



Rethinking Dictogloss: A Practitioner's Reflection on Students' Perceptions of Cognitive Engagement

Hiroko NAKAGAWA

Mejiro University, Faculty of Foreign Language Studies,
Department of English Language Studies

FUTUREd, Volume 1, Issue 2 (2026)

Pages: 174 - 181

ISSN: 2760-8263 (print)

ISSN: 2760-8271 (online)

Keywords:

dictogloss, cognition, learner
perception, cooperative learning,
future language education

Corresponding author:

Hiroko Nakagawa

h.nakagawa@mejiro.ac.jp

Abstract: English education in EFL classrooms is increasingly expected to become more communicative and student-centered. This paper explores dictogloss as a potential pedagogy for future language education in secondary schools. Dictogloss is a collaborative listening-and-reconstruction task in which learners work in small groups to reconstruct the meaning of a text using their own linguistic resources (Wajnryb, 1990). The study examines Japanese 12th graders' responses to an open-ended questionnaire asking whether they believed that regular use of dictogloss from the beginning of high school might have influenced their English proficiency. The analysis focuses particularly on the cognitive benefits perceived by the students. Their responses suggested potential benefits related to summarizing key information, taking notes, identifying main ideas, noticing errors, constructing sentences, making inferences from limited information, and coping with unfamiliar texts. The discussion draws on Yoshida's (2005) metaphors of the "fish bowl" and the "open seas," together with Maeda's view of dictogloss as an intermediate pedagogical environment between controlled classroom practice and authentic communication. Although the findings represent students' perceptions rather than measured long-term effects, they suggest that dictogloss may provide cognitively and collaboratively engaging learning experiences. The paper concludes that, although dictogloss is not a new technique, it deserves renewed attention as a potential approach to revitalizing EFL classrooms and preparing learners for more authentic communication.



1. INTRODUCTION

In Japan, English is one of the mandatory school subjects studied by all students from 5th through 12th grade. In the English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) environment, the overall objective of foreign language education is to develop students' communicative competencies through language

activities including five English domains (MEXT, 2018). However, many teachers in Japan still conduct teacher-centered lessons in a grammar translation teaching style, using whole-class choral activities to translate words and phrases (Lawrence, 2025). Based on the author's teaching experience, the most important competencies that future language education should focus on are the

development of learners' cognitive skills, along with the development of the integrated four basic English skills, vocabulary, and communicative skills, i.e., to notice problems, think critically, and find solutions.

Dictogloss is not new, yet it does not seem to have reached classrooms and is still at an experimental stage in Japanese high school contexts. The author believes that dictogloss may help future generations to acquire cognitive skills, such as understanding main ideas and summarizing a longer text, making inferences, taking notes by listening and recognizing keywords, noticing their own grammatical mistakes through activities with their peers, and finding solutions with their limited information and knowledge to construct English sentences by cooperating with the other group members. In this paper, I would like to investigate how Japanese high school students perceived the cognitive benefits of long-term exposure to dictogloss.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Dictogloss

Dictogloss was originally introduced by Wajnryb (1990) as a method to teach grammar. Wajnryb (1990) defines dictogloss as follows:

In dictogloss a short text is read at normal speed to a class of learners who jot down familiar words as they listen. At the end of the dictation stage, most learners hear only a small number of isolated words (or fragments) which together make up a very incohesive, 'battered text.' In small groups, the students then pool their resources to reconstruct their version of the original text. In the final stage the various versions that the students have produced are subjected to close analysis and comparison (Wajnryb, 1990, pp. 5–6).

While overseas researchers have proven the effectiveness of dictogloss, in Japan, Maeda (2008, 2015, 2021) portrays dictogloss not only as a skill-integrating classroom task but also as a cognitively engaging and instructionally flexible framework. Many overseas researchers have proven the effectiveness of dictogloss in developing vocabulary (MacKenzie, 2013), writing (Sugiarti,

2012; Aryuni et al., 2021), listening (Prince, 2013; Asrobi and Amni, 2017), but not much has been done regarding cognitive development by dictogloss activities.

