-am-I Game	Fruits, food, animals, sports, & subjects	Who's This Game (<i>Activity</i>)	He, She
↓					
Group presentation : Three-hint Quiz (Who's This?)					
14 ~18	<u>Unit 8</u> Occupations <i>Let's Watch and Think-1/2/3</i> Small Talk “What do you want to be?” “I want to be (a teacher).”	Keyword Game <i>What do you want to be</i> (C) <i>Let's Play</i>	Occupations “I want to be”	Interview Game (<i>Activity</i>) <i>Let's Read and Write</i>	Occupations Birthday
↓					
Individual presentation: My Occupation					
↓					
19	Preparation for the meeting				
20	Practice the presentations with the posters and Memo Sheets				
↓					
Individual presentation: My Dream					
21	Meeting with international students				
Let's talk about my dream!					
22	Feedback				

As for an example of a horizontal connection, in Unit 5, the

teachers introduced popular summer events that promoted the students to remember their summer vacations. Next, the students listened to the sentences that began with “I went to I enjoyed It was” while the teachers showed them related pictures, as detailed in column (a) of Table 2. After practicing these sentences, the teachers encouraged the students to sing the chant, *Summer Vacation*. Students also enjoyed the keyword game for summer events and the matching game constituted by a vocabulary of summer events, places, activities, and feelings. Between and after these activities, the students worked on *Let’s Listen-1 to 3* and *Let’s Watch and Think-1 and 2*, as column (b) of Table 2 details. Next, the students read words and phrases related to the summer events, places, activities, and feelings that they had used in the chants and games and therefore with which they were already familiar, as column (c) of Table 2 details. The students practiced how to write sentences for their presentations, as column (d) of Table 2 details. Moreover, students also copied down their names, activities, and feelings, as column (e) of Table 2 details.

2.5. Data collection

The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach based on the three RQs. For the quantitative data collection, the researcher developed (1) a Questionnaire on Learning English (QLE) (RQ 1), (2) a Can-do Questionnaire on Speaking Performance (CQSP) (RQ-2), and (3) an Alphabet Quiz (AQ) (RQ-3). For the qualitative data collection for RQs 1 to 3, the researcher designed (4) the Students’ Open-ended Questionnaire (SOQ) and (5) the HRTs’ Open-ended Questionnaire (HOQ) to provide support for quantitative data and complementary information.

More specifically, the researcher designed (1) QLE to examine the students’ L2 self-confidence in four skills including positive attitudes toward English lessons based on Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels’ (1994) observation that self-confidence in L2/FL learning directly and indirectly influences L2/FL proficiency through students’ attitudes toward learning their L2/FL. Along these lines, Dörnyei (1994) situates self-confidence in FL classrooms as the belief that one is able to produce results, accomplish goals, and competently perform tasks. QLE consisted of ten questions

in Japanese. Each question offered response options on a four-point Likert scale: *strongly agree* (4), *basically agree* (3), *basically disagree* (2), and *strongly disagree* (1). Notably, there was no middle category (*neither agree nor disagree*) on this scale because the respondents were approximately eleven years old, students at this level of cognitive development might simply mark the middle category without thinking carefully (Dörnyei, 2003). Moreover, Nunnally (1978) states that the inclusion or exclusion of a middle category does not affect the relative proportions of the expressed opinions and thus does not significantly modify the results. Therefore, based on Dörnyei (2003) and Nunnally (1978), the researcher adopted a four-point Likert scale.

(2) CQSP consisted of 14 can-do items based on the project's contents to examine the students' L2 self-confidence in speaking performance, as articulated by Clément et al. (1994). There were two response options for each item of the CQSP: *yes* and *no*. While, generally, the more options an item contains, the more accurate an evaluation becomes (Dörnyei, 2003), the researcher chose "yes-or-no" because it is easy for sixth graders to decide between "yes" and "no" (and, besides, because it is simple and easy to answer, a "yes-or-no" question has the added benefit of reducing the students' workloads). Moreover, a polarizing decision can be made intuitively and reliably (Dörnyei, 2003).

