

大学に於ける英語教育

——カリキュラム作成についての一考察

坂本政子*

Improving Design and Development in the EFL Curriculum at Universities in Japan

Masako Sakamoto

要 旨 大学に於ける英語教育の真髄とも言うべきカリキュラムを、“planning”, “implementation”, “evaluation”の三つの見地から考察した。カリキュラムとは、単に新学期の始まる前に作成され、その時点で完成されるものではなく、そのカリキュラムが、本来の目的に向かって遂行されているか、また、目的達成が現実に可能か否かを常に把握し、柔軟に修正等を加えて完成を見るものと考えられる。より効果的な成果を英語教育で上げるには、そのカリキュラムの善し悪しに掛かっていると言っても過言ではない。理想的なカリキュラムは各大学の教育哲学を基本に作成されるものと考えられるが、この際、大学当局と教師陣の教育方針の一貫性がいかに重要であるか、また、どのようなカリキュラムが学生に一番必要とされているかを把握・分析することの重要性について述べてみたい。カリキュラムの作成に当たっては周到な準備と多大な労力が必要となるが、どのように準備をし、遂行する事が現実的かつ効果的であるかを提起するのが、本稿の目的である。

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the importance of planning and developing the EFL curriculum at universities in Japan as an “institutional project”. In particular, university administrators, teaching faculty and students are considered to be crucial participants in developing a successful language curriculum. My assumption here is that if these three entities are involved with one another in the planning, implementation and evaluation, this would greatly enhance the curriculum.

It has been said that individual English teachers have often made valiant efforts but have not been able to improve student English proficiency at many universities in Japan. Therefore, Japanese university students have not been contented with their level of proficiency in English. Because of this situation, it would be worth reexamining and redesigning the curriculum. In this paper I will focus on curriculum development as a cyclical, rather than linear, process of planning, implementa-

* 本学講師 英語教授法 (TESOL)

tion and evaluation. Since it encompasses a wide range of educational issues and people, a cyclical procedure would reflect more diversified and balanced views.

In order to organize ideal language curricula, it is necessary to review what has been happening in ESL/EFL curriculum design and development. Nunan states:

...until recently, there has been a comparative neglect of curriculum theorising in relation to ESL. This neglect could well be done to the dominance (and, some would say, the disproportionate influence) of theoretical linguistics over language teaching. Language learning has been seen as a linguistic, rather than an educational, matter, and there has been a tendency to overlook research and development as well as planning processes related to general educational principles in favor of linguistic principles and, in recent years second language acquisition research. (Nunan 1988: 15)

A similar tendency can be seen in the EFL curricula at most universities in Japan. The English language program at Japanese universities has been conceptualized as a linguistic, rather than an educational matter. Consequently, such programs have neglected crucial areas such as how the learner most effectively learns, how the learner develops his/her self-realization or simply what the learner needs to learn. From time to time some dissenting voices and criticism have been raised, but the curriculum *per se* has not been revised as much as expected. There are several convincing reasons to explain this phenomenon. The main reason, perhaps, is that Japanese universities traditionally have been protected. As a result, many universities did not feel the necessity to change their curricula.

However, the situation is undergoing change because of the decline in the number of Japanese university students, which promises to continue year after year from now on. In analyzing the status quo, not only some private universities but also some national universities have begun to review and reconstruct their curricula to attract prospective students. This situation will give a positive stimulus to university curriculum renewal throughout Japan.

Concerning language curriculum design and development, there will be a number of alternatives depending on the circumstances, such as institutional priorities, teacher priorities, students' needs, etc. What I intend to share in this paper is one possible procedure in organizing an English curriculum for university students in Japan.

Initial Planning

In general, changes are not very welcomed, and in fact, there is usually some resistance involved. Probably one reason is that it is hard to see distinct improvement in a short time even though enormous energy and effort are invested. Changes in education are no exception. Parish and Arrands (1983) report that innovations or revisions in programs in education have had only about 20 percent success. This conclusion from a large-scale study of educational change efforts has been supported by analyses from a wide variety of studies. Rodgers assumes that 'the success rate of new language education programs is no higher and, given the thorny nature of language education,

possibly lower.’ (Rodgers 1989: 25) Parish and Arrends (1983) conclude that the primary cause of educational program failure is attributable to incongruities which exist between administrative priorities and teacher priorities.

