



Insights into Language Curriculum Development

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Abstract

This paper presents results from an exploratory case study of curriculum development processes at three Japanese universities. It considers the possible influence of “The Action Plan to develop ‘Japanese with English abilities’” (Ministry of Education, 2003), reviews models of curriculum development from theory and compares those to data collected from informants working at the three institutions. Analysis focuses on how the processes undertaken by the universities over the last five years show similarities to those predicted by theory, but also highlights how activities in the institutions have differed. Results indicate that the *national university* in the study undertook curriculum development in the most systematic way, one key being the development of a university-wide English language education policy, which was supported by the majority of teachers and administrators. The *municipal university* (only one faculty in this study) had carried out development activities at its formation (2000), but had not continued the processes, particularly in the areas of needs and situation analysis plus evaluation. Curriculum development processes in the *prefectural university* were centered around an individual teacher, with little input from the rest of the organization. The most significant insights from the study are formulated into guidelines for curriculum developers. Finally, the Action Plan was found to have had little influence on language curriculum development processes at the three universities in the study.

1 Introduction

This section explains the background to the investigation, the aims of the current study and builds a theory-based picture of the processes of curriculum development.

1.1 Background

Over the last twenty years many countries have been moving towards freer movement of goods, services and people. These trends, often termed “globalization,” have led governments to review their plans for economic and social development. Accordingly, as Hato (2005, p. 34) reports, the Japanese Government announced revisions through the “Basic Policies for Economic and Fiscal Management and Structural Reform 2002,” which also included details of a “Human Resource Strategy” that sought to develop the English abilities of Japanese people. In turn, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) then implemented an “Action Plan to Cultivate ‘Japanese with English Abilities’ ” (Ministry of Education, 2003). According to Tanabe (2004, p. 7), “the Action Plan is one of the most essential and substantial announcements made by MEXT in the last thirty years” and so something that we should expect those involved with English language education to be concerned about. Indeed, Hato’s (2005) case

study is in itself a reaction to the Action Plan, though her argument is that the plan has been a “relative failure” due to top-down goal-setting and insufficient resources to realize the objectives. However, Hato’s focus was on junior and senior high schools, with no mention of the situation in universities. Bearing in mind that one of the Action Plan’s stated goals was that “on graduating from university, graduates can use English in their work” (Ministry of Education, 2003, Chapter 2, Section 1), any study which provides insight into curriculum development activities in the tertiary education sector would add to the existing body of knowledge in this area.

For those who may not be familiar with the Japanese education system, there are, in fact, three main levels. Primary education is from 6 to 12 years old, during which time English is not compulsory. During secondary education, which is split between three years of junior and three years of senior high school, students have about three English classes per week, though this varies according to the focus of the school (Hato, 2005, pp. 39–40). About 50% of students (Ministry of Education, 2006) then advance to four-year degree courses during which English is compulsory for a further two years and elective thereafter.

1.2 Aims

The current study aims to:

- Provide insights into the processes of language curriculum development in three Japanese universities by comparing a model informed by theory with data collected from informed sources working within the institutions.
- Investigate how the Action Plan may have influenced curriculum development.
- Provide guidelines for educators involved in language curriculum development.

Whilst this investigation only provides a snapshot of curriculum development at three institutions, it is intended to be the start of a longitudinal study (see section 4.4) involving the same organizations.

For the purposes of this study, *curriculum development*, as indicated above, refers to the processes involved in renewing or developing curricula (see also definitions from Brown and Richards below). *Syllabus design*, in contrast, refers to the planning, implementation, assessment and evaluation for an individual course. Nunan (2001) offers the view that “syllabus design is concerned with the selection, sequencing and justification of the content of the curriculum.”

1.3 Theory-based models of curriculum development

This section reviews models of curriculum development by Brown (1995) and Richards (2001), and from them forms a summary of the curriculum development processes that should be in evidence at any particular institution.

Brown describes curriculum development as “a series of activities that contribute to the growth of consensus among staff, faculty, administration and students.” He further explains that this “series of curriculum activities will provide a framework that helps teachers to accomplish whatever combination of teaching activities is most suitable ... that is, a framework that helps students learn as efficiently and effectively as possible in a given situation” (Brown, 1995, p. 19). Figure 1 shows the curriculum development model suggested by Brown.

Richards describes curriculum development as “the range of planning and implementation processes involved in developing or renewing a curriculum” (Richards, 2001, p. 41). He defines the processes as focusing on “needs analysis, situational analysis, planning learning outcomes, course organization, selecting and preparing teaching materials, providing for effective teaching and evaluation” (Richards, 2001, p. 41). The author’s representation of Richards’ view of curriculum development is shown in Figure 2.

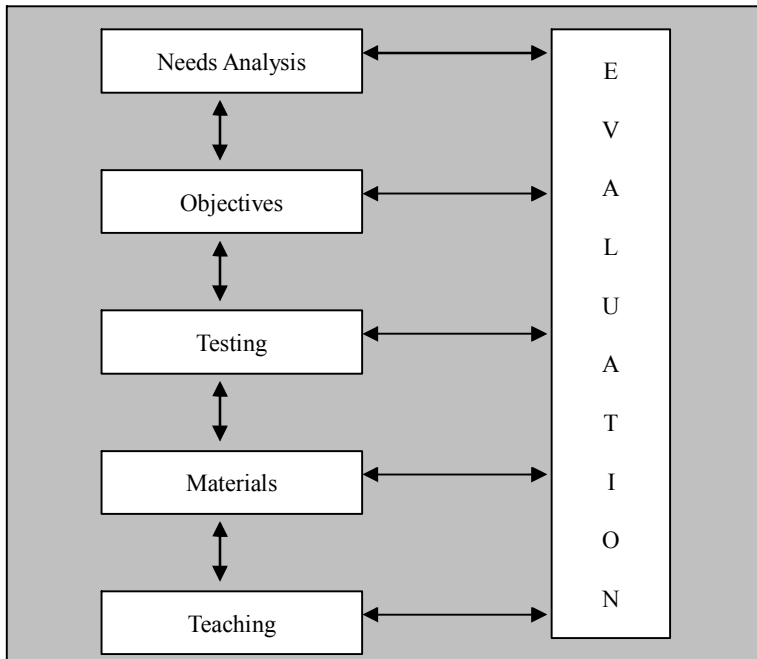


Fig. 1: Brown's view of curriculum development (Brown, 1995, p. 20)