As for the other tools, the researcher also designed (3) AQ consisting of six to seven questions based on the work of Allen-Tamai (2017). After the project, (4) SOQ required the students to self-assess their presentations and provide written reasons for their assessments in Japanese. The assessment question was "did you give your presentation well?" and the four response options were *very much*, *to some extent*, *not so much*, and *not at all*. There was no middle response to the question for the same reason that detailed in the discussion of QLE above. Similar to the SOQ, (5) HOQ was conducted after the project.

3. Results

3.1. Questionnaire on learning English (QLE) (RQ 1)

(1) First term

To investigate RQ-1, the data from the QLE in the first term were analyzed using factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis revealed two factors: Interest in Learning English (Factor I: Nos. 1 to 6) and L2 Self-confidence (Factor II: Nos. 7 to 10) (see Table 3).

Table 3: *Standard Deviation of QLE in the First Term*

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	(SD)	M	(CD)
F I: Interest in Learning English	3.32	(0.52)	3.40	(0.50)
F II: L2 Self-confidence	3.14	(0.61)	4.26	(0.55)

After the factor analysis, univariate ANOVA was applied. There was no significant interaction between the project and the factors, but there was a significant main effect ($F(1, 246) = 12.70, p < 0.01$). Since there were two factors, the simple main effect test was applied. As Table 4 shows, significant differences were observed in both factors. More specifically, Factor I (Interest in Learning English) emerged as: $F(1, 164) = 4.78, p < 0.05$, while Factor II (L2 Self-confidence) emerged as: $F(1, 164) = 24.59, p < 0.01$. The scale reliabilities were as follows: Factor I's Cronbach's alpha was 0.88 and Factor II's Cronbach's alpha was 0.89, these were satisfactory based on. Muijs' (2011) guideline that a Cronbach's alpha over 0.7 is satisfactory. Therefore, Table 4 illustrates that, among the participants, interest in learning English and L2 self-confidence in the four skills developed.

Table 4: *Simple Main Effect Test of QLE in the First Term*

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
F I (Interest in Learning English)	0.31	1	0.31	4.78*	.03
F II (L2 Self-confidence)	1.59	1	1.59	24.59**	.00

Note: ** shows there was a significant difference between pre- and post-questionnaires ($p < .01$).

* shows there was a significant difference between pre- and post-questionnaires ($p < .05$).

(2) Second term

To investigate RQ-1, the data from the QLE in the second term were also analyzed using factor analysis. The results of the QLE factor analysis in the second term showed the same two factors as those in the first term: Interest in Learning English (Factor I: Nos 1 to 6) and L2 Self-confidence (Factor II: Nos. 7 to 10) (see Table 5).

Table 5: *Standard Deviation of QLE in the Second Term*

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	(SD)	M	(CD)
F I: Interest in Learning English	3.34	(0.54)	3.38	(0.53)
F II: L2 Self-confidence	3.13	(0.63)	3.28	(0.55)

After the factor analysis, univariate ANOVA was applied. There was no significant interaction between the project and the factors, but there was a significant main effect ($F(1, 246) = 4.83, p < 0.05$). Since there were two factors, the simple main effect test was applied. As Table 6 shows, a significant difference was observed in Factor II (L2 Self-confidence): $F(1, 164) = 11.10, p < 0.01$. The scale reliabilities were as follows. Factor I's Cronbach's alpha was 0.83 and Factor II's Cronbach's alpha was 0.85. Thus, Table 6 illustrates that the participants' L2 self-confidence in the four skills developed.

Table 6: *Simple Main Effect Test of QLE in the Second Term*

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
F I (Interest in Learning English)	0.06	1	0.06	0.71	.40
F II (L2 Self-confidence)	0.94	1	0.94	11.10**	.00

Note: ** shows there was a significant difference between pre- and post-questionnaires ($p < .01$).