The success rate described above is not very encouraging but it becomes clear that what we ought to tackle is the primary cause of the educational failure, which is created by both administrative and teacher priorities. If administrators and teachers could cooperate to develop a more “learner-concerned” curriculum, which is in fact the heart of each school, we might achieve a better success rate.

With the goal to reduce the incompatibilities between administrators and teachers, we need to assess and evaluate the existing curriculum. At the same time, we need to ascertain the school’s objective situation; e.g., whether new teachers and/or funds for new materials and equipment etc. are available. This kind of assessment is indispensable because without knowing what can be changed for the better, it would be a waste of time to take the first step. We also need to be clear on our school’s educational goals and objectives at the initial planning stage. In practice, university brochures, which generally describe what sort of educational philosophy and programs the school has, are produced not by teachers but the administration. As a consequence, most of the brochures tend to be written in “rosy” expressions to attract prospective students. The tragedy here is that students tend to believe what is said in the brochures. If the university can not offer what it has promised in written form, who is responsible? Is it the teacher or the administrator or those who made the brochures? Whoever is to blame, the school loses credibility with the public.

Universities in Japan tend not to be concerned about complaints from students. One reason for this is, as mentioned before, that they are traditionally protected, that is to say they are usually not subject to criticism by the public. Another reason might come from the fact that in education it is difficult to measure results precisely. Students’ learning needs to be assessed over a long span of time. Therefore, students’ feedback has not been heard seriously and, consequently, is not reflected in curriculum renewal. In this sense, diligent students who have a desire to learn are not be taken seriously. They might go to their teachers to express their disappointment, if their expectation for the curriculum is not met. However, unless the teachers take initiative as a group, the curriculum as a whole would not be constructively revised even though individual teachers try to refine their own programs. Without knowing what other teachers are striving for, it would not be possible to achieve the educational goals or objectives. To improve the existing curriculum or to organize a new curriculum, it seems fundamental for administrators and teachers to work together. They should lay out their priorities and decide what can be agreed on. Otherwise curriculum renewal will have a low success rate as the Parish and Arrends’ research shows.

At the initial planning stage, and throughout curriculum development, a crucial aspect to remember is students’ needs. Brindley says, “One of the fundamental principles underlying learning centred systems of language learning is that teaching-learning programmes should be responsive to learners’ needs. It is now widely accepted as principle of programme design that needs

analysis is a vital prerequisite to the specification of language learning objectives.” (Brindley 1989: 63) At Japanese universities, learners’ needs have not been considered or assessed as much as they should. Presumably, this phenomenon stems from the “teachers-know-better” attitude. Needless to say, teachers have knowledge and teaching experience, but without assessing their students’ needs and interests as well as what type of students they have, their expertise cannot be constructively utilized. It is like a professional seamstress making a dress without measuring her customer. The dress might be beautifully done, but most likely it will not fit to the customer, and the customer would not be able to appreciate the beautiful work. In my opinion, this analogy is not an exaggerated one but amply describes the English curricula at many Japanese universities.

What we need to do to discover students’ needs is never to assume that most students come to universities just to get a diploma. Instead, we need to find out what they want to learn and what they are interested in to better assess and meet their needs. And students’ needs have to be carefully analyzed from time to time during the process of curriculum development, not only at the initial planning stage. This is because the teacher will obtain more information about his/her students as the class progresses, and, as a result, can prepare more suitable learning activities for the students.

In the light of student needs assessment, curriculum planners need to prepare appropriate questionnaires. Since the planners or teachers do not know much about the students entering the new classes (unless they have taught them before.), the questions might be general at the initial stage, but they should be focused on finding out what students need to learn. For students it is a good opportunity to figure out what they expect to learn in the English program and also what they expect themselves to accomplish. These types of questions may help them become more realistic and responsible learners.

