A Decade of the SOCEC Program:

Lessons Taught, Lessons Learned

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Abstract

The following paper presents information about Meiji University's
School of Commerce English Concentration (SOCEC) Program, which
officially accepted students between the 2008 and 2016 academic school
years. The paper aims to provide readers, particularly stakeholders and
those involved to varying degrees in the program, with information on
five overarching areas related to the program, namely, the rationale for
establishing the program, program requirements and entry back-
ground, information regarding the motivation and study technique
preferences of the incoming freshmen program participants, the reasons
for the program's eventual termination, and the program's replacement.
It is hoped that the information found in this paper will aid others inter-
ested in the creation, implementation, or continuation of courses of
study similar to that of the SOCEC Program.

Rationale for the Program

The School of Commerce English Concentration (SOCEC) Program,
which accepted incoming students between the 2008 and 2016 academic
school years, was a short-lived program with several overarching goals
attached to it. As officially stated in various locations (e.g., the School
of Commerce's pamphlets and webpage), the SOCEC Program was
meant to be a comprehensive four-year program for students who, in
the main, were expected to (a) possess a high level of English profi-
ciency prior to university matriculation, (b) exhibit motivation to fur-
ther improve their English abilities (especially as they related to

commerce), and (c) desire to study abroad while enrolled at Meiji University. While the program was meant to serve the needs of School of Commerce students as a whole, two specific groups of students were expected to make up the largest portion of students entering the program: (1) returnee students, including students who had spent sufficient time abroad and thus had become adept at understanding and using English grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, as well as Western cultural nuances, and (2) non-returnee students who had made remarkable progress in their English language learning endeavors and who would benefit greatly from a course of study that would challenge and expand their English abilities.

There were multiple reasons behind the construction and implementation of this competitive multi-year program meant for a limited number of English-proficient and motivated students, but the one to be discussed here is fundamentally the most salient: to provide any incoming School of Commerce student interested in and capable of entering the program the opportunity to improve their English abilities by concentrated study in commerce- and business-related topics through the medium of English. As was related to the author of the present article a decade ago by the creator and first coordinator of the SOCEC Program, Professor Emeritus James Bowers, the School of Commerce sees many English-proficient and motivated freshmen enter the university every year, but for such students, sometimes even the Advanced English classes are insufficient to adequately challenge such students and thus only minimally expand their English language abilities. Classes on any subject that are too easy will fail to make a difference to students, as those students will likely become bored, lose interest, and ultimately not reach their full potential. It was therefore determined by Professor Emeritus Bowers and others (at a time prior to the author joining Meiji University) that a special program should be devised and implemented, one that would meet the language learning needs and interests of students capable and willing to expand their foreign language learning horizons.

The SOCEC Program began with a planning stage that considered,

among other things, needs analyses for program construction and related program services (see Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, for a comprehensive background to program needs assessment and evaluation). The program was initiated when all program details were finalized. Entry into the SOCEC Program was by default limited to 20 students each year. The students who were thought to be interested in and consequently enter the program were predicted to be unique in the School of Commerce, that is, it was believed that they would already be highly proficient in English and be keen to learn English through twice-weekly Izumi campus English classes that aimed to teach domain-specific commerce- and business-related material.

It is of note that some precursor SOCEC classes were begun prior to the 2008 academic school year. It is the understanding of the author that these pre-SOCEC classes were created to multiple ends but that they were in the main meant to gauge student interest and to assess their abilities to excel in such a specific program (see Johns, 2006, for more regarding the pedagogy behind the teaching of languages for specific purposes). These pre-SOCEC classes indicated that such target students (a) populated incoming School of Commerce freshmen classes, (b) were indeed interested in SOCEC Program entry, (c) would attempt to enter such a program if given the opportunity, and (d) would successfully make progress in the program.

