

Individually customized lessons and an app to learn pronunciation using colors! I tried the online English training CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE [Editorial Experience]

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In recent years, many online English conversation services and speech recognition apps have appeared, making it easier to practice speaking. However, there may be many people who started because of its simplicity and quit without feeling the effect. This time, *EdTechZine*'s editorial staff tried an online English training service for companies to explore the “stumbling points” of English conversations and ingenuity on the service side. The CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE program I took was a combination of the online English conversation service called NEI for businesses and the pronunciation mobile app BLUE CANOE. It was provided in collaboration by two American startups. How is it different from traditional online English conversation and one-on-one lessons? This is a summary of what I learned after actually experiencing the 8-lesson course for 60 days.



Native English Institute ([NEI](#)), a Seattle-based venture company that provides online English conversation training for businesses, has partnered with [Blue Canoe](#), a pronunciation mobile app, in **Japan since June 2019, to offer CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE.**

First, what kind of online English conversation service is NEI?

What are the lessons of NEI?

NEI has three courses, which can be taken individually.

- **CORE NEI Basic Course \$75 (per month)**
- INTENSIVE NEI (Intensive Course) \$120 (per month)
- ULTRA NEI (Super Intensive Course) \$170 (per month)

The CORE NEI basic course is included in the CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE program. By the way, the 12-month Core NEI combined with the 12-month Blue Canoe app license is \$799. The CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE program that I experienced this time starts at 7000 yen per month (excluding tax), but it depends on the number of lessons and the number of participants (in the case of corporations).

The CORE NEI Basic Course is a 1 ½-hour study once a week.

(1) **1:1** (one-on-one): **One-on-one** online lesson with instructor (30 minutes)

(2) **Replay Challenge**: Review recorded lesson videos, and answer questions from the instructor with videos (30 minutes)

(3) **Extra English**: online homework to be submitted (30 minutes)

What is unique is **that students do not have to choose a curriculum**. The course contents are customized using AI to create NEI online lessons. After counseling by the instructor, individual curriculums are designed by appropriately combining materials from over 1,000 AI materials.

Instructors are native speakers in North America with a TESL (English Teaching Method) qualification.

You can remember pronunciation by color? Pronunciation mobile app BLUE CANOE

BLUE CANOE, which is partnering with NEI to create this offering, is a pronunciation app that uses a speech recognition system.



Blue Canoe screen

The **learning method called Color Vowel** is a **combination of sound and color** so that you can acquire English-specific pronunciation. For example, the sound "é" is in red and pepper. By memorizing this sound as a "RED PEPPER" sound along with a red pepper icon, other "é" can be properly pronounced.

Various exercises are prepared in the app based on this mechanism. You can actually practice speaking words and sentences into the microphone. Voice recognition points out pronunciation errors, so the pronunciation is corrected.

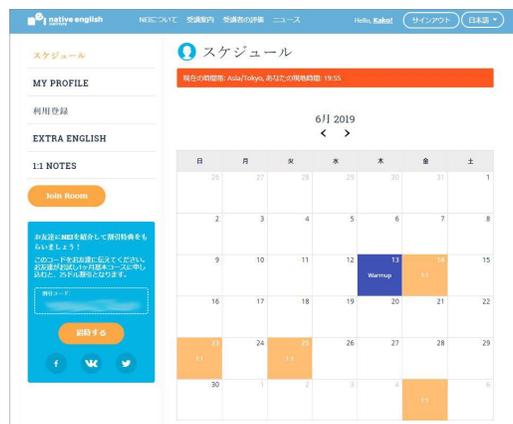
Even if it says "pronunciation correction," the contents are mostly games and quizzes using Color Vowel. For example, in the game Sort It Out where words fall one after another, the stage is cleared by flicking to the correct pronunciation color of the word. Also, in a card game-style exercise called Color It Out, the game is advanced by properly pronouncing words written on the card. Details are explained later in this article.

First counseling

Here is a report that I actually experienced. The service contents and functions of NEI and BLUE CANOE are as of August 2019. Please note that it contains personal feedback for the experience.