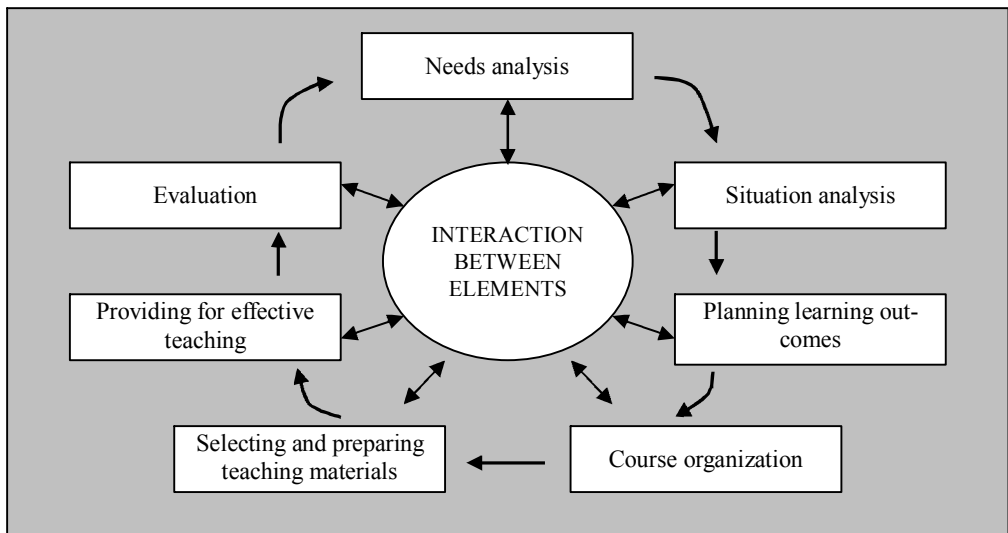


Fig. 2: Richards' view of curriculum development (Richards, 2001)

Looking at the similarities between the models we see that both include needs analysis, setting of objectives or outcomes, materials selection and preparation, teaching and evaluation. In contrast, Brown's model differs from Richards' in that it includes *testing* which is described as "very crucial element in the curriculum development process" (Brown, 1995, p. 22). Looking at Richards' model he includes the additional elements of *situation analysis* and *course organization* as distinctly separate elements of curriculum development processes. Brown (1995) does make refer-

ence to these activities but groups the former into *needs analysis* and the latter into *materials*. Table 1 provides a summary of the combined models and represents processes we should expect to find as part of curriculum development.

Curriculum Development Category	Scope
1. Needs and situation analysis	Primarily based on the learning needs of students, but also any factors in the environment that should be considered.
2. Setting of objectives	Selection of appropriate objectives and the rationale for their selection.
3. Assessment and testing	Selection and development of suitable means of assessment.
4. Planning and organization of the course/syllabus design	Decisions about how best to deliver the course.
5. Selection and/or development of materials	Decisions about the most appropriate materials and/or creation of materials.
6. Planning for effective teaching	Ensuring that appropriate conditions and support systems that promote effective teaching are in place.
7. Evaluation	Evaluation of the above processes in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

Table 1: Summary of theory-based view of curriculum development processes

Other authors such as Harmer (2001), Nunan (1988) and Byram (2000) do discuss elements of curriculum development, though their main focus is on syllabus design.

2 Methods

The methods section aims to explain why the method selected was thought to be appropriate and also how data were collected. As Bickman and Rog (1998, p. 72) explain, “because a design for your study always exists, explicitly or implicitly, it is important to make this design explicit ... where its strengths, limitations and implications can be clearly understood.”

2.1 Method selection

As curriculum development is a complex phenomenon which emerges over a period of time and is most probably best informed by the participants themselves, a qualitative approach was thought to be suitable. Since the study sought to investigate and provide insight into ongoing processes, an exploratory case study approach (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 206) was adopted. Case studies, as Creswell (cited in Arumi & Esteve, 2006, p. 161) states, involve “an exploration of a bounded system or case (or multiple case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context.” For this study, the three universities under investigation were the “bounded system,” and the “in-depth data” were collected by face-to-face interviews with a number of informed subjects.

An important consideration for the study was the position taken regarding reliability and validity. Nunan (1992, p. 80) points out there are differing views on the issue of validity in case study research. As this study aimed to provide insights into processes occurring at three institutions, rather than develop generalizations, the position was similar to that expressed by Stake (Nunan,

1992, p. 80) in that the focus was on “understanding of the particular case,” in which internal validity is the main concern.

2.2 Context

The three institutions involved in the research were all located in Western Japan. Information relevant to this study is provided below.

- The *National University* was part of the system of 87 national universities that stretch across Japan. These universities have close ties to the Ministry of Education (MEXT) and the academic levels of national universities are generally considered to be relatively high. The university in question has an undergraduate population of about 6,000 and five faculties including humanities, science and medicine. All undergraduate students were required to study English for two years, with elective courses being available for third and fourth year, and graduate school students. The English language teaching department for the university consisted of nine Japanese and eight foreign teachers, and was part of a center for “basic education.”
- The *Municipal University* was one of 86 such universities spread across Japan. These universities were created by local governments within cities and their academic levels are also thought to be relatively high. The university in question had, like the national university, had an undergraduate student population of about 6,000 and five faculties related to humanities and sciences, but not including medicine. Again English was compulsory for the first two years of study and elective after that. At the time of the study language teachers were affiliated to each of the five faculties, although a plan to create a center for “basic education” was being implemented.
- The *Prefectural University* was one of about 45 such universities that have been set up by prefectures, or sub-national jurisdictions, across Japan. Like national and municipal universities in Japan tuition fees are less than the private sector, leading to more competition for places, and relatively high levels of academic ability. The university had two faculties, social science and nursing, and was significantly smaller than the other institutions in the study with about 800 students and 80 members of staff. English teaching was faculty-based, and there was no known plan to coordinate teaching through a center for “basic education.”

2.3 Participants

The participants were selected on the basis that they were all involved in curriculum development at their respective institutions. Table 2 shows further details.

