

Support Structures for a Content-Focused EFL Program

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Abstract - In this short report we describe some of the challenges faced in the delivery stage of the content-focused language curriculum we have jointly developed with colleagues at Konan University and the Hirao School of Management (CUBE), and we outline strategies for addressing those challenges. Specifically, we explore how the balance between language and content that we envisioned for the overall program and each specific course has shifted away from an explicit focus on language, with an adverse effect on language-learning outcomes for our learners. In addressing this challenge, we are proposing more direct instruction of language together with other support structures for teachers and students.

Keywords: Second Language Learning, Faculty Development, Organizational Tools, Instructional Resources, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

1. Introduction

In previous publications (Jones & Palmer, 2012; Jones & Palmer, 2016) we have outlined the design and development efforts for a content-focused English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at a private university in western Japan. There is ample anecdotal evidence that many of the target-language outcomes are being met, and we now have empirical data showing modest target-language gains for learners in this program (Appendix 1). However, we notice areas of the curriculum that are not living up to their potential, and recognize several remaining challenges in delivering specific courses as designed and developed. In the following sections, we review some contextual features of the program, highlight some challenges or areas for improvement that we have recognized in each of the required English courses, and elucidate some short- and long-term strategies for addressing these challenges.

There are several aims in writing up this report. First, we recognize the value of stepping back for a macro view of our program. In our daily work, we are often immersed at the micro level of attending to individual students or working on the specifics of classroom lessons and tasks. Also, we see this as a valuable opportunity to document our ongoing improvements to the English program at Konan University, Hirao School of Management (CUBE). At the same time, this documentation process opens up our efforts to public scrutiny and can stimulate dialog among our instructors and the wider community of teachers in similar teaching contexts.

Some of our underlying assumptions are that (1) supporting teachers in their classroom endeavors is potentially the most effective path to supporting learners in our program, (2) teachers come to our program from a variety of educational backgrounds, have a range of pedagogic experiences, and possess diverse skills, knowledge and beliefs

related to teaching and learning language, and (3) learning a new language is a complex, social endeavor that is hindered rather than helped by mechanical, technocratic processes or approaches. Second Language (L2) teaching assumptions are that (4) learning vocabulary is fundamental to language learning and high frequency vocabulary provides the strongest foundation, (5) extensive reading will help learners improve reading competence and confidence, and (6) a genre-based approach to literacy based on sound systemic functional grammar (SFG) perspectives will facilitate a better understanding of the reading-writing connection and increased overall proficiency.

2. Setting the Context

Students at CUBE are enrolled in one of two courses (Management or Study Abroad) and are not English majors. The skills-focused English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum for Study Abroad students (roughly 30 per year) was designed by the English Language Institute at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo and is not described here. For the approximately 160 students enrolled each year in our main program, the Management Course, i.e. the focus of the current paper, the curriculum includes three semesters of required content-focused English language courses. In designing these required courses, we intentionally chose to focus on content but realized fully that the underlying aim would always be target-language development.

Following on from these required courses, students can also elect to study abroad for one or two semesters and have a range of elective courses to choose from if they are so inclined.

Students enter with a range of English language proficiencies. The high and low combined scores on the GTEC listening and reading tests are presented for the last three cohorts together with mean scores and standard deviation:

Cohort 6 (2014) - Low: 140, High: 308, Mean: 212.3, STD: 35.6

Cohort 7 (2015) - Low: 132, High: 289, Mean: 205.4, STD: 33.5

Cohort 8 (2016) - Low: 130, High: 302, Mean: 204.9, STD: 33.8

In the Japanese workplace, the internationally designed and accredited TOEIC is still a more commonly recognized yardstick than GTEC, and in fact for institutional reasons as well as tracking progress and encouraging students to measure their own language development, CUBE students take both tests twice over the course of their compulsory English study. Compiling conversion charts is not an exact science, but they can be used as a rough guide to compare scores on various tests. Appendix 2 includes such a chart for GTEC and TOEIC.

Students in the Management Course have ten required English courses over the first three semesters as listed in Table 1. Each of the English courses listed in this table forms part of a coordinated program in which teacher support includes course-specific handbooks, individual lesson plans, course materials, and supplemental resources. Additionally, each course is overseen by a course leader, who is a full-time teacher in the

program. Each cohort consists of roughly 160 students and class size is normally restricted to about 20.

Table 1. Required Courses for Management Course Students.

Semester One	Semester Two	Semester Three
Global Challenges (2)	American Studies (2)	Japan Studies (1)
Speech and Discussion (2)	Discussion and Debate (2)	European Studies (1)
CUBE English I (1)	CUBE English II (1)	Business Communication (1)
		Introduction to TOEIC (1)

* Numbers in parentheses indicate how many times these classes meet per week.

In terms of program-level teacher support, the above-mentioned handbooks and other resources are reviewed and updated year by year, and both print and digital versions are maintained. Furthermore, semester-end meetings are organized for July and January. The July meetings are course-specific and chaired by the course leader with the aim of sharing ideas and opinions regarding course improvement. The January meeting is a gathering of all full- and part-time instructors with the aim of (1) reviewing each Fall-semester course, (2) preparing for all Spring-semester courses, and (3) providing focused faculty-development workshops. Course leaders again coordinate these reviews and previews of specific courses, while the faculty development workshops are designed and delivered by one or both authors of this article (in cooperation with full-time teachers) or by an invited guest speaker.

Language instructors in CUBE are faced with an adjustment for their learners who have recently emerged from a high school context, where ‘instructionism’ is emphasized and students attend school for the purpose of being schooled or taught; whereas in the campus-based, university milieu, students are expected to fend for themselves while taking responsibility for their own studies, actively seeking out opportunities for learning and learning how to learn. The pressure is felt the most in required first-semester content courses, and the challenge of adjustment does seem correspondingly large. Within the class, the challenge manifests itself as trepidation and excitement on behalf of the students at first, followed by confusion about the overall direction of the class which is content-based, conducted entirely in English by native English-speaking instructors, and lacks the crutch of a textbook to fall back on. Though tests are regularly scheduled, continuous assessment plays a large part in overall grading, and students are expected to maintain focus throughout every 90-minute class. For example, in first semester Global Challenges, countries for individual research are assigned, at once putting the onus on the student to seek, discover and build knowledge for themselves. Featuring a number of tasks which are at times open-ended, much less emphasis is placed on a right or wrong answer. For those

for whom narrow learning and teaching to the test have hitherto been the norm, it takes courage and imagination to tackle less guided activities and complete them within a reasonable time frame. Students are prone to suffer from anxiety and a loss of confidence when they are not immediately rewarded for a right answer, and cannot have every task neatly scaffolded and set within narrowly defined parameters.

We now turn to a semester-by-semester look at required English courses in our program together with some of the challenges and our planned interventions.

3. Semester-by-Semester Challenges and Opportunities

In this section, we provide course descriptions and goals (taken from online syllabi) for each of the required English courses together with perceived areas for improvement and our current plans for further supporting teachers and learners.

Semester One

3.1 Global Challenges (GC)

Course Description: This course will be used to explore some of the major challenges facing the world's inhabitants. Assigned readings on key issues such as the environment, population, quality of life, and peace/conflict will be analyzed and discussed from various perspectives, especially as these issues relate to environmental issues, population growth, sustainable business, quality of life, and peace and conflict. Students will generate and evaluate a range of solutions, both conventional and unique, to various environmental, social and political issues. Material will be introduced through whole texts related to the global issue being discussed.

Course Goals: Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to (1) summarize verbally and in writing their understanding of contributing factors to the key global challenges, (2) engage critically with short readings on these issues, (3) organize their opinions and impressions on these issues in writing, and (4) present their opinions and impressions to their peers.

3.1.1 Perceived Challenges - Perhaps the greatest challenge of GC for the instructor is scaffolding material for students who tend to lack context-specific knowledge about each respective issue and the technical language to describe the issue in terms that make sense of it. Since the content-based curriculum has been designed from the ground up to be taught in English without Japanese language input or a set textbook, the supporting materials are in place but still require the intervention of a trained and experienced teacher. The instructor has the difficult task of either grading the cognitive load of the GC content or the linguistic load of the target language, without overwhelming the students. In GC, where the course content is thematically linked by abstract concepts such as the Global Footprint, it will necessarily require some Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), described by Cummins (1979), before the students have reached a high enough threshold in

English to cope with the language in unsupported activities. While a challenge is broadly positive and fits in with the high expectations of students and teachers within the CUBE English program, GC runs the risk of alienating those who find its demands simply beyond their current or perceived capabilities in the second language.