For thorough needs assessment, there will be two key elements to keep in mind besides the level of English proficiency: one is high school English programs and the other is different learning styles. The new Mombusho (The Ministry of Education) guidelines for teaching English in public high school will come into effect in April, 1994. Under the new guidelines, which give more choices to organize different English curricula, individual high schools will create their own unique English programs. This means the number of English language courses and class hours taught will vary from school to school. In other words, in the very near future, universities will receive students who have more diversified backgrounds of their study of English. Hence, it is important to find out how English has been taught in the high schools when the curriculum designer analyzes students’ needs.

Along with the assessment of students’ backgrounds in English, it is equally vital to discover students’ learning styles, that is, how the learner learns most effectively. Just as human beings have different ways to gather and retain information, they have varied learning styles. Some prefer to participate in lecture type classes, but some learn better in small classes. Some might prefer to work in pairs or groups. Learning styles are so diversified that it is almost impossible to take all of them into consideration. However, by finding out what type of learning styles the students prefer or work productively in, the teachers are able to create more appropriate and diversified learning activities in

language learning. Dubin and Olshtain cite the importance of determining different learning styles as follows:

Course planning which centers around learners and their needs must concern itself with individual differences in learning styles. Awareness of the need to attend to such differences is not new, but recently second language research has looked at individual traits much more seriously.For curriculum planning and material development, the emphasis is to design tasks that will allow learners to experience a variety of cognitive activities. Thus, ideally both teachers and students will become aware of individual learning styles. (Dubin & Olshtain 1986: 70)

Initial planning, as can already be seen, is time-consuming and sometimes painstaking, but it is fundamental. If we can create the proper integrated context at the initial stage, the rest of the work will come along smoothly.

Planning

In traditional English curricula at Japanese universities, aspects of linguistic knowledge are emphasized more than communicative competence, which focuses on language in use rather than on language in acquisition. Acquiring knowledge is imperative in any learning; however, if acquired knowledge is applied to practical use, it becomes more valuable and significant. Concerning a language curriculum, it is necessary to go back to a very basic question: Why do we teach English? Is it only to provide the students with knowledge? Is it to help them acquire something they need or want? Is it to help them develop self-realization and become responsible learners? A number of questions come to mind here. Reexamining and keeping in mind these basic questions will help us plan a fruitful language curriculum.

1. Goals

Each university carries its own unique philosophy which should determine its curriculum goals. In order to create achievable goals, curriculum designers (administrators and teachers) should seek clearly stated, measurable goals. For institutional purposes, that is to say advertisement purposes, the goals often tend to be flowery or misleading, but the educational goals should be decided in terms of accountability.

When organizing an English curriculum, one should include educational aspects, such as self-realization and self-development of individual learners as goals, in addition to linguistic aspects emphasizing communicative competence. Traditionally, language teaching has been considered to be a branch of applied linguistics; therefore, educational aspects have been less prominent in language teaching. In my opinion, language learning-teaching should be performed “linguistically and educationally.” Why not develop university students’ critical thinking and enhance their awareness as responsible learners through language teaching?

2. Short and Medium Term Objectives

The term “objectives” conventionally refers to short to medium term goals necessary to achieve the overall curriculum goal. To reach the overall goal, “objectives” should be defined as clearly and realistically as possible; they are not vague hopes or aspirations but concrete purposes. For example, one objective can be described as follows. If students complete a 24-week reading course, the students should be able to comprehend English language newspapers such as The Japan Times or The Daily Yomiuri without using an English–Japanese dictionary. However, this objective should not be considered as the final one, but it should be revised to see if it is realistic or not during the development of the course.

White (1988) claims that objectives are not a once-for-all matter which occurs at an initial stage of planning and quotes Skilbeck’s (1984a) points concerning objectives:

- 1.Objectives in a curriculum should be stated as desirable student learnings and as actions to be undertaken by teachers and those associated with them to affect, influence or bring about these learnings; they need to be clear, concise and to be capable of being understood by the learners themselves.
- 2.Objectives are directional and dynamic in that they must be reviewed, modified and if necessary reformulated progressively as the teaching-learning process unfolds.
- 3.Objectives gain their legitimacy by being related systematically both to general aims and to the practicalities of teaching and learning, and by the manner of their construction and adoption in the school.... it is desirable to try to show that the objectives have a rational and legitimate basis.
- 4.The construction of curriculum objectives has to be participatory, involving students as well as teachers, parents and community. (White 1988: 38–9)

Both White and Skilbeck advocate that objectives must be reviewed and modified periodically in curriculum development. This process definitely requires time and effort, but it is vital because when we plan a curriculum, we usually do not know our students well even though they can provide us certain information beforehand. We will discover more useful and realistic data as teaching-learning activities proceed.

