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A Needs Analysis of Japanese University Students

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Abstract

This paper describes the results of the first stage of a needs analysis project aimed at determining the English language learning goals of students in a Japanese university. The study was conducted through a 100-item questionnaire administered to over 1500 first-year students. The main findings are that students in this cohort see more value in oral communication skills than any other area and put more importance on achieving communication than accuracy. They also express interest in practical and travel language, but have few other specific goals. Learners respond as having a generally positive outlook towards learning English and notable interest in studying abroad, volunteering at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the TOEIC test. The paper continues with recommendations on how to use this data to make immediate changes to EFL course goals and describes future steps in this research project.

Introduction

An English as a Foreign Language needs analysis is the process through which the learning goals and objectives of language classes are determined. The goal of this project is to assess the broad needs and wants of students studying EFL in a Japanese university. This study will report on the first stage of the project, namely the results of a needs analysis survey administered to over 1500 first-year university students.

There is a clear need for improvement in many aspects of English education in the country. Long seen as problematic, statistics from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEXT) paint a thoroughly discouraging picture of the current state of EFL in Japan, with 55% of 3rd year senior high school students stating that they do not like studying English (MEXT, 2017). Other studies report that while 83% of elementary school students see value in learning English, the same figure for junior high school students sinks to just 54% (Osumi, 2017). Student performance is another area of concern with only 36% of senior high school students reaching the proficiency target of at least grade 3 on the EIKEN exam, well short of the 50% target and essentially stagnant (down 0.5%) from the previous year (Aoki, 2017). Thus, there is clearly a need (and a great deal of space) for improving the quality of English education in Japan and a needs analysis could be seen as the logical first step to be taken at individual institutions.

Literature Review

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis in language teaching began in the 1970s in the fields of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Richards, 2001; West, 1994). A needs analysis is the process of determining the content of language courses based on the language needs of the learners. The needs are determined by several means from various sources—the learners themselves, institutions, employers, parents and any other stakeholders (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2001; Richards, 2001). A comprehensive needs analysis can include Target Situation Analysis (TSA), the skills needed to perform in the target situation, Present Situation Analysis (PSA), the abilities of the learners at the time of the analysis and Learner Situation Analysis (LSA), the subjective characteristics of the students (Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998). In any needs analysis, identifying the target situation is the most critical aspect. The purpose of TSA is to uncover when the language is used, in what kinds of transactions and in what frequency (Richards, 2000). Given that the

genesis of needs analysis was in EOP and ESP, both highly specialized fields of language instruction, TSA in these instances is relatively straightforward as the situations in which the language is used is self-evident. For instance, the broad needs of pilots or doctors are fairly clear and may be obtained without in-depth study or analysis. LSA can include a variety of data including student views of language learning and any time constraints (Brown, 1995; Graves, 2000; Woodward, 2001).

However, as needs analysis spread to general foreign language learning, determining TSA became more problematic as it was realized that in many situations, general learners lack a clear target (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001; West, 1994). This situation was sometimes named Teaching English for No Obvious Reason (TENOR), a term “half-jokingly coined” by Abbot (1980, p. 123). Lambert raises concerns surrounding TENOR, and identifies it as common in Japan, include the critique

... (that) instruction is generally unfocused, learner motivation is lower than it could be, and learners come out of individual courses, and the program as a whole, without any clear idea of what they have learned or the ability to pull it together for any functional purpose. (2010, p. 101)

Thus, while EOP or ESP courses tend to have clear target situations and needs, general learning courses that could be considered examples of TENOR can suffer from a lack of clear direction or focus in terms of needs or goals (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001). Abbott (1980) raises the danger of imposing needs based on intuition in these cases and this highlights the necessity of adapting needs analyses for these situations.

One response to this issue was a reconceptualization of what constituted needs, or perhaps more accurately, the recognition that needs were not necessarily the only source for determining course content. The crucial development was the notion that wants could be considered as relevant as needs in establishing the subject matter of language courses, an idea now well-established in the relevant literature (Brown, 1995; Graves, 2000; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nation & Macalister, 2001; Richards, 2001; West, 1994;). Teaching the students what they want goes some way in addressing some of the issues associated with TENOR and could have a beneficial impact on student motivation. A further, more modern addition to the field is the idea that the non-language interests of the students can be another source of course content (Nation & Macalister, 2001, Woodward, 2001). Other research goes further in highlighting the importance of interests and a potential link to student engagement:

In an EFL setting there are often no clear-cut needs for using English outside of the classroom for a given group of students, and so the teacher cannot base the course on needs that don't exist. In that case, I feel it is crucial to find out about their interests and backgrounds and to build the syllabus around that information so that they will be engaged. (Graves, 2000, p. 105).