3.1.2 Current & Planned Support - From day one in GC, CUBE seeks to institute a supportive culture of accepting mistakes as a natural part of language learning, and embracing the challenges of the aptly named Global Challenges course where there is never an entirely right way, independent of context and local culture, to approach issues such as overpopulation/depopulation. As a response to the problem of narrow exam-focused learning that the majority of students have been trained in, GC develops in learners the ability to function effectively in the target language, providing whole texts (as per the course description above) to interact with and equipping them to decode the written input that they read. An explicit genre-based approach to texts in GC has students learn the structure and language unique to the text types of procedure, narrative and report. They work through structured stages with the help of the instructor: they build background knowledge about the specific global issue; they then deconstruct a number of related texts, first with the help of the instructor and later individually; next, they jointly construct a text of the same type as a whole class; and finally they independently work on their own text. Through studying the genre-specific text structure and language together with the context-specific vocabulary, the perceived shortfall in language-learning in our content-based program is directly addressed. We are looking to extend the work we have done on the reading and writing connection into discourse and spoken genres that support student- and teacher-led discussions in GC. All of these endeavors will require further training and support structures for teachers.

As mentioned above, the main support we offer GC teachers as well as others in our program is to prepare handbooks, lesson plans and materials for each of the required English courses. Initially, we did this via Wikispaces (2016) courses and then on an LMS (Moodle) hosted by one of our colleagues. Gradually, we have moved teacher support materials to Google Drive (Fig. 1) and set up Moodle courses (discussed further below) with materials and activities for students on a school-wide server.

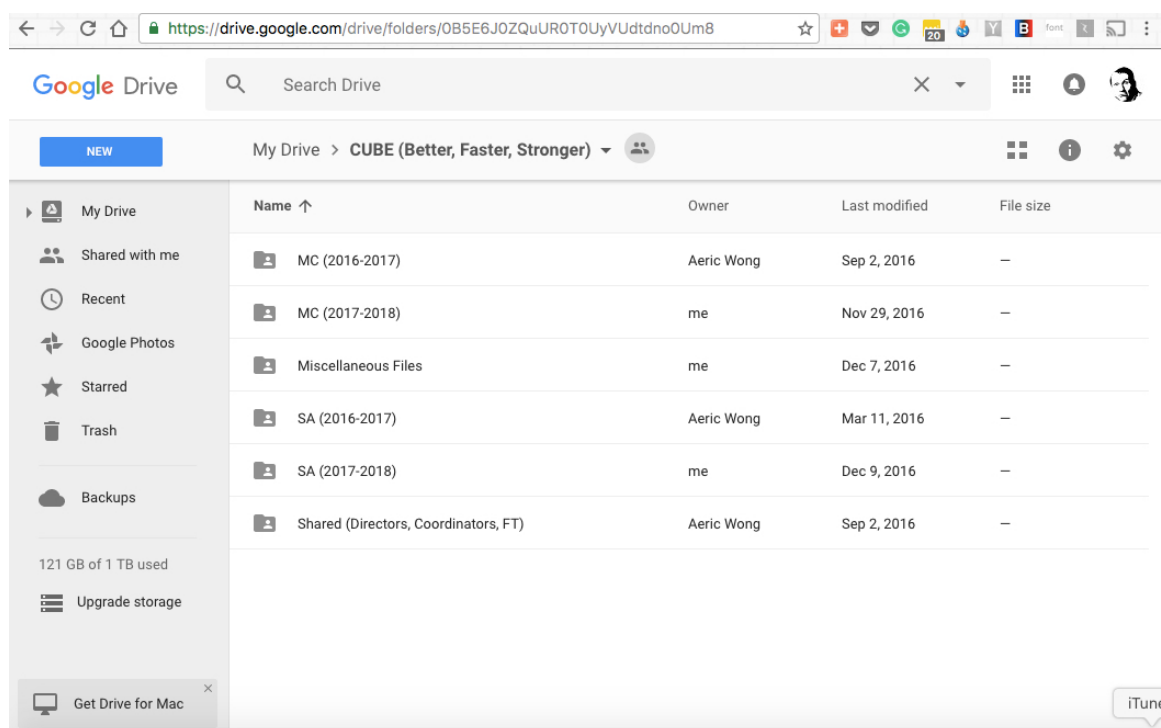


Fig. 1 - Google Drive Folder with Subfolders for Teaching Materials

3.2 Speech and Discussion (SD)

Course Description: This course introduces key concepts and skills related to public speaking, discussion, and other forms of communication. Students will prepare and deliver short speeches (informative, layout, demonstration, and comparison) on topics of their choice. Attention will be focused on both content and delivery. Students will also participate in group discussions, where they will be expected to offer and support their opinions, and ask as well as answer questions.

Course Goals: The main goal of the course is to build a foundation of confidence, knowledge, and skills required to prepare and deliver effective presentations and participate in group discussions. Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate (1) an understanding of key public-speaking concepts, (2) the ability to deliver well-organized speeches (formal & informal) with various types of visual support, (3) the ability to lead and actively participate in short discussions, and (4) effective verbal and non-verbal communication for a variety of settings.

3.2.1 Perceived Challenges - The continuing challenge for this course has been how to work in structured instruction and practice related to discussion skills and strategies. The textbook (*Speaking of Speech*) has been highly regarded by teachers in our program, and provides students with what we believe to be a logical and effective framework for learning and practicing public speaking in the form of short, structured presentations. However, having the textbook as a main component of the course has tilted the curriculum

in favor of presentation skills and practice over formal or informal conversation and discussion. By the end of the course, most students are able to confidently stand up in front of an audience and give a ten-minute poster presentation related to topics from their first-semester core content course (GC), but are unable to successfully participate in any form of follow-up discussion or even have any extended conversation with one of their non-Japanese teachers. Moreover, we have identified awareness of catenation and pronunciation support and practice as areas in need of further improvement.

3.2.2 Current & Planned Support - Despite the above shortcomings, this course has been rated relatively highly by both teachers and students. Teachers are satisfied that most of the learning objectives are being met, while students enjoy the novelty of the course in relation to their past experiences with EFL courses at high school (where oral communication does not get much attention). Thus, the revision or updating of the course has not been a priority until now. However, we now feel that we have the time, energy and resources to devote to needed course improvements. We will likely focus on three initiatives.

First, we will design into the lesson plans some structured work on discussion practice using discussion roles similar to that used in literature circles (see, for example, ReadWriteThink, 2016). This was attempted before, but was crowded out by textbook activities and scaffolded writing practice called Writing Logs (described in the SD handbooks as including a short example, structured practice with the sentence patterns, and a space for students to write their own manuscript).

Second, we will also design in awareness-raising activities and practice of discourse markers (see, for example, Cambridge Dictionary, 2017). In preparation, we invited John Campbell-Larsen as a guest speaker for our January 2017 faculty development meeting, where he stressed to teachers that (1) although spoken language is central to language, spoken forms have been relatively neglected in L2 classrooms, where written forms have dominated, and (2) increased use of discourse markers greatly influences perceived proficiency levels and confidence.

Finally, we plan to offer in-class and online support for pronunciation practice and phonetic understanding (see, for example, Adrian Underhill's video talks on YouTube).

3.3 CUBE English I (CE-I)

Course Description: In this course, students will be introduced to the CUBE English program and learn essential study skills that will help them in their other CUBE classes and beyond. This course will also provide language support for students in their first-semester English courses. Key areas addressed in CUBE English I will be vocabulary building strategies, and improving listening and reading comprehension. Main themes of the course are time management, effective listening, note taking, reading strategies, designing and using study plans, good study habits, and self-assessment.

Course Goals: This course is designed to prepare students for the demands of college and

success in their careers. The main goal of the course is to empower students to succeed in their CUBE English classes and other language learning endeavors. Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to (1) organize a language learning journal, (2) identify key points included in short lectures or other presentations, (3) take effective notes, (4) read smoothly at their own level, (5) listen and read with improved comprehension and retention, and (6) summarize and discuss extensive reading content.

3.3.1 Perceived Challenges - Challenges to date include (1) finding how to best align CE-I with other first-semester courses to maximize language support when and where it is needed, (2) deciding what vocabulary to focus on and what pedagogical approaches to use, and (3) how to motivate learners in their extensive reading endeavors and to take responsibility for their own learning.