Well thought-out and planned goals and objectives will shape what kind of curriculum can be designed. This comes naturally after deciding goals and objectives. However, it is worthy of reviewing what types of curriculum have been presented and discussed in the EFL/ESL field. The following are brief descriptions of several curriculum models worth mentioning.

1. The learner-centered curriculum

The key difference between learner-centred and traditional curriculum development is that, in the former, the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of curriculum and how it is taught. (Nunan 1988: 2)

2. The humanistic curriculum

In concrete terms, the humanistic curriculum puts high value on people accepting responsibility for their

own learning, making decisions for themselves, choosing and initiating activities, expressing feelings and opinions about needs, abilities, and preferences. In this frame work, the teacher acts as an implanter of knowledge. Cooperation between learners and teachers is stressed. (Dubin & Olshtain 1986: 75-6)

3. The communicative curriculum

...it draws from three major areas: a view of the nature of language as seen by the field of sociolinguistics, a cognitively based view of language learning, and humanistic approach in education. These theoretical views which influence the goals of communicative curriculum are shown in diagram 1.

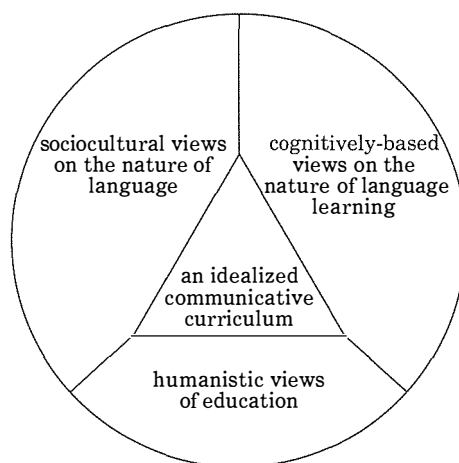


Diagram 1. An idealized communicative curriculum: the theoretical views which influence it (Dubin & Olshtain 1986: 68)

4. The coherent language curriculum

The idea of a 'coherent language curriculum' summarises the range of the papers included and the theme which unites them. 'Curriculum' is used in the British sense to include all the factors which contribute to the teaching and learning situation, while the term 'coherent' emphasises the interdependence of these factors and the need for mutually consistent and complementary decision making throughout the processes of development and education. (Johnson 1989: xi)

5. The situational curriculum

The situational curriculum proposed by Skilbeck (1984a) has its basis in cultural analysis and begins with an analysis and appraisal of the school situation itself. Such an appraisal is, in any case, an important starting point, since one of Skilbeck's major concerns is with school-based curriculum development, implementation and evaluation of a programme of students' learning by the educational institution of which these students are members. (White 1988: 36)

When curriculum designers set up goals and objectives, there is one more notable aspect to consider—what kind of English the curriculum will be focusing on: “general” English or English for specific purposes. What we must admit here is that we can not teach every aspect of the language, which forces us to choose limited aspects of English. If we decide to teach “general” English, that term will create a vagueness about what is to be taught. In this sense, “general” English must be delineated as clearly as possible.

Implementation

Conventionally, most university English classes in Japan have been independently taught by individual teachers, which means there has not been much coordination of individual classes, more specifically, not much integration of the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is because once university teachers are assigned to teach certain classes, they can design their individual programs any way they like and usually nobody observes their classes for evaluation or gives constructive feedback. The teachers are trusted and protected, that is they are not subject to criticism by other faculty members or administration, and there is usually no one designated to look at the whole picture or structure for the teachers to have dialogue with about the integrated picture. In order to reinforce the four skills, different English classes need to be more integrated. Using an analogy explaining why integrated practice is so important, Arena, a professor in the linguistics department at the University of Delaware, says:

You can use the analogy of driving a car. On day one I tell you about gears, the next day about gas. Three hundred days later, after separating each thing out, can you drive a car? Not at all, because there is no integrated practice. You can't separate learning the sound of words, listening comprehension, from reading and writing. It has to be integrated practice. Without integrating reading, listening, speaking and writing, one cannot learn a language. (The Daily Yomiuri, August 1993: 9)