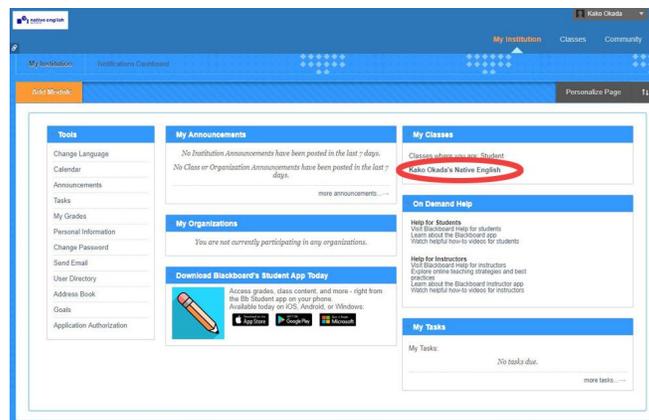
In addition to the CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE program, NEI courses provide counseling before the first lesson, and a curriculum is created based on that.

After logging in with the created account, first make a reservation for the date and time of the counseling (Warmup). You can make a reservation by selecting the desired date and time from [Schedule] in the left column of My Page.



This session is about 30 minutes, as with the 1: 1. For counseling and online lessons, there is no need to launch Skype separately.

Be online by the scheduled time. This was a little complicated, but when you click [Join Room] in the left column, another window opens at <https://nei.blackboard.com>.



Click the [(User Name) 's Native English] link in My Class in the upper right, and a new [Join Room] button will appear. Click this to open the online call screen. Make sure to turn it on by clicking on the icon in the bottom center, since audio and video are initially off.

It is finally counseling. In my case, after a brief introduction of each other, I was asked about my work, where I live, my family and friends. There are questions such as learning English, what you want to achieve with English learning, what effect you will have when you speak English, and there is a sense of motivation by answering in words. did.

In the first lesson and level check of online English conversation, there are often exams that listen to the conversation and answer questions, and there are tasks that express specific themes and give opinions, but **here are all such test things There is no “counseling”** . In English about the student's personality and things that you already have answers to (such as “What is your best friend?” “Which part of your job do you feel rewarding?”) **I had** the impression that it was **time to talk and get to know** the **personality and current situation** .

The next day, “Speaking Assessment and Individual Plan” was uploaded to My Page. An evaluation table that shows my level of English conversation, and information and interests related to interviewed work and hobbies are listed for each item.

13 JUNE 2019 - YOUR SPEAKING ASSESSMENT AND INDIVIDUAL PLAN

Conductor: Susan

Kako Okada
June 13, 2019
Editor of web media, EdTechZine
Ageo, Japan

Pronunciation	0 No English	1/2	3/4	5/6	7/8	9/10
	Speech is often unintelligible	Intelligible in frequent and causes misunderstandings; occasional mistakes related to L1 present	Has a moderate range of pronunciation features. Some intelligibility of specific words and sounds present (2)	Has strong command of most pronunciation features. Intelligible of individual words may prevail	Has a wide range of pronunciation features with some error	Has a wide range of complex grammatical structures with little to no error
Grammar	Can produce only isolated words or unconnected phrases	Can produce basic sentence forms. Frequent errors can lead to misunderstanding	Produces basic sentences with reasonable accuracy. Has a limited range of complex forms with frequent error (2)	Has a wide range of grammatical structures with some error	Has a wide range of grammatical structures with some error	Has a wide range of complex grammatical structures with little to no error
Vocabulary	Can produce only isolated words or unconnected phrases	Can produce some basic vocabulary to talk about personal information and familiar topics	Can discuss most general topics with relative ease. Has strong command of most frequently used vocabulary (3)	Has a wide range of vocabulary with flexibility. Incorporates idiomatic expressions and slang	Has a wide range of vocabulary with flexibility. Incorporates idiomatic expressions and slang	Can discuss and give topic with ease, using relevant vocabulary using natural phrasing
Communicative Fluency	Pauses before most words. Little communication possible	Pauses frequently between phrases. Pauses interrupt flow of communication (3)	Pauses occasionally between ideas or phrases but rapid. Pauses do not interrupt flow of communication	Pauses rarely interfere with the message	Pauses rarely interfere with the message	No pauses that interfere with the message

Score: 21

Pronunciation:
The vowel sound in a *cup* of *mustard* sounds like the vowel sound in *give* *sack*
Voiced and voiceless /th/ *brother* *with*
Occasionally /i/ *like*

Grammar:
Simple past - *Last year, I went to San Francisco. There ~~is~~ was a big event for engineers. I ~~report~~ reported the event and ~~we~~ did some interviews.*
Singular and plural nouns - *We have two ~~kind~~ kinds of web media. / If I travel with many ~~friend~~ friends, I cannot say my own ideas.*

In the table, **four points of “pronunciation”, “grammar”, “vocabulary”, and “fluency of conversation”** are evaluated in **10 levels** . Each evaluation is shown in yellow, and it

shows what level you can do in English conversation. The total score is displayed at the bottom left of the table. In my case, it was 21 points.

