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Insights and Implications from English Medium Programs Regarding English Support Classes

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Introduction

In 2009 the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) launched the “Global 30 Project” which awarded thirteen Japanese universities five-year grants designed to encourage further internationalization of Japanese universities. One of the project’s objectives is to recruit 300,000 international students by 2020. The selected universities are now implementing undergraduate and graduate programs which can be completed entirely in English (MEXT, 2011). This innovation addresses the issue of there being relatively few international students with the necessary Japanese language skills needed to study in Japanese hence limiting the number of students considering an education in Japan. While graduate courses with highly specialized programs have been able to accommodate small numbers of non-Japanese speaking students to a limited extent prior to the Global 30 Project, Japanese universities have not, until now, offered English-medium undergraduate programs - with the notable exceptions of Sophia and Ritsumeikan Asian Pacific University’s special international programs.

However, the Global 30 Project has enormous challenges for participating universities regarding curriculum and staffing needs. Both instructors and administrators must carefully consider these aspects

if the Global 30 undergraduate projects are to succeed in the short-term and grow to become an integral part of the universities’ catalogue in the long-term. The initial and easily identifiable challenges of instituting the project include the of hiring content specific native English-speaking teachers, finding existing faculty members who have the English language ability required to teach within the new curriculum, and developing first-rate curricula for each of the selected fields of study. However, this paper will focus on the challenges the Global 30 Project faces in providing English and academic support for foreign student participants. Specifically with regard to academic performance, Global 30 Project schools need to identify what type English language support system the participant students will need in order to be successful in their studies.

Tohoku University, like other universities in the Global 30 Project, is focusing its recruiting efforts in Asia where countries such as Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea and China heavily emphasize English - and in some cases use English as the primary teaching medium for higher education. Therefore, it is important to understand what degree of English education students from these countries are experiencing. By doing this, Tohoku University will be able to identify and address English language

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issues within their undergraduate English-medium curriculum and also discover clues as to why Japanese students tend to lag far behind other nationalities regarding English language acquisition. (Kwan, 2002). This will provide insight and direction in improving the English curriculum for the general Japanese student population as well. In addition, the curriculum changes required for the Global 30 Project provides Tohoku University with the opportunity to evaluate and compare the kinds of English support structures other Global 30 universities provide.

Thus, this paper will be divided into four parts. Firstly, the paper will present a brief overview of Curricular Innovation Theory (CIT) which will identify problem areas in assessing curricular change. The second part will concentrate on domestic universities which offer English-medium courses, while the third section will focus on several Asian universities' curricula. Finally, the paper will conclude with the reports objective – providing recommendations for improvement of both Tohoku University's current English program and the new Global 30 Project. As such, CIT provides a valuable framework.

Curricular Innovation Theory

Diffusion of Innovations research in education has been a significant field of study since the 1970's (Karavas-Douvas, 1989). Markee (1997) states, "Language teaching professionals are only beginning to discover innovation as an area of professional practice and academic innovation as an area of professional practice and academic study." (p. 6), White (1988) points out that most organizations exhibit a combination of the top-down and bottom up system. Which model or which mixture of models best fits an institution depends on the context. The situation at Tohoku University would fall into a

mixed model category because the new curriculum is a top down decision, but curriculum design and how the support classes will be structured will most likely depend on the recommendations of the teaching staff.

Rogers (1995:131) emphasizes the need to focus on the planning stage prior to diffusion of new innovations. As this is Tohoku University's current position, it is imperative that the university complete a thorough analysis of possible Global 30 student support systems. By obtaining such data, the university will be better equipped to establish an overall program structure essential for success. Using White's (1988: 152-154) model, the stages prior to planning that institutions need to consider are further defined below.

Motivation and Purpose

Understanding why an organization deems a specific innovation to be favorable is the start of the overall innovation process. The motivation behind innovation is usually linked to a problem or a need that arises, and the purpose behind an innovation is to address the problem or the need comprehensively. As such, the perceptions and experiences of Tohoku University's native English speaking teaching staff form the basis for both the motivation and the purpose to institute the innovation of establishing an English support system within the Global 30 Project.

Situation Analysis

Cooper (1989 qtd. in Markee 2000) indicates that the socio-cultural context, which he defines as the "where", can affect the adoption of an innovation. Kennedy (1987) had earlier defined these into separate socio-cultural systems that interact together to limit innovation. The factors he defined, although not inclusive, included "institutional," "educational," "administrative," "political," and "cultural" factors,

which would define the local and more global situations that White (1988) refers to in his model. Many of these criteria refer to the organizational culture and whether or not this culture is conducive to change.