Needs Analysis in Japan

Though EFL is a well-established field in Japan, there are few examples of full-length published needs analysis research on the topic. The most extensive survey is that of Lambert (2010) who used a variety of sources including records from a university employment office and questionnaires sent to university alumni to uncover the Business English needs of students at a small university in southern Japan. The study did not, however, include data from current students and put aside the concept of wants within a needs analysis. He found five Business English tasks of relatively high priority: locating information, translating documents, summarizing information, editing documents and interpreting between speakers. Being able to communicate was by far the most valued performance criterion. It is interesting to note that few of those tasks are communicative and those that are (interpreting) require a high level of proficiency.

Another study in the field of Business English needs analysis was conducted by Nakamura (2014). This study compared the views of subject lecturers at a large private university in Tokyo and employers on the importance of English in business settings. The results showed that subject lecturers were more likely to value Business English skills than employers. There was a wide degree of variation on which specific tasks were important, with employers generally valuing communicative tasks and lecturers focused more on reading. Only answering the telephone was in the five most important skills identified by both groups. The results lead the author to suggest that "Business English is a perceived rather than an actual need" for many university students in Japan (Nakamura, 2014, p. 161).

Studies including data from current students are limited to conference proceedings. Kikuchi (2004) surveyed students majoring in English at a large private university in Tokyo using a triangulated approach employing two questionnaires and interviews. From the 370 respondents to a closed-response questionnaire, non-professional uses such as watching movies, travelling and studying abroad were the most common target goals for students and seen as far more important than any business-related goal, which may be seen as a surprise given that the students had chosen English as their major. Balint (2004) surveyed 363 first-

year students in a university program with an EAP focus. The results showed that students had a generally favorable view of English and that both general and Business English skills were seen as valuable. Similar to the Kikuchi study, English for entertainment (movies and television) and travel were highly valued by respondents.

Though the preceding studies surely add to the knowledge base of the field, there are several gaps in the scholarship on the issue. Of the research surveyed, only two studies include data from current students and both appear to have been conducted in environments with more advanced students and in which English is a relatively high priority. The remaining studies have focused on the post-graduation needs of the students in employment and do not include any data on the non-business wants or goals of the students. Notably, none of the above studies seem to have taken place in settings which can be considered examples of TENOR.

Methodology

Setting

The survey was administered to all first-year students of a medium-sized, mid-ranking university in Tokyo, Japan. The university offers undergraduate degree programs in International Relations (IR), Multicultural Communications (MC), Business Management (B), Business Hospitality (BH), Law (L), Economics (E) and Urban Innovation (U). All first-year students are required to take the Freshman English course which meets five times a week for 45 minutes each class. With the exception of IR and MC groups, all classes are required to use a textbook from the *4 Corners* or *Interchange* series. The course goals are quite broad:

Freshman English is an integrated-skills, topic-based EFL course with an emphasis on speaking and listening skills. Students will engage in reading and writing activities to reinforce their oral/aural skills; however, the primary course goal is developing students' English conversation ability (CELE, 2017, p. 44).

Level-specific goals are based around the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines. However, these are simply suggestions as there are no required syllabus goals or standardized tests and instructors are given significant latitude in choosing the content, delivery and assessment methods of the courses they teach.

The average level of the students is quite low: Table 1 shows that the vast majority of FE students go into classes using a textbook at A1/A2 CEFR level. Only 23% go into classes

at high A2 or above, which can be considered close to the national average. Nationwide, 36% of 3rd year senior high school students passed at least the EIKEN Pre-2 test (Aoki, 2017), which is benchmarked at A2 level (Eiken Foundation of Japan, 2017).

Table 1

Textbook Selection by CEFR Level

Level	Number of Classes	Percentage
A1	27	31
A2	40	46
A2-B1	5	5.7
B1	14	16.1
B1+	1	1.1

IR and MC students take a modified version of the course. For these groups, a TOEIC score of 600 is a graduation requirement. IR students are required to participate in a 5-month study abroad program in the United States. MC students are strongly encouraged to participate in the same program and over 50% generally elect to do so. In the first semester, the course meets five times a week: two days are devoted to general English, two days for TOEIC test practice and one day with a Japanese professor. In the second semester, classes meet twice a week and the focus moves to content-based lessons focusing on discussion and critical thinking skills.