Below that, the results of counseling are displayed in four items. "Pronunciation" shows pronunciation habits, and "Grammar" shows grammatical errors that are easy to make mistakes. In "Goals", you will find the English conversation skills you want to achieve after taking this course, and in "Interests" you will find personal information such as where you have been on your hobby trip, as well as where you live and work.

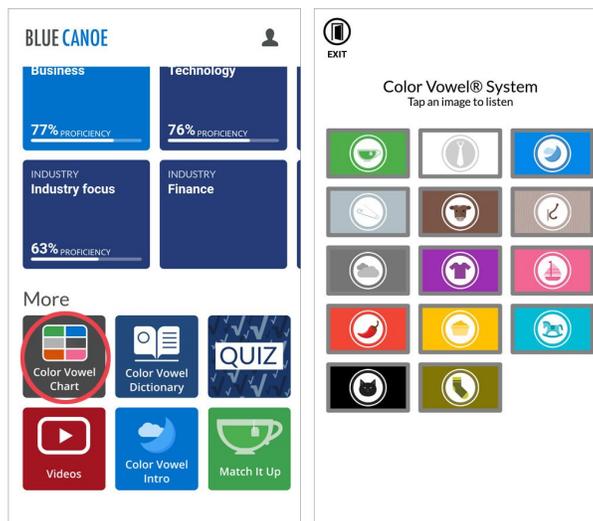
★ Points of counseling ★

- Before the first lesson, there is no counseling to know your personality without any tests or interviews
- Instead of selecting the curriculum yourself, it is automatically customized by counseling
- English speaking ability evaluation table and goals to be achieved are shared as "Speaking Assessment and Individual Plan"

Learn pronunciation in color with Blue Canoe, easy to understand during the lesson

In parallel with the above NEI lessons, we practiced pronunciation using BLUE CANOE. At least 10 minutes a day, we use games and pronunciation practice with BLUE CANOE. There are a lot of activities in the app, such as multiple games, pronunciation exercises for each theme, and quizzes. You may want to talk to your instructor during the 1:1 lesson at NEI.

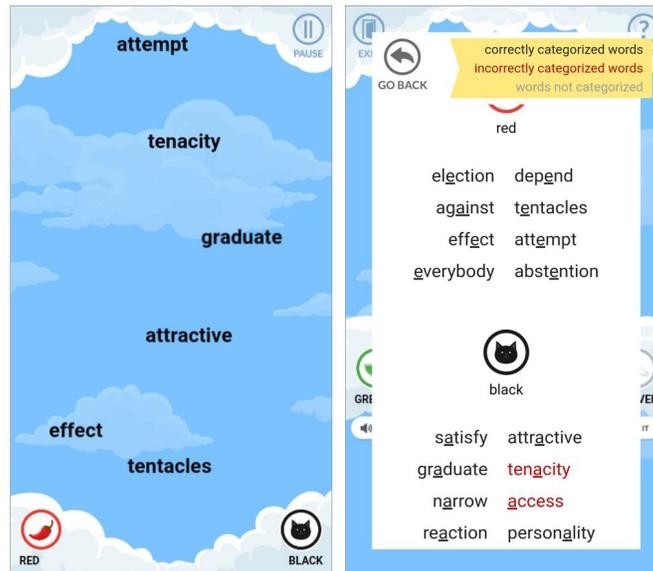
But first, it's a good idea to check the English-specific pronunciation and the Color Vowel chart to connect colors and images.



Tap Color Vowel Chart as shown on the left in the above figure to display the list on the right in the above figure. When you tap each icon, each pronunciation will play. For example, the green cup in the upper left **will tell you the pronunciation of “grí:n tí: í:” and “í:” by connecting them with colors and images.**