However, the situation of English-medium education in Japan provides for a rather complicated scenario because most students will be studying in an environment where there will be little, if any, informal cultural support structures in place - such as having native speaking peers to collaborate with.

Consult with Stakeholders - Identify Specific Problems

In all stages of the innovation process, communication with stakeholders and incorporating their views into the decision making process is vital for successful innovation. White (1988) envisions this to be a form of needs analysis, which determines the parameters in which the innovation can function properly. Tohoku University will not introduce undergraduate majors until the fall of 2011; therefore, we could not directly question current participants. However, researching some of the institutions currently engaged in English-medium undergraduate programs would provide the answers required to address some the needs of prospective Global 30 Tohoku University students will have. To this end, it is important that Global 30 administrators consult other stakeholders as well, especially teachers, to determine the requirements, learning outcomes, workload and language criteria expected from participant students.

Define Aims and Evaluate

The motivation and the purpose for the innovation must be defined for all of the stakeholders so that both the goals and means of attainment of those goals are clearly understood. This is the beginning of

the next process - the evaluation stage. During the evaluation stage, there is continual program assessment which addresses how the language curriculum development innovation fits the context. White (1988) characterizes this as a process of "continuous needs analysis". This stage will take on special significance for Tohoku University because the university will determine the initial innovation needs only by extrapolating from other institutions. Since no two sets of circumstances will ever be exactly the same, it will be vital that Tohoku University carry out continuous program evaluation, assessment and adjustment.

Global 30 Universities: English Education in English-medium Environments

Taking into account the analysis of White's (1988) planning stage of innovation, the researchers set out to investigate three specific situations related to English-medium education in Japan. Firstly, we wanted to understand the current English entrance criteria and planned English support classes at the universities that received Global 30 funding. Secondly, we planned a visit to Kyushu University to determine how the first students studying in a Global 30 undergraduate program were progressing since Kyushu University's first intake of students in 2010. Thirdly, we targeted universities with established English-medium programs in Japan to gain insight from their experiences. Finally, we visited and surveyed English-medium programs at selected Asian universities outside of Japan.

The researchers undertook the investigation of Japanese institutions using three primary methods. First, where possible, we travelled to campuses to directly interview both English faculty and administrative staff. The researchers visited Nagoya University, Waseda University, International University of Japan and Ritsumeikan Asian Pacific

University. Secondly, we were also able to determine how several Global programs were administered through valuable e-mail correspondence with several Global 30 universities' office staff. Lastly, researching many of the Global 30 universities' Internet websites provided us with essential data - especially information related to course and entrance requirements. Table 1 below illustrates the information obtained through these various methods.

There does not appear to be any standard method

amongst the Global 30 universities to effectively evaluate students' English language abilities. While all of the institutions require a number of documents and practices for admittance, which include high school transcripts, standardized test scores (such as the SAT), essays, video self-introductions and an interview, the documentation for English skills vary from nothing at all (Waseda University) to a high of 85 on the iBT TOEFL (Osaka University). Two of the schools indicated that they chose a high TOEFL

Table 1: *Institutions developing new English-medium degree programs*

Institution	English Entry Requirements	Course English Requirements and Support
Doshisha University	TOEFL iBT - 79; TOEFL PBT - 550 TOEIC - 730	-None -Academic Presentation and Academic Writing electives
Keio University	Require a 600-word personal statement, a 3-minute self-introductory video and a certificate of English Proficiency without a set score.	None -Academic English Writing electives
Kyoto University	TOEFL 61 iBT (500 paper) or IELTS 5.0 (within 2 years of enrollment)	None -Writing and conversational English electives. -English for engineering and science electives -Personal tutors to help with academic questions
Kyushu University	English Test score optional. Proficiency based on interview.	None Global 30 students may apply for academic tutors. International Student Support Office
Meiji University	Requires students to have a TOEFL iBT score of 62 or TOEIC 640 or IELTS 5.0	None Global 30 students may apply for academic tutors. International Student Support Office
Nagoya University	TOEFL 80 iBT, 213 CBT, 550 PBT	None International Student Support Office
Osaka University	TOEFL 85 iBT or IELTS 6.5 or GCE A Level Certificate or International Baccalaureate	None. Writing and conversational English electives.-Support seminars on such topics as classroom listening, note taking and academic writing.
Tohoku University	TOEFL 550/79iBT TOEIC 730 IELTS 6.0	None International Student Support Office
Tokyo University	TOEIC or TOEFL score on file - no particular score required. Program entrance examination (in English)	None -English for engineering and science electives. -Personal tutors to help with academics.
Tsukuba University	Skype interview is deciding factor to whether the students English is sufficient	-Mandatory English classes (3 X 75 minutes/week) for first two trimesters). Years 2, 3, 4, the students have 30 hours per year of technical English. No exemptions but the rules are under review.
Waseda University	No set test scores. During admissions they determine if the students have the language ability to enter the program.	-None -Option to enroll in English classes through the "Open Education Center" on campus.