2.2. Dictogloss and Cognition

Dictogloss is assumed to be a cognitively challenging activity for Japanese high school students who are normally passive and receptive in teacher-centered language classes.

Swain (1985) proposed the Output Hypothesis, arguing that language production plays an active role in second language learning. In a dictogloss activity, students attempt to express their intended meanings through writing. Swain (2001) further developed the Output Hypothesis by emphasizing the role of collaborative tasks in language learning. Students participate in cooperative learning where they are encouraged to speak up, discuss, think, and collaborate to find solutions together to reach a common goal. They may learn from gaps between what they want to express and what they can express.

Schmidt (1990) argues that learners must consciously notice linguistic features, such as grammatical structures, vocabulary, or pronunciation, for them to be fully processed. Long (1991) introduced the Focus on Form approach in second language acquisition as part of task-based and communicative language teaching. Both Schmidt and Long place a high value on learning in which grammar is not always directly taught but is noticed by the learner through a task or an activity.

From the perspective of Processability Theory, learners cannot necessarily process or produce every grammatical structure simply because it is presented in the input. Pienemann (1998) argues that learners can acquire only those linguistic forms that they are able to process at a given stage of development. In dictogloss, this suggests that learners reconstruct texts using linguistic forms that they can process at their current stage of development.

Metacognitive processes that may take place during the negotiation and reconstruction stages of

dictogloss include inferencing, summarizing, monitoring, and problem solving.

These theoretical perspectives are used in this paper as lenses for interpreting students' perceptions rather than as frameworks to be empirically tested.

2.3. Collaborative Cognition

It is important to mention that dictogloss is also a cognitive process that occurs through collaborative interaction. Johnson et al. (2009) emphasize important principles of cooperative learning, including positive interdependence, individual accountability, and face-to-face promotive interaction, in which group members support one another's learning by explaining, discussing, teaching, and sharing ideas. Kagan (2013) also proposes structured cooperative learning activities designed to increase active student participation.

In dictogloss, these principles can be applied during the reconstruction stage when students share information, discuss possible answers, and work together toward the common goal of reconstructing the text.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

The research took place in 2025 with students at a Tokyo metropolitan public high school in an urban area of Tokyo. In this research, seventy-two 12th graders aged 17-18 took part (N=72). 49 males and 23 females were surveyed. Since they happened to be on the science track, there were twice as many male students as female students, but this paper is not concerned with gender differences but with the students' general perceptions of their cognitive developments through dictogloss.

3.2. Dictogloss Procedure

The dictogloss experiment was conducted for 50 minutes in a regular classroom according to the procedure and teacher's tasks as follows:

1. Group students into groups of four and have them seated accordingly.
2. Hand out the prepared visual aids (one sheet per group).

3. Hand out *Worksheet 1* to each student for individual notes. See APPENDICES.

4. Have students chat about the topic within their groups while looking at the picture.

5. Teach new words by going through the vocabulary list on *Worksheet 1*.

6. Prepare students for the dictogloss activity.

7. Read the passage in English for the first time while students just listen.

8. Read the passage in English for the second time while students take notes of key words on *Worksheet 1*.

9. Have students individually try to construct sentences using their notes.

10. Hand out *Worksheet 2* for groupwork for reconstruction (one sheet per group). See APPENDICES.

11. Give students 15 minutes to work together in groups to reconstruct the original sentences on *Worksheet 2*. They may create their own sentences based on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

12. Read the same passage one more time while students listen for any parts they could not catch or figure out.

13. Give students additional time to discuss and finalize their reconstructed sentences.

14. Have one member from each group write one sentence on the blackboard.

15. Check the sentences on the blackboard, go through each one, and provide feedback on their reconstructions.

16. Collect *Worksheet 1* and *Worksheet 2*.

17. Following the activity, students completed the questionnaire.

3.3. Open-ended Questionnaire

There were 7 open-ended questions as well as 17 six-Likert scale ones. In this paper, nevertheless, only Open-ended Question 20 is specifically explored and discussed. Question 20 is in a subjunctive form:

If you had continued with this activity regularly from the first year of senior high school (=the 10th grade), do you think it would have made a difference on your English proficiency now? Write anything, such as ‘No, it wouldn’t have,’ ‘In what sense you think it would have made a difference,’ etc.