As Arena states, integrated practice is an essential approach in language learning. However, the teaching situation at many universities in Japan does not allow the teachers to easily organize an integrated curriculum since it obviously would mean an extra work load. Furthermore, all teachers need to work closely to integrate the four skills, and university teachers are not used to doing this since they normally teach independently. Therefore, it would be better, if we could coordinate different English skill classes. For example, more detailed course descriptions should be written based on the English curriculum goals and objectives which the teachers have already agreed on so that individual teachers know what will be taught in other classes. Regular “sharing” meetings could be useful to obtain information about what is happening in other classes, and this would eventually help the teachers reinforce or integrate their teaching materials.

In selecting materials, we must consider students' interests as the first and most important element. Finding out their interests is necessary for motivating them. Even if teachers think certain materials are educationally sound and appropriate, if the students are not interested in them or are unable to find value in them, the success rate will be not high. Selecting materials is not a “one time only” decision. During the course development, material selection will need to be reviewed and modified. Nunan states:

...these (content selection and gradation) will need to be modified during the course of programme delivery as the learners' skills develop, their self awareness as learners grow and their perceived needs change. It is

therefore important that the content selected at the beginning of a course is not seen as definitive; it will vary, and will probably have to be modified as learners experience different kinds of learning activities and as teachers obtain more information about their subjective needs (relating to such things as affective needs, expectations and preferred learning style. (Nunan 1988: 5)

In short, if materials are to be interesting to the majority of the students, they will need to be modified to suit the relevant needs of the students.

Evaluation

As I have stated in the introduction, curriculum development should not be carried out in linear order but in a cyclical process, which means evaluation is not a final stage, but it is a process built into curriculum planning and implemented at each of the subsequent stages of development. By assembling evidence on and making judgments about the ongoing curriculum from time to time, we are able to create a more ideal and fruitful curriculum.

Other Aspects of Concern

1. Motivation

Even if a curriculum is well planned and designed, if students are not motivated, which is often true, the curriculum will not yield good results. Motivation is imperative to successful learning. According to Wright, major studies have found that people are either *integratively* or *instrumentally* motivated toward learning a foreign language. This distinction is based on extensive study of:

Cultural beliefs about learning a second language: It is believed that these will influence the positive or negative motivation individuals have towards learning a language. If the culture values the activity then it is likely there will be a positive motivation. This has been termed 'integrative' motivation.

Attitudes: If the society holds positive attitudes towards the L2 (second language learning) group, it is believed that *integrative* motivation will drive learners towards the acquisition of the language, regardless of the possible loss of cultural identity this might cause. The studies have concluded that *instrumental* factors such as fear of failure, desire to do well at school or future job requirements do not have the power to maintain the long-term effort of learning a foreign language of the *integrative* factors such as a low degree of ethnocentrism, a desire to 'be like others', and a love of other cultures and ways of life. (Wright 1987: 30-1)

Wright (1987) adds that more recent studies have cast doubt on the *instrumental/integrative* distinction but still acknowledge the importance of positive attitudes toward the L2 community as well as the *instrumental* aspect of motivation.

It seems clear that both *integrative* and *instrumental* motivations are important in language learning. The next question is whether or not it is possible to motivate students with low motivation. Generally speaking, Japanese university students are not well motivated to learn foreign languages. Or it might be more accurate to say that the students have concluded that they are unable to acquire

a foreign language at university. Though their goals may not be very realistic, many especially students in the English department, want to acquire communicative competence. Since they cannot expect too much out of their universities' English programs, some of them supplement their language study by attending local language schools to learn spoken English. In recent years, there are a good number of university students have enrolled in language schools.

A large number of Japanese university students taking English classes or majoring in English have a desire to communicate in English. The important question here is what their real motivation is: *instrumental* or *integrative* or both? To sustain and enhance their motivation, we need to assess and analyze it. The following points could be explored to find out the depth of motivation in acquiring English.

