English Program in the Faculty of International Studies, Takushoku University: English Education for 'Empowerment'

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Abstract

The Faculty of International Studies, Takushoku University (hereafter FISTU) has originally started as the Faculty of International Development Studies in 2000. As a unique brand-new Faculty aspiring to educate internationally-minded youths who can function anywhere in the world as well as survive in the era of globalization, its English program was designed with particular emphasis on teaching 'practical and communicative English'. Looking back on the author's own experience of teaching English at FISTU since 2002, this paper examines how the English Program of FISTU has tackled (or not tackled) many problems standing in the way of improving students' English proficiency. After clarifying the background to so-called Japanese poor communicative competence in English, it reviews the English Program at FISTU from the aspects of its curriculum reform, the utilization of G-TELP test as a placement test and TOEIC 500 as a target score and, more importantly, a kind of life motivator, the annual speech contest as a visible embodiment of three 'core' English classes, the special care to support students, and the efficacy of study abroad (SA) programs. Following this, it aims to identify the defects of the current program and discuss the tasks for its further improvement. As an exemplificative case of today's English education program at an average private university in Japan, to a great extent, this particular case study will reflect the current situation of today's English education in Japan by illustrating some difficult challenges it has faced and struggled to tackle over the past few decades. In conclusion, the notion of 'empowerment' is proposed as an important philosophical framework to lead to a way out from the blind alley of Japanese English education.

Keywords: English language education in Japan, English program in FISTU (The Faculty of International Studies, Takushoku University), globalization, World Englishes, English for 'empowerment'

1. Introduction

As globalization advances, English language education is increasingly emphasized in Japan where English is "taught not only as a foreign language but also as a global language" (Ito, 2002, p. 36). As Schneider (2014) succinctly states, "in policy and pedagogy, and in public discourse, the impact of and a

desire for English appears to be steadily growing" (Schneider, 2014, p. 18). There is a common belief that English communicative competence is essential in global communication and that English is the language which people in the world use to communicate and which enables communication with people in the world. Whether this is true or not[1], in this context English education in Japan has been reshaped so as to improve English communication abilities in recent years and the same is the case with English education in the Faculty of International Studies, Takushoku University (hereafter FISTU) where I have been teaching English since September, 2002. This paper clarifies the background to Japanese poor communicative competence in English, and then examines how the English program of FISTU has tackled (or not tackled) many problems standing in the way of improving students' English proficiency, focusing on the issues such as the curriculum reform, the class division based on G-TELP scores, the utilization of TOEIC score of 500 as a target score to motivate students to study English, the annual speech contest as the visible embodiment of three 'core' English classes, the special care to prevent students from failing English credits and dropping out, and the study abroad (SA) programs to cultivate students' cultural awareness. By doing so it aims at identifying the defects of the program and the tasks for its further improvement. As an exemplificative case of today's English education program at an average private university in Japan, to a great extent, this particular case will reflect the current situation of English education in Japan by illustrating some difficult challenges it has faced and struggled to tackle over the past few decades.

2. Background

2.1 So-called 'Japanese Poor Communicative Competence in English'

As is well known, there is one popular view that "Japanese are notorious for their 'national' failure to acquire a working command of English" (Honna, 2006, p. 121) despite some six to ten years of English education. It is even said that "TEFL in [Japanese] high schools and universities has been a failure" (Hashimoto, 2009, p. 22). While in Japan "English is a much-sought-after major preferred foreign language" (Kachru, 2005, p. 75) and policy and pedagogy have experienced an enormous upsurge of English in recent years, "many –if not most—Japanese claim little fluency in the language in spite of some six to ten years of schooling in it" (Stanlaw, 2004, p. 7). Interestingly and perhaps aptly, Kachru characterizes the relationship between Japanese people and English language as "a sweet and sour relationship" (Kachru, 2005, p. 73).

Of course, I have been painfully made aware of this rather shameful situation through my own experience of learning and teaching English in Japan. The answer to the question of why we are so poor at commanding English is not simple at all. Here, needless to say, various factors seem to combine to produce so-called 'Japanese poor communicative competence in English'. Although 12 factors to be listed below might be rather overgeneralized, they are all based on my own experience of learning and teaching English in Japan and I believe they would be a good starting point for the deep understanding of the current situation of English education in Japan.

2.2 12 Factors of Japanese Poor Communicative Competence in English

1. 'Juken' (preparation for entrance examination) which forces students to study reading and rule learning and to acquire the skills needed to achieve pass rates in the prescribed written exams, not communication skills. Here English is regarded as "a means of sorting students rather than a pass to communication" (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 301) and 'yakudoku' (a widely-used grammar-translation teaching method) "continues to predominate in English language pedagogy, its proponents proclaiming its necessity as the key to success in the all-important entrance exams" (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 302). O'Donnell explains:

> Emphasising translation over grammar study, the 'yakudoku' classroom is teacher-centred on the word for word translation of English text into Japanese. Language instruction is almost always conducted in Japanese; the development of oral and written English is not fostered in this learning environment (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 302).

