〈研究ノート〉

日本の大学におけるカリキュラムデザインの考察

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Considerations for Curriculum Designers at Japanese Universities

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要　旨　本稿は，日本の大学で教育カリキュラムのデザインに携わる者が，そのカリキュラムを進展させるにあたり，考慮しなければならない制限について考察するものである。はじめに，昨今の日本人学生達の学習態度や行動によってもたらされる，カリキュラムへの制約について検討する。次に，日本の大学が抱える制度的文化や政治的風土に起因する，カリキュラムへの束縛について考証したい。最も顕著な制約に関して考察した後は，大学教育の場においてカリキュラムデザインを担当する人達に向けて，制約の中にあっても，どうしたら可能な限り最大の教育効果を達成するカリキュラムを組むことができるか，いくつかの提案を試みたいと思う。

キーワード　curriculum　environmental analysis　curriculum design

"He who every morning plans the transaction of the day and follows out that plan, carries a thread that will guide him through the maze of the most busy life. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidence, chaos will soon reign." Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

Introduction

A well-designed curriculum is recognized as the foundation of a solid educational program because it provides the program with focus, efficiency and structure. It is so important that undergraduate and graduate level teacher-training programs invariably include several courses in curriculum theory, design and implementation in their programs. In the same way that we would not start out on a cross-country trip without a good map, we should not ask our students to start an educational journey without providing them with a well-constructed curriculum. So, clearly, curriculum development should be central to the efforts of professional educators and administrators.

Yet as fundamental to the educational process as curriculum is, it is universally a rare thing to find

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a program that is both well-designed and well-implemented. Examples of failed curricula abound, while examples of successful curricula are few and far between. Although there are a multitude of reasons why this is so, many of the pitfalls of curriculum design and implementation can be minimized, if not completely avoided, if care is taken to understand and plan for the parameters that the educational environment sets on curriculum.

This paper will, therefore, examine some of the limitations that curriculum designers in Japanese universities must recognize and take into account in their planning. The aim of the paper is not to be critical of Japanese learners or universities, because it goes without saying that every country's educational system has its own unique set of constraints. Instead, by highlighting some of the key limitations that exist in the context of universities in Japan, curriculum designers, university instructors and administrators may gain a better understanding of how to set goals that are appropriate for the Japanese university environment and how to work within the limitations to achieve those goals. This understanding, it is hoped might then lead to both more realistic and more successful programs.

What Do We Mean by the Word 'Curriculum'?

Given the sometimes confusing differences in meaning attached to the word 'curriculum', it is necessary to define the term as it will be used in this paper. For the purpose of this paper, the definition proposed by White (1988) will be used, "… 'curriculum' refers to the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within one school or educational system." In other words, the word curriculum refers to the overarching plan or structure for an educational program that identifies the goals for the program and sets out the means by which those goals are to be achieved. This includes the progression of courses from year to year as well as the goals of the individual courses within the program.

The Importance of Environmental Analysis in Goal Setting

Just as a well thought out curriculum is the foundation of a sound educational program, goal setting is central to a sound curriculum. To continue the map metaphor from the first paragraph, we must first decide where we are going, before we can begin to consider the best way to get there. And to choose an appropriate destination, we must first carefully consider the constraints or limitations under which we will be operating. For example, some desirable destinations may be out of reach if we have a limited amount of money or time available for our travel, or if our car is old and unreliable. Other destinations may be difficult if others taking the trip with us want to go in a totally different direction. Whatever the constraints may be, unless they are recognized and taken into account in the goal setting process, the trip may be doomed from the start, or it may been needlessly circuitous, inefficient, or trouble-filled. In the case of curriculum design and implementation, failure to take these constraints into account may lead to rejection of the curriculum, much like a living organism

sometimes rejects new tissue (Holliday, 1992).

In the field of curriculum design, environmental analysis is the term used for examining the constraints placed on curriculum by the environment within which the curriculum will exist. The environment consists of learners, instructors, administrators and the culture of both the educational institution and the larger society. This paper will be restricted to a discussion of the constraints imposed by Japanese university students and by Japanese universities themselves. Again, it should be stressed that focusing on these issues in the Japanese university does not in any way imply that other countries' systems are free of their own set of limitations.