Background to the SOCEC Program

The first two years of the SOCEC Program were conducted at Meiji University's Izumi campus. During these two years students who were able to enter the program were required to enroll in a number of English classes, the main ones being the SOCEC (集中上級英語) classes for first- and second-year students. These twice-weekly classes were taught by native English instructors (one taught the freshman classes, one taught the sophomore classes) and were restricted to SOCEC Program students only. Credits from other Izumi campus classes could be applied to SOCEC Program completion requirements (e.g., from Ad-

vanced English, Essentials of Commerce A and B, and Meiji Language Program classes). In their junior and senior years at Meiji University's Surugadai campus, students could finish accumulating their required 30 program credits by taking Progressive English, Business English, or Verbal Business English A and B classes. Students who met all the program's requirements were granted a Certificate of Completion. If students could provide proof that they had obtained a TOEFL-iBT score of 100 or more or a TOEIC score of 874 or more they were awarded a Certificate of Completion with distinction.

SOCEC Program entry

SOCEC Program entry was restricted to incoming freshmen only. Thus, students had to decide prior to registering for their first semester/year of classes whether or not to attempt to enter the program. As such, several days prior to the required freshmen orientation, incoming freshmen were provided with a SOCEC Guidance explanation session where the SOCEC teachers and the head of the English department would explain the purpose of and the background to the program to interested students. Session attendees were given three handouts: an attendance card, a sheet explaining the class and credit requirements for SOCEC Program completion, and a SOCEC Entry Sheet (explained below).

As previously mentioned, as a general rule only 20 students were accepted into the program each year. To reach this number, program entry was determined by gathering and weighing three sets of criteria:

1. Demonstrable English proficiency, particularly through high TOEIC scores

In fact, as all incoming School of Commerce freshmen are required to take the TOEIC test on campus prior to the start of spring (i.e., first) semester classes, SOCEC instructors would know which students cleared the expected score of 650 required of SOCEC Program hopefuls. As was often the case, many students who wanted to enter the SOCEC Program had already taken the TOEIC test previously and thus knew

that they had already cleared this criterion.

2. Entry Sheet completion

The SOCEC Entry Sheet, which students were required to submit completed on SOCEC entry test day, served several functions. First, it provided SOCEC teachers with background information on the prospective students (e.g., pre-Meiji-entry TOEIC or TOEFL scores), their past travel or living abroad experiences, and their plans regarding their future use of English after graduation. Second, it provided the students with a checklist explaining the type of student the SOCEC Program was meant for (e.g., students already highly proficient in English and motivated to stay in the program throughout their Meiji University experience). The checklist also had the function of making it absolutely clear to program hopefuls what was expected and required of incoming SOCEC students. It was therefore expected that the clearly less proficient and less motivated students, upon reading the checklist, would self-select out of attempting to enter the program.

3. The taking of an entry test

The SOCEC entry test was comprised of a reading comprehension section, a video comprehension section, and a free response writing section. The first two (graded) sections dealt with commerce and business situations and were meant to assess students' English reading and listening skills, respectively. The final section asked questions whereby program hopefuls would relate their understanding of the SOCEC Program as a whole (as explained in the Guidance session and via the Entry Sheet) and explain something about who they are as individuals (e.g., their experiences, their plans for the future). This final section was rated by the two native English-speaking SOCEC instructors on a predetermined rubric.

SOCEC Student Details

This section provides some background information about the

students who were initially interested in and who eventually succeeded in joining the program, with greater attention given to the latter. Regarding the former, every year saw more than 100 students voluntarily attend the SOCEC Guidance explanation sessions. Between 60 and 90 of these students expressed interest in SOCEC Program entry by indicating as much on their SOCEC Guidance attendance cards, with between 40 and 60 of these students sitting for the SOCEC entry test each year. Although 20 students was the expressed limit/goal for incoming SOCEC student enrollment, actual program enrollment numbered between 16 (for the 2012 school year) and 21 (for the 2014 school year) students. Roughly five percent of the students accepted to the program dropped out of the program during the first two years of classes at the Izumi campus (as indicated by their insufficient attendance in the twice-weekly SOCEC classes). Data regarding the number of students who ultimately failed to obtain program completion requirements are not yet available, as the last SOCEC students are expected to graduate in March 2020.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were administered on a nearly yearly basis by the author (who was also the freshman SOCEC class instructor for all but the first year of the program). The purpose of the questionnaire was threefold. The first reason concerned student assessment, that is, to ascertain if the incoming students were indeed the type of students the SOCEC Program was targeting. Second, the questionnaire aimed to gather additional information about the entering students, particularly regarding their language learning motivation and learning styles, for it was speculated that such information, once analyzed, could provide program stakeholders with valuable data that could be used to appropriate ends, including program modification, alterations to program entry methods, and updates to classroom pedagogical practices that would meet the interests and needs of the students.