3.3.2 Current & Planned Support - To address the first and second challenge, we continue to reference the weekly schedule and lesson plans for GC and SD when reviewing and updating lesson plans for CE-I. Vocabulary and expressions seemed to us an obvious starting point. Our earlier plan for teaching high-frequency vocabulary was to include work on the General Service List (GSL) and Academic Word List (AWL) as follows: Semester One (GSL 501-1000, AWL 1-60), Semester Two (GSL 1001-1500, AWL, 61-120), Semester Three (GSL 1501-2000, AWL 121-180). Our reasoning for starting from the second five-hundred words of the GSL was that incoming students would likely have learned (or at least encountered) the first five-hundred words. We shifted to the New General Service List (2016) and New Academic Word List (2016) when they became available in 2013-14. However, we stuck to the above targets. Subsequently, for NAWL words, we decided to shift from introducing words in order of frequency to those that came up in other first-semester courses, mainly GC. At around the same time, we began directing students to using Quizlet (2016), which is an online resource enabling learners to create their own digital word cards or use cards that others have created. A variety of activities and resources are available on Quizlet such as arcade-style games and audio links. Quizlet is discussed further under CUBE English II (CE-II).

We continue to struggle with the motivation issue, but have used Moodle Reader and then mReader (2016) to provide learners with incentives and feedback related to their extensive reading. The benefits on overall second-language development have been well-documented (see, for example, The Extensive Reading Pages, 2017), but our main impetus for including extensive reading throughout our program was the positive influences on attitude (Yamashita, 2013).

Figure 2 is a screenshot of the administration page for the CUBE mReader courses. These courses allow teachers to track the progress of individual students and adjust settings such as reading level and number of passed tests needed to advance to the next level.



Fig. 2 - M-Reader Administration Page

Figures 3 and 4 are screenshots of an individual student's page. The colorful book covers collected in one place provide learners with a sense of accomplishment (or incentive to read more), while the goal bar at the bottom of the page offers clear feedback on their progress toward the reading goal of 60,000 words per semester.

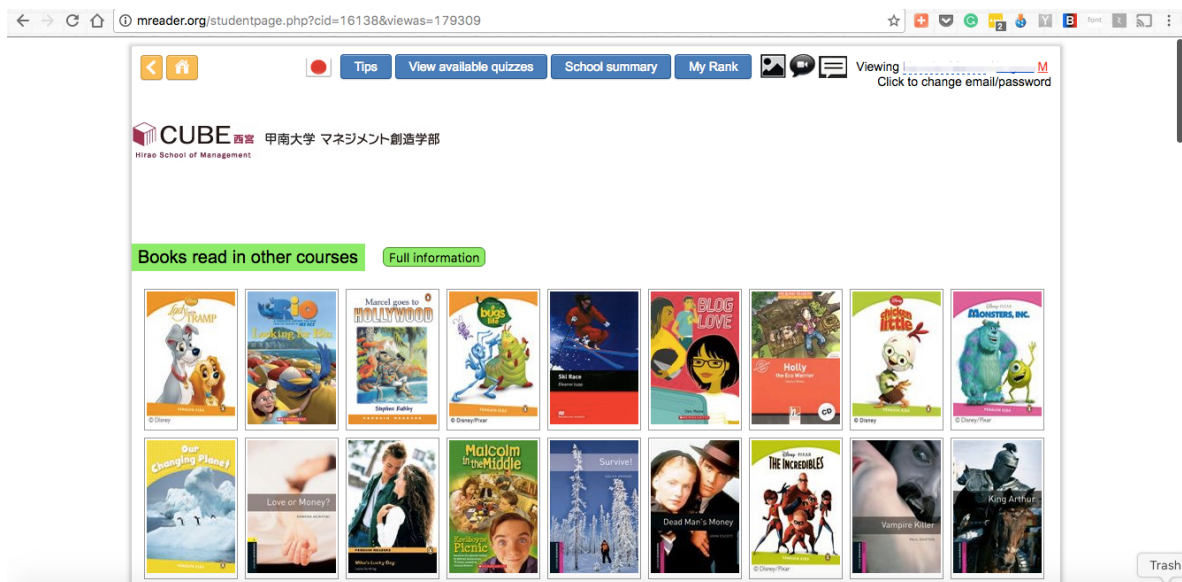


Fig. 3 - M-Reader Student Page (top)

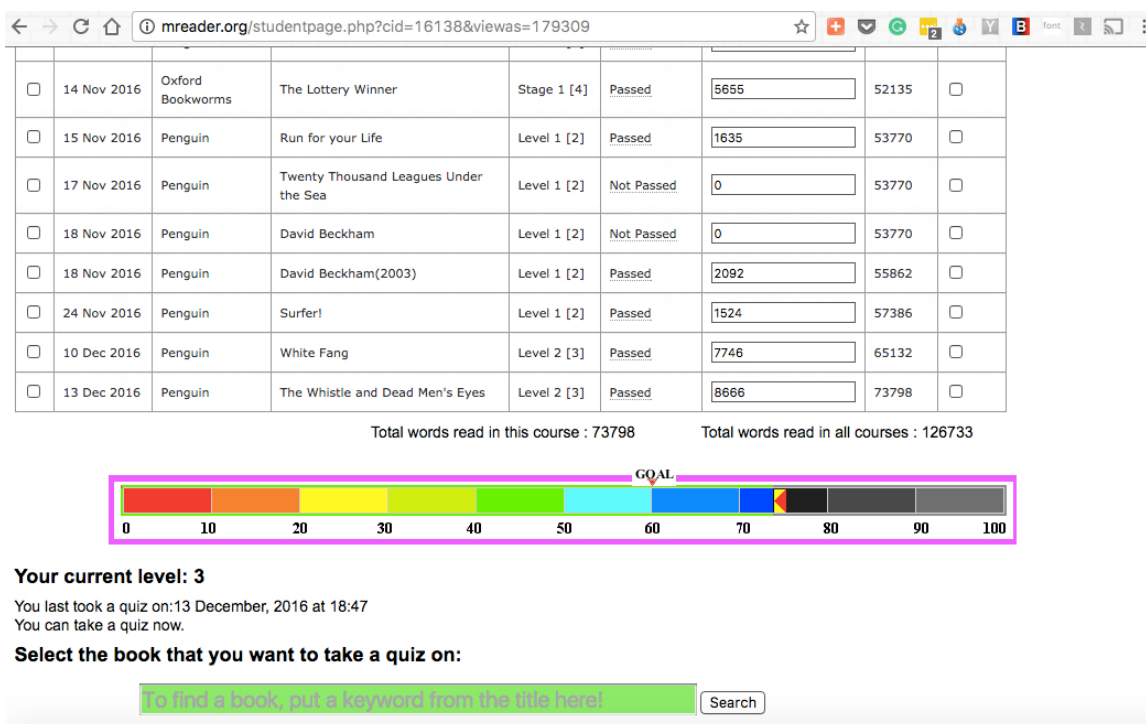


Fig. 4 - M-Reader Student Page (bottom)

Another tool that we have introduced for teachers and students is a book report form (Figs. 5-7), using Google Forms, which students can complete when a quiz for their book is not available on mReader or when the teacher or student wants some variety in terms of follow up to extensive reading.

The screenshot shows a Google Form titled "Book Report Form - 2016". The form is designed for students to write and submit their book reports. It includes fields for "Your Name:", "Student Number:", and "Class Number:". The "Class Number:" field has a dropdown menu with options: "CUBE English II (1)", "CUBE English II (2)", "CUBE English II (3)", and "CUBE English II (4)". The form is decorated with a blue and white floral pattern.

Book Report Form - 2016

Students will use this form to write and submit their book reports

Your Name:
(e.g. Taro SUZUKI)

Student Number:
1168xxxx

Class Number:
Which class are you in?
☐ CUBE English II (1)
☐ CUBE English II (2)
☐ CUBE English II (3)
☐ CUBE English II (4)

Fig. 5 - Book Report Form (top) created using Google Forms

Book Title:
(e.g. A Christmas Carol)

Author:
(Who wrote the book?)

Publisher:
(e.g. Oxford, Cambridge, Penguin)

Number of words:
(e.g. 1,300)

Publisher Level:

- ☐ Easy Start
- ☐ Level 1
- ☐ Level 2
- ☐ Level 3
- ☐ Level 4

Fig. 6 - Book Report Form (middle) created using Google Forms

Summary:
(50-word overview of the story)

Reaction:
(25 words - How did this story make you feel?)

Rating:
(Do you recommend this book to your classmates?)