Institution	Participant's position	Number of years position held	Number of years as a university teacher	Involvement with curriculum development	Number of teachers in department in which data were gathered
National university	Professor	6	22	Responsible for coordinating curriculum development in addition to teaching duties	17 full-time teachers serving five faculties with no part-time teachers
Municipal university	Professor*	6	22	Responsible for coordinating curriculum development in addition to teaching duties	6 full time teachers serving one faculty (4 departments) plus one part-time teacher
	Associate Professor*	2	10	Contributes to curriculum development and a member of the faculty curriculum committee in addition to teaching duties	6 teachers serving one faculty (4 departments) plus one part-time teacher
Prefectural university	Associate Professor	2	8	Responsible for curriculum development for first-year communication and second-year writing classes in addition to teaching duties	2 full time teachers serving one faculty (3 departments) plus two part-time teachers

Note: * working in the same department

Table 2: The participants

2.4 Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants being encouraged to talk about their curriculum development experiences over the last five years. The following questions were used to provide structure to the data collection process.

Background

1. How many years have you worked at your institution?
2. What is your current position?
3. How many years have you held this position?
4. How many years have you worked as a university teacher in total?
5. How do you define “syllabus” and “curriculum”? How are these terms used in your institution?

Current Responsibilities

6. In your current position, what involvement do you have with syllabus design/curriculum development?

First-year communication classes

7. Has the curriculum for first-year communication classes been developed in the last 5 years?
8. How has the curriculum changed?
9. What were some of the factors that led your organization/you to want to develop the curriculum?
10. Which of the factors were most important in bringing about change in the curriculum?

11. What were some of the key steps in the process of developing the curriculum for first-year classes?
12. Looking back, were there some things that were not part of the curriculum development processes that you think should have been included?
13. What kind of activities could have been part of development processes?

Freer discussion

14. Please talk about anything else that you feel should be added to the above.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and sorted, where necessary, to match the sequencing of the questions. When clarification, or expansion of points raised, was thought appropriate, follow-up questions were asked. Completed transcripts were sent to each participant for checking. Appendix A contains the transcripts that were approved by the participants.

2.5 Data analysis

Data were checked against the categories derived from the theory-based model shown in Table 1. The first point of analysis was to look for evidence that actions corresponding to the categories listed had taken, or were taking place. A check mark (✓) was awarded if the process had been discussed by the participant(s). Then, an estimation based on frequency and strength of the actions corresponding to each category was given. This was done on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest possible score. Although this was only based on the authors' judgment, it did allow a degree of objectivity in what was a subjective process, and additionally allowed factors like strength of interviewee intonation to be considered in the assessment. Both Brown (1995) and Richards (2001) talk about systematic program development and so an overall judgment of the degree to which this had been carried out was also made.

3 Results

This section presents the results of the analysis. Table 3 shows the results of analysis that sought to look for similarities between curriculum development processes at the three universities, whereas Table 4 shows results from analysis that looked for differences between processes.

Curriculum Development Category	National university	Municipal university	Prefectural university
1. Needs and situation analysis	✓ 8	✓ 5	✓ 5
2. Setting of objectives	✓ 8	✓ 6	✓ 5
3. Assessment/testing	✓ 7	✓ 5	✓ 7
4. Planning/organization of course/syllabus	✓ 8	✓ 6	✓ 7
5. Selection and development of materials	✓ 6	✓ 8	✓ 8
6. Planning for effective teaching	✓ 8	✓ 6	✓ 7
7. Evaluation	✓ 6	✓ 5	✓ 5
TOTALS Processes done	✓ = 7/7	✓ = 7/7	✓ = 7/7
Average score *****	7.3 *****	5.9 *****	6.3 *****
Systematic approach	7.5	6	6

Note: ✓ = evidence found that actions were taken
 No. = the author's judgment regarding the frequency and strength of the actions taken (maximum 10).

Table 3: Analysis of similarities

Curriculum Development Category	National university	Municipal university	Prefectural university
1. Needs and situation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for communicative teaching from science professors • Identification of the need for a remedial program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs data for curriculum formation from the Ministry of Education • Moving towards a university-wide liberal education center that will coordinate curriculum development 	
2. Setting of objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five point policy of English education that every teacher should support 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No input from other English Department members
3. Assessment/testing			
4. Planning/organization of course/syllabus		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on ESP (Technological English) 	
5. Selection and development of materials			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive development of materials/textbooks
6. Planning for effective teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor in charge of native speakers acting as special assistant to the president. Given support and money to renew curriculum • Five English native speakers recruited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation problems due to mismatch of course objectives and teachers' skills for ESP courses • Turnover of teaching staff 	
7. Evaluation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little initial feedback from students (though in place now) • No systematic mechanism of feedback from other teachers 	

Note: blanks indicate that there is no significant difference to mention.

Table 4: Analysis of differences

4 Discussion

This section discusses the findings from the study, identifies limitations, provides advice for curriculum developers and makes suggestions for future research.

4.1 Findings

Analysis of the primary data for similarities and differences of curriculum development processes showed that the three universities in the study had, in the last five years, carried out to varying degrees, actions in the identified categories. The following discussion seeks to explain and identify key learning points from the analysis (considering both similarities and differences). One note of caution to bear in mind while considering the arguments presented below relates to the

nature of this investigation, as a pilot study, and generalizations which the labels *national*, *municipal* and *prefectural* may infer as to the situation in other universities across Japan. The intention is to present the study as an exploratory work, focusing on the 3 institutions mentioned, and as such the findings should not be taken as representative of the situation within national, municipal and prefectural universities across Japan.