Between 2009 and 2016, the author administered the questionnaires six times, with questionnaires administered by no later than the end of

the second week of classes. No questionnaire was administered in 2010 due to freshman SOCEC class curriculum retooling (see Johns, 2006, for a discussion on the pedagogical tenets behind constructing curricula for language-for-specific-purposes contexts) or in 2011 due to widespread disruptions caused by the March 2011 Tohoku earthquake. Open-ended questionnaire responses were briefly assessed yearly in order to iden- tify general trends, but deeper response analyses (see below) were not conducted until after the program was officially set to end.

Prior to questionnaire administration, the students were informed that (a) the questionnaire was voluntary, (b) student responses would remain anonymous, (c) all responses should reflect their honest thoughts and feelings, (d) queries regarding question meanings were welcome, and (e) any results gained would be used solely for academic purposes, that is, that questionnaire results would not influence their grades or standing at the university in any capacity. In total, 112 stu- dents volunteered to complete the questionnaire, though not all stu- dents answered all questions.

The questionnaire was a mix of program-specific questions and questions adapted from questionnaires presented in Ehrman's (1996) text on understanding the difficulties that learners encounter in their language learning endeavors. The questions were primarily but not exclusively Likert-type questions (see below). The questionnaire con- sisted of three main sections: a section meant to assess their aptitude and motivation for language learning, a section meant to gain informa- tion regarding both their general learning styles and the teaching tech- niques that they believed were most conducive to their own individual preferences for learning, and a section meant to reveal the students' personal learning techniques. Due to space limitations and the wide scope of responses obtained, only the most pertinent or illuminating results from the questionnaire will be relayed here.

Questionnaire, Part I: Aptitude and Motivation

This part of the questionnaire asked the students to relate their views about their ability to learn foreign languages, their reasoning for

entering the SOCEC Program, and their motivation for learning a foreign language. Regarding their perceived ability to learn a foreign language, 58 (52%, the largest portion) claimed to have above-average ability, with five students (4%) claiming superiority. Most of the students expected to perform at least at an average level or better in the first-year SOCEC class (92 students, 82%), and 98 students (88%) claimed to possess motivation to learn English to either a high or an extremely high degree. Next, students were asked why they entered the SOCEC Program, to which a wide range of answers was given. When asked about the degree to which they wanted to see their reason(s) through, 92 students (82%) claimed to either want to do it/them "very much" or were "really looking forward" to reason completion.

The next question in this section asked students to indicate from a list of common reasons their motivation for learning English. Students were allowed to indicate multiple motivations, and space was allotted for students to provide any unlisted motivations. The top three cited motivations were related to their enjoying talking with English speakers (93 students, 83%), their finding enjoyment in language learning (88 students, 79%), and their finding such learning challenging (63 students, 56%). Interestingly and somewhat unexpectedly, given the rationale for the SOCEC Program's existence, only 16 students (14%) indicated motivation to learn another language for future job purposes.

Finally, students were asked about their anxiety with regard to learning English and speaking up (in English) in class. The importance of determining and addressing student anxiety cannot be overstated, especially in content based learning (CBL) or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) situations such as that of the SOCEC Program, for anxiety likely affects up to half of all second and foreign language students (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Regarding learning English generally, 84 students (75%) indicated their anxiety was extant to a fair degree or higher. Nearly identical results were had regarding students' anxiety about speaking in English in class (86 students, 77%).