Constraints Imposed by Japanese University Students

Motivation

The first and most important constraint is the oft lamented lack of motivation exhibited by Japanese university students. Instructors report common student behaviors such as sleeping in class, being frequently late or frequently missing classes. Some students may even fail to purchase their required textbooks and many fail to bring essential items such as pencil and paper to class. Homework, if assigned, will usually not be done, or if it is done, it will be hurriedly 'completed' just prior to the start of the class for which it is due.

There have been several theories put forward to explain the reasons for these motivational issues. Some of the more common theories are:

- The majority of students have little need (real or perceived) to use English in the future. They have little or no internal motivation to invest in the difficult task of language learning.
- They have already had 6 years of English classes in junior high school and high school and most have formed negative opinions of language learning. Then they are often required to take 2 more years of language courses in which they have little or no interest.
- There still exists the notion that the purpose of the university is to provide students a respite between the rigors of examination hell and the rigors of employment in Japan (Lehmann, 2002). Therefore, there may be a prevailing sense among university students that coursework need not be taken too seriously.
- The difficulty of getting a good job in the current economy has made some students question the value of a college degree.

Regardless of the cause, behaviors such as those previously mentioned present quite a challenge to the conscientious instructor and curriculum designer who must take into account that a high percentage of the learners in the classroom will have little or no interest in improving their language skill, and those who are interested in learning the language can not be counted on to invest the time or effort necessary to drive language skill forward.

The Quiet Student

Much has been written of the tendency of Japanese students to remain quiet and passive in the language classroom. As any instructor who has stood in front of a classroom of students and asked a question can tell you, students rarely volunteer an answer or give opinions freely. It is often said that the reason for this reticence is a result of an aspect of the Japanese culture which places great importance on group harmony and discourages behaviors that would cause someone to stand out from the group, either positively or negatively (Nishihara, 1997). Accordingly, to answer a question puts the language learner in a situation where they may either lose face by making a mistake or be seen to be showing off if they answer the question correctly. Either way, the safe course is for students to remain silent and not call attention to themselves. No matter what the cause, however, curriculum designers and instructors must learn to work within this cultural constraint and design courses that use methods that will, to the greatest extent possible, reduce the anxiety of the Japanese students in the language classroom.

Avoidance of Target Language Use and Large Class Sizes

Another learner constraint is the obvious but overlooked fact that nearly every learner at university shares Japanese as their first language. The result of this linguistic and cultural homogeneity is that the use of the target language, English, is not necessary. When difficulties in communication arise, avoidance of the target language is not only possible, but commonplace. From the standpoint of language acquisition theory, it is exactly at the point where students use the target language to overcome a communication problem that the greatest gains occur. If students can, and usually do, use their first language when difficulties in using the target language arise, the opportunity to make gains in the target language is greatly reduced.

In addition, class size may range from 30 to 100 or more students in the first and second-year 'conversation' classes at Japanese universities. It would be difficult in even the best of situations for one instructor to monitor so many students and provide any useful guidance. But in a class of over 30 students, where many or most of the students have little or no motivation and who can easily avoid the target language by using their first language, the instructor generally spends more time in classroom management tasks than in helping to facilitate the students' learning. Given the aforementioned motivational issues, the large class sizes and the tendency of students to use Japanese to avoid use of the target language, the curriculum designer and instructors must consider using methods that provide the best chance of keeping students on task and in the target language even when not being monitored.

Lower Academic Skill

In recent years, the problem of students being accepted to university despite lower and lower

academic skill has become acute (Moriguchi, 2002). With the overabundance of universities in Japan and the dwindling number of students at college-entry age, it has become much less difficult for a student to attend university, regardless of their academic abilities. Mid- and lower-tier universities have lowered their entrance requirements to levels that allow students with very low academic qualifications to matriculate. Many professors even at top-tier universities have complained of problems caused by lower student academic abilities (Hani, 2001). This has lead to a situation where students who lack the study skills or ability to do university-level work are filling the classroom. Course designers must be aware of this trend as it will have a definite impact on what goals can be realistically set for a program.

