

Okayama University LEC English Program Evaluation Plan and Pretest Results

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Abstract

This article describes the methods and rationale of the Okayama University LEC English Program evaluation. The methods include summative measures (TOEIC and TOEIC SW) to see if the program is helping students improve their English proficiency. Formative measures are also being utilized to understand various aspects of students' communicative competence and language learning to consider ways to improve the program. These measures include surveys on learner affect (motivation and anxiety), a reading strategy survey, and vocabulary tests. The results of the pretest measures will be reported and possible implications will be discussed.

Keywords : program evaluation, curriculum, administration

Introduction

To improve the English proficiency of its students in this age of increasing globalization, the Language Education Centre (LEC) at Okayama University revised and expanded its English as a Foreign Language curriculum from the 2013 academic year. The number of lessons for all first-year students was increased from two to four lessons a year, and these courses are now all skill based. Four courses are now also required for second-year students, including skills-based courses, independent study and e-learning options. In addition to these courses, there are various types of advanced classes which serve as electives or as requirements for certain faculties and the Minor Program. In 2013, the university also newly created the Global Human Resource Development Program to help elite students become better trained to contribute to local and global society. This paper will focus on the required first- and second-year courses which serve all students in all eleven faculties (and the inter-faculty Matching Program).

Several LEC English Department faculty members (see Acknowledgments) decided to carry out a formal evaluation of the new program, with support and contributions from the LEC Vice Director, Yoshi Kenmotsu. Language program evaluation has been defined as the systematic collection and analysis of data, such as learner attitudes and outcomes, in order to improve a curriculum and to determine its effectiveness and efficiency (Brown, 1995). This paper will first describe the background and rationale of the LEC English program evaluation. Then it will discuss the evaluation methods, which include tests, survey instruments, and other

methods (course evaluations are also used to evaluate the program; see Kenmotsu et al., this volume). Finally, the results of the pretest measures will be presented. While the main purpose of the pretests was to compare the results with the posttest results to grasp the effect of the program, the data will be discussed here as a needs analysis for the program.

Background

The English Department in the LEC had very little time to do a needs analysis to plan for the new curriculum, which started in April of 2013. The instructors used their experience and expertise to create curriculum objectives, course descriptions, recommended materials, and lesson plans (available at <http://www.develop-your-english.com/wordpress/>). The overarching program goals have not yet been explicitly defined, but most of the courses aim to improve the students' communicative competence, especially in academic contexts. Communicative competence can be broken down to language acquisition (e.g. vocabulary and grammatical structures), communication strategies (e.g. clarification skills, selective dictionary use), and fluent language use (e.g. reading at a high rate, speaking smoothly and naturally) (Bachman, 1989). Some course objectives also address language learning strategies, intercultural competence, and learner affect. Generally speaking, the first-year courses focus more on fluency and affective factors, while second-year courses stress academic skills.

The original discussions were for the LEC to rely on data from the TOEIC exam to evaluate the curriculum, as is typical at Japanese universities (e.g. Newfields, 2005; Usui, 2004). However, many LEC English Department teachers felt that this was inadequate. Though utilizing TOEIC scores can be very useful, relying on them exclusively has several potential pitfalls. First, TOEIC scores alone do not provide data on ways to improve the program. The main TOEIC exam only tests receptive skills (listening and reading), and though the language skills correlate quite strongly, the test does not accurately represent students' productive skills of speaking and writing (Hirai, 2002; Liao, Qu, & Morgan, 2010; Powers, 2010). In addition, since we cannot get feedback on various aspects of students' communicative competence, standardized test scores are considered inadequate for formative evaluation of language programs. For example, TOEIC scores alone do not provide data on students' productive vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation, communication strategies, learning strategies, motivation, and confidence, all of which have been shown to affect learners' proficiency.