The number of those students who answered that this activity would have made a difference was counted. As high as 76.4% of the participants gave positive feedback, while 23.6% were skeptical about the effect.

To explore participants’ perceptions of the effects of the dictogloss activity in greater depth, the open-ended responses to Open-ended Question 20 were coded and grouped into seven major categories, the percentages of which are presented in Figure 1.

As this question asked students to imagine a hypothetical situation, their responses represent retrospective perceptions rather than observed long-term effects.

3.4. Coding Procedure

To explore participants’ perceptions of the effects of the dictogloss activity in greater depth, the open-ended responses to Question 20 were coded and grouped into seven major categories. The responses were first read carefully, and recurring themes were identified inductively from the students’ responses rather than defined in advance. Each response was assigned to only one of the seven major categories. Each of these 13 responses was assigned to only one of the four cognitive categories. Responses related to cognition were then further classified into four categories: summarizing skills, taking notes and identifying main ideas, noticing errors and finding solutions, and coping with unfamiliar texts or making inferences.

The coding was conducted by the author. No second independent coder was used, and therefore inter-rater reliability was not calculated. This is acknowledged as a limitation of the present study.

The numerical results reported in this paper are descriptive frequencies and percentages based on

the coded responses. No inferential statistical analyses were conducted.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical regulations of Bunkyo Gakuin University. Because the participants included minors, the required consent procedures, including consent from their parents or guardians, were completed before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and the purpose of the research and the handling of personal information were explained in advance. All data were handled so that individual participants could not be identified, and participation or non-participation did not affect students’ academic evaluation.

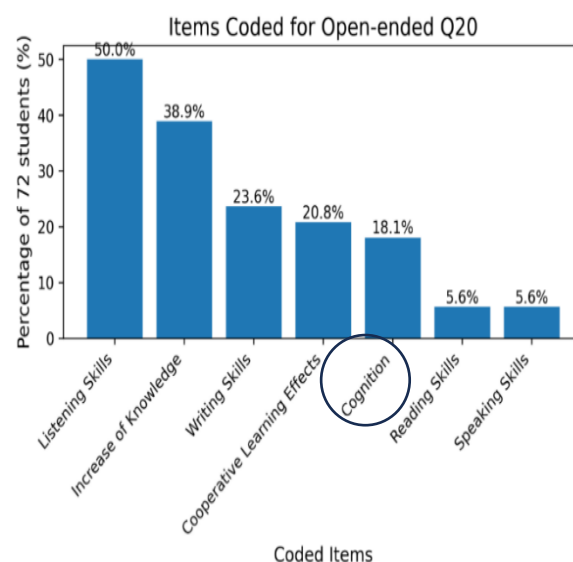


Figure 1 - Items Coded for Open-ended Question 20 (N=72)

4. RESULTS

4.1. Perceived Effects on Cognition

Thirteen respondents (18.1%) described cognitive benefits (See Figure 1 and Table 1). These included summarizing skills (5.6%), taking notes and identifying main ideas (5.6%), noticing errors and finding solutions (4.2%), and coping with unfamiliar texts or making inferences (2.8%). (Table 1) These comments suggest that students perceived potential benefits related to higher-level cognitive processes such as analysis, inference, and metacognitive awareness. Students’ recognition of noticing and problem-solving further suggests the perceived potential of the task

to support deeper cognitive processing.

Table 1 - Cognitive items mentioned by students, coded 12) – 15)

Coded Items	Number	%
15) Summarizing skills	4	5.6
14) Taking notes / Identifying main ideas	4	5.6
12) Noticing errors / Finding solutions	3	4.2
13) Coping with unfamiliar texts / Making inferences	2	2.8
Total number of students:	13	18.1

The following student comments were originally written in Japanese and were translated into English by the author.

4.2. Summarizing skills

One student writes that he could have acquired the ability to recognize the important parts and summarize the text. Another student writes that he could have listened while being aware of the main ideas and the flow of the whole story. For example, one student wrote, “I think I would have developed my listening and summarizing skills. The ability to explain the whole content in general terms.”