score for admittance because of problems experienced by other universities which admitted students with insufficient English language ability.

By setting higher English scores, both Nagoya and Tohoku Universities feel the English level of admitted students will be sufficient and, as such, will not require any supplementary English courses. However, there are certain dangers in adhering strictly to the TOEFL as a judge of the students' academic English abilities, especially when an institution accepts more than one version of the test. Currently, Educational Testing Service (ETS) offers three different tests: TOEFL computer-based (CBT), paper-based (PBT), and Internet-based (iBT). ETS (2005:4). An ETS (2005) publication points out that there are comparison difficulties between the three tests since " ...TOEFL iBT measures speaking ability, but TOEFL CBT and PBT do not. The TOEFL iBT writing score is based on responses to two writing tasks, one of which is based on a listening and a reading text. In TOEFL CBT, the Structure and Writing section score is based on multiple-choice questions and an essay. On the TOEFL PBT, the Structure and Written Expression section score is based on multiple-choice questions only." (p. 4) Therefore, there are English ability discrepancies between the different versions of the TOEFL.

In addition, some universities do not even require TOEFL and allow TOEIC to be taken in its stead. While both tests are produced and administered by ETS, there are fundamental differences. Generally TOEFL is specifically designed to measure an individual's ability to communicate effectively in an English-speaking classroom setting. TOEIC, on the other hand, is designed to assess English in the global workplace. (ETS, 2005)

Furthermore, regardless of what standardized test

is used to determine English proficiency, the problem of test "washback" is another important consideration. Buck (1988) describes the apparent effect of Japanese university entrance examinations on English-language learning in Japan. He describes washback as follows: "There is a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the tests are very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success. This influence of the test on the classroom (referred to as washback by language testers) is, of course, very important; this washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful." (p. 17) Thus Buck's definition stresses the impact of a test on what teachers and students do in classrooms. (Bailey, 1999)

In fact, one of our research visits to a Japanese university which offers English-medium curricula revealed that there had indeed been some cases where students could not perform academically in English and accordingly the university required extra (and troublesome) remedial tutoring for the students. One administrator concluded this may have been because the students "crammed" for the TOEFL - scoring high enough for program admittance but not reflecting true proficiency.

Another reason to question the true abilities of the students compared to the reported TOEFL score is the "Test-Wiseness", or the ability to implement particular test taking strategies designed to help students achieve better scores. Farhady (2005) found that standardized tests such as TOEIC and TOEFL can many times overestimate the test-taker's actual proficiency because of problems with construct validity.

Table 2: *University with existing English-medium programs*

Ritsumeikan APU	TOEFL iBT – 61 TOEFL PBT 500	No required English; however, due to high demand they are expanding the curriculum
International University of Japan	550 TOEFL to enter. 580 for exemption from English classes	8-week intensive program on academic writing and speaking. Required Academic English courses during regular term.
Sophia University	Must have a TOEFL 550 (213 CBT) for	Four English courses are compulsory for all students: English Composition 1 and 2; Public Speaking; and Thinking Processes. Incoming students are given a placement test to determine placement or waiver of classes

** Although Sophia University is one of the universities to receive Global 30 funding, the Faculty of Liberal Arts has offered degrees in English for a number of years prior to the Global 30 Project.

Universities with Existing English-medium Programs

Because of the inconsistency in which different institutions assess English language ability and questions of accuracy concerning the TOEFL scores, the research indicated that a better insight into English language needs and support would come from universities that have already had extensive experience with English-medium curricula. Thus, Table 2 highlights entrance requirements and English classes at three Japanese universities with well-established English-medium programs.