Moreover, relying only on one test could lead to a negative "washback" effect on instruction (Bailey, 1999; Brown, & Hudson, 1998; Choi, 2008; Newfields, 2005; Powers, 2010). Because the LEC English Department could face criticism if TOEIC scores do not improve, there is pressure to improve students' scores and instructors may be pressured to "teach to the test", rather than trying to meet the communicative needs of the students. For example, since the main TOEIC exam ignores learners' productive skills, it could lead to a washback effect on instruction, with teachers overly focusing on receptive skills.

Because of the reasons described above, several LEC English Department faculty members decided to find ways to evaluate the program more fully. The two main objectives of the LEC English program evaluation are as follows:

1. Understand if our program is helping students improve their English proficiency to reach their needs.
2. Understand ways our program can further improve.

Related to the first objective, program evaluation is necessary to increase accountability and to make sure the institution's finances and resources are being used wisely to help learners reach their objectives effectively. The LEC received significant funding to expand the program and all the eleven faculties (and the Matching Program) that the program serves needed to rearrange their own curricula to make the changes possible. Therefore, the LEC needs to show as much data as possible to show these interest groups that students are improving their English with the new curriculum.

The importance of the second objective, finding ways to improve the program, was magnified by the fact the curriculum was revised without a detailed needs analysis. The program evaluation measures, especially any pretest measures, could be used as a needs analysis for future change. This paper will first describe the program evaluation measures used and then present the results of the pretest exams and survey instruments.

Program Evaluation Methods

To evaluate the students' English language learning over the two-year program as completely as possible without over testing the students and using too many resources, the group settled on the exams and survey instruments listed in Table 1. The program evaluation measures could be broken down to summative and formative assessment (Harlen & James, 1997), and each measure is described in more detail below, under the relevant assessment type.

Table 1 : LEC English program evaluation methods

Evaluation Method	Students (Ss)	Time
TOEIC Listening/Reading	2,300 (all Ss)	April, 2013 January, 2014 January, 2015
TOEIC Speaking/Writing	72 (Law / Economics)	April, 2013
Vocabulary Levels Tests	All 404 Law & Economics Ss	January, 2015
Strategy/Affect Surveys		
Program-wide Evaluation	2,300 (all Ss)	January, 2015

Summative assessment measures

Summative assessment is to monitor learning outcomes to evaluate if a program is helping

students reach their goals (Harlen & James, 1997). To maintain high standards of accountability, it is important to use established standardized exams. The TOEFL test may be more appropriate for the LEC since the program aims to improve the students' academic English skills rather than workplace English. However, the TOEIC test is already being used by the university for student placement, so the program evaluation group decided to utilize the TOEIC data to evaluate students' general listening and reading ability. The test is to be given three times over two years. There is some concern whether the students will continue to take the test seriously as it has no effect on student grades. At a similar national university in the region, an analysis of the scores suggests that many students may lose motivation to take the TOEIC test multiple times, which harms the reliability of the scores (Tatsukawa, 2013). Therefore, this issue needs to be considered carefully.

To evaluate students' productive proficiency in English, we decided to use the TOEIC Speaking and Writing (SW) exam. The test was introduced by the English Testing Service in 2006 to validly assess students' productive skills in daily life and the workplace. Unlike the regular TOEIC test, test takers need to actually speak and write in English to complete various tasks. Relatively few students take the test compared to the main TOEIC exam, but the number of test takers has increased each year (English Testing Service, 2013).

Due to its high cost, the LEC could not afford to have all students take the TOEIC SW test. We hoped to involve a random sample of students, but this was also unfeasible. Therefore, we identified three classes of Law and Economics (over 80 students) at three proficiency levels. These faculties were chosen because they represent two very different academic fields and their course schedules made it feasible to administer the test. The test was given to 72 students (some were absent or did not give consent) a few weeks after entering the university, and the posttest is scheduled to be given at the end of the second year, when they have nearly finished their English course requirements. The LEC received funding from the school for this test (*Senryaku Keihi*).