Questionnaire, Part II: Learning and Teaching Techniques

In this section, students were provided with an abbreviated version of one of Ehrman's (1996) questionnaires. Students were asked to rate techniques they find useful for their learning of another language (techniques used by either students or teachers). These techniques were to be rated between 1 ("a waste of time") and 5 ("nearly indispensable"). The five most helpful techniques (rated in the 4-to-5 range) were found to be:

1. "I use English in the classroom as much as I can." (108 students, 96%)
2. "Group study with classmates is part of the lesson." (99 students, 88%)
3. "The class breaks up into small groups to talk." (98 students, 88%)
4. "Students have a classroom discussion of some topics such as the economy or social problems. The emphasis is on exchanging personal opinions." (98 students, 88%)
5. "The program takes it step-by-step, so I won't be confused." (89 students, 79%)

The techniques rated lowest (i.e., in the 1-to-2 range) were:

1. "Each student finds and reports on an interesting news or magazine article in English." (41 students, 37%)
2. "I study alone." (37 students, 33%)
3. "The teacher reads new material in the textbook aloud, followed by students reading it aloud one by one." (35 students, 31%)
4. "I use videos at school or outside." (32 students, 29%)
5. "A written in-class exercise in which students fill in the correct verb form, like: (walk) John ___ to school every day." (31 students, 28%)

These responses indicate that, overall, students preferred to study or otherwise engage in group activities rather than learn by methods of

a more solitary nature. This makes sense considering the fact that pre-tertiary-level education in Japan, which a vast majority of SOCEC students experienced, is highly group-oriented by nature (e.g., by the construction of and students' participation in small groups called *kumi* and *han*) and that students bring with them to university many of the study habits and learning techniques as well as expectations that their use will be suitable at the university level (see Rubrecht, 2005, 2006, 2008a), which, in a number of cases, are not expected to be particularly effective (Rubrecht, 2004, 2008b). The realization that their previously successful strategies for second or foreign language learning at pre-tertiary levels cannot be relied upon at university likely induces or adds to already extant freshman anxiety (Lowe & Cook, 2003).

Questionnaire, Part III: Personal Learning Techniques

In a manner similar to that as explained above, the students were asked to rate between 1 ("almost never") to 5 ("most of the time") the various aspects that help them to learn, in terms of how often they are likely to do a list of activities. The most highly ranked techniques were:

1. "Figuring out the system and rules for myself contributes a lot to my learning." (76 students, 68%)
2. "I like to complete one task before starting another." (74 students, 66%)
3. "I like to know how the 'system' works and what the rules are, then apply what I know." (71 students, 63%)
4. "I feel the need to check my answers to questions in my head before giving them." (70 students, 63%)
5. "I remember better if I have a chance to talk about something." (67 students, 60%)

The personal techniques ranked lowest were:

1. "My mind wanders in class." (54 students, 48%)
2. "I like to be able to move around when I work or study." (44

students, 39%)

3. "I can do more than one thing at a time." (43 students, 38%)
4. "I like to work with some background music." (42 students, 38%)
5. "I prefer to jump right into a task without taking a lot of time for directions." (41 students, 37%)

What can be seen here is that the incoming SOCEC students, on the whole, preferred organization, structure, and clarity, all of which they believed were conducive to their learning.

Termination of the Program

By the start of the 2016 academic school year, it became clear that the SOCEC Program was not only not performing as envisioned, but also that the program was in several ways negatively impacting other English classes and the English department as a whole. In response to this situation, a call was made within the English department to officially terminate the program. Once finalized, no students were admitted to the program from the 2017 academic school year onward. All students already participating in the program were allowed to continue taking classes and gaining credits in their pursuit of program completion. At the time of this writing, it is expected that the last of the Certificates of Completion will be awarded in March 2020.

As the program now draws to a close, what is required is reflection on the conditions that made continuation of the program no longer viable. When the request was made to end the program, three major drawbacks were officially cited as reasons for program termination. In order of presentation, they were as follows:

Problem 1: Students with high TOEIC scores (i.e., over 650) were not interested in SOCEC Program participation

Explanation: Although the reasoning behind the creation and implementation of a program for high-level English students was sound, there was nevertheless the unpredictable nature of student desire.