   The symbiosis between 'juken' and 'yakudoku' creates a powerful emphasis on "the meticulous standards for accuracy and an unfortunate tendency to focus on exceptions to the rules of grammar" (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 302). As a result, Japanese students end up by acquiring a sort of 'mute English' instead of communicative English.
2. Lack of fundamental English knowledge and skills caused by lack of English learning due to the recommendation ('suisen nyūshi') system which allows students to enter university without writing entrance examinations. Recently many students can get admission to Japanese universities including Takushoku University without taking any English examinations. This very fact causes a serious problem that they have not acquired even basic skills of English, let alone 'mute English', before entering university. For such students, needless to say, the high priority of English education should be assigned not to communicative English but to what is called 'remedial English' even at the level of higher education. This means that they are taught at university fundamental English knowledge and skills such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation which should have been learned at junior high school.
3. The tradition of 'shame culture' which hinders many Japanese students from engaging in active communication practice in English—they do not try to take linguistic risks, feeling afraid of making mistakes and bringing shame on themselves by doing so.
4. Classroom culture nurtured by cultural traits which put a high value on 'humility' (Aspinall, 2006, p. 263-4), 'silence' as gold, and spirit of 'harmony'. Japanese students tend to keep classroom harmonious by keeping silent without showing off their skills acquired even though they are excellent enough to do so. For them it is very important to blend into the group just by listening passively to what their teacher says and getting on with the work they have been told to do. This kind of attitude in the classroom cannot be considered as a barrier to progress for other school subjects such as mathematics and science, but it can be a serious barrier for communicative English learning. With

regard to this point, Aspinall says, "Clearly, the nature of communicative English as an academic subject that requires an extra dimension of activity above and beyond 'book learning' creates serious problems for the established Japanese culture of learning in schools" (Aspinall, 2006, p. 264).

5. 'Native speaker fallacy' that "the native speakers' English is standard and worth trying to achieve as the best knowledge about English language use" (Abe, 2013, p. 49-50). In Japanese junior and senior high school, as Abe (2013, p. 50) points out, all the audio materials accompanying English textbooks are recorded by native Western English speakers, Americans in many cases. Besides, most of the native speaking English teachers working at Japanese schools are native Western English speakers (and surprisingly the majority are white men). Here is what is called "native-speakerism" which is "a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterized by the belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (Holliday, 2006, p. 385). In such an educational milieu it might be natural that most students should have "a belief that the native western speakers' English is the only correct and authentic form of English" and "it may be that this general belief causes Japanese people to lose confidence in their own English" (Abe, 2013, p. 50). Lack of confidence would surely lead to their hesitation to speak English in front of others and block their progress with English communication skills.
6. Major affective as well as cognitive barriers caused by learning English which is a 'noncognate' language. Needless to say, English is 'a truly foreign language' which is more demanding than cognate languages for Japanese students to learn, thereby producing strong negative affective reactions from them. According to Samimy (1994) who conducts research on teaching Japanese language to American university students, "the attrition rate among students who take Japanese has been reported to be 'as much as eighty percent'" (Samimy, 1994, p. 29). Moreover, she introduces the ETS (Educational Testing Service) Oral Proficiency Testing manual which states "under ideal conditions, it takes American students 720 hours of instruction to reach the Level 3 in oral skills in French or Spanish, whereas it takes the same students 2,400-2,760 hours to achieve the same level of oral proficiency in Japanese" (Samimy, 1994, p. 29). Terashima (2010) also explains the relationship between linguistic distance and difficulty of language acquisition for native English speakers in the following table:

Table 1

Linguistic Distance: Time Required for the Acquisition of a Target Language and its Difficulty for Native English Speakers

	French	Russian	Chinese	Korean	Japanese
time required	1	3	no data	No data	6
difficulty	1~2	2~4	5~7	9~10	10

Note. Adapted from Terashima (2010, p. 127)

Conversely, these researches would also indicate enormous difficulty of learning English for Japanese students. From the above information, it might be even surmised that about eighty percent of the Japanese students studying English are potential dropouts. If so, it would be considered quite natural that Japanese cannot easily acquire the language. Thus, linguistic distance between Japanese and English is a serious barrier for Japanese students to overcome.

7. Lack of enough hours of instruction. Despite the fact that it takes enormous time for Japanese students to reach a certain level of English oral skills as discussed above, Japanese schools (junior and senior high schools and universities) do not offer sufficient hours of English instruction. According to Hanefuji (2006), Japanese students study English at junior and senior high school for 550 ~ 950 hours (Hanefuji, 2006, p. 16). In universities the hours of English instruction vary according to schools and majors. In the case of FISTU 315 hours are spent on the instruction of compulsory English classes. Thus obviously Japanese students do not get enough hours of English instruction from schools. To make the matter worse, many students not only in FISTU but also in general do not spend much time in studying English after school despite the fact that they need to supplement the lack of study time. As a result, their English proficiency remains low level.
8. Large class size which makes the management of the class difficult for English teachers and hinders active communication practices there. O'Donnell takes note of the belief of a Japanese teacher whom he interviewed for his research that "communicative teaching cannot be accomplished unless class sizes are substantially lowered" (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 312). A couple of years ago FISTU decreased the average number of the students in one class from over 30 to about 25 for the purpose of improving the quality of English education. Although this was surely a good improvement, the class size is still rather big for active and effective communicative English learning/teaching.
9. Few opportunities to speak with English speakers not only during English class but also in daily school life. Abe (2013) claims, "Increasing the number of English speaking teachers (whether they are native English speakers or not) is necessary because Japanese students have few opportunities to speak with them" (Abe, 2013, p. 52). In fact, many students wish to communicate with English speakers at school and improve their communication skills. In 2015 I conducted a survey by questionnaire to 22 first-year students in the lowest-level English class. To the question of whether they like English or not, 11 students (50%) answered "Yes" and 4 (18%) answered "Rather yes". The students who answered "No" or "Rather no" were only 6 (27%). Besides, to the question asking the aim of learning English, 9 students (41%) answered, "They aim at improving communication skills". Despite their poor English skills assessed based on the results of the placement test, surprisingly many of them were still interested in English, or rather, English communication. We, English teachers, should take their wishes and needs in English education more seriously and explore pedagogical approaches that can meet them. In this sense, the current situation which do not offer many opportunities to speak with English speakers at school is nothing else than discouraging and demotivating for students.
10. Lack of synergy among English teachers. In Japanese universities many English teachers work

part-time and most of them teach English at a couple of universities. In such circumstances it is quite difficult that they spend extra time exchanging information about their classes and students and cooperating with other teachers teaching the same class. In the case of FISTU students need to take three kinds of compulsory English classes taught by three different English teachers in charge of each class. Ideally speaking, these three teachers should share information about their teaching, students' attitudes, progresses, problems, etc. and utilize it for educational purposes during the term. But the reality is that each class is taught completely separately as an independent one and the three teachers do not know what is going on in other two classes. This can be the case happening in many other universities in Japan. Although it might be too demanding to ask all the teachers for extra time to share their class information after class, lack of synergy among English teachers can be regarded as a backdrop of inefficiency of English education in Japanese universities.