Formative assessment measures

Several formative assessment measures were selected to find ways to modify the program to further improve student learning. In addition to test scores, the program evaluation plan utilizes detailed and more well-rounded evaluation methods which are necessary to provide a more complete picture of the students' proficiency and learning (Powers, 2010). For example, if the TOEIC test results suggest that students' reading ability is not improving, we need data to help us understand the cause. Is it because their reading strategies are not improving; because their receptive vocabulary is not increasing; and/or, because they are not retaining their motivation to continue studying English? The formative assessment measures should provide such insights into student learning and help suggest ways we can improve the reading courses, in addition to the rest of the courses

Most of the surveys and tests described below were administered at the beginning of the students' first year (April, 2013) and they will be given again near the end of their second year (January, 2015) to determine if the program has a significant effect on students' communication strategy use, motivation, and confidence. (see Table 2). Moreover, at the end of their second year, program-wide evaluations will be administered to examine students' feelings and opinions on the courses.

Table 2 : Evaluating communicative competence and other factors

Language Acquisition (vocabulary, grammar, phonemes)	Communication Strategies (e.g. clarification, elaboration, previewing)	Affective Factors (e.g. motivation, confidence)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vocabulary test ● Vocabulary and grammar receptive data from TOEIC ● Pronunciation ranking from TOEIC SW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading strategy survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Motivation survey ● Anxiety survey

All measures have been used extensively and have been shown to be valid and reliable. Unless otherwise noted, these measures are being given to all Law and Economics students (404), who represent a target sample. (It was determined that giving these instruments to all students would be too burdensome on the faculties and take away too much time from classroom learning activities.)

The program evaluation group will aim to see if our courses are helping students acquire new language items. Two vocabulary tests were selected, one for the 2,000-word level and one for the Academic Word List (AWL) (Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapham, 2001). The 2,000 word level test aims to see if the students have mastered the most common and essential words in English. The AWL was selected because one of the major objectives of the program is to prepare students for field-specific academic studies, which begin in their third year. In addition to the vocabulary test, supplementary data from the TOEIC test and the TOEIC SW test will be considered. The TOEIC test provides data on learners' understanding of grammar and vocabulary while reading, and the TOEIC SW provides a ranking of the learners' pronunciation.

The Reading Strategy Survey (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) was selected to determine if the students are achieving strategic competence (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991). Since the Law and Economics students take the reading course (Integrated English 2) in the fall semester, this survey will be given in October, 2013. Other communicative strategies survey instruments for speaking, listening, and/or writing may be given in the future.

Affective factors have also been shown to greatly affect language learning (e.g. Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). To understand aspects of affect factors concerning language learning, two surveys

were selected. The motivation survey was based on Dörnyei (1990), and the anxiety survey was based on Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). The motivation survey measures instrumental motivation (i.e. using English to meet one's goals), interest in the target language and culture, and need for achievement. The anxiety survey measures how comfortable students feel when using English in various contexts. The two surveys were merged and translated to Japanese by Tanaka (2003), and then edited slightly by the evaluation group (see Appendix). The survey utilizes a six-point Likert scale.

Course evaluations are being distributed at the end of each semester and Japanese instructors were asked to give feedback on the new curriculum after one semester (these measures are discussed in Kenmotsu et al., this volume). A program-wide evaluation is also planned for the end of the second year. This survey will aim to see how the students feel about the curriculum. For example, did the students think the program was adequately challenging, motivating, and relevant? Should the courses be more academic or more conversational? Should the courses focus more on fluency or acquiring new language?

Other evaluation methods were also considered, such as discourse analysis of student interaction and interviews with teachers and students, but these were cancelled due to a lack of funding and resources. However, these methods, as well as others (e.g. learning strategy surveys, fluency measures), may be considered in the next round of the program evaluation.