While there is some slight difference in entrance requirements between the three universities, one constant is that they all offer English courses to students – either mandatory or as an elective. Actually, during our discussions with teachers at Ritsumeikan APU, it was mentioned that the demand for English support classes was so high that they were greatly expanding their course offerings.

Academic English Considerations

Given that the new English-medium degree programs are competing for students with universities in English-speaking countries, students coming into Global 30 Projects should reasonably expect to receive an education to the same level they would obtain in their home or English speaking countries. Thus, the course requirements of

universities from English-speaking countries provide valuable insight into the needs of the general population of undergraduate students. For example, most American, Canadian, Australian and UK universities require students to complete general education courses (outside of their majors) as part of their graduation requirements. In addition, virtually all of these universities require freshmen to enroll in English courses. In fact, many require students to enroll in at least one writing course and in many cases mandate an oral presentation course. This is because simply being fluent in English is not enough to perform academically in the university environment. Many English native speaking freshmen lack the necessary writing, reading and presentation skills required for academic success.

While TOEFL, TOEIC and other standardized tests score can gauge one’s English level, English test *proficiency* is not always an accurate indication of English academic *performance*. In fact, according to an Albany State University study of 376 international students, TOEFL was a poor predictor of academic success. (Light *et al.* 1987).

University level essay examinations, comprehensive research reports, class presentations and even effective class note taking, all skills necessary for university success, cannot be easily accessed by any standardized English test.

An International Perspective: English in other East Asian Countries

In addition to our domestic research, we also investigated the general English curricula of two Hong Kong and two Korean universities. The researcher observed classrooms and interviewed both teaching and administrative staff at these universities.

Table 3 contrasts various aspects of the English curricula for the University of Hong Kong (HKU), Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), Yonsei University (YU), and Sungkyungwan University (SU).

The similarities and differences are illuminating especially with regard to class size and program length. Coupled with this, the degree of specialization and standardization of learning outcomes (content-focused in Hong Kong and presentation-focused in Korea) clearly suggests specific avenues that Tohoku University could explore both in the redesign its general English curriculum and in the implementation of the curricula for Global 30 and other special English-medium classes for foreign students.

Conclusion

For undergraduates, the current English language proficiency entrance requirements for each of the thirteen Global 30 universities' vary enormously. Further, it is unclear how each university determined their criteria. In addition, the English language support course offerings are equally diverse. Curricular Innovation Theory (CIT) suggests the necessity to further investigate existing English-medium degree programs both inside and outside Japan to determine the specific needs of undergraduate students. The research determined that it is essential for Global 30 Projects to provide supplemental English language education, specifically academic English, for incoming undergraduates.

As such, in order for Tohoku University to insure the success of their new undergraduate Global 30 Project the researchers recommend the following:

- 1) Require all foreign students (including native English speakers) to take academic English courses or, at the very least, have these courses available as an elective. These courses could parallel English speaking countries' required freshmen English courses and could include

Table 3: *Asian Universities with existing English-medium programs*

	HKU	HKUST	YU	SU
Length of program	3 years (duration of degree)	3 years (duration of degree)	1 year (first year students only)	1 year (first year students only)
Curriculum	Overall goals mandated: teachers also choose from a list of approved textbooks	Set curriculum created in-house	Overall goals mandated: teachers also choose from a list of approved textbooks	Overall goals mandated: teachers also choose from a list of approved textbooks
Class size	~15	~20	~15	~20
Focus	English for specific purposes	English for specific purposes	Presentation skills and academic writing	Presentation skills and academic writing
Teachers	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time
Use of online CMS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assessment	Test set by teacher according to guidelines	Common test to all students	Common test to all students	Test set by teacher according to guidelines

report writing, research methodology, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) depending on the needs analysis.

- 2) Offer English native speaking tutors for students who struggle with English-medium instruction – either because of the “washback” effect or through other standardized test anomalies.
- 3) Establish a central language support center for all students and staff.
- 4) Conduct fact-finding visits to selected high schools where the recruiting of prospective Global 30 students is likely to take place in order to understand first-hand both the precise curricula and the level of English used these curricula.
- 5) Administer a comprehensive English needs analysis and in-house proficiency examination on the first intake of undergraduates.
- 6) Standardize the English curriculum so that content, goals, and assessment are the same for all students. This may require more full-time, specialist English-teaching staff.
- 7) Observe and report on required freshman English courses at selected universities in English speaking countries.

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