3.2. Can-do questionnaire on speaking performance (CQSP) (RQ-2)

(1) First term

To investigate RQ-2, the data from the CQSP were analyzed using factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis showed two factors by deleting Nos. 1 and 2 (due to these having the same answer) and Nos. 4 and 7 (due to the small factor loading): Already-learned Things (Factor I: Nos. 3, 5, & 6) and Newly-learned Things (Factor II: Nos. 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12) (see Table 7). After the factor analysis, univariate ANOVA was applied. Because there was a significant interaction between the project and the factors ($F(1, 246) = 7.88, p < 0.01$), the simple main effect test was applied. As Table 8 shows, significant differences were observed in Factor I (Already-learned Things: $F(1, 164) = 39.55, p < 0.01$) and Factor II (Newly-learned Things: $F(1, 164) = 108.08, p < 0.01$). The scale reliabilities were as follows: Factor I's Cronbach's alpha was 0.75 and Factor II's Cronbach's alpha was 0.72. Therefore, Table 8 illustrates that the participants' L2 self-confidence in speaking performance developed. However, due to the means and standard deviations of the post-test detailed in Table 7, there is a possibility that both factors involved a ceiling effect.

Table 7: *Standard Deviation of CQSP in the First Term*

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	(SD)	M	(CD)
F I: Already-learned Things	0.79	(0.27)	0.99	(0.08)
F II: L2 Newly-learned Things	0.47	(0.32)	0.79	(0.23)

Table 8: Simple Main Effect Test of CQSP in the First Term

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
F I (Already-learned Things)	1.61	1	1.61	39.55**	.00
F II (Newly-learned Things)	4.39	1	4.39	108.08**	.00

Note: ** shows there was a significant difference between pre- and post-questionnaires ($p < .01$).

(2) Second term

To investigate RQ-2, the data from the CQSP were also analyzed using factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis showed one factor by deleting Nos. 1, 3, and 4 (due to these having the same answer) and Nos. 2 and 7 (due to the small factor loading). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.75. Based on the factor analysis, a two-way *t*-test was applied. As Table 9 shows, a significant difference was evident: $t(83) = 11.79$, $p < 0.01$. The effect size of this *t*-test was large ($r = 0.79$) based on Cohen’s (1992) criterion. Thus, Table 9 illustrates that the participants’ L2 self-confidence in speaking performance developed.

Table 9: Two-Way T-test of CQSP in the Second Term

6th grade <i>n</i>	Pre-test		Perfect Score	Post-test		<i>t</i>	95% CI		<i>r</i>
	M	SD		M	SD		LL	UL	
84	2.54	2.33	7	5.15	1.92	-11.79**	-3.06	-2.18	.79

Note: ** shows there was a significant difference between pre- and post-questionnaires ($p < .01$).

3.3. Alphabet quiz (AQ) (RQ-3)

(1) First term

To investigate RQ-3, the data from the AQ in the first term, which was conducted after the project, were analyzed using the degree of achievement. As Tables 10 and 11 show, each question had a high degree (over 87%)—although, these questions did not involve many sub-questions.

Table 10: *Achievement Degree of Each Question of the Alphabet Quiz in the First Term*

Question	No. 1 (6)	No. 2 (8)	No. 3 (10)	No. 4 (10)	No. 5 (4)	No. 6 (8)	Total (46)
Degree	92%	92%	87%	99%	94%	87%	92%

Table 11: *Each Question of the Alphabet Quiz in the First Term*

No.	Kind of Question	Aim of Question
1	Knowledge of Alphabet	Reading the Names of Big and Small Letters → Letters
2	Words related to Unit 1	Seasons: Reading to Spelling; Reading and Spelling to Meaning
3	Words related to Unit 2	Tastes: Reading to Spelling; Reading and Spelling to Meaning
4	Words related to Unit 4	Facilities: Reading and Spelling to Meaning
5	Words related to Unit 1	Birth-month: Meaning to Spelling
6	Name	Writing names in Hepburn Romanization

On the whole, the results show that the students' abilities to understand the letters of the English alphabet and written words in English developed.

(2) Second term

To investigate RQ-3, the data from the AQ in the second term, which was conducted after the project, were also analyzed using the degree of achievement. As Tables 12 and 13 show, each question had a high degree (over 94%)—although, these questions did not involve many sub-questions.