- **Needs and situation analysis.** The *national university* scored well (8/10 compared to 5/10 and 5/10 for the *municipal* and *prefectural* university respectively) and was in the process of renewing its English curriculum. In fact, the professor interviewed had just written a research paper detailing the “new” English policy for the university. Strong evidence of needs, and some situational analysis, was apparent in the primary data, and in the research paper mentioned above. For example, the university asked first-year students if they wanted to take classes with native speakers and the interviewee reported that “60% answered that they did, so there is a strong interest in English education.” Two further factors of significance were, one, the support given to the English policy by professors of engineering and medicine and, two, the identification of the need for remedial courses for lower level students. When asked about the Ministry of Education the interviewee responded that “very specific aims” had been issued in the form of “Japanese with English abilities” (the Action Plan) and that this had been “one of the external factors.” What was less clear was if other external needs like those of prospective future employers had been included. In contrast, the situation in the *municipal university* (5/10) reveals how needs change over time and why a systematic approach is important. The Japanese professor reported that when the curriculum was set up “the top officer of the Ministry of Education stayed with us for curriculum design and he was in charge of almost everything from A to Z.” Furthermore, that person “had a lot of raw data from the nationwide research. This was collected from other universities” and “He knew everything.” However, the Japanese professor at the *municipal university* also said that “there was a very serious problem about the implementation of the curriculum” and that “we had very few teaching staff to deal with technology orientated courses” leading to the situation where “our original curriculum collapsed in the middle of its implementation.” This indicated that the original plan, and its associated needs and situation analysis, had not foreseen these problems, and that no ongoing systematic needs/situation assessment processes had been carried out. Again, this was also apparent in the comment “For the past few years, I have been teaching technical English to the second-year students. I am feeling more and more serious about the level (of students’ abilities), and the level of teaching.” The native teacher at the *municipal university* made corroborating comments related to needs and feedback, such as “when we first got here there was very little feedback or input from any other department.” This lack of communication was also demonstrated by the remark that “It was in the third year when they studied with the professors in the various departments that we did get some comments. Some of them said that they thought that the students were studying more English.” For the *prefectural university* needs analysis was carried out but was found to be “so vague that it wasn’t useful.” In addition, when asked to talk freely the interviewee commented that, “The main problem is that there is no input from anyone other than the teacher.”
- **Setting of objectives.** Again the *national university* scored well (8/10), with objective-setting a part of the renewal process mentioned above. The development of language policy for the university, which “every professor should support,” was thought to be significant. Possible problems in the process of needs analysis and objective setting were highlighted by the attempts of the *municipal university* to set up an English working group. The associate professor interviewed remarked that “we asked the four departments what they thought should be included in the English curriculum. Some departments said that we don’t even need English classes, others said teach reading and writing and yet another department said teach communication.” With such a lack of consensus objective-setting becomes very difficult. A similar kind of objective-setting vacuum seemed to be the case in the *prefec-*

tural university (5/10) where the teacher commented that “if no objectives were set and no curriculum plan was made...then that would be okay because the university would be fulfilling the requirement to provide English to students.” When asked about input from any curriculum working group, or the like of, the interviewee said that “yes, there is a curriculum committee, but they are focusing more on the major itself. English is just a general subject, so it is left up to the individual teacher to do as he or she pleases,” all of which indicates an uncoordinated approach to objective-setting. One possible reason for the apparent lack of interest in English language teaching from major-subject teachers may be related to the perceived scope of English teaching, as the *prefectural university* interviewee’s comment indicates, “one problem is that is we go down the ESP route is that we may be teaching them about their subject before they study it in Japanese. For that reason, they just want us to teach any old English.”

- **Assessment/testing.** In this case, the *prefectural university* achieved the highest score (7/10) as work had been carried out to “have more continuous assessment, rather than the grade being based on two speaking tests.” TOEIC and TOEFL were mentioned as “very objective tools” by the interviewee from the national university. In general, though, assessment and testing were, in the most part, not mentioned by the interviewees. This could be because they are considered to be syllabus-related and so considered not so relevant to a discussion on curriculum.
- **Planning/organization of course/syllabus.** The *national university* scored well (8/10) and had developed “optional classes for excellent students, such as academic writing.” In the *prefectural university* attempts to develop particular courses through individual effort had taken place. The interviewee said, “I wrote the curriculum myself, so it’s been developed” and “...I just made my own course.”
- **Selection and development of materials.** All the universities had made efforts to develop and improve teaching materials. The *national university* was allowing its newly recruited native teachers to choose their own textbooks, but wanted to move to a common text for all teachers. An in-house textbook, with online learning components, had been produced at the *municipal university*, and this was also true at the *prefectural university*.
- **Planning for effective teaching.** The *national university* scored well (8/10) due to the support given to renewal plan by the president. The status of “special assistant to the president” helped to give the plan’s instigator the authority to see through changes in the face of a situation in the English Department where most of the other professors disagreed with his ideas. An important consequence of this support was financial backing and “getting the support of administrative officers.” This then allowed for the recruitment of native-speaker teachers, which was an important element in English education policy agreed upon by the university. As for the *municipal university*, good work done in setting up the curriculum was undone by implementation problems connected to “a lack of teaching staff...to deal with technology orientated course for English (CALL environment).”
- **Evaluation.** For the *municipal university* there seemed to be a lack of feedback systems as indicated by the comment, “we may have needed a more cooperative method of feedback from the students” and “we had no way of feedback from other departments about the result of curriculum implementation” (Japanese professor). Evidence of evaluation processes were noted for the *prefectural university*, with a system of university-wide evaluations having been introduced 3 years before. However, the teacher questioned their value and commented that “I always get high scores, so there has been no input from the university” and “basically, if they enjoy the course they give high ratings to everything.” This questions the effectiveness of university-wide questionnaires as a tool to evaluate language programs.

Regarding the Action Plan and its possible influence in tertiary education only one of the four interviewees mentioned it as a factor in curriculum development activities. The professor from the *national university* said it was “one of the external factors” when prompted on the role of the Ministry of Education. For all three institutions in the study the vast majority of data collected dealt

with internal factors, particularly the needs of students, which indicates the perceived relative importance of student needs in language curriculum development.

4.2 *Limitations of the study*

Whilst the current study has sought to provide insight into language curriculum development processes at universities in Japan, it should, because of its limited scope, be regarded as more of a pilot study rather than research from which theory can reliably be derived. A number of limitations emerged:

- Only three institutions were included in the study. A more comprehensive investigation would have a larger sample size and gather data from multiple sources. This would contribute to validity.
- The method of primary data analysis was rather subjective, relying on the judgment of the author, and could have been made more robust by asking another researcher, independent of the study, to corroborate the analysis.
- On reflection, the questionnaire could have been better designed so that interviewees were asked more directly about the curriculum development categories which had been identified from theory.