11. "Sociolinguistic reality [which] does not call for much English" (Schneider, 2014, p. 22). In practice "English is not much needed in Japanese society" outside of international businesses (Honna, 2006, p. 121). In short, English competence is not necessary for our survival. Japanese is the only language we Japanese need to master for our daily survival. In such a monolingual society it might be natural that Japanese students should have poor communicative competence in English.
12. Strong tendency that students are attracted to many other exciting and interesting activities rather than English learning. Although this might be an indirect factor causing students' poor English communication abilities, it can be still an important aspect in considering the issues of motivation, or rather, the lack of motivation to study English. During university, students put their heart into many interesting activities such as sports clubs, part-time jobs and volunteer work. In a sense, their lives are full of exciting things to do and, needless to say, English learning which requires a lot of time, efforts, and patience for the improvement must be perceived to be boring and unexciting. As a result, many university students end up doing the minimum work required to get the credits of the compulsory English classes without aspiring to acquire a good command of English.

These are the notable and important factors which I consider cause so-called 'Japanese poor communicative competence in English'. It might be said that the future success of English education in Japan depends on removing or at least minimizing these factors for the improvement of English proficiency. In the following section, looking back on my own experience of teaching at FISTU over the past decade, I will examine how the English Program has tackled (or not tackled) the above 12 factors in order to make progress with students' English competence.

3. English Program in FISTU

3.1 English Curricula in FISTU

3.1.1 'Innovative' Old Curriculum for Improving Communicative Competence

In 2000 FISTU originally started as the Faculty of International Development Studies, and it was then the only undergraduate school in Japan where students could major in Development-Cooperation

Studies. It also offered another department called Asia-Pacific Studies which was also unusual as an undergraduate course in Japanese universities at that time. As a unique brand-new Faculty aspiring to educate internationally-minded youths who can function anywhere in the world as well as survive in the era of globalization, its English program was designed with particular emphasis on teaching 'practical and communicative English' and its curriculum made for that purpose was surprisingly innovative and unconventional.

Table 2

Old English Curriculum at FISTU Adopted from 2000 to 2003

year	term	Taught by JTEs	Taught by NESTs	Taught by NESTs	Credits
1	1	Communication I A	Communication I B	Reading & Writing I	1x 3 = 3
	2	Communication II A	Communication II B	Reading & Writing II	1x 3 = 3
2	1	Presentation I A	Presentation I B	Debate I	1x 3 = 3
	2	Presentation II A	Presentation II B	Debate II	1x 3 = 3

(total) 12

In 2002 when I began teaching English there, I was unexpectedly asked to be in charge of oral communication classes called Communication A for the first-year and Presentation A for the second-year. Both were aimed at developing English oral communication skills through extensive oral communication and listening practice. The main focus of these classes was on giving students an opportunity to start by talking familiar topics, to build confidence in using English without being afraid of or shy about speaking English in front of others, to enjoy using English and to get a sense of achievement from expressing themselves in English. To put it briefly, they were designed as the classes to break their silence in English classrooms. The role of Japanese teachers was to help them overcome their psychological barrier in speaking English and get used to English communication. The reason why these unique classes were incorporated in the curriculum seems to lie in the fact that many students have not acquired basic communication skills even after six years of English education at junior and senior high school. In fact, many Japanese students feel frustrated when their mind goes blank even when listening to the simplest of English or at their own lack of ability to say even the simplest of expressions.

However, why were these classes taught by Japanese teachers of English (JTEs), not by native-English-speaking teachers (NESTs)? Normally in Japanese universities JTEs teach English reading and writing skills as well as grammar, whereas NESTs teach listening and speaking skills, as well as oral communication and presentation skills. And this division of roles has remained unchanged as something prescriptive and superior up to now. But the English program of this brand-new Faculty unconventionally assigned oral communication classes to JTEs and reading and writing classes to NESTs. Communication A and Presentation A, both of which were taught by JTEs, were paired with Communication B and Presentation B taught by NESTs respectively. Each pair was composed of the part teaching 'unstructured' discourse of English communication and presentation such as small talks and everyday casual

conversations (Communication A, Presentation A) and another part teaching the 'structured' one which focused on reading for, writing and presenting a speech (Communication B, Presentation B). This was actually a quite natural division of roles which could bring out the best in strength of each side, as JTEs knew the process of acquiring English communication skills through their own learning experience and NESTs were much better versed in structured English. Nevertheless, I could not realize this immediately.

Recollecting my own experience of learning and teaching English, neither had I seen JTEs teach English oral communication nor taught it myself in spite of the fact that I had experienced teaching English at several Japanese universities before. Therefore, at first I was perplexed about what to do in these completely new classes. However, it ended up being a needless fear and unexpectedly I found this way rather effective and innovative. And, above all, these classes were always interactive and so very lively and interesting.

With no teaching model in mind, I could teach English freed from the traditional teaching methods such as 'yakudoku' (grammar-translation teaching method) which I had got used to both as a student and a teacher. "Don't worry! Look at me! When I was a university student, I couldn't speak English at all. You are much better!" Speaking like this, I tried to make myself function as a kind of facilitator to decrease students' enormous hesitation to speak English and encourage them to speak English freely without bothering too much about grammatical mistakes or correct sentence structures. Here I made the most of my own 'painful' experience of struggling with English in the past and presented myself in the classroom not as a good "role model" with a high fluency in English, which Tsukamoto's (2011) study considers very important, but rather as a bad "role model" from whose 'shameful' experience they could learn something fundamental and useful in acquiring English communication skills.