Table 12: *Achievement Degree of Each Question of the Alphabet Quiz in the Second Term*

Que.	No. 1 (6)	No. 2 (3)	No. 3 (8)	No. 4 (10)	No. 5 (10)	No. 6 (3)	No. 7 (8)	Total (48)
Deg.	98%	99%	97%	99%	94%	96%	98%	98%

Note: "Que." represents "Question," and "Deg." Represents "Degree."

Table 13: *Each Question of the Alphabet Quiz*

No.	Kind of Question	Aim of Question
1	Knowledge of Alphabet	Reading the Names of Big and Small Letters → Letters
2	Knowledge of Alphabet	Reading the Sounds of Big and Small Letters → Letters
3	Words related to Unit 6	Sports: Reading to Spelling; Reading and Spelling to Meaning
4	Words related to Unit 3	Subjects: Reading to Spelling, and Reading and Spelling to Meaning
5	Words related to Unit 8	Occupations: Reading and Spelling to Meaning
6	Words related to Unit 5	Reading the Key Sentence to Meaning
7	Name	Writing names in Hepburn Romanization

Like the first term, on the whole, the results show that the students' abilities to understand the letters of the English alphabet and written words in English developed.

3.4. Students' open-ended questionnaire (SOQ)

(1) First term

The results of the SOQ's four response options in the first term as answers to the question, "did you deliver your presentation well?" were *very much* (61.5%), *to some extent* (38.5%), *not so much* (0%), and *not at all* (0%). The reasons for the students' assessments were qualitatively analyzed based on the work of Kawakita (1967) and categorized into four groups as follows: (a) completion of their presentation (e.g., "I could present in a big voice with gestures" and "I presented with smile and eye-contact"); (b) fruits of their efforts (e.g., "because I practiced a lot and received advice, I performed well" and "I drew the posters and figured out how to present with my group members"); (c) assessment from others (e.g., "the international students listened to my presentation with nod and smile" and "the international students appreciated me and said, 'Good!'"); and (d) negative self-assessments based on a presentation failure (e.g., "because I was tense, I could not convey what I had thought").

(2) Second term

The results of the SOQ's four response options in the second term as answers to the question, "did you deliver your presentation well?" were *very much* (44.6%), *to some extent* (50.6%), *not so much* (3.6%), and *not*

at all (1.2%). Compared with those of the first term, the rate of the second response, *to some extent*, increased. This may be because presenting one's unique ideas can be more difficult for students at this level than presenting sourced information. The reasons for their assessments, similar to those of the first term, were qualitatively analyzed based on the work of Kawakita (1967) and categorized into four groups as follows: (a) completion of their presentation (e.g., "I could present in a big voice with gestures" and "I presented with smile and enjoyed my presentation"); (b) fruits of their own efforts (e.g., "because I practiced a lot, I performed well" and "I made sentences with many known words so that the international students could understand my ideas"); (c) assessment from others (e.g., "the international students listened to my presentation with nod and smile" and "the international students asked me some questions about my presentation"); and (d) negative self-assessments based on a presentation failure (e.g., "because I was nervous, I could not convey what I had thought completely").

3.5. HRTs' open-ended questionnaire (HOQ)

(1) First term

The qualitative analysis of the HOQ data in the first term highlighted two groups based on the work of Kawakita (1967). 1) English lessons based on the PBA (e.g., "the goal was clear, and the process of learning was understandable for the students" and "all activities including task-based activities were connected to the goal, and there were no useless nor unreasonable things" and 2) use of *We Can! 2* (e.g., "the chants are useful when changing the speed and using gestures" and "although we can use the visual and auditory information, we have to figure out better ways to use *We Can! 2* because the lessons with *We Can! 2* tend to be passive for the students"). Ultimately, the HRTs felt that they had many problems to solve regarding the use of *We Can! 2*.