While there were certainly SOCEC students with impressive TOEIC scores (e.g., above 800), more than a few incoming freshmen with similar scores opted not to enter the SOCEC Program. At first glance, this may seem perplexing. Why would students most capable of reaping the benefits of a program like SOCEC opt not to enroll? Informal polling by the author of students with high TOEIC scores who were taking his Advanced English classes and yet had not enrolled in the SOCEC Program revealed that students already demonstrably proficient in English were uninterested in improving their English abilities to the extent that the SOCEC Program proposed. In other words, their opting out of the Oral English and Readings in English classes to take Advanced English classes was sufficient for them, as they had purposefully entered the School of Commerce to gain knowledge about commerce- and business-related areas (e.g., marketing), which are areas they knew little or nothing about. For some, the idea of spending time improving foreign language skills — skills they already possessed — seemed counterproductive, even if they could learn commerce- and business-related information through English. It is speculated that for many English-proficient students, the newness of university life, coupled with the allure of the many university clubs and the need of many students to search for and work at part-time jobs, kept many target SOCEC students from attempting to enter the program.

Additionally, viewed from both internal and external perspectives, the existence of the SOCEC Program was seen as questionable, as some of these non-SOCEC students who were enrolled in the Advanced English classes were clearly more skilled at English than their SOCEC counterparts. Although they possessed noteworthy abilities in English, their lack of motivation to study English, their motivation to concentrate their energies on learning areas other than English, or other factors (e.g., the above-mentioned clubs and part-time jobs) steered them away from SOCEC Program participation.

One of the main goals of the pre-SOCEC English classes that were started prior to the 2008 academic school year was to gauge student interest and potential participation in a SOCEC-type program, and to

that end it succeeded, as there were both to be had. However, it was impossible at that time to predict how successful the program would be as a whole, even as students were expressing interest in this type of specialized program. Thus, in the early days of SOCEC planning and development, no consideration was given — and indeed, there were no indications that consideration need be given — to the thought that there would be students *fully qualified for but not interested in* SOCEC Program participation and that such students, by not taking advantage of the SOCEC Program, would ultimately hurt the program by their disinterest.

Problem 2: SOCEC Program participation provides relatively little merit for job-hunting students

Explanation: Theoretically, students are able to accumulate their 30 credits required for SOCEC Program completion in three years rather than the typical (and expected) four. However, this is a rather difficult feat to accomplish, given an understanding of students' typical course loads and the fact that a SOCEC student tended to be the type of student who enrolls in two separate seminars under the Double Core system.   To date, the number of students who have received their Certificates prior to starting their fourth year remains in the single digits. Potential employers are not particularly interested in certificates students may or may not one day obtain just prior to graduation. Without their Certificate in hand when they commence job hunting (which usually begins toward the end of their third year), SOCEC enrollment and participation presents little immediate job-hunting benefit, the realization of which in the students' final years at university can lead to demotivation and even to some students no longer pursuing credits for SOCEC Program completion.

Problem 3: The SOCEC Program introduced a disproportionate drain on the department's native English-speaking instructors, which negatively impacted the department as a whole

Explanation: This third problem stems from many sources, including

the newly-implemented 100-minute class system (increased from 90 minutes), which began from the 2017 academic school year, and the twice-weekly SOCEC Izumi campus classes being given when the SOCEC instructors must teach third- and fourth-year classes at the Surugadai campus later those same days.

The most serious problem, however, came from an inefficient use of the department's native instructors. One teacher was in charge of one year of the Izumi campus SOCEC classes (either the freshman or the sophomore classes), meaning that one teacher devoted two class periods per week to teaching 20 students. Thus, in any given academic school year, two native English-speaking instructors spent their time teaching only 40 students. Hypothetically, the same four class periods per week could have been turned into Advanced English classes where around 80 to 100 students could have had exposure to native English-speaker instruction. Suffice it to say that terminating the SOCEC Program meant more students could enroll in these two instructors' classes and that the higher-level English classes (i.e., Advanced English and Progressive English) would become the true draw for students keen on improving their English abilities and the classes into which the native instructors could pour their energy and devote their resources.

It should be noted that although these were the three official drawbacks expressed by the department in the call to phase out the SOCEC Program, additional problems were noted and expressed prior to program termination. In the opinion of the author, one of the more troubling aspects of the program was that students were forced to decide too soon whether or not they wished to enter the SOCEC Program. Unlike seminar selection, which occurs in the fall of students' freshman year, SOCEC entry was determined each year prior to first-year students registering for classes. It seemed unreasonable for students not yet familiar with university life to so quickly make a decision regarding classes they would have to take for the next four years.