Lacking clear syllabus goals, English instruction in the university in which the present study is situated seems like a clear case of TENOR. Lambert (2010, p. 101) contends the following:

TENOR is typical of English programs in Japanese public schools. At the university level, for example, learners often major in English because they need some university degree to obtain a higher paying position, not because English is a requirement for the position. Companies frequently train their employees themselves, and university training functions as background rather than meeting any specific job requirements.

The Freshman English course is very self-contained as only IR and MC students go on to take further classes taught by CELE instructors. Students from other majors do take further English classes in some cases, but these are staffed and organized independently of CELE. As

such, long-term learning objectives and continuity between courses is an issue, a noted feature of TENOR.

Survey

A 100-question bilingual survey was used to gather data. As with any other research instrument, this approach has both strengths and weaknesses. The choice to employ a survey at this stage of the project was based on the goal of acquiring a large quantity of data that could be used to both establish the general direction of further steps in the research process as well as to inform eventual decisions relating to syllabus content. As such, the data lacks the specificity and the potential to be analysed in greater depth that could be provided by other data collection methods such as interviews or focus groups. Further, this initial approach also does not include data collection from sources other than current students such as recent university graduates or potential employers, both of whom can speak to post-graduation English language needs.

The survey posed questions in four broad categories. The first asked students to rate the utility of various skills on a three-point Likert scale of very important, somewhat important and not important. The subsequent section investigated the students' previous use of English outside the classroom, both in Japan and overseas. The third section asked students about their future hopes and plans connected to English. The final section focused on LSA and gathered general information about the students including previous history studying English, information relating to time commitments and their general view towards English language study.

As seen in Table 2, the response rate of 91% was extremely high, with a total of 1517 students responding.

Table 2

Survey Participation

Department	Responses	Total students	Percentage
International Relations	187	197	94.9
Multicultural Communications	112	129	86.8
Business Management	347	384	90.4
Business Hospitality	100	152	65.8
Law	368	378	97.4
Economics	257	267	96.3
Urban Innovation	146	160	91.2
Total	1517	1667	91

Results

Student Profile and LSA

General information was collected about the students for teachers to better understand their level of motivation, their existing time constraints and data concerning their background in English studies. Figure 1 shows that students in general report a positive view of learning English, with 65% responding as having an either positive or slightly positive outlook towards English language study. Only 14% replied with a negative response. Figure 2 shows that the frequency of speaking activities in their previous learning is relatively low as only 41% report speaking as often or always being a part of a lesson. Forty percent of students report having a part time job and 29% have a non-education or employment time commitment (sports team, volunteering, family obligation), though the bulk of these respondents spend less than five hours a week meeting these commitments. As students in mid-ranking Japanese universities tend to commute rather than relocate to attend university, travel time and attendance are known issues as all FE classes start between 8:50 and 11:35. Thirty percent of students travel between 60-90 minutes to reach the university and 17% spend over 90 minutes to reach the university.