Program Evaluation: Pretest Results

The program evaluation pretest measures (except for the Reading Strategy Survey) were administered at the beginning of the spring semester, 2013, as new first-year students began their English studies and as the new curriculum commenced. As mentioned before, the primary purpose of the pretest measures is to serve as a comparison to the posttest results in order to grasp the effects of the two-year program. The pretest measures alone were not intended for diagnostic purposes, but they may provide some insights as to the students' needs, especially considering the new curriculum was not based on a detailed needs analysis. As these are pretest data, it important to stress that these data do not reflect the LEC English program, but rather the data may help the program shape the curriculum around student needs. The results and possible implications of these data will be discussed below.

TOEIC data for the four skills

The TOEIC data mean scores for all first-year students entering the university were 243.6 on the listening test and 213.7 on the reading test (see Table 3). There is great variance depending on the faculty. The overall mean TOEIC score was highest for medical students (646) and lowest for science students (404). The mean score for the Law and Economics students, who were chosen as the target sample group, was close to the university-wide mean but slightly higher.

Table 3 : TOEIC Listening and Reading and TOEIC SW (mean scores)

	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
All 1 st -year students	243.6 <i>SD</i> = 58.9 (<i>N</i> = 2,279)	213.7 <i>SD</i> = 65.3	--	--
Law and Economics target group	245.9 <i>SD</i> = 54.9 (<i>N</i> = 438)	222.9 <i>SD</i> = 60.9	72.3 <i>SD</i> = 24.9 (<i>N</i> = 72)	102.4 <i>SD</i> 27.7
1 st -year university Japanese average (2012)*	232 (<i>N</i> = 186,793)	180	84.5 (<i>N</i> = 422)	99.2

*TOEIC IP Test data from the English Testing Service (2013)

By comparing with the national average for incoming university students, it becomes evident that Okayama University students, except for Science faculty students, tend to have better receptive skills than the average Japanese university student. This is not unexpected due to the fact Okayama University is a national university. This factor affects the curriculum as students in most faculties tend to have at least a basic understanding of English. Language teachers new to the program should be aware of this fact, and this could help explain why our program has an academic focus.

While the 72 target sample students had better TOEIC listening and reading scores than average, the TOEIC SW scores provided some surprising results. The mean writing score was 102.4 (*Mdn* 100, *SD* 27.7), which is better than the mean score for first-year students nationwide (95.1; English Testing Service, 2013). However, the mean speaking score of 72.3 (*Mdn* 70; *SD* 24.9) was lower than the national mean (82.6). It is difficult to make strong conclusions from the SW pretest data because relatively few students nationwide take the TOEIC SW test (English Testing Service, 2013), and those who do may tend to be more motivated and proficient than the typical Japanese student. Also, many of the first-year students in the nationwide data provided by ETS may be in the middle or the end of the first year, while the Okayama University data was for incoming students. Therefore, the speaking ability of the incoming students may not actually be lower than average.

Nevertheless, while more data is necessary to make a strong conclusion, these results may suggest that many incoming Okayama University students may need more work with oral skills than other language skills (since the scores for these skills were all superior to the nationwide average). However, under the current curriculum and program requirements, most students take only one speaking class, which lasts just one semester, over a two-year period. Students are allowed to choose their courses in the second year, and relatively few selected the presentation course, which is the only oral skills option. While more data is necessary to make a

confident decision, the program may need to consider how to get the students to take more oral skills courses. Other possible solutions are to incorporate more speaking activities in other skill-based classes or encourage students to visit the university's L-café.

TOEIC gives score breakdowns on the listening, reading and speaking results (but not writing) to provide test takers and other interest groups with more detailed feedback. These data (see Table 4) could provide more clues as to the needs of the students. For the reading scores, the students had the least trouble with understanding grammar (66%), and they scored much lower on the other questions which test learners' ability to make inferences, scan for details, synthesize ideas, and comprehend vocabulary. This may suggest that the students need particular instruction on reading more strategically, rather than grammar-translation activities. The breakdown of the listening scores suggests the students had much more difficulty with longer talks than shorter talks, but the implications of this are unclear.