Constraints Imposed by the Institutional Policies of Japanese Universities

As previously mentioned, it is important to look not only at the limitations presented by the learners, but also by the constraints placed on curriculum from the institutional environment. In other words, we need to examine the culture and the policies of the educational institution that limit curriculum options. This section will discuss four of the most significant institutional constraints.

The Failure to Fail

Recently, it has become nearly impossible to fail a student for anything other than poor attendance (Bremner, 2002). Even in cases where student attendance has dropped well below the minimum requirement, universities often prefer that instructors give the failing students a make-up assignment instead of failing them. The situation the curriculum designer and instructors must understand is that the hollow threat of failing students for poor attendance or for not meeting course standards can no longer be counted upon to motivate students to invest even minimally in the course. The resultant high rates of absenteeism will cause problems with classroom continuity and cohesion. With students who have low motivation and who face no credible threat of failing a course for attendance well below standard, curriculum designers must understand that whatever goal they set for the language program, it must be one that will, by necessity, be far lower than what would be optimal from the standpoint of language acquisition theory.

Lack of Full-Time Staff

When it comes time to implement a curriculum, it is the instructor who will be called upon to make the daily decisions in the classroom that give life to the curriculum and make it more than just a document. Therefore, it is essential to have instructors who not only understand the goals of the curriculum but who, ideally, also have taken part in its development and have a stake in the outcome the curriculum is designed to produce. As Bolin (1987) acknowledges, "Whether or not one accepts the role of the teacher in curriculum praxis, the teacher will make choices that influence curriculum

outcomes." Unfortunately, at most universities in Japan, there are few full-time instructors on staff (McVeigh, 2002). Instead, most of the courses are taught by part-time instructors. This reliance on part-time instructors presents the curriculum designer with a number of limitations to consider.

The first of these limitations is that part-time instructors have little time available for anything beyond the teaching of the class for which they have been contracted. They usually have put together a schedule of classes at a number of different universities and spend a significant amount of time commuting from one university to the next. Sometimes instructors will teach as many as 20 classes per week. Naturally, they do not have the time to take part in curriculum meetings, to discuss the course with full-time instructors or to collaborate with other instructors teaching the same course. Under such circumstances it is problematic for a harried part-time instructor to tailor their course or methodology to fit an individual university's curriculum. Since it is the rare for a university to actually know what happens behind the closed doors of the classroom, whether or not an instructor makes a conscientious effort to adhere to the curriculum rests almost entirely upon the professionalism of the individual instructor.

A second problem with reliance on part-time instructors is that they often feel uncomfortable to press students to meet minimum standards set out by the educational institution. Given the fact that part-time instructors work under renewable contracts, they are very careful to avoid situations that might cause students to complain about them. Understandably, part-time instructors will be more lenient in enforcement of standards to avoid such complaints and to make certain that the renewal of their contract is not jeopardized.

A third constraint is that reliance on part-time instructors introduces instability into the program. Since universities tend to show little loyalty to the part-time instructor (i.e. 1 year renewable contracts and no guarantee of schedules or classes from year to year), part-time instructors, in turn, feel little loyalty to the university. If the part-time instructor finds a university that offers better pay or a better schedule, the instructor will, quite understandably, leave. The result is turn-over, turmoil and instability--problems that have profound negative impacts on curriculum implementation.

It should be noted that the limitations that overreliance on part-time staff presents are not the fault of the instructors who often are very dedicated professionals. Rather, these limitations result from the inherent difficulties that result when people who are instrumental to the success of a program do not have a significant stake in the success of that program and have little or no time to invest in the program beyond teaching the classes. But for the curriculum designer, it is best to acknowledge that without a full-time staff of instructors dedicated to developing and implementing the curriculum, adherence to curriculum goals and enforcement of minimum standards is difficult to assure.

Varied Interests and Majors

At most universities, there is little commonality of student majors. Students from a variety of

majors with a variety of specialties within majors are often placed in the same classroom. The result of this is that curriculum designers will be unable to write curriculum that can be tailored to the skill set and vocabulary needs of any one specialty without ignoring what are almost entirely different skill sets and specialized vocabulary needed by others in the class. For example, the needs of a student majoring in fashion journalism will be quite different than those of a student majoring in fashion design. The trend toward English for Specific Purposes (ESP), therefore, seems misguided unless the students are separated by major and also by specialty within their major.