This is why Wajnryb (1990) states the name dictogloss comes from traditional dictation, but the procedure and objectives are different. There is much cognitive work required in listening for key words and reconstructing sentences.

4.3. Notetaking

Four students mentioned the potential of dictogloss in developing their note-taking skill itself. They can develop their concentration to listen for key words and write them down quickly through repeated practice. For example, one student wrote, “I think my listening skills would have been better than now. I think I would have developed the ability to take notes on important points.”

Even in this seemingly simple note-taking task, cognitive engagement in sorting out keywords from a lot of detailed information is required.

4.4. Noticing Errors / Finding Solutions

One student wrote, “Since everyone has different

English abilities, ways of thinking, and ways of expressing things, I could learn various ways of expressions and also notice my own mistakes.” One other student says he could notice his weaknesses to be enhanced in English learning.

4.5. Coping with Unfamiliar Texts and inference

One student comments, “In our English Communication classes at school, we only read and comprehended textbook passages, but I thought that regularly working with unfamiliar texts read by the teacher would help me become better prepared for entrance examinations.” In other words, the student would be able to infer while listening or reading even with limited information or poor prior knowledge.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Dictogloss as a Potential Cognitive Apprenticeship

Based on the analysis of the survey’s Open-ended Question 20 as well as the review of previous research, dictogloss may be regarded as a potential cognitive apprenticeship for Japanese high school EFL learners. Through the carefully prepared materials and worksheets and well-considered procedure suitable for the level of the target learners, dictogloss can provide learners with such opportunities for highly cognitive “man-made” language experiences provided by the teacher.

Reconstruction work in dictogloss is negotiation among the group members. Naturally, it means a lot of cognitive efforts in filling in the parts of the sentence they did not understand by listening. With their limited knowledge and information, students are supposed to create their own sentences, each sentence with a subject and a verb.

5.2. Goldfish Bowl and Open Seas

In an EFL environment such as Japan, there are no opportunities for students, except for some contact with ALTs at school, to work with native speakers or international students to practice English. It is difficult to create truly authentic communicative situations for them. While teachers are supposed to guide students into the “open seas” of authentic

communication, students are often confined to a “fishbowl” of limited classroom exercises (Yoshida, 2005).

5.3. Dictogloss as a Swimming Pool

In this sense dictogloss can serve as an intermediate “swimming pool,” enabling learners to engage in structured yet meaningful pseudo-communication situated between controlled practice and authentic interaction (Maeda, 2021). With appropriate scaffolding, students can participate with reduced anxiety and actively engage in collaborative efforts through cooperative learning.

5.4. Implications for Future Language Education

What is the ideal future language education? In the era of AI, it will be more important that human thinking not be replaced by AI. For us foreign language teachers to fully prepare young students to survive in the future, the skills and qualities required are surely communicative skills, critical thinking skills, and social skills to cooperate with others and function in society. Although dictogloss itself is not new, it may hold the key to the renewal and activation of EFL classrooms for the globalized world.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Students’ Perceptions of the Cognitive Value of Dictogloss

For the survey, many responses to Question 20 mentioned the perceived effectiveness of dictogloss to help develop their listening and writing, vocabulary, and grammar. However, one particularly noteworthy finding was that quite a few respondents mentioned dictogloss potential to help develop their skills and qualities that they are going to need to meet their future challenges. Their responses suggested that they perceived the possibility of developing metacognitive skills. They perceived that they could develop the skills to think individually and notice, negotiate and think collaboratively, extract information, make inferences, cope with unfamiliar information, summarize, solve problems to reconstruct, create, and express.

6.2. Limitations

As Question 20 is just a small part of the questionnaire conducted this time, and as the number of coded responses was limited, for example, 2 students (2.8%) for inferencing and 4 students (5.6%) for summarizing skills, none of these findings can be statistically generalized. However, the voices of students who verbally expressed the perceived effectiveness of dictogloss from a metacognitive perspective cannot be overlooked. Therefore, these responses deserved a closer look and analysis.

