New Challenges in the English program at Ryukoku University, Fukakusa campus: English education and teaching reform on organizational and individual levels

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Introduction

This paper aims at reviewing the basic principles of curriculum innovation and evaluation, and introduces a pilot curriculum of English program which is based on these principles. ELT programs go through various changes in response to the evolving needs of ELT students, faculty, and educational programs themselves (Stoynoff, 1989). Due to the decreasing number of youth, Japanese universities are having a particularly difficult time recruiting new students for their institutions. Many Japanese universities feel that they will not survive in a new competitive market unless their curriculum at universities attracts future candidates. The English curriculum is one of the areas, which requires prompt innovation because English communicative competence is becoming the basic skill for a global society. Meeting the needs of the society and the world ELT programs experience changes in the content of the curriculum. ELT has a justified reputation for constantly seeking innovation, although changes do not always lead to improved results, they may result in improved practices of curriculum for teachers. Universities, which attempt curriculum innovative changes, draw attention in various ELT conferences in Japan. For example, JACET or the Japan Association of College English Teachers, will have a symposium titled, "English education in the 21st century- past experiences and future perspectives." English education in Japanese universities, which fell into a jeopardized status, will be critically evaluated, and some cases of
presently occurring curriculum innovations at university levels will be introduced in the symposium. Designing an innovative curriculum is not a simple task. Furthermore, implementing and evaluating a new program are more difficult tasks. The following section reviews attributes for successful innovations and explores the procedures followed for managing an innovative curriculum.

Attributes of innovations

Because innovations are difficult to quantify, numerous researchers have attempted to characterize the qualitative attributes of innovations. The most often cited set of perceived attributes was proposed by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971). The five attributes, based on the conclusions of more than 1,500 empirical and non-empirical studies, are listed and defined in Table 1.

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<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<td>Relative advantage</td>
<td>The degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supercedes.</td>
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<td>Compatibility</td>
<td>The degree to which an innovation is consistent with already existing philosophies, policies, practices, and beliefs.</td>
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<td>Observability</td>
<td>The degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others.</td>
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<td>Trialability</td>
<td>The degree to which an innovation can be experimented with on a limited basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>The degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to use and/or understand</td>
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Some of the attributes take facilitative roles and others take negative roles in innovation. In Roger and Shoemaker’s study, it was found that three of the five attributes: relative advantage, observability, and trialabil-
ity, were positively related to the adoption of an innovation. Complexity was negatively related to adoption; compatibility, on the other hand, either hindered or facilitated adoption, depending on the nature of the innovation and its relationship to previously introduced ideas, values, and beliefs, and/or perceived needs in institutes. Other researchers have proposed different sets of attributes which predict the likelihood of innovation adoption or rejection (Henrichsen 1989; Markee 1990). For example, Henrichsen (1989) performed a study on the attributes which contributed to the spread of innovation in Japan. He found nine attributes: explicitness, relative advantage, trialability, observability, status, practicality, flexibility, primacy and form had a positive relationship to adoption. However, two other attributes, originality and complexity, were negatively related to successful adoption.

Curriculum development or renewal, and the decision to design and implement a new language syllabus are aspects of innovation. White (1988) elaborates this point: the decision to alter existing syllabi or to develop new curricula, especially decisions to adopt new aims (or ends) and new methods (or means) is a decision for innovation. He explains how successful organizations, whether educational or commercial, deal with new decisions for innovation. Successful organizations are willing to take positive actions and they avoid stultification by finding problems and solving the problems for better rather than remaining routinized and standardized. White notes that innovativeness is also associated with autonomy and entrepreneurship: Excellent organizations encourage ideas and never kill a likely one until it is tried out. Above all, they foster communication and the infectious spread of ideas and they never penalize failure if it is learnt from (Handy in White (1988)). As Miles (in White (1988)) notes, a healthy organization exhibits problem-solving adequacy. To this we might add that a healthy and successful organization is good at identifying new problems and setting people to work on them, a characteristic commented noted by Handy (p.27 in White (1988)), who says that "Problem-finding is often a more creative and difficult task than problem-solving. It does not mean looking for problems for the sake of it; it does mean discerning key oppor-
opportunities for the advancement of the organization."

**Managing effective innovation**

There is an extensive literature on change in education that shows whether it takes place at the institutional or the national level, innovation is much more than rescheduling, new materials and a peptalk (Simmons, Yonally & Shiozawa, 1996). Simmons et al. state that curriculum change involves teachers' ability to understand how an innovation is to be applied, why it is to be implemented, or how it may fail. Managing innovation, which involves setting up and implementing new policy, is a highly complex business, and the numerous theories of management in general, and of educational management in particular, provide only a partial view of the process. White (1988) points out that an educational manager should carry out the following actions to succeed in curriculum innovation:

1. Take account of difficulties which teachers will probably be exposed to when they attempt to implement the innovation.
2. Provide for feedback mechanisms to identify and cope with barriers and problems arising during the period of attempted implementation.

