

## **Developmental Proposal of the English Curriculum at Okayama Prefectural University Based on the Present Curriculum and First-year Students' Beliefs regarding English Learning**

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*In order to provide students with good teaching, the curriculum needs to be reviewed and revised periodically. Even minor changes can be of benefit. To prepare a better curriculum for students, teachers should know students' needs and wants. In this report, the present English curriculum at Okayama Prefectural University is described. The present curriculum aims to improve students' four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing in addition to increasing vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Then, the results of a survey on 2018 first-year students' beliefs regarding learning English are reported. Students' beliefs include attitude toward English learning, motivation, anxiety, and expectation. Last, based on the results of the survey, the strengths and weaknesses of the present curriculum are discussed.*

**Keywords: university, belief, learning, English, first-year student**

### **The Okayama Prefectural University English curriculum during the academic years 2016–2018**

Beginning in the academic year 2017, Okayama Prefectural University (OPU) adopted a quarter system. In order to improve students' English-language communication skills, and to provide them with a better learning environment,

OPU had implemented a new English Language Program (ELP) in the previous academic year (2016). In the 2017 academic year, the ELP was expected to enter a new stage because both first- and second-year students were enrolled in the new English curriculum: the ELP program followed by English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In addition to overseas

learning programs focusing on languages and cultures which had been conducted for years, the students were provided with new study-abroad programs (field-specific programs).

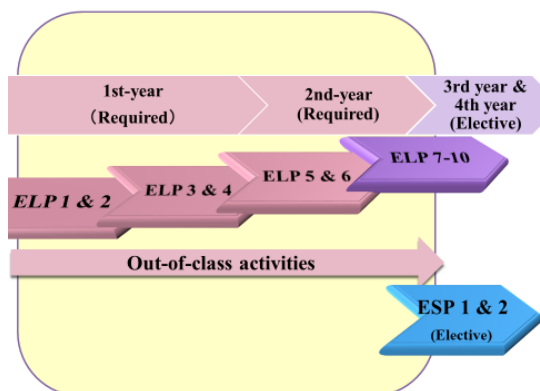


Figure 1. An overall picture of the English program

All first- and second-year students at OPU are required to take classes from ELP 1 to ELP 6. The program is devised to have a spiral progression. Students start with ELP 1 which improves receptive skills; move to ELP 2, focusing on productive skills; then to ELP 3, working on receptive skills again; ELP 4 (productive skills); and ELP 5 and ELP 6 (receptive skills). In addition to in-class activities, out-of-class activities are provided by staff members in the Language Education Division. These out-of-class activities include extensive reading and e-learning activities: students are provided with advice on which books to read and are encouraged to accomplish learning on the Web by teachers and

Language Education Division staff members. Students' achievements in extensive reading and e-learning are evaluated and counted toward their grades in each ELP class. After finishing the ELP program, students are ready to proceed to the next stage-ESP classes. Overseas learning programs are also prepared. Students can choose a language program and a field-specific study abroad program as elective subjects.

### Present situation about students' beliefs regarding learning English

The Language Education Division collected data on students' beliefs regarding learning English for three years (2016–2018). We collected data at the beginning and the end of the year from first-year students. We also collected data from second-year students at the end of the ELP program (at the end of ELP 6), when they finished the required classes. We found that students' beliefs regarding the value and importance of learning English declined (Takahashi, Sugimura, & Kazahaya, 2017). We administered a questionnaire survey. The items included students' attitudes toward English learning, motivation, anxiety, and expectation, and the results showed significant declines on the following items: "I really like learning English," "I would like to get better grades in English," and "I spend more time on English than on other subjects." The decline in the last

item might imply students became more interested in their own fields.