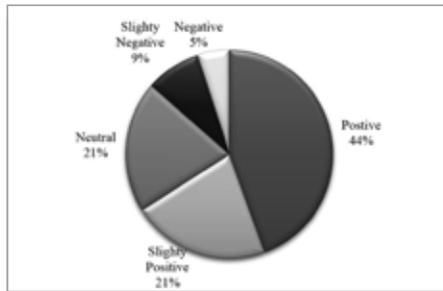


Figure 1. Student views on learning English

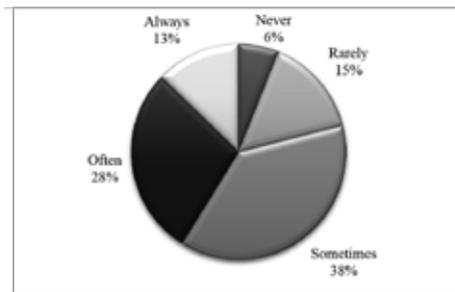


Figure 2. Frequency of speaking activities in previous English education

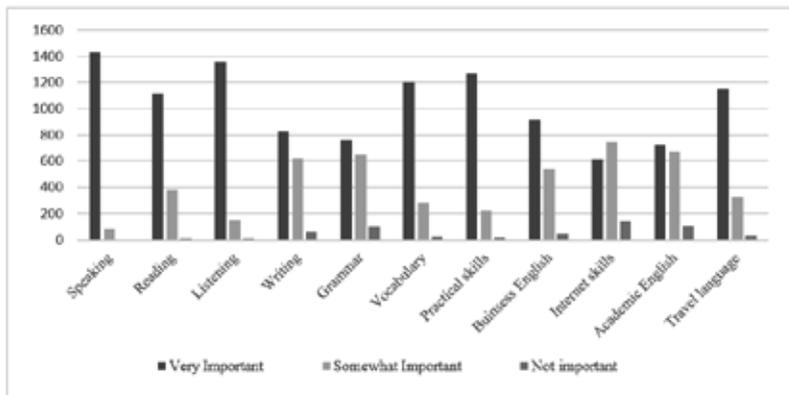


Figure 3. Student views on skills

Student Views on Skills

The first section of the survey asked students how important they feel various English skills are and those findings are displayed in Figure 3. There is a clear preference towards oral communication skills, with upwards of 90% of students replying that speaking and listening are very important. Reading and writing, in particular, are seen as far less valuable as speaking or listening. Vocabulary knowledge is rated as much more important than grammar, with answers of very important for the former of 80% compared to 50% for the latter.

In terms of topic areas, practical skills rank highest, behind only speaking and listening of all surveyed categories. Travel language is another area to which students respond positively, with Business English being a topic of secondary importance. Neither internet skills nor Academic English are seen as particularly useful to respondents.

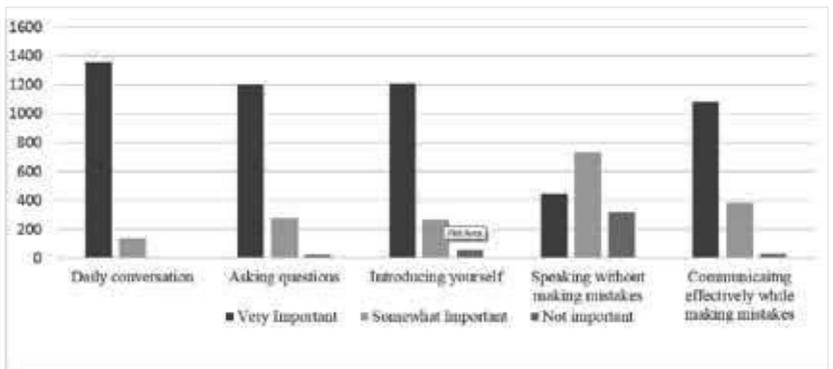


Figure 4. Speaking sub-skills

An analysis of sub-skills reveals little specificity with a high percentage of learners feeling strongly about general skills. Within the broader category of speaking skills, seen in Figure 4, daily conversation is the area receiving by far the most interest from students, followed by introducing oneself and asking questions. Interestingly, casual conversations with a friend ranks lower than any of the previous items despite the obvious link between it and the admittedly vague notion of daily conversation. More specific skills such as talking about Japan or giving presentations received less support, with less than two-thirds of students rating them as very important. Within the speaking sub-skill section, the students were also asked their views on the importance of speaking with grammatical accuracy and communicating effectively while still making some mistakes. The ability to effectively

communicate is twice as likely to be seen as very important. Only 448 respondents replied that speaking accurately was very important, compared to the 319 who replied that it was specifically not important, the highest total for that response on any question from this survey.

Tallies from the listening sub-skills section (Figure 5), largely mirror those from the speaking, with the broad goal of understanding conversations outranking all other sub-skills. Understanding music and movies are less valued and the highest valued practical skills all relate to travel language, with giving directions, helping people take the train, ordering at a restaurant and making travel reservations receiving the most support.