(2) Second term

The analysis of the HOQ data of the second term divided into the same two groups as the first term: 1) English lessons based on the PBA and 2) use of *We Can! 2*. Regarding English lessons based on the PBA,

two HRTs mentioned that the students worked on their projects eagerly and that they had opportunities to read and write English to achieve their goal. Another HRT realized that the students had become more familiar with the characteristics of the presentation and were able to make more substantial presentations because they had already completed many presentations by the second term of the sixth grade. Moreover, regarding the use of *We Can! 2*, the HRTs observed that the students understood activities more easily and enjoyed them without *We Can! 2* compared to lessons with *We Can! 2*, specifying that this asymmetry was due to the fact that the students were independently engaged in the task-based activities rooted in goals that they wanted to achieve such as the interview game and the three-hint quiz. Another HRT reported that the listening activities in *We Can! 2* such as *Let's Listen* tended to make evident differences between students who could understand them and students who could not. Because of this, the HRT reported that some students did not feel a sense of accomplishment during their English lessons.

4. Discussion

4.1. Response to RQ-1

Regarding RQ-1, the simple main effect tests of the QLEs in both the first and second terms showed significant differences in L2 self-confidence. The results have illustrated that the participants' L2 self-confidence in the four skills increased.

The reasons for the statistical data provided above can be explained through two of the PBA characteristics: purposeful language use and recycling known language (see Section 1.3). The PBA uses the contents of individual tasks related to the project's topic to promote various authentic contexts (Fried-Booth, 1986, 2002). The meetings between the international students and the sixth graders in the first and second terms were good examples of an authentic context in which purposeful language use can occur. As a result, many of the sixth graders could have more easily accomplished language input and output. The other characteristic, recycling known language, could also help the sixth graders develop

their four skills based on Haines (1989). This is because they had the opportunity to repeatedly listen to the same words and expressions related to the topic, such as “We can enjoy... (Unit 2),” and “I want to be ... (Unit 8),” across various authentic contexts produced by sequenced tasks. This makes clear that it is effective to not only repeat vocabulary across listening and speaking activities but, moreover, to appropriately recycle this vocabulary whenever possible.

Consequently, the answer to RQ-1 (“do four-skill English lessons based on the PBA increase the interest and self-confidence of sixth graders in learning English during the transition period?”) was positive.

4.2. Response to RQ-2

With regard to RQ-2, the simple main effect test of the CQSPs in the first term showed significant differences in both factors (i.e., in Already-learned Things and Newly-learned Things). Moreover, the *t*-test of the CQSPs in the second term showed a significant difference between pre- and post-tests. In other words, the tests demonstrated and thus validated the effectiveness of four-skill English lessons based on the PBA for the development of the students’ abilities to speak in English. In addition, the data analysis of the SOQs, such as the students’ senses of accomplishment about their presentations, and of the HOQs, such as the quality of the students’ presentations, confirmed this primary finding.

This interpretation is supported by the four characteristics of the PBA (see Section 1.3). More specifically, the appropriate balance between teachers’ guidance and students’ autonomy helped the students develop L2 self-confidence in speaking performance. Moreover, the PBA offers L2/FL students with opportunities for decision-making and accomplishment (Fried-Booth, 2002). For example, the students in each group chose their favorite place in their city and determined how to conduct research on these places for their presentations. At the same time, the teachers provided appropriate support to the students, such as linguistic advice and encouragement. Purposeful language use allowed the students to communicate with others meaningfully and in an authentic context—even in the classroom (Fried-Booth, 1986, 2002). The comments of the SOQs showed the effectiveness of purposeful language

use. Multi-skill tasks and recycling known language were also discovered in the English lessons based on the PBA. More specifically, multi-skill tasks were able to promote students' individual strong points and increase their L2 self-confidence by generating more equal opportunities for participation in various tasks among students with different skills and language learning styles (Ribé & Vidal, 1993). Based on the work of Haines (1989), recycling known language decreases student anxiety about learning English and increases L2 self-confidence by repeatedly using the vocabulary related to a project topic in various authentic contexts.

It should be considered that the CQSPs were based on the students' self-assessments. However, based on the above, it is reasonable to argue that the PBA helped the students become more self-confident about speaking English. Hence, the answer to RQ-2 ("do four-skill English lessons based on the PBA develop L2 self-confidence of sixth graders in speaking performance during the transition period?") was positive.