4.3 *Guidelines for curriculum developers*

The study highlighted a number of factors for curriculum developers to consider:

1. **Needs and situation analysis** should include the students, teachers, administrators, plus external groups like the Ministry of Education and employers. Giving relevant parties a say in the development process is likely to generate the support needed to see changes through.
2. Regarding **setting of objectives**, if possible, a language policy for the whole university should be agreed upon. This, then, provides a framework in which courses relevant to the identified needs can be planned and implemented.
3. **Assessment and testing** should be part of curriculum development. This includes consideration of how to make use of objective tests like TOEIC and TOEFL.
4. Concerning **planning/organization of courses and syllabus design**, if needs, objectives and testing processes outlined above are done thoroughly, this step should be relatively straight forward.
5. Regarding **selection and development of materials**, if teachers have been included in needs development processes they are likely to be more motivated to develop materials appropriate for the learning objectives that have been identified.
6. With reference to **planning for effective teaching**, support from senior figures and administrators, including monetary support, is important to overcome resistance to change. Additionally, achieving a balance between, courses in the curriculum, required teaching skills and teachers' abilities should be considered.
7. Regarding **evaluation**, effective feedback systems from students, teachers, administrators and relevant external parties, such as employers, are vital to the maintenance of curriculum.

4.4 *Future research*

Building on the insights gained from the current study, future research could be carried out in the following areas:

- Continuing with the current investigation and developing it into a longitudinal case study. One option would be to look in greater depth at the same institutions (intended plan). Another option would be to keep the same institutions and then add another/others.
- Perform a quantitative investigation into curriculum development through a questionnaire and, or, analysis of published data.

5 Conclusion

This study sought to provide insights into language curriculum development by comparing a model informed by theory with primary data collected via interviews. The categories identified were: needs and situation analysis; setting of objectives; assessment and testing; planning/organization of the course/syllabus design; selection and/or development of materials; planning for effective teaching and evaluation. Whilst evidence of these processes was found for all three institutions, the *national university* in the study demonstrated the most systematic approach to renewing and maintaining its curriculum. A significant factor in favour of the *national university* was the development of a university-wide English language education policy supported by the majority of teachers and administrators. The *municipal university* investigated had carried out curriculum development, but not systematically and on an ongoing basis. In particular, the areas of needs and situation analysis, and evaluation had been neglected in the early part of the curriculum implementation. One important point to note is that the data for the *municipal university* were collected from only one, new faculty (started 2000) and that the university as a whole was planning to centralize English language teaching through a liberal arts center. As for the *prefectural university* in this study, it appeared that the development work had been centered through one individual teacher, without input from other parties in the organization.

The study found that the Action Plan to develop “Japanese with English abilities,” which was introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2003, has had little effect on language curriculum development. The primary influences were internal factors within each institution, with student needs being the most often cited.

The key insights from the study were formulated into guidelines for curriculum developers, the most important being the value of appropriate needs and situation analysis followed by appropriate objective-setting, which should, then, lead to the development of a university-wide English language education policy.

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Appendix

Approved transcripts are shown below.

Interview A: Native Associate Professor at a Prefectural University

Background

How many years have you worked at your institution?

I've been working there full time for 4½ years.

What is your current position? How many years have you held this position?

I'm an associate professor, and I have held this position for 2 years.

How many years have you worked as a university teacher in total?

In total I've worked in universities for 8 years.

How do you define "syllabus" and "curriculum"? How are these terms used in your institution?

I like to use syllabus because curriculum to me means university-wide, or at least department wide. For example, if the students are studying sociology then the curriculum would be everything related to that course that they are studying. The combined syllabuses for the classes that the students take, then, makes up the curriculum.

Current Responsibilities

What involvement do you have with syllabus design / curriculum development?

My involvement in curriculum development (CD) is that I make my own syllabus for my course. I have complete say. I teach communication courses for first-year students, however, they are not majoring in English so I'm teaching English as a general subject.

First-Year Communication Classes

Has the curriculum for first-year communication classes been developed in the last 5 years?

Well, yes, I've been there for 5 years and I wrote the curriculum myself, so it's been developed. I don't know what they did before. I suppose I should have tried to find out, but no documents were ever given to me. I have no idea what they used to do in the oral communication classes. I was just told that you need to teach oral communication for first year students, and that was all the information or guidance I was ever given, so I just made my own course.

How has the curriculum changed? (What did you start with?)

When I made the course I focused on the content rather than any building up of grammar or anything like that. I just thought about the things they need to talk about if they are going to talk in English. I made up the situation that perhaps they travel overseas and become an exchange student. Like if a university student from Japan travels overseas and meets a university student from another country, what kind of things are they going to talk about? And also what do people talk about in general conversation? The first part of the course was about talking about yourself, like hobbies, interests and families etc. These occur in many syllabuses. The next part was talking about experiences. I think a lot of our conversations are about experiences. The next major group of lessons was on plans and future, for example career wise, in the vacation. The final part was giving opinions. Educational, environmental and some kind of social issue. I focused on making a curriculum that allowed students to talk about those things.

So how have I changed the curriculum? The changes have been to experiment with different classroom procedures, the methodology. The curriculum itself has not changed. It's the way it is delivered. I have also changed the way I do the grading. Now we have more continuous assessment rather than all the grade being based on two speaking tests. So I've changed the scoring and the class procedures but the curriculum itself has remained unchanged.

What were some of the factors that led your organization/you to want to develop the curriculum?

Have you had any input for anyone else in the organization?

No, none whatsoever. Not even from the other English teacher at the university (faculty). The Japanese Professor at the university (faculty) teaches reading. He doesn't ask for my opinion on what he is doing and he doesn't offer any opinion on what I'm doing. However, he is very friendly, so if I want to talk to him he will talk about it if he is interested.

For the last 3 years, we have had class evaluations from the students. I always get high scores, so there has been no input from the university. Maybe if the scores were lower the university would give some input (to teachers). As long as the students are satisfied and you teach every lesson there is no input from the university.

What were some of the key steps in the process of developing the curriculum for first-year classes?

What about a curriculum working group?

Yes, there is a curriculum committee, but they are focusing more on the major itself. English is just a side subject, isn't it? What's within that doesn't really matter as far as the university is concerned. English is just a general subject so it is left up to the individual teacher to do as he or she pleases.

What could have been included? Were there some things that were not part of the CD processes that you think should have been included?

To be honest, I would like to revamp the whole thing, but I have spent so much time and energy making the current curriculum that I don't want to redo the whole thing at the moment.