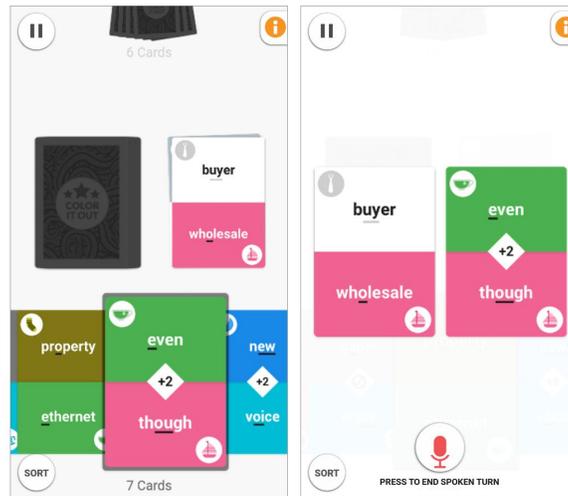
As I get used to this, there are more exercises using the Color Vowel mechanism in NEI lessons, such as “What Color Vowel do you think this word is?” “This word is not this color, but this color.” **When a mistake in pronunciation was pointed out, I knew exactly how to fix it, so I felt a sense of improvement.**

There are two main games, Sort It Out and Color It Out, described above. Sort It Out is a game that sorts falling words between two pronunciations.



As shown on the left in the above figure, as words fall, the user identifies whether they are pronounced “Red Pepper” or “Black Cat.” If you make a mistake, lightning will fall. After finishing, **you can look back at the wrong word.** If you answer more than a certain number, you can move on to the next stage and gradually increase the difficulty.

On the other hand, Color It Out is a card game like UNO that incorporates pronunciation practice.



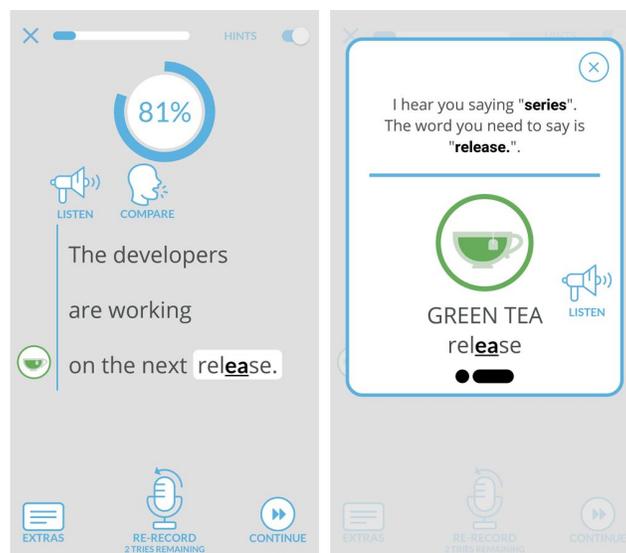
In this game, as shown on the left in the figure above, you try to match the Color of the card on the discard pile with the Color of a dealt card. Then the word written as shown on the right is pronounced into the microphone. The game **cannot proceed if it is not judged that the pronunciation is correct by voice recognition**. If you pronounce it incorrectly, it will tell you with voice and text in the form of “I heard Black Cat, but this is a “Silver Pin” word.

Color It Out can only be done in a quiet environment, but Sort It Out is easy to use because it can be tackled relatively anywhere in the train. Both will display “You met your daily play goal!” when you reach the goal of 10 minutes play time per day. Even when it reaches half, the following display will appear.



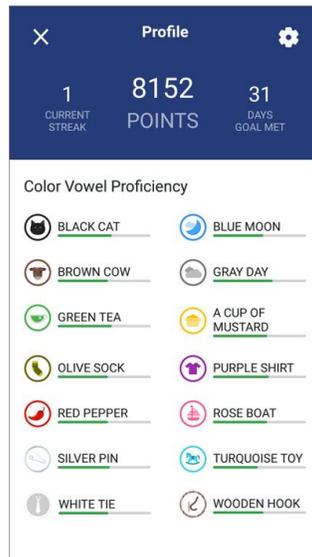
However, according to the person in charge of the service, since there are problems such as not being displayed unless you play continuously, how to show how much you did for the target number of hours is being repeated in trial and error, is what they said.

In the Sentences activity, you can practice pronunciation of example sentences for various industries and occupations, such as "Business," "Technology" and "Finance." Color Vowel is displayed at the point of pronunciation, and it judges how much you can pronounce correctly by voice recognition. **For a wrong pronunciation, it points out how it is wrong as shown below.**



There were many other features, but I haven't completed it yet. In Quiz, various questions related to pronunciation will be asked, and you will be able to identify correct pronunciations and select the wrong word and pronunciation color combination. In Color Vowel Dictionary, you can search for the word you care about and check the Color Vowel of the pronunciation of that word.