- ☐ Great - I highly recommend this book
- ☐ Good - I recommend this book
- ☐ Okay - Some people might enjoy this book
- ☐ Dreadful - Don't waste your time

Fig. 7 - Book Report Form (bottom) created using Google Forms

Book reports submitted via this book report form go straight into a Google Spreadsheet which can then be used by the teacher to check and manage student work.

One further change which will be introduced from April, 2017 is the inclusion of an English Only Zone (O-Zone) assignment. The English O-Zone is a self-access language center on the sixth floor of CUBE which was established to provide learners with opportunities outside the English classroom to come into contact with and practice the target language of English. Visiting the English O-Zone is also a way for learners to take more responsibility for their language learning progress (one of the main goals of CE-I and CE-II), and this assignment will require learners to visit at least twice a month and attend at least two English O-Zone events (e.g. guest speaker, movie night, Konan Chat).

Semester Two

3.4 American Studies (AS)

Course Description: This is a survey course offering an overview of cultural, economic, historical, social and political developments in North America. A variety of materials (including readings and films) and tasks will be used with the aim of gaining an insight into the U.S. At the same time, this course will act as a bridge to university-level studies. Topics will include both historical and contemporary issues that relate to the United States and its place in the world.

Course Goals: This course is to provide students with a basic understanding of a broad range of themes and issues, including past and future challenges while also developing and refining reading, writing and critical thinking skills. Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to (1) explain major social and political currents in the U.S., (2) identify major historical figures and key geographic locations, (3) employ various reading strategies and skills, (4) identify main and supporting ideas, and (5) write papers in specific genres related to the field of American Studies.

3.4.1 Perceived Challenges - This is the core content-focused course for the second semester and some of the same challenges experienced in first-semester GC, such as supporting students without depending on a textbook or Japanese language content, persist into this course. Due to the nature of AS, a twice a week course with a relatively heavy cognitive load of content unfamiliar to students, we have certainly spent the most time and energy on updating the lesson plans from year to year. Since moving AS to the second semester to accommodate GC in the first, we no longer have the final poster presentations as a culminating or capstone activity. We are faced with the need to choose between introducing a broad range of topics and issues or go deeper with fewer themes. We are similarly vexed at times by the daunting challenge of balancing content with achieving language development outcomes for the program.

3.4.2 Current & Planned Support - We have decided to slightly rework some of the modules to ease the burden on teachers who struggle to cover the content aims in sufficient

depth, and to help students go deeper into the subject matter without being overwhelmed by the amount of input. The module on ‘Leaders and Entrepreneurs’ will be simplified to a more general focus on ‘American Leaders.’ Students in AS have to complete a range of individual assignments on their designated US state, and the job of locating a leader from their state and accessing background information on them is already challenging enough without restricting the definition of leader even further. Moreover, the genre-specific text structure and language which they first studied in GC is reinforced in AS to enhance language development, and in this case they write a biography (recount text) about their chosen leader. Providing greater support for the language-learning outcomes must be prioritized over the marginal gains of a more nuanced focus on content when dealing with an introductory survey course on North America. Likewise, the teachers will be given more time and freedom to bring out the themes by changing the narrower scope of ‘Westward Expansion’ to a discussion of ‘Immigration.’ Finally, ‘Race Relations and Civil Rights’ will be modified to a module on ‘Rights’ in an effort to make the burden of state research and content less onerous and the theme more inclusive of contemporary and relevant rights such as women’s rights.

Figure 8 is a screenshot of the AS course on Moodle.

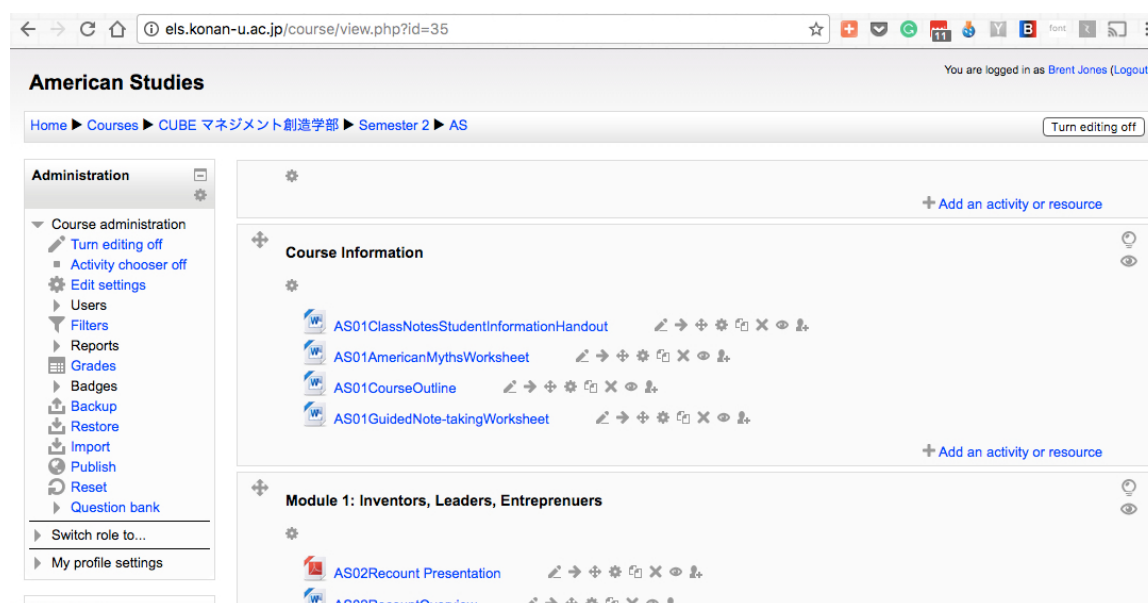


Fig. 8 - American Studies Moodle Course

3.5 Discussion and Debate (DD)

Course Description: This course builds on concepts and skills presented in Speech and Discussion. Attention will shift away from prepared speeches toward more natural and spontaneous interaction. Students will work on developing conversation strategies and skills that can be used in a variety of settings, including discussions and semi-formal debate. Students will select current event topics to prepare for discussions and debates.

Students will also participate in a group deliberative polls project.

Course Goals: The main goal of Discussion & Debate is to gain experience and confidence in negotiating increasingly sophisticated discussions as well as semi-formal debate. Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to: (1) use the various debate principles outlined in the course textbook, (2) participate in discussions on a range of topics using a variety of discourse markers, (3) prepare for and conduct a deliberative poll, and (4) debate assigned topics with persuasive arguments and respond confidently to counter arguments.

3.5.1 Perceived Challenges - A number of teachers do not seem to have a firm grasp of Deliberative Polls (DPs) which has a knock-on effect for their students. This is unfortunate as DPs have great promise for the course, given that they follow a sequence that builds knowledge through (i) selecting a public issue, (ii) researching the issue to gain background knowledge, (iii) creating an opinion survey, (iv) preparing briefing materials, (v) organizing a plenary session, where students (playing the role of experts on a panel) take informed stances on the issue, and (vi) produce a report that is presented orally in teams. Persuading teachers to prepare context-specific language towards the aim of enabling students to work with briefing materials on the issue has proven particularly challenging. Without a doubt, some other CUBE courses constitute a much lighter burden, since the themes are predictable and the language already provided for instructors. The public issues in DD are selected by each class, meaning that there will necessarily be a great diversity. Those challenges notwithstanding, DPs are the kind of structured tasks with achievable outcomes and language learning potential that we envisaged for the program. Structured discussion activities outside the course textbook also seem to have taken a backseat in DD. The danger is that well-organized public speaking tasks in SD that build student confidence are replaced by DD tasks which really require more scaffolding. Without defining the purpose (such as to persuade, or to entertain) or audience (friend or foe, family member or stranger) then discussions quickly lose the social context and dynamic upon which they depend to give them meaning.

3.5.2 Current & Planned Support - One approach is to include the same support for discussions as already discussed (see Speech and Discussion, above). When the taught curriculum deviates too far from the planned curriculum, either the support is insufficient or the course aims are too hard to set up or achieve in the time available. In the case of DD, where the handbook is thorough and the materials extensive and detailed, even so DPs are hard to implement for part-time instructors who cannot meet students regularly between class meetings. Even though DPs are structured, DP issues are open-ended and demanding for teachers to prepare and teach. In common with some other courses at CUBE, DD as currently designed requires a team of dedicated full-time instructors to succeed. Removing the DPs is a recognition that expectations for language development in content-based

language teaching cannot be taken for granted. Different public issues that form the DPs require different context-specific language to be taught and practised, together with the discourse structure of the survey, plenary, briefing, and report. More scaffolded discussions and debates, broken down into generic types with the social purpose and intended audience, may be more limited in scope than the DPs but more achievable as well as transferable to other speaking tasks. The plan is to take lessons from Functional Grammar, such as the register variables of mode, tenor, and field (Eggins, 2004) and explicitly teach and assess register in DD.