The ratings provided on the TOEIC SW for pronunciation and intonation were both 1.9 out of three. This is near the score of two, which represents "comprehensible responses" but with some mispronunciations. This possibly suggests that the students may benefit from some practice with pronunciation and intonation, but these do not seem to be major factors in the students' relatively low speaking test scores. Therefore, other factors are likely to be more important, such as oral fluency (i.e. speaking at a natural rate with few pauses or false starts), language usage (e.g. vocabulary and grammar), and speaking strategies (e.g. giving examples when you do not know a word, supporting your argument, hedging). These factors should be practiced as much as possible in the Speaking courses (IE 1), as well as in other courses.

Table 4 : TOEIC data breakdown

Listening (all Ss)	Reading (all Ss)	Speaking (72 Ss)
Inferring main points (short talks): 67%	Making inferences: 43%	Pronunciation: 1.9 / 3
Inferring main points (long talks): 51%	Scanning for details: 48%	Intonation: 1.9 / 3
Understanding details (short talks): 63%	Synthesizing ideas: 43%	
Understanding details (long talks): 48%	Understanding vocabulary: 47%	
	Understanding grammar: 66%	

Affect survey: anxiety and motivation

The incoming Law and Economics students (404 students) took the affect survey to determine their anxiety level for using English and their motivation to learn the language. On

the six-point scale, the results suggest that the students are somewhat anxious to use English in various contexts (4.0), but they are also somewhat motivated to learn (4.1; see Table 5). The mean results suggest that their motivation to use English for their goals (instrumental motivation) and their interest in the language and culture somewhat outweigh their need for achievement. The results were not unexpected and seem to support the anecdotal evidence provided by many of the LEC English teachers that the students are generally motivated, but not so vocal in class.

Table 5 : Results of the affect survey

Anxiety	Motivation		
	Instrumental motivation	Interest in the L2 / L2 speakers	Need for achievement
	4.2	4.3	3.8
4.0 (SD .7)		4.1 (SD .6)	

Unsurprisingly, more proficient students tended to be more motivated than less proficient students, but this difference was not as large as expected. There was an extremely weak correlation between motivation and TOEIC scores for listening and reading (Pearson's $r = .19$). There was a significant difference (t -test; $p < .05$) between "basic-level" students with TOEIC scores below 400 (4.0) and "proficient-level" students with scores above 600, but the mean differences were not too large (4.0 and 4.3, respectively). This suggests that instructors should not "hold back" on their basic-level students, as many students in these classes are serious about improving their English.

There was no correlation between the anxiety results and the TOEIC scores, and no difference between basic and proficient students for anxiety. This suggests that proficient students especially need to be encouraged to be confident in their skills so that they can engage in more communication opportunities. Nevertheless, all students need more opportunities to communicate and should be encouraged as much as possible.

Vocabulary Tests

The vocabulary pretest results were not surprising (see Table 6). Incoming basic-level students (defined as students with scores below 400) answered correctly on 76% percent of the items on the 2,000 word level test. Even proficient-level students (with TOEIC scores of at least 600) missed 14% of the questions related to the basic words. As these are the most common words (e.g. *debt*, *elect*, *curious*) making up over 80% of words used in English (Nation, 2001), most students need more practice reinforcing their knowledge of these basic words. Therefore, the program should continue to review basic, frequently-used vocabulary, either explicitly (e.g. through vocabulary e-learning programs) or implicitly (e.g. through

extensive reading of graded readers).

On the other hand, the students showed somewhat higher comprehension of academic words (e.g. *evidence*, *phenomenon*, *exploitation*) than expected, with even basic-level students answering correctly on two-thirds of the items. Nevertheless, the program needs to help students master these words before they begin field-specific academic studies in their third year.