We concluded that this was caused by the fact that students had become demotivated to learn English as a whole. After passing the entrance examination and entering university, they lost their instrumental motivation to learn English. Also, the number of English classes per week decreased drastically. Even in the first year, students only had two classes a week; and when they began second year, they did not have any English classes for three months due to the quarter system. No required classes (including English classes) were provided in the second quarter for second-year students. As students advanced to higher levels, they were expected to acquire more professional (content, as opposed to language) learning. This learning is conducted in their first language, Japanese; thus, they gradually spend less time on English-only work. Eventually, we concluded students' desire to learn English will increase if they have access to English-language learning resources within their own professional fields.

Also, we assumed that before university starts and students begin the English curriculum, students' beliefs about learning English would have been different. Therefore, we decided to explore students' beliefs at the beginning of their university life in quite some detail. OPU consists of three different faculties:

Health and Welfare, Information Technology, and Design. Each faculty has its own characteristics, and the students' attitudes and learning styles entering each faculty seem to be different from faculty to faculty. We, as members of the Language Education Division, try to reach out to all three groups in an equal manner, as we also did in collecting their data. If we know of differences in beliefs among these groups, we might need to set different learning goals depending on their interests.

In the survey, we investigated differences among students in different faculties. The research question is as follows: "Do OPU first-year students' English learning beliefs differ at the beginning of university life?" If so, we will need to consider language curriculum depending on major.

### **Ethical considerations**

The survey approved by Okayama Prefectural University's Ethics Committee, and the study was approved.

### **Method**

#### *Participants*

In this study, 370 first-year students aged 18–19 answered the survey. The university is ranked slightly above average for all public universities in Japan ( $T$  ranged from 45 to 50; Kawai-juku K-net, 2019). The participants in this study majored in Health and Welfare ( $n = 138$ ),

Information Technology ( $n = 146$ ), or Design ( $n = 86$ ). They were enrolled in 12 separate classes; four in Health and Welfare, five Information, and three Design. At the time of data collection, all students were taking 90-minute listening/reading classes (ELP 1). However, we expected little influence from the teacher in charge or from the curriculum because this survey was conducted at the beginning of the year.

#### *Instrumentation*

A questionnaire was prepared in Japanese, and asked the participants about their beliefs regarding learning English. Thirty-one items were chosen based on the results of a previous study (Takahashi, 2003; Takahashi, Sugimura, & Kazahaya, 2017). The participants gave responses on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The data were collected at the beginning of the 2018 academic year (within the first three sessions). All the participants completed the questionnaire in class.

#### **Results**

All the variables were examined using SPSS 25.0J for Windows (2017) for continuity of scales, independence of scores, missing values, fit between their distributions, and the assumptions of the

multivariate analyses. The values for skewness and kurtosis were within normal bounds. There was a concern about unequal sample size among the three samples; however, SPSS properly adjusted for this problem.

A between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on 31 dependent variables related to learning English. The independent variable was faculty. Table 1 shows the results of a descriptive analysis for items which show significant  $p$  values ( $p < .05$ ). These results were also confirmed using one-way analysis of variance for each item.

Table 1. Items which show significant differences according to faculty

Item	M	SD	N
9. I'm studying English so that I can understand English lectures and write academic papers.	2.41	.690	138
	2.61	.890	146
	2.30	.704	86
13. I have had a bad experience learning English.	2.17	.828	138
	2.50	1.046	146
	2.35	.991	86
14. I really like learning English.	2.35	.770	138
	2.13	.889	146
	2.08	.857	86
16. I want to join a group that has the same goal	3.03	.661	138
	2.99	.843	146
	2.71	.784	86

(improving English).			
18. English speakers are sociable and hospitable.	2.82 2.68 2.53	.664 .803 .698	138 146 86
20. English-speaking cultures appeal to me.	2.99 2.75 2.97	.634 .775 .727	138 146 86
21. I'm studying English so that I can read English articles and books in my field.	2.07 2.40 2.09	.721 .868 .806	138 146 86
22. I'm studying English so that I can write English articles in my field.	1.96 2.33 1.92	.621 .848 .785	138 146 86
23. I'm studying English so that I can listen to English lectures in my field and comprehend them.	2.22 2.52 2.10	.762 .881 .826	138 146 86
24. I'm studying English so that I can give an English presentation in my field.	2.11 2.53 2.17	.647 .823 .910	138 146 86