At the same time, sometimes I tried to make myself function as a kind of cultural mediator to inform them about cultural differences we Japanese find confused in communicating in English and how to deal with them. Here I introduced my experiences of living in the UK, where I discovered English as a living communication tool, not a subject for exams, and found English communicating style quite different from Japanese. In order to avoid misunderstanding and make communication smooth, needless to say, it is essential for students to know the aspects of cultural differences and language usage depending on the situation.

In spite of its certain effectiveness and potential as a new 'innovative' system, the English curriculum was reviewed shortly in 2003 and the unique system in which JTEs teach oral communication and NESTs reading and writing was replaced by the traditional one in which JTEs teach grammar, reading and writing and NESTs listening and speaking, oral communication and presentation skills. And the curriculum was completely reformed at the same time with the Faculty reform carried out in 2005. The main reason of this change was that the previous curriculum did not give students any opportunities to learn English grammar properly despite the fact that many of them had not understood basic grammar at all. Moreover, their average TOEIC score had never reached 400 and it seemed necessary for JTEs to teach basic grammar properly first of all in order to improve their English proficiency. This was simply because JTEs were "perceived as good teachers of grammar, and had the ability to resort to the students' first

language when necessary" (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014, p. 1). Since then I have been teaching grammar, reading and writing in the class named English Foundation Skills. Frankly speaking, sometimes I wonder how much more effective this traditional way of teaching English is and if this change might be not a reform but a retrogression or not, missing the previous interactive, lively oral communication classes where I could see students 'empowered' in the process of finding their English voice.

3.1.2 'Traditional' New Curriculum for Building Up English Foundations

The Faculty was renamed the Faculty of International Studies in 2005 when it was reformed in its course system. At present it offers seven courses: International Cooperation, International Culture, International Economics, International Politics, International Tourism, International Agriculture, International Sports. As stated above, the English program also revised its curriculum so as to accommodate English education as a 'tool' to gain academic knowledge in these seven courses, while emphasizing the aspects of 'practical and communicative English' much more strongly in response to social 'desperate' demand for globally competitive graduates with high communicative abilities in English.

The current curriculum is composed of two parts: (i) three 'core' English classes and (ii) a variety of Practical English classes. First- and second-year students need to attend the three 'core' English classes and earn 12 credits in total. And when they become third-year they are required to register two Practical English classes and earn 2 credits. Each English class is worth 1 credit and students are required to take at least 14 credits in English: 12 of three 'core' English classes and 2 of two Practical English classes.

3.1.2.1 Three 'Core' English Classes

Three 'core' English classes are (a) English Foundation Skills I~IV, (b) English Oral Communication Skills I~IV, and (c) English Presentation Skills I~IV, and students has each of the classes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the first two years and need to take 12 credits in total as is shown in the following table:

Table 3

Current English Curriculum

year	term	Taught by JTEs	Taught by NESTs	Taught by NESTs	Credits
1	1	Foundation Skills I	Oral Communication Skills I	Presentation Skills I	1x 3 = 3
	2	Foundation Skills II	Oral Communication Skills II	Presentation Skills II	1x 3 = 3
2	1	Foundation Skills III	Oral Communication Skills III	Presentation Skills III	1x 3 = 3
	2	Foundation Skills IV	Oral Communication Skills IV	Presentation Skills IV	1x 3 = 3

(total) 12

The broad descriptions of each class are:

1. English Foundation Skills: this class is taught by JTEs with the emphasis on basic grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary expansion in addition to reading and writing.

2. English Oral Communication Skills: this class taught by NESTs is aimed at improving students' oral communication skills.
3. English Presentation Skills: this class is also taught by NESTs and has its goal as the integrated form of making full use of all the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking which students will have learned in the above two classes.

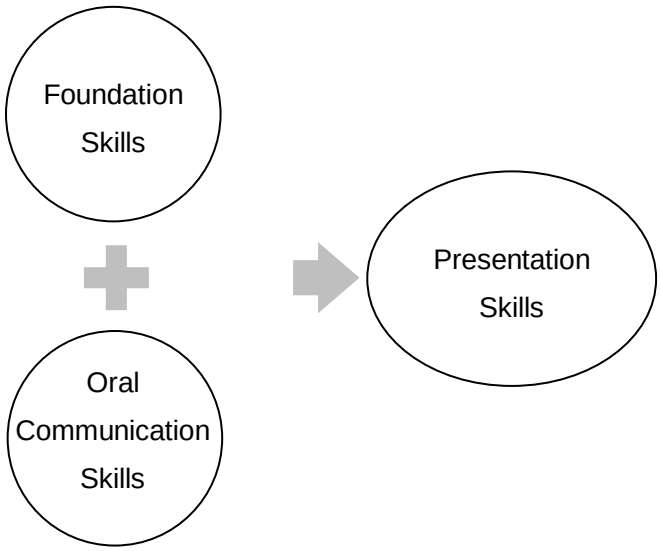

Figure 1. The Image of the Connection among Three 'Core' English Classes

Contrary to its concept and image, however, 'lack of synergy' among three teachers in charge of each class can be observed here as I discussed above as the tenth factor of Japanese poor communicative competence in English. Of course, we, English teachers, sometimes exchange information about our classes and students in the lecturers' room or in the corridor during a break between classes or lunch time, but no system has been established in order to connect the three classes with a view to producing synergy effect. This could be seen as a kind of systematic fault which might need some repairing.