I would like to start from the beginning again looking at objectives. Looking at the skills we would like them to have at the end of the course, and build those up. So something like a very basic skill, like the student can introduce themselves smoothly and shake hands, right up to giving an opinion on a complex issue. So have a whole list of objectives and when students are ready to demonstrate their ability to achieve that objective they come to the teacher and say "I can do that, please check me." So what I want to do is to move towards a self-study course in a CALL room in which students choose components and the list of objectives that they will be judged against. At the end of the course they are not given a grade but a list of objectives that they have achieved. They would kind of choose a mini-course, from within the course. As long as they meet core objectives and other optional objectives then they will pass at whatever level they achieve.

Freer Discussion

Anything else that hasn't been done that could or should have been done.

The main problem is that there is no input from anyone other than the teacher. There are no expectations. If no objectives were set and no curriculum plan was made and teachers just used any old textbook then that would be OK because the university would be fulfilling the requirement to provide English to students. So there is no curriculum development as such, it is just up to the individual teacher. What I would like to see is that the departments would give some input. What I'm talking about is ESP and what the English will be used for. I would like to have input from each department.

What's your perception in terms of which of the 4 skills other teachers attach importance to?

On yes, they (major teachers) want the students to be able to read, but the students themselves want to learn how to speak. One problem is that if we go down the ESP route is that we may be teaching them about their subject before they study it in Japanese. For that reason, they just want us to teach any old English. The major teachers don't teach the students until the 3rd year.

Basically, I feel there is no curriculum at my institution. How can we influence that? It's very difficult for an individual, especially an outsider, to influence the curriculum. So for general studies teachers I think everyone is left up to their own devices.

What about asking the students?

I've tried asking students, doing needs analysis, but it is just the usual things like movies, hobbies. Their input is limited. Needs analysis is so vague that it wasn't useful. Students just say that they want to speak English. So now I don't do it.

And as you say the university has a feedback system?

Yes, and basically if they enjoy the course they give high ratings for everything. They are going to enjoy almost anything that the English teacher does in communication classes, because in most

other classes they are listening to lectures. In communication classes they can talk, which most students enjoy. We can't tell what needs to be done to improve the course because the feedback is good. So that just tells us to keep on doing what we have been doing.

Anything else?

To be honest, I think that what we need is a system like a foundation course. If they are going to study a particular subject in 3rd year in English we need to get them ready for that. To be able to read academic papers in English and discuss them takes time to develop. However, that means that the departments feel that we are stepping on their toes. We are not preparing them in a direct way. We are just preparing them in an indirect way. But I really feel it should be more specific than that. But that means a big change at the institution. I don't know anywhere that uses this kind of ESP approach, do you? They all seem to just follow eikaiwa books.

Interview B: Native Associate Professor at a Municipal University

Background

How many years have you worked at your institution?

I've been working here for 5½ years.

What is your current position? How many years have you held this position?

I'm an associate professor and I have held this position for 1½ years. Before that, I was a lecturer for 4 years.

How many years have you worked as a university teacher in total?

I'm in my 10th year now. Before coming here I was a lecturer for 4 years at another university.

How do you define "syllabus" and "curriculum"? How are these terms used in your institution?

Syllabus to me deals with the design for each specific class. Curriculum is the overall design for all the classes. That is the goals for all the English classes. Since I've been in Japan, that is my impression of the difference between the two.

Current Responsibilities

What involvement do you have with syllabus design / curriculum development?

That's a complicated issue. When I first came here I wasn't involved in curriculum design because it was already set up when I got here. I am now the representative for English on the faculty curriculum committee. This committee discusses curriculum issues for the whole faculty, and I bring the issues back to the department and we discuss the issues.

First-Year Communication Classes

Has the curriculum for first-year communication classes been developed in the last 5 years?

When I first came here the curriculum was set. We had specific classes: English conversation and CALL. I'm not sure how it was set and you would have to ask my colleague for more details. Anyway, I was asked to take care of the English conversation classes, so I designed a syllabus using a general English conversation textbook. However, after a while we realized that there were some problems with the textbook. If anything, it was too easy for the students. One other thing was that the other 2 other native teachers were not so interested in the curriculum. They only had teaching responsibilities and left after a few years.

The Japanese teachers took care of the CALL part. However, the CALL classes ended up being a kind of independent study class and not very communicative, so I think they confused the students because they really couldn't see the relationship between English conversation classes and CALL. Students said that there was a lack of communication between the teacher and the students. I also talked to the students and they said that they were dissatisfied with that kind of "jishu" approach. They wanted to talk to the teacher, and be able to get feedback from the teacher. There was one particular section on pronunciation that the students said that they didn't need to do. One result of this was the ultimate combination of CALL and English conversation. In fact, after the second year of being here I was in favour of doing that, but other teachers said we needed to wait because of

the way the curriculum was set up. Another problem we had was that teachers left.

What input did you get any other parts of the organization?

To be perfectly honest, when we first got here there was very little feedback or input from any other department. In reality in the first few years there were only first and second-year classes. A lot of faculty weren't teaching themselves and so they didn't think so much about curriculum until they started teaching themselves. It was in the third year when they studied with the professors in the various departments that we did get some comments. Some of them said that they thought that the students were studying more English. The syllabus was communication centered, focused on improving conversational skills, because in high school students do a lot of reading and writing. The idea was to give students a chance to use English with native speakers. However, it was in the third-year that some of the Japanese teachers questioned what the students were studying.

What were some of the key steps in the process of developing the curriculum for first-year classes?

What about a curriculum working group?

Then, last year we had an English Working Group (EWG) in which we asked the four departments what they thought should be included in the English curriculum. Some departments said that we don't even need English classes, others said teach reading and writing and yet another department said teach communication. A lot of this depends on the field and the professors.

Do you think any kind of needs analysis that takes into account students has been done?

Actually, in general in Japan I haven't seen a lot of that done. I've taught in a technological faculty for 10 years now and there is always this kind of never ending thing about what science professors think are required English skills. Until this point we have been an independent unit and we have had no connection with the humanities faculty at the other campus. Centralization is good, and I think we can help each other out, but I do think that we still need to still have elements of our classes that are for science students. One thing about doing a needs analysis is that the answers may not be so clear, however, there are always some students who will give you constructive opinions.