26. With better English proficiency, I can get any job I wish.	2.90 3.34 3.27	.795 .727 .658	138 146 86
27. I'm studying English just because it's a required subject.	2.67 2.35 2.50	.849 .980 .891	138 146 86
31. I can handle English if I have enough vocabulary.	2.17 2.11 2.37	.690 .840 .704	138 146 86

### Answers to the research questions

An answer was gained to the research question “Do OPU first-year students’ beliefs differ at the beginning of university life depending on their major?” The participants’ beliefs regarding English learning differed significantly by faculty even at the start of their university English curriculum. Their needs and wants were different because their objectives in learning for their higher education were very clearly defined and distinct even at the beginning.

Although Table 1 focuses on items where a difference was found between the faculties, one item indicated overall positive attitudes toward learning English. Table 2 shows the item which indicates participants’ positive attitudes.

Table 2. Item which shows students' positive attitudes toward learning English

Item	M	SD	N
26. With better English proficiency, I can get any job I wish.	2.90	.795	138
	3.34	.727	146
	3.27	.658	86

### Strengths and weakness of the present English curriculum

The present English curriculum at OPU was planned and managed by the members of the Language Education Division before conducting the survey described above. All the members shared their ideas on in-class and out-of-class activities. Although the number of part-time teachers in the Division exceeds that of full-time teachers, full-time teachers work as coordinators and are in charge of the management of the program. Because the program is a one-fit-for-all program, it was easily managed and operated. This is an easy way in terms of the management and operation.

However, as shown by the results of the belief survey, students' beliefs differed depending on their major. Since OPU consists of three colleges that are totally different to each other, the English curriculum (teachers, teaching methods, and textbooks) might need to be adjusted to their respective students' needs and wants, which might also involve losing some advantages associated with the

current one-size-fits-all curriculum, like those mentioned above. In order to improve the curriculum and make it adequate to shifting demands, teachers need to understand what their students want and need. Since the curriculum has considerable influence on the ways in which students make sense of their learning, teachers and administrators have to prepare an environment that encourages students to construct their own learning in the most helpful way. We need to be aware of what our students need and want and to adjust the objectives of the classes accordingly as they advance to higher levels.

### Implications for future teaching

One concrete teaching implication is that teachers should enrich the learning log (paper-based record book) that has already been assigned to students. Students are required to carry a learning log during the first two years and to submit them to the teachers when asked. Students have to record when and what they did during out-of-class activities (extensive reading and e-learning).

This learning log works as a portfolio. Teachers can observe their students' developmental level, interests, and concerns, which cannot be assessed in class. Students write their comments for graded readers using their own words.

The learning log also promotes students' autonomy. Students can reflect

on their own learning by recording and checking. As Little (1991) describes, “autonomy presupposes, but also entails that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning”.

The most important rationale for using a learning log may be based on the theory of self-efficacy. Bandura (1995) defined this concept as the degree of an individual’s belief in their own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. The learning log plays an important role in promoting students’ self-efficacy.

The next step is to refine the present learning log. The frame and structure should be carefully planned and devised before students start recording.

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## 現在の英語カリキュラムと新入生の学習者ビリーフに基づく発展的提案

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### 要旨

平成 30 年度に実施された英語カリキュラムを説明し、平成 30 年度入学生の入学直後の学習者ビリーフ（学習への期待、意欲、不安など）を調査した。調査の結果、3つの学部から構成される岡山県立大学は、学部ごとに、学習者ビリーフが大きく異なることが明らかになった。語学教育推進室は、全学を対象とした統一英語カリキュラムを実施しているが、学部ごとに、学生のニーズに合わせた英語カリキュラムを工夫していく必要がある。

### キーワード

大学・ビリーフ・学習・英語・新入生