However, it is easier said than done. What can we do in order to connect the three classes in a systematic way and gain synergy effect in the English education of FISTU? Probably the possible and fundamental thing to do would be to examine the current three syllabi of each class and combine them into one 'big' syllabus so that they could share it. But this would certainly require reviewing textbooks used in each class and surveying minutely what is taught there. As a result, it might be necessary even to regulate textbooks and contents taught there. Such a strict regulation might prevent each teacher from expressing his/her individuality and damage educational effect. Needless to say, this must be avoided and here the issues of how much we should leave each class to teacher's discretion should be carefully considered. The current system which separates each class as individual guarantees teacher's right to choose the textbook in accordance with the broad description of his/her class and makes it possible for them to teach English in their own style. This would be a merit of the current system. Maintaining such a merit and avoiding too strict regulations, we need to explore the best way of connecting the three 'core' classes systematically and gain more educational effects by doing so. This is one of the urgent tasks for the English Program of FISTU.

3.1.2.2 Practical English Classes

In addition to the above three 'core' classes, there are a variety of Practical English classes offered in the Faculty. Practical English I and II are elective classes for first- and second-year students to prepare for TOEIC test. Practical English III and IV for third-year students are, as I mentioned, compulsory. However, if students' TOEIC scores have reached 500 when they become third-year, these classes are exempted and they can get 2 credits without attending the classes.

The Faculty also offers four elective English classes called Advanced Practical English for third- and fourth-year students. Here students can learn mainly academic English laying stress on TOEFL and other English tests.

However, why should we offer these English classes to prepare for external English tests such as TOEIC and TOEFL under the course name of 'practical English' in the university curriculum? Especially it seems that the classes for TOEIC test are rather overemphasized despite criticisms that TOEIC test composed of English listening and reading sections cannot measure every aspect about students' communicative proficiency (Cunningham, 2002; Knapman, 2008; Takahashi, 2012). Takahashi (2012) claims that "what is measured [by the TOEIC test] is only the degree of receptive skills" and the test scores cannot measure accurately the "communicative abilities which ensure the test-taker's interactions in real life contexts" (Takahashi, 2012, p. 132). In this sense, TOEIC test which is "such a pencil and paper multiple choice test" that cannot reflect real life communication is neither 'practical' nor 'communicative' (Takahashi, 2012, p. 132). If we aim at offering English program focusing on truly practical and communicative English in a very real sense, it would be necessary to review the current curriculum putting strong stress on TOEIC test.

3.2 Class Division Based on English Proficiency

In FISTU all the English classes except Advanced Practical English are divided based on students' proficiency in English. In April when the academic year starts first- and second-year students take G-TELP Test (Level 4) as a placement test and are divided into 12 classes according to six levels based on the results of the G-TELP Test. Each class consists of about 25 students. Added to these 12 classes, there are two more classes for the students who belong to International Sports course. Their English curriculum is designed specially for them so that we can teach them English specific to their course and treat them differently from the students of other courses.

G-TELP (General Tests of English Language Proficiency) conducted by ITSC (the International Testing Services Center) in the US "assesses the English language ability of nonnative speakers in real world situations" and "the content comprises practical words and expressions in actual, contemporary use in the U.S." (G-TELP). It evaluates the English proficiency of examinees at five different levels (four levels in Japan) and the following (Figure2) is the correlations with other prominent English language tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL and EIKEN:

G-TELP	TOEIC scores	TOEFL scores	EIKEN
Level 1	- 990 - 900	- 650	Grade 1
Level 2	- 800 - 700	- 600 - 550	Grade Pre-1
Level 3	- 600 - 500	- 500	Grade 2
			Grade Pre-2
Level 4	- 400 - 300 - 200	- 400	Grade 3

Figure2. Correlations with Other Tests

S*ource*: G-TELP, http://www.g-telp.jp/index.html

Note. "Eiken" is the test of Practical English Proficiency administered by Eiken Foundation of Japan.

One of the biggest differences between G-TELP and other English tests such as TOEIC and TOEFL is that the former is 'Criterion Referenced Test' whose "assessments are made according to universally recognized criteria that describe the ability of the examinee in the performance of specific language tasks" and the latter is 'Norm Referenced Tests' which "compare the examinee's test scores with those of other examinees" (G-TELP; Ogasawara & Maruyama, 2014). While the scores of TOEIC and TOEFL "serve as general indicators of language proficiency relative to that of other test-takers", G-TELP provides "objective, diagnostic information" on the examinee's performance (G-TELP). As English proficiency should not be measured by comparing students' scores, G-TELP as a criterion-referenced test is considered desirable as a placement test.

FISTU use G-TELP Level 4 Test, which has three sections of Grammar, Listening and Reading & Vocabulary, to evaluate students' proficiency. It focuses on basic English in simple communications and is, as Figure 2 shows, equivalent to TOEIC score of less than 400 or EIKEN Grade 3 which is the English proficiency level of junior high school graduates in Japan. Level 4 Test can differentiate well TOEIC scores of less than 400 and this very fact makes us keep on using it as a placement test.

The average G-TELP scores of the first-year students of FISTU in 2015 are Grammar 62.5,

Listening 55.7, Reading & Vocabulary 55.9, and Total 174.1. Considering that a skill area score of 75% or more indicates that "examinee has demonstrated mastery of the particular skill area" (G-TELP), these average scores clearly show that more than half the students of FISTU need 'remedial English education' at university. As I discussed above as the second factor in causing Japanese poor communicative competence in English, they should be taught basic English knowledge and skills such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation which should have been learned at junior high school.

At the same time, however, the result of G-TELP test in the year also shows that about 26% of the first-year students obtain the total score of more than 240. Obviously this group of the students has already acquired a mastery of basic English skills and does not require remedial English education. What they require is the further improvement of their English competence. Thus, G-TELP test plays an important role not only as a convenient and reliable placement test but also as a tool to grasp students' English level and their needs in English education.