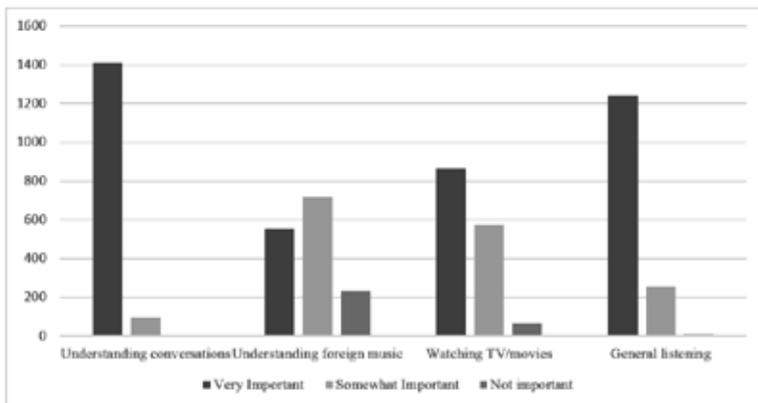


Figure 5. Listening sub-skills

Past Use of English

The third section of the survey examined the students' past use of English, both in Japan and abroad. Perhaps unsurprisingly, reported use of English in Japan is extremely limited. Of the 20 items surveyed, "Never" was the most common answer for all but five items. Of those five, four are related to receptive skills (movies, TV, music and reading websites). Giving directions was the only productive skill used at any frequency with just over half of respondents having had this experience. Use of English outside Japan was even lower. Though 48% of students have been abroad and 10% have studied abroad, "Never" was the most common answer for all items. Restaurants, airports and sightseeing locations are the places where English is used most by this group. Though low, the figures for use in and

outside Japan are expectedly so. As most students are 18 years old, their exposure to outside classroom use of English in Japan would be highly limited and any overseas trips they have taken would almost certainly have been in the company of family members or others who would take on the responsibilities of arranging transportation, accommodation and any other such tasks.

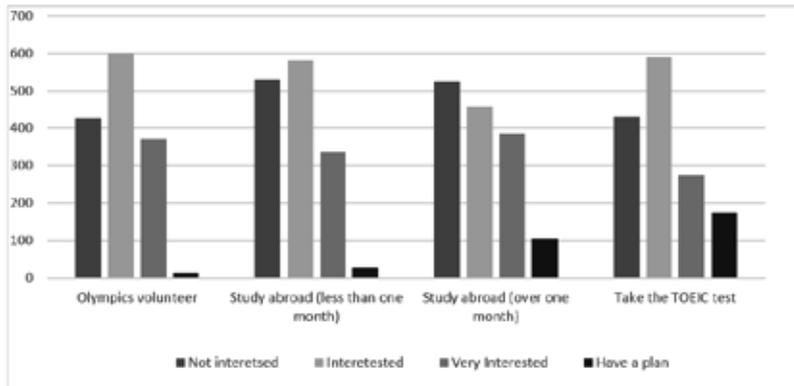


Figure 6: Future plans using English

Future Use of English

Students were also surveyed on what their plans or interests are regarding use of English in the future. The results are shown in Figure 6. In terms of English tests, the TOEIC test is preferred to the Eiken, IELTS or TOEFL. Given that the TOEIC test is a part of the curriculum for students from two majors, this is not particularly surprising, but as more than 70% of all respondents report some interest, it does rank higher than any other surveyed item. One potential explanation is that a TOEIC score is a common item on job applications in Japan. The other highest-ranking activities are those connected to either study abroad or the upcoming Olympics in 2020 with well over half of all students expressing some degree of interest in both.

Responses from Higher-Level Students

As stated, the vast majority of students responding to this survey are at the beginner/elementary level. In order to assess the needs of higher-level students, results from the top two classes (approximately CEFR B1 level) from each faculty were separately

analyzed. This group totals 243 students, or 16% of the total. In broad terms, though, they are no notable differences between the general results and students from this section. Reported motivation among both groups is similar, with the higher group actually displaying slightly fewer positive feelings towards learning English. In terms of skills, there are not major differences, with speaking, listening and practical skills also the most valued. Both groups rate effective communication as far more important than speaking without making mistakes, but the higher group show a greater desire to speak accurately, with 7% more students viewing this as important and 5% fewer responding that it is specifically not important. Students from this group are 9% more likely to have been abroad and twice as likely to have studied abroad, with 20% reporting having had this experience. Overall use of English in the past remains low in this selection, but more than half of these students have some experience of outside classroom use of English in the past compared to roughly 25% of the general group. Overseas use was also notably higher, with the same situations- restaurants, airports and sightseeing locations- seeing the most reported use.

One notable difference is in plans or hopes for use of English in the future. Students from this group are more interested in using English in the future as over three-quarters responded positively towards either studying abroad, being a volunteer for the Olympics or taking the TOEIC test, which is the highest-ranking item in this group as well.