Another limitation is that the coding was conducted by the author alone. Since no second coder was involved, inter-rater reliability could not be calculated. In addition, Question 20 asked students to imagine the possible effects of regular use of dictogloss from the first year of high school. Therefore, the responses represent students’ perceptions of possible long-term effects rather than measured longitudinal outcomes.

For further research, a larger-scale survey focusing specifically on the metacognitive aspects of dictogloss should be conducted, preferably with multiple coders and additional measures of cognitive or metacognitive development, as well as longitudinal or experimental research designs.

6.3. Teaching Implications

Despite these pedagogical, practical, and theoretical advantages, dictogloss is not yet widely known or systematically used in Japanese classrooms. Therefore, the author would strongly like to recommend that dictogloss be introduced to a wider community of middle-school English teachers in Japan as a future method because it may provide learners with opportunities to develop not only language skills, but also cognitive and collaborative competencies required for authentic communication.

6.4. Final Remarks

Although dictogloss itself is not a new teaching technique, this study suggests that it deserves renewed attention from the perspective of future language education. By integrating listening, reconstruction, collaboration, and cognitive

engagement, dictogloss may serve as a bridge between traditional EFL instruction and more authentic communication-oriented learning.

Groupwork Photo of Reconstruction Groupwork



AUTHOR'S NOTE

The dictogloss activity and questionnaire were originally conducted in 2025 as part of the author's master's thesis research at Bunkyo Gakuin University. The present paper re-examines a specific aspect of those data, i.e., the students' perceptions of the potential cognitive and metacognitive value of dictogloss, which was not examined in the original thesis.

The original data collection was conducted in accordance with the university's ethical requirements. Required informed consent procedures were completed before data collection, including the appropriate consent procedures for participants who were minors. Participation was voluntary, personal information was protected, and the data presented in this paper do not identify individual participants.

Microsoft Excel was used only to calculate descriptive frequencies and percentages. No inferential statistical analyses were conducted.

AI-based tools were used only for limited language editing and proofreading. All analyses, interpretations, conclusions, and any remaining errors are solely the responsibility of the author.

REFERENCES

Ariyuni, D. E., Waris, A., & Jamiluddin, J. (2021). The use of dictogloss technique to improve students' writing skill. *E-Journal of ELTS*

(*English Language Teaching Society*), 9(1), 32–41.
<https://doi.org/10.22487/elts.v9i1.1836>

Asrobi, M., & Amni, K. (2017). The use of dictogloss in teaching listening comprehension for EFL learners. *Voices of English Language Education Society*, 1(1), 61–70.
<https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v1i1.394>

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Holubec, E. J. (2009). *Circles of learning: Cooperation in the classroom* (6th ed.). Interaction Book Company.

Kagan, S. (2013). *Kagan cooperative learning structures*. Kagan Publishing.

Lawrence, L. (2025). Yakudoku today: Investigating the use of yakudoku in Japanese secondary schools using the COLT observation scheme. *Sougou Bunka Kenkyuu*, 30(2–3), 1–19. https://www.bus.nihon-u.ac.jp/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/30_LukeLawrence.pdf

Long, M. H. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K. de Bot, R. Ginsberg, & C. Kramsch (Eds.), *Foreign language research in cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 39–52). John Benjamins.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/sibil.2.07lon>

MacKenzie, A. (2013). Dictogloss tasks to promote cooperative learning and vocabulary acquisition. *Journal of Business Administration*, 81, 135–143.
<https://toyo.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/4585>

Maeda, M. (2008). Dikutogurosu wo mochiita risuningu noryoku wo nobasu shido: Ginokan no togo wo shiya ni irete [Improving listening ability through dictogloss: Focusing on the integration of language skills]. *STEP Bulletin*, 20, 149–165.
https://www.eiken.or.jp/center_for_research/pdf/bulletin/vol20/vol_20_p149-p165.pdf

Maeda, M. (2015). Natural approach or artificial approach? *Forum of Language Instructors*, 9, 13–32. <https://kanazawa-u.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/30167>

Maeda, M. (2018). *Dikutogurosu wo toriireta eigoryoku wo nobasu gakushuho shidoho* [Learning and teaching method by dictogloss to improve EFL learners' English ability].