3.3 TOEIC

As for TOEIC test, FISTU administers TOEIC IP test twice a year in April and November and all the first-year students are required to take the November TOEIC test. Since 2013 the Faculty has set a target score at 500 and, as I explained above, introduced compulsory Practical English classes for the third-year students who have not obtained the target score (Practical English III and IV), expecting this system could promote students' motivation to learn English even for the purpose of gaining enough TOEIC score to be entitled to the exemption from the third-year compulsory classes of Practical English. However, both in 2013 and 2014 the average scores of TOEIC test did not reach even 400, and consequently in 2015 many third-year students had to take Practical English III & IV against our wish. To make the matter worse, many of them voluntarily chose to take the classes instead of making efforts to improve their TOEIC scores before they became third-year.

This fact actually aroused deep doubts among English teachers about the meaning of setting TOEIC 500 as their target score. It might be said that this newly introduced system has been already a mere formality. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that it has surely contributed to encouraging and motivating some, not many though, students to study English hard to reach the target score. Even among the students of the lowest-level class some studied English from the very basic skills and succeeded in getting more than 500. For example, a female student I taught when she was a first-year student could improve her English proficiency enormously in the process of learning English with the aim of gaining TOEIC 500. Her G-TELP scores in April, 2013 when she entered FISTU (Grammar 45 + Listening 45 + Reading & Writing 20 = Total 110) placed her in the lowest-level class (Class 1). She was one of the students who entered FISTU by means of the recommendation ('suisen nyūshi') system. Looking back on her high school days, she told me that she had done nothing but play rock music in her club activity. Entering FISTU, however, she seriously started thinking about her future career and studying English from the basic at the university and even at an English language school outside of the university. After one year's hard study she achieved the TOEIC score of 505 in April, 2014 and her English class for the second-year went

up from Class 1 to Class 3. This little success brought her confidence in her own ability, encouraging her to study English more and go for the next challenge in her life. Now she studies at a different university in order to realize her dream of studying abroad. As can be seen here, TOEIC 500 means more than the score. It can work positively as a motivator for students not only to study English but also to challenge many other things in their lives. In this respect, we cannot easily disregard this system just as a mere formality.

3.4 Speech Contest

In November an annual speech contest for the first-year students is held. Although students' speeches are prepared and trained in the class of Presentation Skills, we actually regard them as the outcome of the three 'core' English classes. The contest is simply a good opportunity for students to develop their communicative competence and presentation skills in English as well as their own thoughts and opinions in the process of producing the speech draft. Even though the students' speeches presented there cannot be expressed numerically like the result of TOEIC test, they are surely the visible achievement of English education in FISTU.

3.5 Special Care

English program in FISTU deals with many problems all the year around and some of them have no relation with English education. For example, we call all the students who have not turned up for the first and second English classes at the beginning of the term in order to remind them to attend the class. This might sound silly, but it works and many students start attending not only the English classes but also other classes. In this way we try to prevent students from failing English credits and even dropping out of the university. Besides, some students have psychological problems and cannot interact with other students smoothly in the classroom. For such students attending oral communication classes is nothing but a great burden and it is part of our job to understand this and help those students in many ways so as not to fail the credits and end up leaving school.

3.6 Study Abroad Program

FISTU offers a variety of Study Abroad (SA) programs[2] and encourages the students to participate in at least one program so that they can develop not only their linguistic ability but also 'cultural awareness' which is essential in fostering their communication skills. Regarding 'cultural awareness', Ito (2002) advocates the necessity of "cultural learning" in today's English language education in Japan as follows:

> We should desire to develop among our students awareness of the existence of cultures different from their own, awareness of the interrelation between English and the culture of English-speaking people, and awareness of the global status of today's English. This multifaceted awareness is then expected to lay the basis for a positive attitude among our students toward cross-cultural communication and understanding. This attitude then has to be converted into a skill with which to explore not only other cultures but also their own cultures, and later into a skill with which to

explore the world around themselves through the medium of English (Ito, 2002, p. 52).

Needless to say, the experience of studying abroad is the experience of "cultural learning". Students can broaden their perspectives of different people and cultures as well as themselves and their own cultures. Moreover, they can realize the usefulness of English language as lingua franca through their experience and many of them come back to Japan with strong sense of purpose in their study.

Besides, as I mentioned as the eleventh factor in Japanese poor communicative competence in English, sociolinguistic reality in Japan does not call for much English. In fact, most of the Japanese students do not have an opportunity to use English as a means of real life communication in their daily life. Therefore, SA experiences have significant meanings for them, fueling their efforts to communicate in English. Moritani et al. (2016) points out the psychological impact of an SA experience especially in the motivational and attitudinal aspects which influences the students' future linguistic outcomes. As the students' willingness to communicate in target language is an essential factor for their linguistic progress, the important role of affective factors on the linguistic outcomes derived from SA experience should be more stressed in English education in Japan. In this sense, it would be vital to the further improvement of our English program to explore the possibility of developing its own SA programs and establish a system to incorporate them into the curriculum in the near future[3].

4. Tasks for the Future

Looking back on my experience of teaching English at FISTU, I examined the English program from the aspects of its curriculum reform, the utilization of G-TELP test as a placement test and TOEIC 500 as a target score and, more importantly, a kind of life motivator, the annual speech contest as a visible embodiment of the three 'core' English classes, the special care to support students, and the efficacy of SA programs. Although we have made every effort to provide good English education for our students inside and outside the classrooms, the examination has revealed that the program is still imperfect in many respects and needs its further development for the purpose of improving students' communicative competence in English. The main tasks to be tackled are as follows.

4.1 Revising Curriculum for Truly Practical and Communicative English Education

The old English curriculum of FISTU was designed with the intention of reforming students' 'mute English' caused by 'Juken' and English learning through 'Yakudoku' with its emphasis on thoroughly communicative English learning through the unique system in which JTEs teach oral communication and NESTs reading and writing. As a result, this curriculum did not provide students with an opportunity to learn English through 'Yakudoku'. In this sense, this was an innovative curriculum aiming at transforming their 'mute English' to 'communicative English' through the process of finding and fostering their English voice. At the same time, the unique teaching system forced JTEs to speak English much more in instructing students and transform their teaching from Japanese-based instruction to English-based, which was simply revolutionary as we JTEs had got too much used to learning/teaching English in Japanese. If

we aim at truly practical and communicative English education, such merits of the old curriculum should be remembered once again and incorporated in the future revised curriculum.