1. Mastering a foreign language is a sense of personal achievement.
2. If we speak English, it may provide more job opportunities.
3. Speaking English well is impressive.
4. Acquiring English is both desirable and necessary for the future since English is becoming a "global" language.
5. It is interesting to learn about other people's cultures, and learning English facilitates this goal.
6. Acquiring English gives us the chance to read original materials in our field, and as a consequence, we can gain more diversified information and views.

Individual teachers can add many more examples because of their knowledge of individual students.

Based on the collected data, we can analyze what motivates students, but some teachers might be concerned about students who do not have any motivation. Many Japanese university students want to "coast" while they are in university. Then, what can we do for these students? I personally feel that we still need to find out where their apathy comes from or why they cannot have more positive attitudes toward learning. This type of analysis will be useful data for creating relevant educational designs.

2. Class Size

There will still be a number of aspects to study and analyze for better curriculum development depending on the nature of individual schools and their students. However, class size is a common issue in language teaching so it seems worthy of discussion. Class size used to be overlooked by experts in the field of language learning, but recently many native English teachers who teach large size classes at Japanese schools have started sharing their observations, ideas and some strategies to deal with large size classes. Based on research and studies on language learning, language classes of 50 to 100, found at many Japanese universities, are less than ideal. The biggest problem here is that class size seems to be related to financial concerns; therefore, class size is determined by university administrators. This is why even though everyone knows it is problematic and ineffec-

tive to teach large size language classes, there has not been much candid negotiation between administrators and teachers. The decision seems to be financially based with not much consideration for educational concerns.

For successful curriculum development, class size should be considered more seriously and objectively. According to research by La Castro, large classes affect teaching, in terms of: *pedagogical concern*, large classes make it difficult for teachers to monitor work and give feedback; *management concern*, correction of large numbers of essays is difficult for composition classes; *affective concern*, it is impossible to establish rapport with students. This research indicates that ‘teachers feel they can not do their job properly (in large classes) because they can not do such things as assess students’ needs and interests, help weaker students, or even learn their students’ names.’ (La Castro 1988: 9)

When we discuss and analyze class size issues, we may need to consider different perceptions on big or small sized classes. However, if we look at language learning as interaction between teachers and students, eventually individual teachers should be able to define the ideal class size.

Conclusion

In the light of English curriculum design and development at Japanese universities, we need to design ways to have administrators, teachers and students talk together to create a context in which the three groups have to work together to create a student-concerned curriculum. All three key participants must be involved in curriculum development. To create a fruitful language curriculum, it is essential to design a dynamic cyclical process of planning, implementation and evaluation. We need to revise and modify our curriculum from time to time as students’ needs and interests are clarified or changed as the teaching-learning process unfolds. Lastly, it is very important to remember that university students not only need to be able to acquire linguistic knowledge and skills but that self-development is an important part of the education process. If we could provide more “learner-concerned” curriculum, we could develop more responsible learners who will become the future citizens of Japan.

References

- Brindley, Geoffrey. The role of needs analysis in adult ESL programme design. In Robert K. Johnson (ed.), *The Second Language Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1989.
- “Communicative teaching stresses integrated approach.” *The Daily Yomiuri*, August 23, 1993, p. 9, cols. 1–6.
- Dubin, F. & Olshtain, E. *Course Design: Developing Programs and Materials for Language Learning*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge. 1986.
- Johnson, R. K. (ed.) *The Second Language Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1989.
- La Castro, V. Research on Large-Size Classes: A Progress Report. *The Language Teacher* XII (12) 1988: 7–11.
- Mombusho (The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture). *The guidelines to study in the senior high school*. Tokyo: Kairyudo Publishing Company. 1989.
- Nunan, D. *The Learner-Centred Curriculum*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge. 1988.
- Parish, R. & R. Arrends. Why innovative programs are discontinued. *Educational Leadership* 40 (4) 1983: 62–5.
- Rodgers, T. S. Syllabus design, curriculum development and polity determination. In Robert K. Johnson (ed.),

The Second Language Curriculum. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1989.
Skilbeck, M. *School-based Curriculum Development*. London: Harper and Row. 1984a: 234–6, quoted by Ronald
V. White, *The ELT Curriculum*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 1988.
White, R. V. *The ELT Curriculum*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 1988.
Wright, T. *Roles of Teachers & Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University 1987.