Kaitakusha.

Maeda, M. (2021). Instruction through dictogloss. *Kanazawa Seiryō University Bulletin of the Humanities*, 5(1), 1–8. https://www.seiryō-u.ac.jp/u/research/gakkai/ronbunlib/humanities_ronsyo_pdf/No5_1/01_maeda.pdf

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2018). *Koto gakko gakushu shido yoryo dai 2-sho dai 8-setsu gaikokugo* [The Course of Study for senior high schools, Chapter 2, Section 8: Foreign languages]. https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/1417513.htm

Pienemann, M. (1998). *Language processing and second language development: Processability theory*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sibil.15>

Prince, P. (2013). Listening, remembering, writing: Exploring the dictogloss task. *Language Teaching Research*, 17(4), 486–500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813494123>

Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129–158. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/11.2.129>

Sugiarti. (2012). *Improving the learners' writing skill through dictogloss: A classroom action research at grade IX I of SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran in the academic year 2011–2012* [Master's thesis, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta]. Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta Institutional Repository. <https://eprints.ums.ac.id/20823/>

Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 235–253). Newbury House.

Swain, M. (2001). Integrating language and content teaching through collaborative tasks. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58(1), 44–63. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.58.1.44>

Wajnryb, R. (1990). *Grammar dictation*. Oxford University Press.

Yoshida, K. (2005). The fish bowl, open seas, and international English. In *KOTESOL Proceedings 2004: Expanding horizons: Techniques and technology in ELT* (pp. 11–

20). Korea TESOL.

https://mail.koreatesol.org/sites/default/files/pdf_publications/KOTESOL-Proceeds2004web.pdf

APPENDICES

Worksheet 1 – Sample of Notetaking

Step 1 Why are some people bitten by mosquitoes more often than others?

Step 2 Listen to the key words, pronounce and memorize them!

addition	付加, 追加	
attract	～を引きつける	
bacteria	バクテリア, 細菌	
biological	(物) 生物学的な	
bite	～を噛む	
blood type	血液型	
breathe	息を吸う	take a breath – 息をいだけ
CO ₂	二酸化炭素 (Carbon Dioxide)	
certain	(部) 特定の	
chemicals	化学物質	
factors	要素	
generally	一般的に	
land	陸地	
few	(物) より少ない	little-less-least
mosquitoes	蚊たち	
nearly	ほとんど	
regardless of	～とは関係なく	
release	～を放す, ～を放つ	
dengue	デング熱	
Zika	ジカ熱	

Step 3 1 回メモを取らずに書く, 2 回目に関き取ったワードなどを、できるだけたくさんメモしなさい。

1	blood type can also be factor.
2	be sandy ground certain blood type
3	in said land people type ② mu croc time (A)
4	B > A B < O
5	in nation 25% dengue while 30% do not
6	has are more do less regardless of blood type attractive

Step 4 Use your memos and try to reconstruct the sentences on your own. (自分ひとりで)

Worksheet 2 – Sample of Reconstruction

<Worksheet 2>

Why do mosquitoes like you?

Step 5 Reconstruct sentences with your group members!

Work together to reconstruct (再構築する) the sentences. Think about the content (内容) and grammar (文法).

※ 語彙は全員で覚えておいて、みんな内容に決まらなくてもいいから、S, V を使って自分たちで文を作ってください。

Decide the roles in your group! Write the nicknames.

1. Leader () 2. Secretary () 3. Facilitator () 4. Timekeeper ()

3 & 4 can be done by one member.

1.	Some people attract mosquitoes.
	It is said that there are several factors.
2.	One factor is color.
	Mosquitoes don't like black color.
3.	Another factor is temperature.
	Mosquitoes like high body temperature.
4.	Next, like carbon dioxide.
	Because, it is attracted mosquitoes.
5.	In addition, mosquitoes like bacteria.
6.	Finally, people have 4 blood types.
	Blood type O people is most often bitten by mosquitoes another blood types people.
7.	After all, mosquitoes really dease.