On the other hand, it is essential to maintain the aspect of the current English curriculum which offers opportunities to learn basic English knowledge and skills for developing four well-balanced skills, especially grammar which is "part of the required knowledge in language acquisition", to the students who have not acquired them before entering the university (Okada, 2014, p. 99). Contrary to the old curriculum, the current one focuses on building up students' basic knowledge and skills of English and in the class entitled Foundation Skills JTEs teach mainly English grammar, reading and writing following the traditional role division of English teaching. As Park (2012) claims that one of the strengths of NNESTs [nonnative-English-speaking teachers] is "their ability to explain and teach English grammar due to their lived experiences as English language learners", it would be appropriate for JTEs to teach grammar (Park, 2012, p. 129). However, the problem which might happen here is that there is high possibility for JTEs to end up reapplying such a traditional teaching method as 'Yakudoku' and returning to the old way of teaching English which does not pay much attention to developing students' communicative competence. Here it seems helpful to note Takahashi's study (2010) discussing the indispensability of grammatical competence as "solid core" in fostering communicative competence (Takahashi, 2010, p. 62-4). She advocates "Form-focused instruction" which "assumes that learner's attention to linguistic forms while focusing on meaning plays an essential role for learning grammar" and argues the importance of conducting both "implicit grammar instruction" and "explicit grammar instruction" in the framework of communicative approach (Takahashi, 2010, p. 57, 59). The English Program of FISTU should place grammar instruction in this way for the purpose of improving English communicative competence.

Moreover, the current curriculum with strong emphasis on TOEIC should be reconsidered. A series of Practical English classes are aimed at preparing for TOEIC. As I discussed above, studying for TOEIC is not useful in nurturing truly practical and communicative competence of English. Instead of TOEIC, it would be more helpful to offer truly practical English classes such as media English and business writing as well as communicative English classes to give students more opportunities to speak English with English speakers in the curriculum.

4.2 Diversifying Teaching Staff from the Viewpoint of 'World Englishes'

At present nineteen English teachers (three full-time JSEs, five part-time JSEs, one full-time NEST, one special part-time NEST, and nine part-time NESTs) are working for FISTU. Out of the eleven NESTs only one is female and the rest are all male, and all are white Westerners (American, Australian, British and Irish). I consider this rather ill-balanced in the light of the concept of teaching/learning English as an international language. As is well-known, English is now regarded as 'World Englishes'. Japanese students need to know the fact that multiple varieties of English are spoken around the world and recognize they do not need to speak like native English speakers. If they have opportunities to be taught by English speaking teachers from the Outer and Expanding circle countries (Kachru, 1985) who speak the varieties of English, they may "see English from different perspectives" and "begin to notice that communicating in a variety of

Englishes is both practical and fun, and that they too can perceive themselves as intelligible to other English speakers all over the world" (Abe, 2013, p. 52). The awareness of 'World Englishes' may push aside their pressures to speak like native English speakers by encouraging them to speak English "without having an overemphasis on pronunciation and grammar" (Abe, 2013, p. 52). Thus, diversifying teaching staff would surely contribute toward correcting their 'native speaker fallacy' which blocks the improvement of their communicative abilities. Together with having English teachers with different backgrounds, it would also be effective to incorporate SA programs in non-Western countries where English is effectively spoken as their second and foreign language into the English curriculum.

4.3 Developing a New Evaluation System

One of the biggest systemic defects in the English Program of FISTU is that no systematic evaluation system "from the perspectives of 'language assessment' and 'program evaluation'" has not been developed (Saida et al., 2010, p. 241-2). 'Language assessment' is mainly composed of students' proficiency, achievement and self-learning motivation. Although TOEIC can be a motivator in encouraging students to study English, TOEIC scores do not always reflect students' English proficiency. In this regard, the English Program should review the current system to use TOEIC as their goal, an indicator of students' proficiency and achievement, and instead explore other methods which can assess their English competence in a much more concrete and visible way. One direction would be to introduce Can-Do statements (CDS) to the curriculum so that students' English competence can be grasped clearly and objectively for both teachers and students. In this case, CDS should be "tailor-made" so that it can fit our students and assess their proficiency as accurately as possible (Fujita & Mayekawa, 2013, p. 147).

Another much easier way would be to use G-TELP not only as a placement test but also as a 'posttest' to assess their improvement of the skills. At present G-TELP is used just for the purpose of dividing students into classes based on their English proficiency. However, G-TELP could be more useful if we try to make the most of it by grasping students' needs through its results, providing English teaching which fits them during the term, and assessing the improvement of their skills after the term. Utilizing G-TELP as a series of cycle in this way would be helpful in producing good educational effects.

Besides, the current system which allows each teacher to decide the assessment of students' grades simply makes the achievement evaluation opaque, unclear, and even unreliable when considering the grades of 'S' or 'A' do not always guarantee their good English skills. In order to avoid this, it would be necessary to set the same objectives, syllabus and grading system to be shared among teachers so that students' grades could reflect their proficiency and achievement. However, we have never discussed these issues among English teachers in the program in the past. This very fact may be actually a fatal flaw of our English Program. We have totally lacked a perspective to evaluate objectively our English Program. For the further improvement of the program, needless to say, it is essential to establish a system to monitor the program itself at regular intervals and revise it if necessary.