Discussion

Discussion of Results

Speaking broadly, the results seem to strengthen the feeling that this group is a case of TENOR- there are not, at this stage of the research, any easily identifiable specific goals for many of these students. More research on such cohorts is certainly necessary, but there is at least the possibility that 18-year-olds do not necessarily have clear language goals. There is also the potential that the preference for general skills is a genuine recognition from the students that while they have no specific needs at this point, they do want to improve their general English skills without having an explicit goal or target situation in mind. Perhaps the term TENOR itself needs to be reconceptualised as it does not have to necessarily be a pejorative term. For students without a clear objective, particularly younger learners and those at lower levels, a general foundation in English and focus on oral communication skills could serve them well once their actual future needs become more apparent. Designing a course with too much specificity comes with the risk of alienating those without specific

goals and in cases where the English study is mandatory, such as this institution, this possibility is likely higher.

The key finding of this study is the primacy of speaking skills. Speaking is the skill seen as most important by students, but Ministry of Education figures show that just 11% of 3rd-year senior high school students reach the stated goal of speaking at CEFR level A2 or higher, compared to 32% for reading, 27% for listening and 18% for writing (MEXT, 2017). Data on students' background in English language study and the infrequency of speaking practice lends empirical weight to the common anecdotal belief that language learning in Japanese junior and senior high schools does not put enough focus on speaking skills. Speaking is one area in which student needs, perceived and actual (insofar as it is likely to be their least proficient area) closely align. An increased recognition that, despite several attempts to address the matter, secondary education is failing in developing students' oral skills combined with the suggestion that it is the ability most valued by students is the first step in making effective changes to address this issue. In practical terms, these findings also show that the current overarching syllabus guideline at this university advising teachers to focus on oral communication skills is still valid. It is also immediately applicable to any class level and the knowledge that speaking is of primary importance should form the basis of subsequent course planning.

In terms of motivation, while the percentage of students who feel positive towards English in this survey is far higher than the national average of similar age groups (64% compared to 45%), the circumstances of the survey and the possibility that students are giving the answer they feel they should have to be taken into account. An increased focus on speaking could also have a positive impact on motivation. MEXT figures show that students who perform well on speaking tests have a vastly more positive outlook on English than those who do not. Nearly 90% of students who scored in the B1 CEFR speaking band responded positively towards English compared to 46% of those in the A2 band (MEXT, 2017). While the motivation of higher-level (though not specifically more proficient in speaking) students in this survey actually revealed a slightly lower level of motivation, the MEXT findings raise the possibility of improving students' speaking skills as a means of strengthening overall language learning motivation. Crucially, this necessitates students being aware of the progress that they are making and this has clear implications for assessment.

Student interest in or plans to take the TOEIC test is an issue that requires further investigation. It is the future activity using English in which students from this survey are most likely to consider taking part in, with over 70% of respondents interested in taking the

test. This is tempered slightly by further examination. Students from the top two sections of all classes are even more interested (85%), as are those in the departments of International Relations and Multicultural Communications (nearly 90%) who require a TOEIC score of 600 to graduate. More detail on why students would like to take the test (for example, if they would like a high score for job applications, if they are interested in knowing their own level or tracking their improvement) is needed. Whether the students would like TOEIC practice to be a part of class instruction is another open issue.

Implications for Course Planning

As noted, this paper is reporting the broad initial results of a research project. More detailed analysis and investigation are required before using any of these results to make detailed changes to the overall course syllabus. That notwithstanding, the early results do have some clear implications for teaching that can immediately be put into practice. The following is a general proposal for using the data gleaned from this study to make immediate alterations to the course goals and syllabus.

Some issues said to be connected to TENOR- a lack of understanding as to what is being learnt and why- can be at least partially addressed. An overall course goal of improving speaking skills with particular focus on communicative competence, vocabulary, language for travel and practical skills would provide a degree of cohesion to instruction and are themes which teachers can immediately introduce into classes of any level. Many of the skills involved have the benefit of being of utility to those wishing to travel abroad or work in Japan and can be presented to students as such. For example, a lesson on restaurant language will undoubtedly involve role-play in which one student is a waiter and the other a customer. Students learn language they can use when they travel while in the role of the customer and skills to assist English speaking foreign visitors or residents of Japan when in the role of the server. There are numerous such situations including giving directions (on foot or public transport), hotels, sightseeing information, describing food or culture and shopping that can be used in similar ways and graded to suit almost any student level. Raising student interest level by connecting course content to the Tokyo Olympics could well strengthen these lessons as many of the students have at least stated an interest in being a volunteer when the games are held in Tokyo in 2020.