The SOCEC Program Replacement

As can be seen, the SOCEC Program was created with the best of intentions, particularly for student academic progress and advancement regarding their English abilities, yet the program was beset by unfulfilled expectations and problems that were ultimately deemed too persistent and hence detrimental to the continuation of the program and to the English department as a whole. Even so, the English department continues to strive to keep students aware of the importance of English in their lives and not leave the motivated and proficient students without language learning goals. To this end, starting from the 2018 academic school year, the School of Commerce began offering the Commerce Language Advancement Studies Program (CLASP) as the SOCEC Program replacement.

Briefly explained, CLASP is a two-year program based solely at the Izumi campus. There are no specific CLASP classes like there were for the SOCEC freshmen and sophomores, and students are not required to register for or test into CLASP. If eligible students wish to receive a Certificate of Completion from the program all that is required is their filling out the necessary paperwork. For program completion, at least six of the program's eight required English class credits must be gained via students taking (and passing) Advanced English classes. For the remaining two credits, students may take (and must pass) any approved class given in English (e.g., English Communication II/III A and B, Essentials of Commerce A and B). Students clearing these requirements will be awarded a Certificate of Completion at the end of their second year. Students can receive a Certificate of Completion with distinction if, by the end of their second year, they have obtained (a) a TOEFL-iBT score of 100 or more or a TOEIC score above 874 and (b) an "S" or "A" grade in four or more of their Advanced English classes.

Readers should note that the above explanation only provides a broad overview of CLASP. There are more conditions and requirements to the program. All parties interested in CLASP are encouraged

to find out more.

Conclusion

With the closing of the SOCEC Program comes the inevitable look back on its decade-long run and speculation about whether or not it successfully accomplished its aims, and if so, to what degree. The very fact that the program is ending may cause many to assume that the program was a failure. As was explained above, the program was not without its problems. Some of these problems were intrinsic to the program, some were unforeseen, and still others were insurmountable. And yet from the outset many students exhibited curiosity about and interest in the SOCEC Program, and some attempted and even succeeded in entering and completing the program. A vast majority of this latter group of students graduated with Certificates of Completion (some with distinction). It is therefore difficult to apply a negative label in such a sweeping manner onto a program that was, for many students, a defining component of their Meiji University experience.

There is certainly much more to be said about the SOCEC Program and the students who had participated in it. For instance, data presented above from the questionnaires came only from basic preliminary analyses. A considerable amount of questionnaire data remain to be analyzed, and their analyses may shed light on a number of areas, one of which is the perplexing (and, considering the SOCEC Program's focus on commerce and business, somewhat disheartening) finding that so few SOCEC students indicated that their motivation to enter the program was in preparation for their future jobs.

Additionally, it has been found that the literature on special programs akin to the SOCEC Program lacks investigation — and thus lacks information — on a number of key areas. One such area is that of individual teacher differences. For example, if the SOCEC Program stands as an example of CLIL, specifically one of forward design (see Richards, 2013), and if it functioned as a multi-year program with multiple teachers involved, even with instruction of all of the SOCEC classes matching

in terms of program aims, it begs the question how differences in the teachers' teaching styles and pedagogical approaches across the years at the Izumi campus impacted the students in the program. Stated differently, although it is clear that teachers differ in myriad ways, from personality and temperament to experiences and personal beliefs (Briesmaster & Briesmaster-Paredes, 2015), and that SOCEC class content between first and second year naturally differed — partly but not exclusively due to SOCEC Program coordinators understanding the crucial and influential nature of students' very early university experiences (see Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Smith & Hopkins, 2005) — the SOCEC students were essentially "locked into" a program that gave them no choice of SOCEC instructor, even though alternatives existed for their other classes, such as their Advanced English classes.

In short, how various differences influence students in CLIL-type programs has not been adequately addressed in the literature. A call can therefore be made for further research and discussion on these and other related matters. Indeed, with there being far more left to be said regarding the SOCEC Program and those involved, attention to these and other related matters are surely to be forthcoming.

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