Time

Language acquisition is a long, arduous process that requires patience, dedication, and, most of all, time. But in most programs at Japanese universities, English classes meet only once or twice a week. This means that within one academic year, students will, if they attend every class session, receive 45 to 90 hours of instruction in English. In addition, since the classes often meet only once a week, even the more diligent students will have forgotten most of what was covered in the previous week's lesson. Also, there are the long holidays during which, few if any students will spend time studying or using English. This is problematic since it is well known that knowledge of a foreign language decays very quickly if not used. Administrators of the highly regarded foreign language schools run by the U.S. Department of Defense have noted that graduates of their courses may lose up to 25% of their language skill within 2 months of graduation unless the language is reinforced continuously. And it should be noted that students of these schools spend nearly as much time in language classes in one week as Japanese university students spend in language classes in one year. Curriculum goals must, therefore, be realistic and take into account the fact that the limited amount of time dedicated to language instruction is insufficient to maintain, much less improve, the students' English language skill. Additionally, the long break between terms will work to undermine the gains achieved in the first term.

Summary

In summary, within the context of Japanese universities, learner constraints limit the curriculum goals in the following ways. Learners are likely to be unmotivated and often uninterested in studying English. Even good students will tend to be quiet in the classroom. Large class sizes combined with low motivation and the ease with which avoidance of English can be accomplished, will limit the types of activities designers and instructors should use. Finally, on average, the students in today's university classrooms are not as capable of doing university level work as has been the case in the past.

The limitations imposed by the policies of Japanese universities can be summarized as follows. Failing students is discouraged, so standards of academic achievement are difficult to enforce. The

policy of reliance on part-time instructors instead of having more full-time instructors on staff makes it harder to coordinate curriculum, to assure instructor compliance with the curriculum, to enforce minimum program standards and to assure the stability of the program. Classes that are composed of students from different majors and specialties within majors makes ESP courses problematic. Finally, the number of hours of language instruction per year normally required of university students is not sufficient to allow for language maintenance, much less language gain.

When taken together, the list of constraints reviewed in this section seems overwhelming. However, as stated earlier, the impact of many of these constraints can be greatly minimized if not avoided completely by understanding them and planning for them in the design process. To ignore them as if they don't exist, however, is to assure failure of the curriculum from the start. The next section suggests possible ways in which the previous limitations can be dealt with and makes recommendations to curriculum designers working at Japanese universities.

Recommendations

The recommendations made here are in recognition of the world as it is, not the world as we would like it to be. Few of the recommendations are ones that are optimum from a purely pedagogical standpoint or even from the view of language acquisition theory. But it is counterproductive to put plans into place that ignore reality rather than work within it. Perhaps someday, some of the policies at Japanese universities will change, or perhaps students will for some reason become much more motivated to study diligently while at university. But until that day comes, it is best to design curriculum for the world as it is. Following are recommendations for the world as it is at Japanese universities today.

Goal Setting

When considering how ambitious to be in setting goals for language courses at a Japanese university, the designer must, above all, be realistic. Large classes, low motivation, infrequent sessions, and an inability to enforce minimum standards all argue against setting ambitious but unrealistic goals. To set such goals simply leads to frustration for the teaching staff, who will most likely abandon the curriculum, and for the students, who will most likely abandon the classes. Instead, it should be understood that under the aforementioned limitations, one will be lucky to create a situation in which even the modest goal of language maintenance can be achieved. It would be better to set a rather minimalist goal and achieve more than expected than to set a goal that is unachievable and that 'turns students off'. A goal of maintaining the students' current level of English skill is, therefore, more appropriate in this context.

Design Complexity

Curricula can be very detailed and complex documents. But in the context of Japanese universities, complexity works against the chances of the curriculum being successfully implemented. Since part-time instructors have no time to be a part of the design process or to coordinate with other instructors who teach the same course, the greater the complexity of the design, the greater the chance it will be abandoned or ignored. Rather than to spell out in great detail the course goals and how to accomplish them, it is better to set broad goals for each class that give freedom to the instructor to bring as much of their experience to the classroom as possible. Designing curriculum with broad, simple, easily understood goals, gives the best chance that the curriculum will be both understood and implemented.