In addition, **the proficiency level of my pronunciation is graphed in “Color Vowel Proficiency.”** The following is displayed for each Color Vowel.



★ BLUE CANOE points ★

- You can learn pronunciation with colors and icons, so pronunciation guidance is easy to understand during lessons
- Daily exercises are not a pain since they are games
- Because of its multiple functions, it is difficult to decide which one to work on. Consult with your instructor on how to use it effectively
- I can visualize my weak pronunciation on a graph

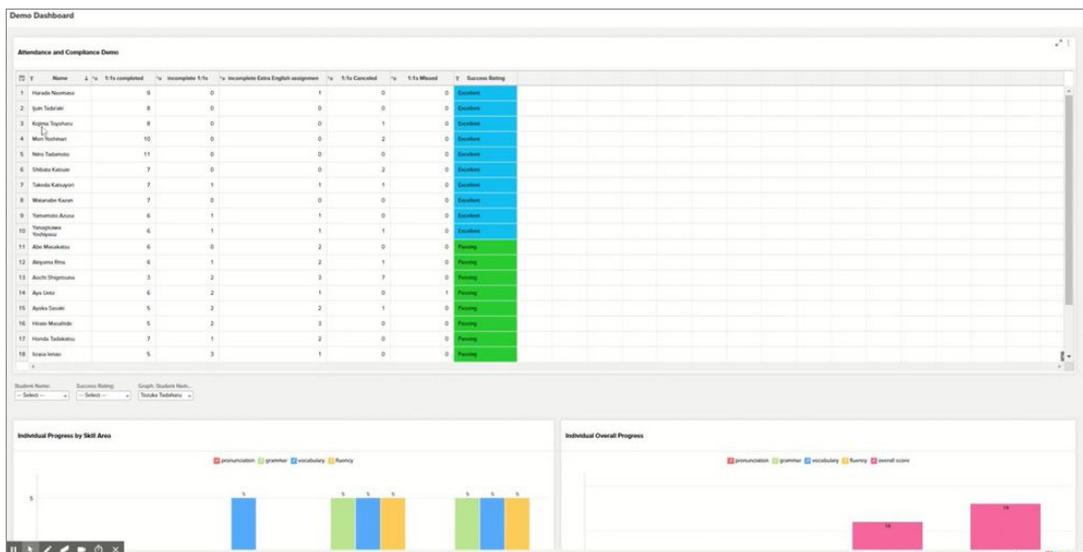
Summary

This time, I experienced all 8 plans for 60 days. After completing 24 lessons, you will receive “Progress Assessments” that show how much you have improved your English from the beginning.



Image of “Progress Assessment”

When implemented in a company, managers and training staff can understand the learning status of employees taking the course. It seems that you can check the following management screen as an administrator.



Management screen image

The features, tricks, and service ideas that I felt in the CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE program are as follows.

★ “CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE” points ★

(1) Curriculum

Since the curriculum is tailored to the personality of the students, you can enjoy a close connection with a coaching English learning program. I think it is suitable for those who were not good at organizing university classes by themselves.

If you want to know and prepare all the curriculum, you may be a little confused. However, since the goals are visualized and “Progress Assessments” that show the amount of growth depending on the course are given, it seems you cannot do fewer lessons and grasp the whole picture.

(2) Homework (review)

The two types of homework, Replay Challenge and Extra English, seem to be heavy at first glance, but I didn't feel burdened because there was no preparation.

There is a deadline rather than it being optional, and the point that it must be submitted may be the point where new learning is not appropriate. The impression is that it is suitable for those who are not good at reviewing and analyzing lessons on their own, and who are good at tackling the problems under a deadline.

(3) Improve pronunciation with BLUE CANOE

Using the Color Vowel mechanism as well as the ability to practice pronunciation in the app itself with fun and abundant functions, I felt the guidance easy to understand during NEI's online lessons.

I was at a loss as to which exercise I should work on to overcome my weak points, but it seems to be a good idea to consult during a 1: 1 lesson. Also, I thought it would be more motivating if there was a mechanism for understanding my current level, but let's expect improvement because it is improving, as seen in the display for how much you have achieved your daily goal.

As you can see from the above points, CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE is a unique curriculum, two types of balanced homework, and pronunciation exercises using Color Vowel. When choosing an online lesson, try to find one that fits your learning habits.

This is the CORE NEI + BLUE CANOE experience report by the editorial staff.