While accuracy should not be ignored, the key performance metric should be communicative competence. Student responses relating to the primacy of communicative competence over accuracy go against the oft-repeated trope that Japanese students tend to be

less participatory in class because of their fear of making a mistake. Additionally, the stated preference of vocabulary rather than grammar should be a guiding principle for the course.

All these changes seem to require a coherent assessment regimen that reflects the aim of improving effective communication skills. There is currently no institutional guidance on what form testing should take. The Japanese education environment at all levels places heavy emphasis on tests and using some form of spoken tasks as the main assessment mechanism would not only reinforce the course goals to the learners, but also give them a means to assess their own progress. This could further have a beneficial effect on their motivation and satisfaction with the class.

Future Steps in this Research Project

The next stage of this needs analysis project is to analyze the existing data in greater depth to attempt to discern more specific situations in which students would like to be able to use English and discover any department-specific goals. For example, Business Management students are more likely to consider Business English to be important (68%) than the total student population (60%). Similarly, Business Hospitality students (who choose a specialization including Hotel and Food Services, Travel and Tourism and Cabin Attendant) place increased value on travel language (80% compared to 75%). While neither difference seems so great as to require a specific syllabus, they nonetheless suggest the existence of other differences that should be further examined and these preferences need to be taken into account when selecting course material. While lower and higher-level students from this study have broadly similar needs, more investigation into these groups is necessary for the same reason.

As noted, the survey described above is only the initial stage of data collection for this project and other sources of data should also be included and other stakeholders consulted as the needs analysis proceeds. Further avenues of data collection could include interviews or focus groups in order to gain a deeper understanding of the learning needs and wants of students. Data from other studies, particularly those assessing the post-graduation needs of learners, are similarly of value to course planners as the long-term needs of the learners should be factors in determining course content. Finally, the views of other stakeholders, particularly university administrators, also need to play a role in syllabus planning. As they are responsible for the overall education policies of the institution and quite possibly have valuable contributions to make in terms of the broader societal trends that may affect future graduates, their views cannot be ignored.

A finished syllabus requires more than solely broad statements as to what students wish to learn in class. In the absence of institution-set goals, one possible solution that could be enacted would be to base future syllabus content around CEFR levels and goals while at the same time maintaining an appropriate amount of flexibility to account for local and contextual considerations. There are several reasons why this would be of benefit to teachers, learners and administrators. Firstly, the framework is the result of years of study by academics and professionals and represents the most comprehensive effort of establishing key goals and abilities for language learners at different levels. Each CEFR level also has both broad and specific targets for each skill and are, particularly at lower levels, very concrete and could prove helpful in the key needs analysis task of helping to bridge the gap between the current abilities of the students and their target skills. Given that they are now also a standard used by the Ministry of Education in Japan and widely used by materials developers and publishing companies, CEFR scores are also beneficial in that they provide teachers and administrators a clearer means of describing ability rather than vague descriptors of “Beginner” or “Intermediate” or by benchmarking different tests to each other. Further, the use of CEFR levels by the Ministry of Education allows for better standardization between schools and institutions. Finally, they are surely an upgrade on the far less common ACTFL guidelines that are currently used.

Use and reference to the CEFR guidelines is a simple method through which teachers can organize course content and would also facilitate incorporating student wants and needs into course planning. A simple survey could be used to investigate the views of individual classes or proficiency levels by having students rank the utility of CEFR sub-skill and thereby play a direct role in selecting the course content. Many textbooks, including the ones used in the current institution, have explicit reference to the general and specific goals for each skill at each learner level and this would allow teachers to select content based on data rather than intuition. Once selected, the goals also provide a way for students to track their learning and there are obvious applications to learner reflection and self-assessment through can-do statements and other means.

Suggestions for Further Research

As noted, there are few examples of needs analysis studies in Japanese universities and more research is needed to gain a better understanding of the needs and wants of these students in general, particularly low proficiency level university students. Different research methods including focus groups and interviews would also be of benefit. Once a course is

designed using data derived from any such research, assessing student perceptions of and satisfaction with such a course is another obvious future research project. This could lead to further, in-depth information on what specific skills the students want to learn and whether delivering a course around these objectives has a noticeable effect on student satisfaction or motivation and if it would lead to a better sense among the students of what is being learnt and why.

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