What were some of the factors that led your organization/you to want to develop the curriculum?

Have you had any input for the organization?

Well, this is Japan and everything is indirect. When it comes to talking frankly about English curriculum it has always just been among the English teachers. We did have the working group last year, but if you look at the documents they are quite vague. In reality, other members of the faculty probably aren't really thinking too deeply about English curriculum. The other side of it is that do we really want other members of the faculty thinking too deeply? One thing in Japan is that if too many people are involved then you can never really get anything done. I think we do need input, but if you are going to design a curriculum I think it is better to have professionals with related backgrounds. Having different kinds of English teachers with different backgrounds would be beneficial, I think. Perhaps, indirect input would be best.

When it comes to this faculty, I think one of the biggest things is getting a job. They probably want us to focus on those skills that will be most useful to students. Most of the professors here think that English is a tool. English is something that is going to help students get a better job or be promoted. That is why the TOEIC has become so important, and it is something that that other faculty recognize and understand. Maybe that is something that we can focus on, we can set goals and focus on different skills through the TOEIC. That is what we are doing right now, through the reading and working on reading fluency.

What about ESP directed towards the majors of the students?

Well, some of the professors are not fond of talking to their students in English. They are also not too keen on us teaching students something related to the subject as we might teach them something that they disagree with or send the students in the wrong direction. After all we are not specialists in their subjects, so we would have to study like the students. To be honest, I'm not a curriculum specialist, but I'm happy that there is going to be a more centralized design for English courses for the whole university. I don't want to say that there has been no design. In last years EWG I was really surprised to hear that there are professors that think that English is not necessary. And we need to talk all of that into account when we develop curriculum. There are additional

issues like the number of staff and student numbers in classes that could be managed well by a centralized organization.

What about the influence of government policy?

When we first came here we were being evaluated by the Ministry of Education. It would be my assumption that the courses we set up were approved by the Ministry of Education. In the first-year all the staff we interviewed by a member of the Ministry of Education. We were under a lot of scrutiny. You should ask my colleague about that.

What about the role of the language curriculum as a competitive tool?

Oh yes, I'll go back to what I said before about students getting a job. English is important in helping the students getting a job. For example, if they have a certain score on the TOEIC then that will help them to get a job. That is one of the reasons that the head of the curriculum committee is a supporter of English. He wants us to set up a curriculum that helps students gain skills that will help them get a job. He is very honest and says that he doesn't know much about how to set up an English curriculum, but he knows that is very important.

What could have been included? Were there some things that were not part of the CD processes that you think should have been included?

Well, you can't always depend on student evaluations, but it probably would have been a good idea for all the teachers to do student evaluation right from the first year. There should be communication between the English teachers and the members of the other departments, but one difficulty is how do you organize that? But in one way it brought up a lot of issues and highlighted misunderstandings. It seems that the staff from the other departments just seem to want the English department to take care of the English curriculum. They had opinions, but they were not really prepared to get involved in helping to add content to the curriculum. One of the things was asking the other faculty to do interviews in English and they really didn't want to do that. I'm thinking that having a center (for "basic education") will be beneficial. Having a larger body of knowledge will be good.

Freer Discussion

Anything else to add to our discussion?

Just opening a dialogue is very useful and before last year we really hadn't done that. So even though there were misunderstandings between departments, at least we could come to appreciate that if we are going to do something, then we need to do it ourselves.

Interview C: Japanese Professor at a Municipal University

Background

How many years have you worked at your institution?

I've been working for 6 years.

What is your current position? How many years have you held this position?

I'm a professor and I have held this position for 6 years.

How many years have you worked as a university teacher in total?

In total I have worked in universities for 22 years.

How do you define "syllabus" and "curriculum"? How are these terms used in your institution?

I think the syllabus is related to the implementation of a given curriculum. The syllabus refers to the procedures that are carried out in the classroom. It is more detailed. The curriculum is like a blueprint, or a grand design. It deals with principles and orientation. In this university the same kind of concept has been applied to each term.

Current Responsibilities

What involvement do you have with syllabus design / curriculum development?

Actually, I was in charge of curriculum design before this school began in 2001. I didn't have any career or technique to incorporate any kind of educational concept into the curriculum development. But according to insight and research into the needs of students and the needs of companies

we had to develop a kind of innovative planning of a brand new teaching design related to environmental protection or natural conservation, and the English curriculum was no exception.

First-Year Communication Classes

Has the curriculum for first-year communication classes been developed in the last 5 years?

How has the curriculum changed?

At the start we had CALL and English conversation. The CALL was the unique subject at that time. Very few of the Japanese universities provided CALL oriented courses for engineering departments. Other universities had already introduced CALL type curriculum development for the whole university, but it was not orientated towards engineering students. It was very unique for us to offer CALL for engineering students from the start of a new school. But there was a very serious problem about the implementation of the curriculum. The syllabus was mainly designed for the technology conscious teachers, but, actually, we had very few teaching staff to deal with technology orientated courses for English. In other words English for specific purposes. From the first year of our implementation we were faced with a shortage or lack of teaching staff. Our original curriculum collapsed in the middle of its implementation between 2002 and 2003. We had to give up our original framework and change drastically to an integrated course of English communication rather than separate general English course and English for Specific Purposes (CALL).

What were some of the factors that led your organization/you to want to develop the curriculum?

As a new school, what kind of input was there from the Ministry of Education?

Honestly speaking, the top officer of the Ministry of Education stayed with us for curriculum design and he was in charge of almost everything from A to Z. He was here from 1998 to 2000. Before he left here, he determined the basic policy of the faculty and that included foreign language education. He declared that English was the only foreign language that was needed. Our curriculum was radically different from our counterparts on the other campus. They consist of 4 faculties of humanities and social sciences. I was asked by the officer from the Ministry of Education to make the English education as technologically orientated as possible. He wanted us to take special care of technical English education.

What were some of the key steps in the process of developing the curriculum for first-year classes?

What about needs – where did the information/research come from?

That's why the officer from the ministry of Education came here. He had a lot of raw data from the nationwide research. This was collected from other universities. He knew everything. I took the responsibility for the curriculum design as a whole, but the grand design was there before I took the position.

What about asking the teachers in the other departments?