3.6 *CUBE English II (CE-II)*

Course Description: This course is an extension of CUBE English I, where students build on and reinforce effective study skills and habits that will help them in their other CUBE classes and beyond. This course will provide language support for students in their second-semester English courses. Key areas addressed in CUBE English II are vocabulary-building strategies, improved listening skills and the reading-writing connection. In addition to revisiting themes from CUBE English I, the course will focus on organizational skills, retention strategies, advanced note taking, deconstructing and responding to text, and genre writing.

Course Goals: This course is designed to further prepare students for the demands of college and success in their careers. The main goal of the course is to empower students to succeed in their CUBE English classes and other language learning endeavors. Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to (1) apply the various study skills, (2) organize a language learning journal, (3) identify and analyze key points included in short lectures or other presentations, (4) evaluate class notes, (5) listen and read critically with improved comprehension and retention, and (6) synthesize in writing information from multiple sources.

3.6.1 *Perceived Challenges* - There are at least two areas where we perceive shortcomings. One is how to include more direct instruction of vocabulary. The other is how to further promote extensive reading. There are also some macro problems with CE-II when compared with CE-I, especially in terms of creativity and variety vis-a-vis student tasks. The focus on vocabulary and reading manifests itself at times in a rigid approach to lesson planning, whereby every class follows a predictable pattern of sustained silent reading (SSR), target vocabulary practice, and reflective writing for learning journals. The creative spark of an activity from CE-I, such as the Thiagi envelopes discussion, or a mini-lecture based around stimulating video content directly related to the learning, is lost when too many other components of the course have to be covered in every class. Though a study skills support class more than a content class, CE-II needs to avoid falling into the trap of repetitive skill-based training.

3.6.2 Current & Planned Support - With the above challenges in mind, we will need to review the lesson plans with more attention to the progress made in CE-I with creative, engaging material and tasks/activities. As one example, we may want to build on a listening activity that comes mid semester where students listen, summarize and critique student-generated instructional videos (Fig. 9) on language-learning topics. Groups of students in CE-II could be challenged to plan out and record their own videos. Requiring more of students than passively complying with routines is an endeavor that reaches beyond CE-II.

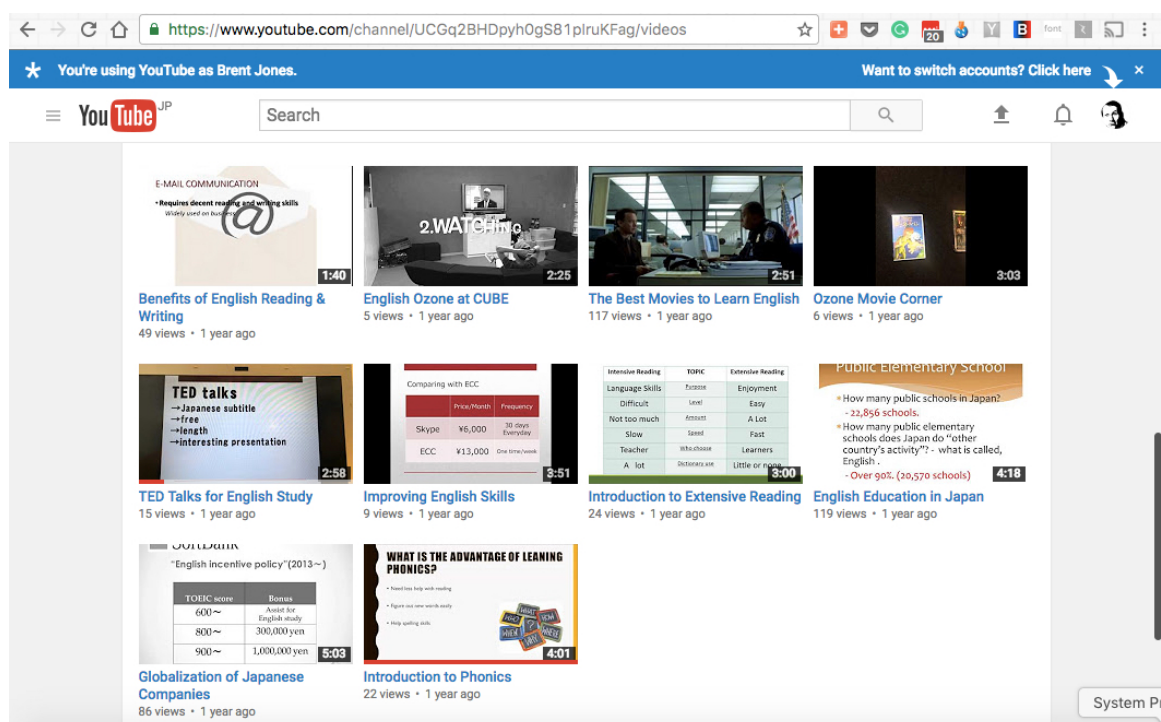


Fig. 9 Student-Generated Instructional Videos

As mentioned under CE-I above, we have attempted to provide vocabulary learning support via Quizlet. Figure 10 is a screenshot of the CUBE English II course that was prepared by one of our full-time instructors. This course includes ten sets of fifty NGSL words, and students are instructed to study and practice with these sets before taking a practice quiz on Moodle (Fig. 11). To gain better student buy-in, there is still a need for more explicit instruction in how to sign up for Quizlet, a better understanding of the advantages of using it, and a better demonstration of Quizlet in action.

With this type of preparation, we can expect students to do much better on the in-class quizzes, which account for thirty percent of their CE-I and CE-II grades.

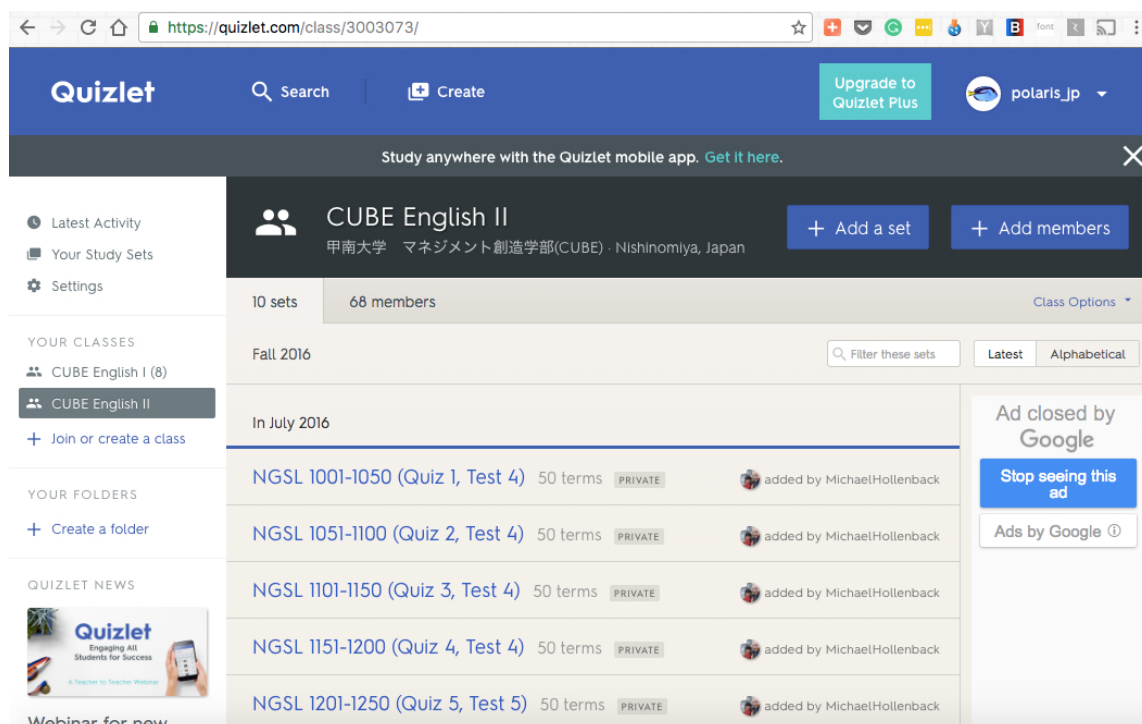


Fig. 10 - CUBE English II Course on Quizlet with 10 Sets of 50 NGSL Words.