Methods and Techniques

Self-contained classes - Given the constraints caused by poor attendance, it is not unusual to find that many students who attended a class the previous week are not in this week's class, and vice versa. As a result, when planning courses it is best to keep each class self-contained, in other words, don't plan on being able to build on what was learned in a previous lesson or to use homework assigned previously. Keep each class as a self-contained unit that presents the material, reinforces that material through practice, and then when possible, checks the students' understanding of the new material. Review and reinforcement of previously presented material is desirable, but one should not expect to be able to use previously studied or assigned material as a basis for a current lesson.

Repetition - Present the material in one lesson but find ways to reintroduce and 'recycle' the concepts in subsequent lessons. Sometimes this can take the form of reviewing a dialog or of introducing the same concepts or vocabulary in a new situation that adds variety and a new layer of complexity and understanding to what was previously taught. Another way of recycling ideas is to have short 'time-outs' where you depart from the main topic of the day and reintroduce an older topic. By doing this, you can strengthen the student's knowledge while keeping the material fresh.

Pair and Group Work - In order to avoid the problem of quiet students, the best method is to move away from whole class activities and move toward pair and small group work. Students who are otherwise concerned about making mistakes in front of an entire class are less intimidated when they are working with only one other person or in a small group. Suddenly the risk of making a mistake has been greatly reduced. This approach works well within the cultural constraints previously discussed.

Task Type - When considering what kind of tasks to recommend to those who will implement your

curriculum, it is important to keep in mind the low motivation levels and low skill levels of many of the students. These can be the most challenging constraints to deal with, but there are tasks and activities that have a much better chance of success in these circumstances than others.

First, designers should recommend that a variety of task types of short duration be used. By keeping activities short and simple, the boredom that often accompanies longer tasks can be avoided. Vary the order of tasks when possible and avoid routine classes where the same tasks are done in the same way each time. Make sure to use the full range of activities available rather than to do the same tasks types in each class session. "Variety is the spice of life," has particular importance in the environment of low motivation and short attention spans of today.

Next, the curriculum designer considering the kind of linguistic tasks to set, should lean more toward the linguistic tasks that provide the most 'bang for the buck'. In other words, one should choose phrases and situations that students will need and use most frequently. Given the fact that most students are in classes with other students who have different majors or different specialties within the same major, it is problematic for designers to attempt to narrow the linguistic selection to suit any one professional goal. For this reason, unless there is an overriding need for ESP classes, and unless a careful needs analysis has been conducted to discover the exact needs of the ESP students, it will be much more beneficial to the average university student to have a command of more general linguistic skills than to have a narrow range of skills that may not, in fact, be the skills they need.

Tasks should also be of the 'closed' type. Especially in large classes of over 35 students or more, open ended tasks are problematic. The very nature of open ended tasks means that they allow for greater freedom of use (assuming the student is actually trying to do the task), but the problem then becomes that students may make and practice mistakes, and the teacher, because of the size of the class won't be able to catch the mistakes by monitoring their output. Closed tasks, control the linguistic options to a much greater extent and in cases where careful monitoring of students is not possible, they reduce the risk of students learning and practicing incorrect forms of the language.

Finally, a task type that is especially useful in the educational environment at universities in Japan is the 'information-gap' task. This is essentially a task in which one student has information their partner needs and vice versa. Students must share this information to complete the task. The advantage of this type of task is that it has a puzzle-like nature to it so that students often get caught up in trying to complete the task. The desire to work together with a partner to 'solve' the task helps supply the motivation the student may otherwise lack and the idea of working together to get things done is a concept well suited to the Japanese culture. A well-constructed information gap task provides instructors with the best opportunity to keep students motivated and on task.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have identified several of the most important limitations that Japanese learners and

the policies Japanese universities present to the curriculum designer. I have argued that these limitations must be acknowledged and understood so that realistic goals can be set for a language program. This provides the best chance of the curriculum being successfully implemented and of it being effective in helping students to achieve the stated goals. I have put forward a number of recommendations regarding goal setting, design complexity, methodology, and task type choices that take into account the environmental constraints at Japanese universities and work within those constraints to provide the best possible outcomes for the learners, instructors and administrators.

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