4.3. Response to RQ-3

With regard to RQ-3, the results of the AQs in both the first and second terms demonstrated that participants' abilities to understand the letters of the English alphabet and written words in English developed during this study. Accordingly, the answer to RQ-3 ("do four-skill English lessons based on the PBA facilitate the sixth graders' understanding of the English alphabet and the written vocabulary during the transition period?") was also positive. On the other hand, based on the results of the AQs, the participants seemed to take time to connect spelling with meaning, suggesting that they may not have been able to connect the sound and spelling of each word to its meaning within a short time. Thus, continual and individual teaching remains necessary to strengthen student reading and writing.

The findings obtained in this study by a qualitative data analysis of SOQs and HOQs, and a quantitative data analysis of OLEs, CQSPs, and AQs—the affirmative answers to RQs 1 to 3—suggest that English lessons based on the PBA that use *We Can! 2* are effective for teaching the four skills to sixth graders. More specifically, English lessons based on the PBA helped the students during the transition period to

achieve most of the objectives for the four skills, as specified by the new government guidelines. To optimize lessons with *We Can! 2*, as the HRTs advise (see Section 3.5), teachers should articulate their instructions in ways that encourage students to actively address activities in *We Can! 2*. Subsequent research and practice would do well to address this issue.

This study had several limitations. First, as a result of educational and ethical reasons, this study did not involve a control group. Comparing experimental groups with a control group would have enabled this study to offer more insight into the characteristics and effects of the PBA. In addition, because, as noted above, a ceiling effect may have occurred during the first term of the CQSP, it is necessary to improve the CQSPs in subsequent work.

5. Conclusion

This study sought how four-skill English lessons based on the PBA influenced sixth graders during the transition period to the government's new educational guidelines, specifically by using Japan's new standard material, *We Can! 2*. The results yielded positive responses to the study's three RQs, affirming that it is appropriate to adopt the PBA in elementary school English curricula. More specifically, the English lessons based on the PBA conducted in this study developed the participants' L2 self-confidence across all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (and therefore notably developed their L2 self-confidence in speaking performance) as well as their understanding of the letters of the English alphabet and written words in English. Further research on the effectiveness of the integration of the four skills will be discussed in a subsequent study.

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Appendix 1: Memo Sheet for the first-term project

Welcome to Our School! (Presentation Memo Sheet)

Hello, I'm _____

*名前を紹介 (名字+名前) 「こんにちは、私は/ぼくは～です。」

My Birthday is _____

「私の・僕の誕生日は～月～日です。」(日にちは数字でOK) *班全員次々に自己紹介する。

We like Japan. 「私たち・ぼくたちは日本が好きです。」

In spring summer autumn/fall winter, *季節を選び○で囲む。

we can enjoy _____

*その季節で楽しめることを入れる。「春・夏・秋・冬には、～を楽しむことができます。」

And, we like _____

*おすすめの日本食を入れる。「そして、～が好きです。」

It's delicious tasty sweet spicy salty bitter sour.

*味を選び○で囲む。「～の味がします。」

Also, we like _____

*班おすすめの日本の遊びを入れる。「～の遊びも好きです。」

It's fun. 「おもしろいです。」

In our city, we have _____

*おすすめの施設や場所を入れる。「私たちの市には～があります。」(名前も加えるとより良い。)

We can _____

*そこのできること(留学生に知ってほしい情報)を入れる。「そこで～ができます。」

Please try it. 「試してみてください。」

Thank you for listening. 「聞いてくれてありがとう。」

Appendix 2: Memo Sheet for the second-term project

My DreamHello. My Name is _____
_____I'm from _____

*ローマ字で (例: Kodaira.)

My birthday is _____
_____*月名は英語 [1月 January, 2月 February, 3月 March, 4月 April, 5月 May, 6月 June, 7月 July,
8月 August, 9月 September, 10月 October, 11月 November, 12月 December] 日には数字でI want to be a/an _____

*職業を We Can! を見て英語で書く

because I _____

*「～が好きだ (から)」(because I) like ~. *「～ができる (から)」(because I) can ~.

I _____

*理由をもう一つ

*「～が好きだ」(I) like ~. *「～ができる」(I) can ~. *「～をしたい」(I) want to ~.

*「～を練習している」(I) practice~. *「～を勉強している」(I) study~.

Thank you for listening.