However, a closer look at Figure 10 reveals that only 68 out of roughly 180 students (including repeaters) actually went to the trouble of signing up.

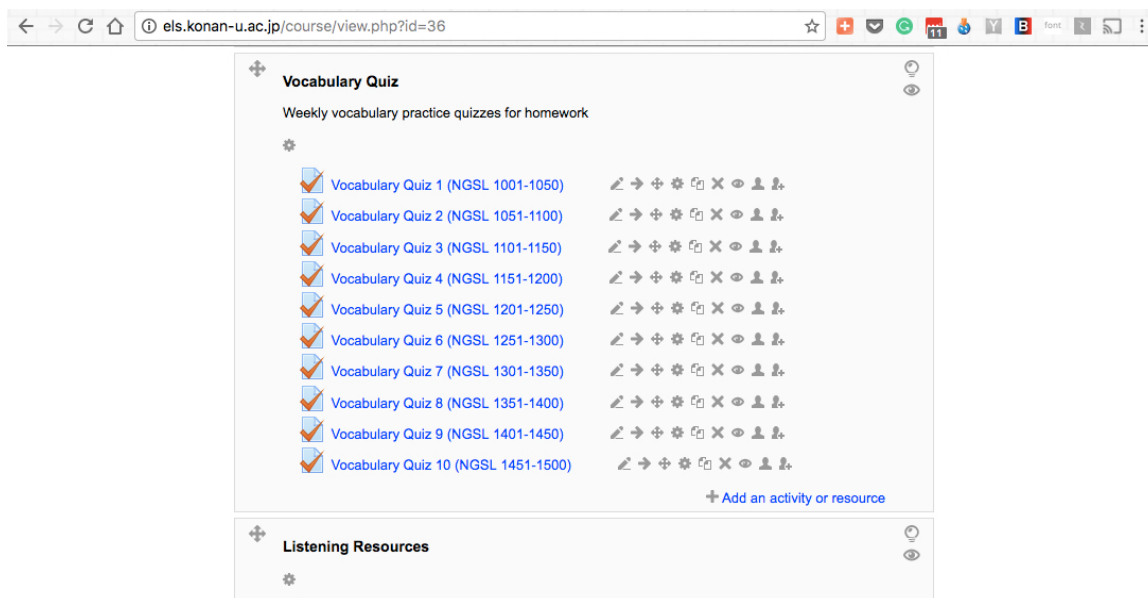


Fig. 11 - Self-Access Practice Vocabulary Quizzes on Moodle.

Semester Three

3.7 Japan Studies (JS)

Course Description: Japan Studies is a content-based English course, with an integrated

skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) focus. This course will be taught in three-week modules, and will cover four broad themes as they relate to Japan: (1) society/culture, (2) business/economy, (3) the environment, and (4) politics/government. Students will be challenged to build on their existing background knowledge, and reflect more deeply on what it means to be Japanese and Japan's role on the world stage. Weekly reading and/or listening assignments will be used as a basis for in-class discussions and activities. Students will write short multi-paragraph texts (narrative, recount, report, hortatory) on Japan-related themes.

Course Goals: The overall aim of the course is to develop English language and critical thinking skills through engagement in the course content. Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to do the following for Japan-related topics: (1) read and comprehend extended texts, (2) listen and comprehend short lectures or videos, (3) write narratives, recounts, reports and persuasive texts, (4) discuss confidently, and (5) think critically.

3.7.1 Perceived Challenges - One challenge we anticipated when designing this course was gaining student buy-in with regard to the value of studying about Japan. With this in mind, we designed in a goal-setting activity in the first lesson. However, the overall crowded curriculum and end-of-semester peer interviews scheduled for the last class have made it nearly impossible to follow up with students how well these goals have been achieved. Also, as this and other third-semester courses meet only once a week, teachers are limited in how deeply they can go into each of the topics/issues. We designed this as a survey course, but there are times when it feels like there are missed opportunities where students would benefit from delving deeper into the content and/or exploring the language more. There is also a danger with this type of course that materials will become outdated. As one example, we have used video clips and short readings focused on Hiroshi Mikitani and the English policy at Rakuten. Although we still see value in using this material to reaffirm for students the importance of their English studies, this material has lost some of its freshness. Finally, as with other courses with a genre reading-writing focus, gaining teachers' understanding and acceptance of this approach has been a challenge. At the same time, we are not sure whether or not individual teachers are using the intended teaching-cycles (or other best practices) for each of the target reading and writing assignments.

3.7.2 Current & Planned Support - We continue to make extensive use of Moodle to support students in the JS class. Figures 12 - 14 are screenshots of some of the resources for each of the modules. There are links to practice tests, videos and other online resources, as well as PDF or Word versions of worksheets, transcripts and writing frameworks. The new writing assignment for the society and culture module is a narrative based on a school-related *anime* (animation), *manga* or television drama. This change was introduced so that students would have further practice with this genre and also because the topic is more

closely linked with the listening-reading material, which comes from an NHK video about the Japanese education system. We also believe that learners will be more invested in the assignment if they can choose a story of their liking. We will upload final versions of the narratives written by higher proficiency students as examples for future cohorts.

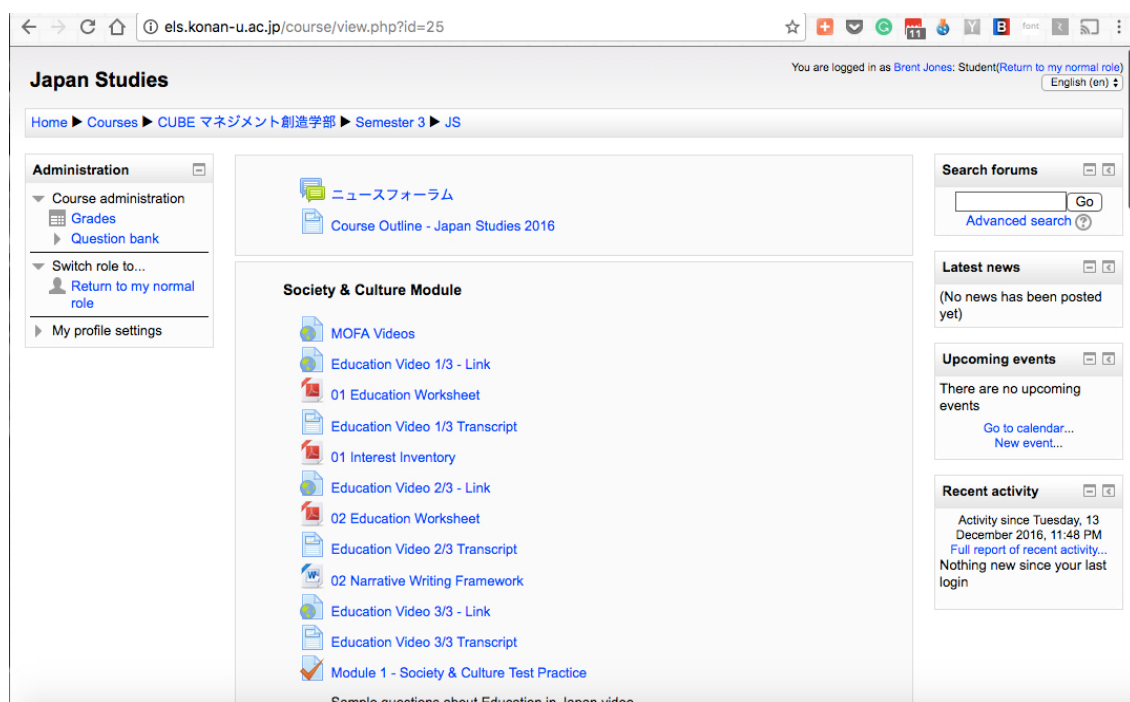


Fig. 12 - Society & Culture Module in Japan Studies Moodle Course.