Table 6 : Vocabulary test results

Student level	2,000-word level	Academic words
Basic (<400) N = 104	76%	68%
Intermediate (400-595) N = 289	83%	77%
Proficient (600 ≤) N = 46	86%	81%

Conclusion

The evaluation of the new curriculum is essential to make sure it is helping students meet their English learning needs. The first half of this article discussed the overall evaluation methods and their rationale. The measures include summative evaluation methods (TOEIC and TOEIC SW) and formative evaluation methods (Affect Survey, Reading Strategies Survey, Vocabulary Tests). Pretest results will be compared with posttest results to see how the program is affecting the students' English proficiency and to understand ways in which the LEC English Department can improve the curriculum and program policies. Surveys are also being planned, and other evaluation measures may also be considered in the future.

The second half of the paper presented the results of the pretest measures. While incoming Okayama University students' listening, reading, and writing TOEIC scores were better than average (for Japanese universities), the average speaking score was lower than average. As for the affect survey, the incoming students, including ones in the proficient level, were fairly anxious about using English, yet most students tended to be moderately motivated. The vocabulary test results were somewhat predictable, but most incoming students, including proficient students, showed gaps in their knowledge of basic vocabulary. On the other hand, even basic-level students have decent receptive knowledge of academic vocabulary.

While the pretest measures were not intended as a diagnostic and we have to be cautious when generalizing from mean scores of a sample (Law and Economics students), there are some possible implications that can be made from the data. While more data is necessary to make strong conclusions, the speaking scores on the TOEIC SW and the results of the anxiety

survey suggest that the program may need to further stress oral skills and build students' confidence in using English. Furthermore, since many incoming students show gaps in their knowledge of basic vocabulary, these words should be reviewed and reinforced. The breakdown of the TOEIC reading scores suggest students may need instruction on reading strategies, but the Reading Strategies Survey, which has yet to be administered, should provide clearer data.

As mentioned repeatedly, the purpose of the pretest measures is to compare with the posttest to evaluate the program. Hopefully, the results will suggest that the students are improving all four skills while also becoming more confident and motivated to continue studying and using English.

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Appendix

Language Learning Survey (Tanaka, 2003, based on Dörnyei, 1990 and Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986)

1. 英語の授業で間違いをしても気にしない。
2. 授業中、自分があたると思うと不安になる。
3. 先生が英語で話していることがわからないと、不安になる。
4. もっと英語の授業があってもよい。
5. 自分より他の人の方が英語できると思う。
6. テストでは緊張しない。
7. 悪い成績をとらないかと不安になる。
8. 英語の授業はとても緊張する。
9. 授業中、自分から発言するのは恥ずかしい。
10. 英語で外国人と話すとき、緊張しない。
11. 英語で答える時、自信をもって発言できる。
12. 先生が、自分の間違いを全部直すのではないかと心配になる。
13. 自分があたる番になると、心臓がドキドキする。

14. クラスの人の前で英語で発言するのははずかしい。
15. 英語の授業は早く進むので、取り残されるのではないかと心配になる。
16. 英語の時間は、他の科目の授業より緊張する。
17. 英語の授業が始まる前は、リラックスしている。
18. 先生の話す英語が全部わからないと、不安になる。
19. 英語を話せるようになるために覚えることが多くて、圧倒される。
20. 英語を母国語とする人と一緒にいても緊張しないと思う。
21. チャンスがあれば留学したいと思う。
22. 英検やTOEFLなどに挑戦してみたいと思う。
23. これからの社会では英語を使えることが大事だと思う。
24. 将来、英語を使う仕事をしたいと思う。
25. 英語の授業は楽しい。
26. 英語のほかにも外国語を勉強したいと思う。
27. 英語を通してほかの国の文化を学びたいと思う。
28. 英語を使ってほかの国の人と友達になりたいと思う。
29. テレビやラジオの英語講座の番組を定期的に利用している。
30. 英語のテキストを家で復習している。
31. 英語でよい成績をとりたいと思う。
32. 英語を勉強することは、自分にとって大切である。