For the past few years, I have been teaching technical English to the second-year students. I am feeling more and more serious about the level (of students' abilities), and the level of teaching. We should focus on basic English for natural sciences in general, not for environmental engineering or engineering in general. If students wish to continue their studies in the graduate school, then they can study the appropriate technical English through an ESP course. Therefore, the current technical English for second-year students will no longer be valid. We should change our way of thinking from the technology orientated to the science orientated. I have just begun teaching the basics of science to second-year students and I have found that very few of them understand the basic concepts of electronics or science. We need to be very careful about the choice of teaching material. The teaching method will not be limited to reading and writing as listening will be included.

What could have been included? Were there some things that were not part of the CD processes that you think should have been included?

We had no way of feedback from the other departments about the result of curriculum implementation. We were short of methodology or a concrete method. We may have needed a more cooperative method of feedback from the students. We may need to do more to orientate students and we may need an extra course for study skills. Most students don't seem to be able to improve their skills according to a given theory or course of study.

For the first-year a great job has been done. But after that they need a lot more care about reading a

writing of the technology oriented content.

Freer Discussion

Anything else to add to our discussion?

The university will set up a liberal education center, so we should see what they propose. We should wait to see what happens.

Interview D: Japanese Professor at a National University

Background

How many years have you worked at your institution?

I've been working for 22 years.

What is your current position? How many years have you held this position?

I'm a professor and I have held this position for 6 years.

How many years have you worked as a university teacher in total?

In total I have worked in universities for 22 years.

How do you define "syllabus" and "curriculum"? How are these terms used in your institution?

My definition is the teaching guidelines, including the class purpose and evaluation system and the demands on students, and of course the teaching procedure.

Curriculum is the educational system over 4 years.

Current Responsibilities

What involvement do you have with syllabus design / curriculum development?

I'm in charge of the classes taught by native speakers. I will give them the purposes of classes. I will give them my idea of syllabuses. They wrote the final document, but before that I explained my policy and my version of each respective syllabus. They then used this when they made each syllabus.

First-Year Communication Classes

Has the curriculum for first-year communication classes been developed in the last 5 years? How has the curriculum changed?

Actually, we are now reforming our English educational system. We have just employed 5 native speakers to strengthen our educational system. I have, also, just written a paper about educational reform. The paper analyses Japanese students' abilities and highlights that their levels (of English ability) are decreasing, and the reasons for the decline. In contrast, the need for English in society is increasing, that's why universities should have an educational system for those students.

Last year we made a policy of English education at our university. I wrote a draft, which for the most part was liked by everyone. These are my ideas and our policy:

1. Communication ability is most important. This is very important because most professors of English disagree with my ideas. Some English professors think they are professors of English literature or linguistics, and not English education. Especially at a general education level English education should be aimed at training of the students' communicative competence.
2. Through English students can know about the world.
3. Exposure of students to living English. Teaching by exposure to living English, not lectures or speeches by teachers. Training is most important and this should, preferably, be by native speakers.
4. Satisfy all students' needs for English education. The ability is varied, but universities should satisfy all the students' needs for English education. We have to adapt our system for every student.
5. Training of academic English ability. Graduate students, especially science students, are required to write papers in English.

We have optional classes for excellent students, such as academic writing. We have just employed 5 native speakers and they are required to have 10 classes per week. They are teaching communi-

cative English classes but also academic English. Some classes are required and others are optional. For example there are TOEIC and TOEFL classes which are optional, non-credit classes, and excellent students are taking these classes (in addition to other classes).

We also have remedial classes for very poor students. We have just started these programs.

We also have to make the best use of TOEIC and TOEFL. These are very objective tools

So, we have increased the number of native speakers' classes. There is more emphasis on training of students' communicative competence. Smaller classes, and also classes divided according to students' abilities. We are using a placement test before classes.

What did you have before the current curriculum? Say 5 years ago?

Not systematic; big classes and the student levels were varied. It was very difficult to teach. These three were the most terrible situation.

What were some of the factors that led your organization/you to want to develop the curriculum? Have you had any input from the organization?

The needs of the students were very important. This year we asked first-year students if they wanted to take native speakers classes and 60% answered that they did, so there is a strong interest in English education. Even poor students want to master English if they are given a chance. So students' needs were an important factor in reforming our system.

The professors of engineering and medicine asked us to change our English educational system. They think the students should be better in speaking or writing, but our old fashioned systems couldn't respond to their demands.

What did they (professors from other departments) say about reading?

Of course they say it is very important, but their interest is in the speaking abilities of students. Most English teachers want to read textbooks with students, but that kind of system couldn't respond to students' needs or engineering professors' needs.

What were some of the key steps in the process of developing the curriculum for first-year classes?

What about a curriculum working group?

As a first step in reforming we made a 5 point policy that every professor in the university should support. This was done through a working group whose members came from every faculty. Right now, I am a special assistant to the president, so I am a little bit powerful. This is the reforming plan, showing our purpose. Our education focus has shifted into communication ability training. Most students have enough knowledge of English, but they have no chance to use that so need training to change their knowledge into practical skills. Training is important and the needs of students should be respected.

Money is very important and this includes getting support of the administrative officers. I also got the support of the president and the vice-president, and so we could do it.

Questionnaires from the students were also important.

The English classes should be divided according to their English abilities. Last year we have very big classes of about 50 to 60 students, so we have to make smaller classes of 20 students.

Making the curriculum systematic is important, from basic to advanced.

Students should be given many opportunities in a class to speak up.

What about the Ministry of Education? How have they influenced your thinking about curriculum?

Yes, as you know the Ministry of Education issued very specific aims. Here, "Japanese with English abilities" (translated). Not abstract ideas, very specific. This is one of the external factors.

What could have been included? Were there some things that were not part of the CD processes that you think should have been included?

I thought the curriculum should be more systematic than the current situation. Even now, the teachers can decide what kind of classes they have. The teachers can choose the textbooks and the levels and how to teach. That's why I can't say all the classes are really systematic. In the future we want to control the choice of textbook. If a common textbook is used, the classes can be controlled in terms of levels or purposes.

Freer Discussion

Do you have anything else to add to our discussion?

Our remedial program will be very important because the entrance examination system will be changed. I think the student who are poorer in English will come, however, those students will be interested English, and so will need our strong support. We need a curriculum for those students. Good students can develop themselves, but poor students need support.