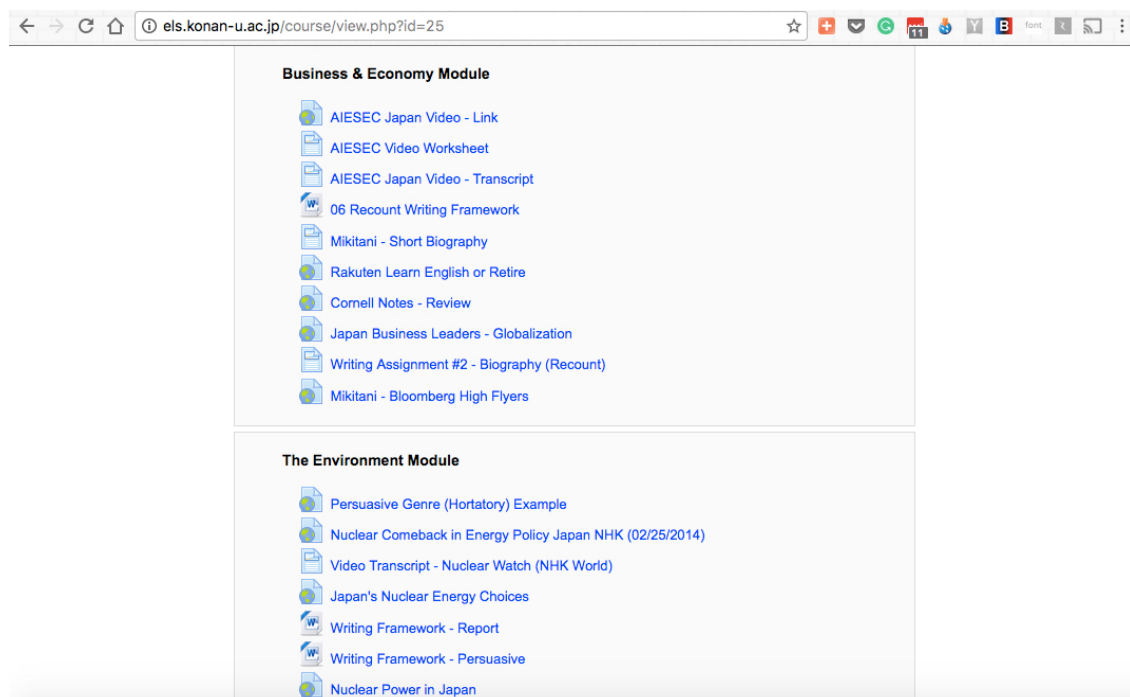


Fig. 13 - Japan Studies Modules (Business & Economy and The Environment)

Another challenge in the past has been finding good biographies of famous Japanese women in business. We are finally seeing more female business leaders like Tomoko Namba, Founder and Chairman of the Board for DeNA, and hope to gain a better gender balance.

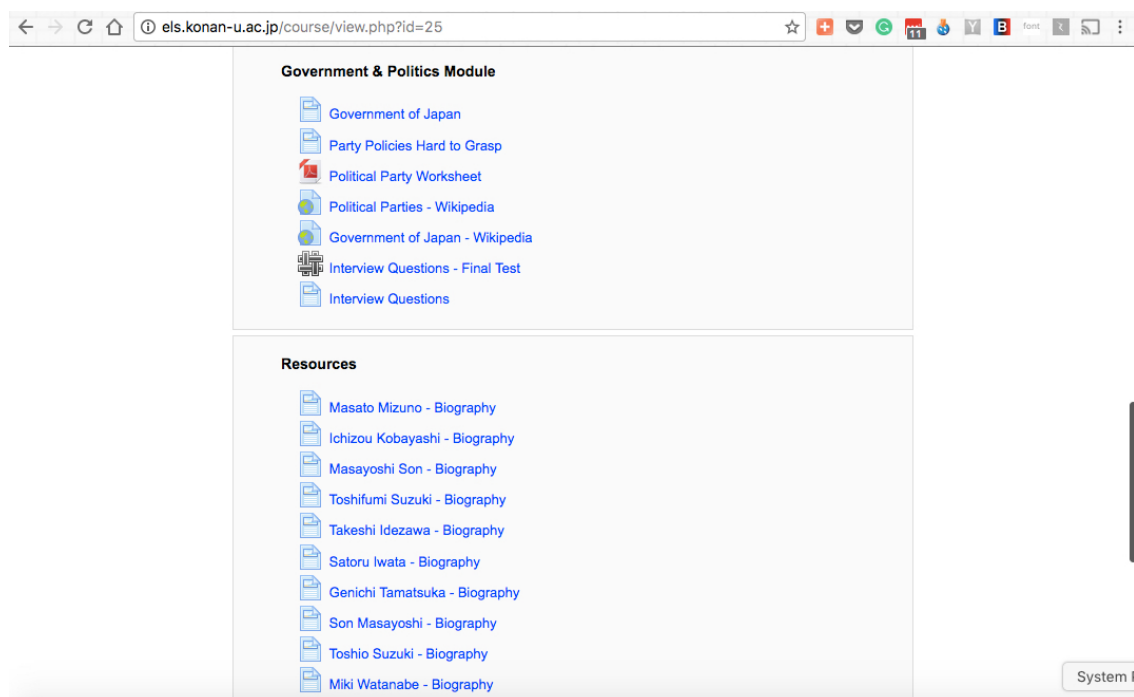


Fig. 14 - Government & Politics Module (with biographies written by past student).

One further plan we have for JS and other courses where genre writing is taught is to prepare short, focused instructional videos for students, with an understanding that these videos will also help teachers better understand the instructional cycles we expect in the program. We see these types of videos as also being an important support structure for other parts of our program.

3.8 European Studies

Course Description: European Studies (ES) is a survey course covering cultural, economic, historical, social and political themes in Europe. Through a variety of materials (including readings and films) and tasks you will gain an insight into Europe while improving your academic and research skills. Themes will include both historical and contemporary issues that relate to Europe and its place in the world.

Course Goals: ES aims to provide you with a broad understanding of Europe-related themes, while helping you to develop your English language capability (reading, writing and vocabulary) and critical thinking skills. Upon completion of the course, you will demonstrate the ability to (1) identify key points in readings, short lectures, films, or other

presentations, (2) write clear notes and summaries while reading, listening and watching, (3) show a broad grasp of European themes and developments up to the present day, (4) conduct country-specific research and present findings to the class, and (5) develop an ePortfolio to expand on what is studied in class.

3.8.1 Perceived Challenges - A requirement of ES is that students have studied first and second semester required English. One challenge is to make use of and build on what students already know, based on the assumption that students have acquired mastery over core pillars of the program. It follows that for them to work individually on an ePortfolio requiring digital literacy skills in ES, they need to make effective use of the knowledge of the fundamentals of learning journals which they produced in CUBE English. Likewise, to accomplish the aims of jigsaw learning tasks on their assigned EU and non-EU countries, where they exchange knowledge that they have gleaned from their individual study with their partners, the challenge is accurate and meaningful research that provides relevant information. In ES, students are expected to make connections between what they know (some background knowledge about Europe and the EU) and what they have learned in CUBE in other required courses and apply that to the course content. Hence they make a PowerPoint (SD and some of their Japanese courses) in weekly group meetings, as well as taking notes from their partners using the Cornell Notes method (GC and CE-I). ES has students participate in a guest lecture from the EU Delegation to Japan, design and deliver a poster presentation which must be videoed and submitted to the instructor, and as a culminating task write an extended persuasive text bringing together expertise taken from the other elements of the course. Though the quality of submitted work is generally high, there is a danger of students missing the important connections between the disparate parts of their studies.

3.8.2 Current & Planned Support - ES has no textbook, and like other English courses places great emphasis on support for the instructors via Google Drive where the handbook, lesson plans and course materials are to be found. Support for students comes from thorough preparation of the course itself and making sure the instructors have everything in place to best achieve the learning outcomes. ES materials seek to overlap with and extend work that is familiar to students: making an online European Language Passport is closely aligned with the CEFR language bands (from A1 to C2) and Can-Do statements that students studied and practised in CE-I and CE-II; delivering a poster presentation takes as its basis the oral report from SD but goes into greater depth; writing a persuasive text develops the genre-based pedagogy at the core of the reading and writing language targets. The repetition, overlap and development of language and study skills bound together by the context of the content theme does appear to be meeting expectations. To boost language support, the next step is to more closely align the vocabulary taught in ES with the NGSL lists.

3.9 Business Communication

Course Description: This is a practical business skills course. The aim is to prepare students for international and domestic business contexts using a variety of tasks and exercises (including reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Students will work in groups to research a specific company and conduct mock business meetings. Students will be responsible for individual preparation and contributions to team projects. In doing so, they will gain experience with the expectations of the workplace.

Course Goals: The main goal of the course is to provide students with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills for business contexts. In addition, students will be introduced to the various roles and functions in company settings. Upon completion of this course, students will demonstrate the ability to: (1) understand and use spoken English for business, (2) analyze different business concepts, (3) participate in a variety of business meetings, (4) research and report on specific business-related topics, and (5) write effectively for business situations.