4.4 English Education for 'Empowerment'

Another defect is that English education in Japan including the English Program of FISTU seems to lack any clear vision or philosophy of teaching/learning English. What kind of English should we Japanese acquire? What should we target in our English education? Why should we teach/learn English? The answers of all these questions remain unclear and just the idea that English is so important and useful as an international language that we Japanese need to acquire its skills has urged and pressurized us to try to teach/learn English hard.

At FISTU I have seen many students suffering from their poor English competence despite the fact that most of them like English and wish to become a good English speaker. "What should I do to improve my English skills?" "What is necessary to be able to communicate in English?" Every time they ask me these questions, their hopeless faces remind me of my school days. When I was a university student, I was dreadfully pressurized into mastering English by a wave of 'internationalization'. The word 'internationalization' sounded attractive, but it also burdened us, young students, with a feeling of great oppression. And now the word 'globalization' oppresses my students enormously and impels them to conquer English by any means in order to survive the era of 'globalization'. In a sense, we Japanese have been obsessed with English learning spurred by such vogue words as 'internationalization' and 'globalization', and, as a result, miserably we have ended up disempowered by our lack of enough competence to command English. Remembering the fact that English is just a foreign language, it would be nonsensical and unnecessary that we have felt so oppressed by English. Besides, English is now an international language whose ownership native speakers cannot claim and which "no nation can have custody over" (Kilickaya, 2009, p. 36). The concept of 'World Englishes' is useful here again in that we Japanese also can speak our variety of English "not as passive and malleable subjects, but as agentive and creative multilinguals" (Kuppens, 2013, p. 327). English education in Japan should not only "teach English so that they [students] will be able to understand/tolerate many accent and varieties through exposure" (Kilickaya, 2009, p. 37) but also develop "the Japanese variety of English that is not restricted by the native-speaker norm" (Matsuda, 2003, p. 726). By doing so we Japanese will be empowered with its intelligible competence. English education in Japan should set the goal for this purpose. The viewpoint of English education for 'empowerment' will help us explore "a different way of looking at the language [English], which is more inclusive, pluralistic, and accepting than the traditional, monolithic view of English in which there is one correct, standard way of using English that all speakers must strive for" (Matsuda, 2003, p. 727) and establish a different way of learning/teaching English for Japanese people to create a new relationship between English and themselves.

Conclusion

English education in Japan has been wandering into a blind alley for a long time, searching for a surefire remedy which can cure Japanese poor competence to command English. As can be seen, the English Program of FISTU is no exception. Although we have tried hard to develop students' English competence in the framework of teaching practical and communicative English, we have not yet

established an effective system to produce satisfactory results in our English education. Or rather, lots of defects of the program hindering the improvement of students' English competence have been found as a result of looking back on my own teaching experience at FISTU and examining the English Program for this paper. The tasks are daunting and many of them cannot be tackled alone. It would be most important to cooperate with other English teachers and the faculty members in order to improve our English Program. No matter hard it may be, challenging the tasks and repairing the defects one by one will surely lead us to a way out from the blind alley of English education in Japan and pave the way for its original, new English education which can empower us Japanese.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Natsumi Aratame (Takushoku University, Tokyo, Japan) who kindly offered me precious opportunities to make a presentation at *Philippine-Japan International Roundtable Conference on TESOL in Asia: Connecting the Philippines and Japan through English Education* held in Cebu city, Philippines in November, 2015 and to write this paper based on the presentation.

Notes

1. Kubota and McKay's study (2009) questions "to what extent English actually does serve today as a lingua franca in multilingual, internationally diverse communities" (Kubota & McKay, 2009, p. 593). Concluding that "English is not an international lingua franca in many multilingual contexts yet it exerts invisible symbolic power" (Kubota & McKay, 2009, p. 616), they advocate that "[a]s TESOL professionals, we need to critically reflect on our own attachment to English so that we can create a discourse that affirms all kinds of diversity; promotes language awareness, attitudes, and skills necessary for communicating with non-English speakers; and scrutinizes racial, class, linguistic, and cultural biases that perpetuate unequal relations of power" (Kubota & McKay, 2009, p. 615).

   With regard to multilingualism, since its foundation in 2000 FISTU has adopted 'a dual foreign language system' teaching students two foreign languages, that is, English and one more chosen by students themselves among 11 foreign languages: Arabic, Brazilian-Portuguese, Chinese, Filipino, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Malay, Spanish, Thai, Vietnamese. Although it can be too demanding for students to learn two foreign languages at the same time, it goes without saying that this system surely contributes toward widening their views and developing their language awareness based on multilingualism, which I find invaluable in educating internationally-minded youths in the Faculty of International Studies.

   However, the reality is much more complex. In spite of the dual language system which promotes multilingualism, there is still a tendency that we consider English much more important as 'Almighty' lingua franca than any other foreign language. Students are, in a sense, pressurized to improve their English proficiency as much as possible for their future success.

2. FISTU offers seven short study abroad programs (Canada, China, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand) during summer and spring vacations. The periods range from two weeks to one month and mostly first-year students participate in the programs. They can choose to learn either English language or the native language of each country in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

   Studying English language in the Southeast Asian countries has different value from studying English in English-speaking Western countries such as the USA and the UK, because students can have opportunities to speak with many people in those countries who speak both English and their native language in their everyday life despite the fact that English is a foreign/second language for them and learn the usefulness of English language as an international communication tool. Here probably students can understand native-like pronunciation and way of speaking English is not so important for English communication and shake off their obsession of 'native speaker fallacy' which pressurizes them to speak like native speakers. Besides, English teachers in those countries know very well how to learn English and improve English skills as non-native English speakers from their own learning and teaching experiences. Therefore, it would be helpful for our students to receive English instruction from them in improving their English skills.

3. Over the past few years more than fifty students of FISTU have studied English at English language schools in Cebu city, Philippines. FISTU has allowed many of them to replace their study there with English classes at FISTU and gain the credits depending on their study hours and contents. In this respect, we have already incorporated SA programs into our program.

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