3.9.1 Perceived Challenges - We have recently moved away from a business English textbook in response to a complaint by teachers that students do not have the relevant work experience needed for those types of materials. The new textbook for this course is Level Two of *Speaking of Speech*, which provides a framework that students are familiar with from their SD course. The focus of the Level Two book is much more on business-related topics. In discussions with teachers, the following challenges remain: (1) what to do after the core component of the course (a multi-week company expo), and (2) an overload of presentations.

3.9.2 Current & Planned Support - To address these issues, we plan to take out one presentation before the expo, and follow up the expo with instruction and training in how to critique a presentation. Finally, there will be a shift toward including two or three case studies for the month after the expo.

3.10 Introduction to TOEIC

Course Description: This is a test preparation course, with special emphasis on the TOEIC test. In addition to studying academic content, students will be introduced to various test-taking strategies and skills and will develop personalized plans to prepare for these tests. Test questions, examples, and model answers will be used to highlight successful approaches and potential trouble spots. Graded reading conducted outside of class will be supported with sustained silent reading (SSR) in class for fluency development.

Course Goals: The main goal of the course is to equip students with the academic tools and skills necessary to succeed on standardized tests while creating a foundation for autonomous learning. In addition, improving vocabulary and grammar control along with

enhancing reading, listening, and speaking abilities will contribute to overall language development. Upon completion of this course, students will demonstrate the ability to: (1) understand and identify what is expected in each section of this and similar tests, (2) recognize and explain why specific answers are stronger/weaker or right/wrong for individual question types, (3) analyze common types of TOEIC questions on vocabulary, parts of speech, grammatical forms, and usage, and (4) apply skills in academic reading, listening, and note-taking for improved comprehension.

3.10.1 Perceived Challenges - One major challenge with IT is the range of motivations that students bring to the course. On the one hand, we have a number of students who take this class very seriously precisely because it is TOEIC and that will be one of the criteria on which they will be screened in their job-hunting endeavors. At the same time, we have a significant number of students who don't see TOEIC as relevant to their immediate needs. Also, strictly speaking, this is a skills course in a content-based curriculum, and thus tends to be more top-down, teacher-led in nature.

3.10.2 Current & Planned Support - Although not mentioned as a challenge, by this point, the excitement of entering university has worn off and the realities and routines of college life have set in. The motivation to continue in IT with a third semester of extensive reading drops off for some students and we have individuals who don't push themselves in any meaningful way. We see evidence of this in both the extensive reading book reports and vocabulary building assignments. Slight shifts have been to continue with mReader for the IT course and as mentioned above, focus more on the NGSL and not require the NAWL. We will also add Moodle quizzes like those used in CE-I and CE-II, and drop from four to three practice tests. This last change will give instructors a chance to go more deeply into test strategies and language points. One future change we hope to pursue is requiring students to make their own test items, thus addressing the overly top-down nature of the course at present.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

In these pages, we set out to describe challenges we are experiencing in the delivery of a content-focused English language program at a private university in Japan and how we are addressing these challenges. Based on what we have outlined above, there are three main areas that we have identified where support is being provided for teachers and learners. Our current understanding is that these three areas (Fig. 15), namely, faculty development, organizational tools and instructional resources, will continue as the pillars of our support structure.

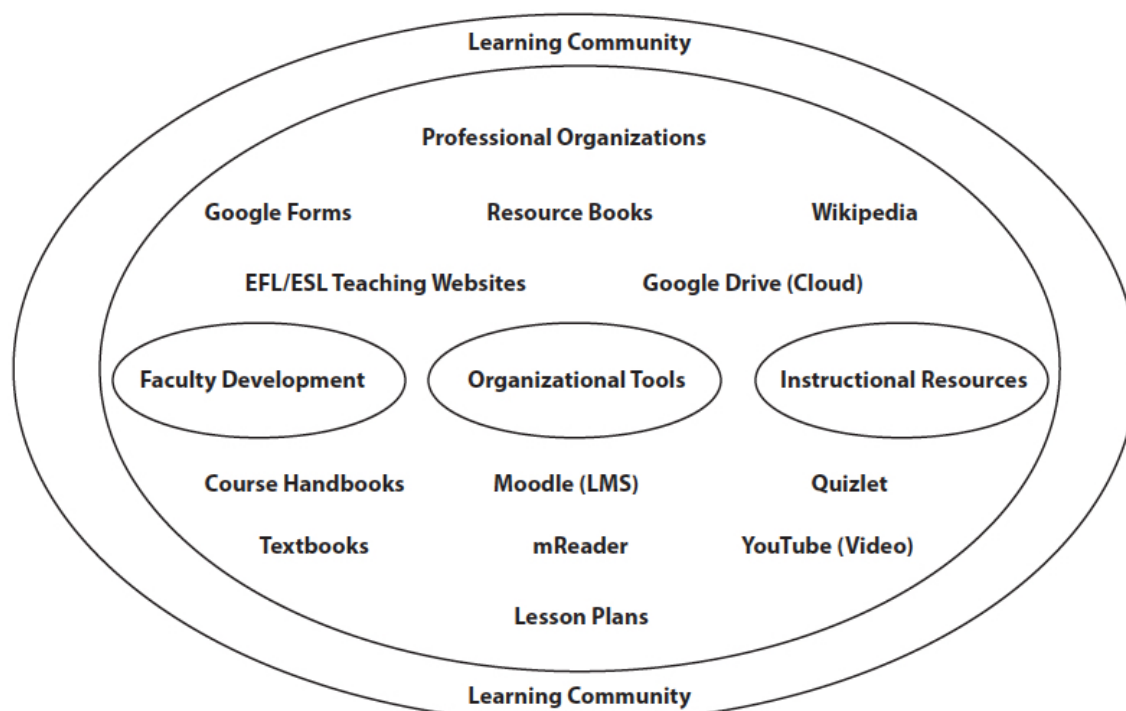


Fig. 15 Tentative Conceptualization of Teaching/Learning Support Structures/Frameworks

We see faculty development as being all-important in that teachers need to continue struggling toward best practices, especially for a content-focused language program. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, we view that support for teachers in their classroom endeavors is potentially the most effective path to supporting learners in our program. Another core element is organizational tools, by which we mean a place like Moodle or Google Drive where teachers and students can access and share materials, links and other resources where and when they need them (just-in-time). Instructional resources, such as handbooks, lesson plans, and worksheets form the final pillar of support.

As mentioned in section three, we are making efforts to address the various challenges, and some of these are listed around the core elements of faculty development, organizational tools and instructional resources. Many of these are not neatly categorized under any one banner, which is why we arranged them around the core elements.

Our final observation from this analysis is that none of these elements can function to its full potential in isolation, and what gives them their dynamism is the learning community that forms around them. What we mean by this is that these efforts can be approached and perceived in a mechanistic way, but in fact they depend on each other and the individual teachers, students, administrators and other stakeholders.

We earnestly hope that the process of documenting challenges within our program as evidenced here will stimulate dialog among our instructors and the wider community of teachers in similar teaching contexts.

5. Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the many colleagues (past and present) that have helped us develop ideas and contributed to the program. At the same time, we appreciate the efforts and enthusiasm of past and present students who have kindly put up with our zany antics and kept their good humor.

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Appendix 1 - GTEC & College TOEIC Gains (Cohorts 6 & 7)

Cohort 6	GTEC #1	GTEC #2	Difference	TOEIC #1	TOEIC #2	Difference
Mean	212.3	216.7	4.3	385.4	433.8	48.3
STD	35.6	34.3		110.4	131	

Cohort 7	GTEC #1	GTEC #2	Difference	TOEIC #1	TOEIC #2	Difference
Mean	205.4	214.4	9	376.4	399.9	23.5
STD	33.5	35		102.2	105.2	

Appendix 2 - GTEC-TOEIC Conversion Charts

■GTEC4技能 VS TOEIC VS TOEFL技能換算値】

GTEC-LRWS	TOEIC	TOEFL-PBT
1000	1346	764
950	1269	738
900	1192	711
850	1115	684
800	1038	657
750	961	630
700	884	604
650	807	577
600	730	550
550	653	523
500	576	496
450	499	470
400	422	443
350	345	416
300	268	389
250	191	362
200	114	336
150	37	309
100	-40	282
50	-117	255
0	-194	228

■【GTEC2技能 VS TOEIC2技能換算値】

GTEC-LR	TOEIC
500	1281
475	1210
450	1139
425	1068
400	997
375	926
350	856
325	785
300	714
275	643
250	572
225	501
200	430
175	359
150	288
125	217
100	147
75	76
50	5
25	-66
0	-137