**Systematic approach to an innovation**

Clarifying goals, setting standards, and monitoring progress are all aspects of good management, which in turn will help to sustain appropriate conditions for the continuing good health and adaptability of the organization in responding to environmental changes. In applying a systematic approach to introducing an innovation, the aims should be clarified by describing what is to be achieved. Secondly, we should attempt to define the end results. What, in short, do we want to achieve? It is crucial that everyone has to agree on the general features of the end result. Thirdly, we have the question of the evaluation. What are the success criteria or standards? How can we demonstrate that we have been or are being success-
ful? How can the end product be evaluated? Evaluation criteria should be built in right from the start, since it is important to be more efficacious in achieving organizational goals. Evaluation can be thought of as occurring in two stages: firstly on going, then outcomes are evaluated against the success criteria specified during the goal setting stage. In both cases, successes and difficulties can be analyzed to provide the basis for improvement.

The focus in evaluation

Evaluation is not, in itself, new. What is new is the inclusion of evaluation as a source feedback and as a formative process within language curriculum development. An extension and elaboration of needs analysis becomes possible with the use of the same information gathering procedures and techniques such as standardized tests, questionnaires and interviews. Evaluation is now seen to be an integral part of language curriculum development, at whatever stage, and no one should make proposals for any aspect without carefully evaluating and justifying such proposals.

Evaluation should follow basic principles, especially ethical ones. These are discussed by Simons (in White, 1988), who lists five factors which the evaluator must take into account. It will take little imagination to see how these can apply to evaluation of any aspect of the language curriculum.

1. Impartiality;
2. Confidentiality and control over the individuals' data;
3. Negotiation among all parties involved;
4. Collaboration by all concerned;
5. Accountability by all levels in the organizational hierarchy.

What seems to be clear is that evaluation can be regarded as threatening, can lead to misconceptions, and can be destabilizing because evaluations are as Adelman and Alexander (1982) argue, political. What is vital is that evaluation should focus on issues and not on individuals. For exam-
ple, once individual teachers feel that they are being evaluated, problems are likely to occur. Openness, clarity or aims in evaluation and preparedness to collaborate are all, in Simons' view, fundamental. Educational methods, resource levels, implementation strategies, school climate and leadership, teacher attributes, and district management capacity and support were all important factors in innovation. Methods, resources and expenditures have significant effects on the predictability of success. But, teacher empowerment, utilization of the local expertise and creativity, the quality of leadership, the teachers' attributes, and community and administrative support are more significant in predicting project outcomes and duration. In the ELT environment in Japanese universities, it would be difficult to predict successful outcomes if individual teachers are not concerned with such significant factors as those mentioned above.

The evaluation procedure

A number of evaluation procedure have been suggested by past researchers (Alderson & Beretta, 1992; Bell, 1982; Brown, 1995; Harlen & Elliot, 1982; Lynch, 1996; Weir & Roberts, 1994; White 1988). Brown (1995) emphasized the importance of needs analysis and states that good teachers have been conducting some form of needs assessment constantly. Needs analysis has two objectives: to gather information in order to find out how much the students already know and what they still need to learn. Rossett (in Brown, 1995) suggested five different categories in the process of gathering information: problems, priorities, abilities, attitudes, and solutions.

Based on the gathered information, goals and objectives should be set in the second stage of the evaluation procedure. Brown (1995) notes distinctive difference between goals and objectives. Goals are general statements of the program's purposes and should focus on what the program hopes to accomplish in the future. Objectives are more specific. Mager (in Brown, 1995) indicates three characteristics of objectives: 1) performance (what the learner will able to do), 2) conditions (important conditions under which the performance is expected to occur), 3) criterion (the quali-
ty or level of performance that will be considered acceptable).

Harlen and Elliot (1982) and Bell (1982) have provided checklists for evaluation. The following questions are from their suggested checklists.

1. What are the purposes of evaluation?
2. What programme, instructional material or issues are being evaluated?
3. Who are the potential audiences of the evaluation?
4. What particular characteristics of the context may be relevant?
5. What are the particular questions to be answered in order to achieve the purpose?
6. What types of information will be collected and from whom?
7. What techniques and instruments will be used for gathering the information?
8. Who is to be involved in conducting the evaluation and in what capacity?
9. How are time and funds to be allocated?
10. What is to be the form of reporting?
11. What difficulties, compromises, side effects do you anticipate?

Lynch (1996) provides the essential phenomena or features that characterize a program and its setting. It is content-adoptive model (CAM) addresses this issue with a checklist, or inventory, of potentially relevant dimensions of language education programs:

1. Availability of a comparison group (such as a "traditional" language program in a similar setting)
2. Availability of reliable and valid measures of language skills (such as statistical analysis, naturalistic research)
3. Timing of the evaluation
4. The selection process for admitting students into the program (random selection, self-selection, selection according to preestablished criteria)
5. Characteristics of the program students
6. Characteristics of the program staff
7. Size and intensity of the program
8. Instructional materials of the program
9. Perspective and purpose of the program
10. Social and political climate surrounding the program

According to Lynch, a critical issue that arises early on is how to focus the evaluation. What aspects of the program should the evaluator investigate in detail? This preliminary thematic framework provides a conceptualization of the program in terms of the salient issues and themes that have emerged from the determination of audience and goals and the elaboration of the context inventory.

Each teacher/evaluator has to work out the most effective methods to suit his or her own situation (Weir & Roberts, 1994). Since no single design can hope to address the great diversity of questions that are asked about programs, evaluators will attempt to master a variety of research methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative. The design and research methodologies adopted will be the province of the evaluator, but he or she will be influenced by the information needs and deadlines of clients (Beretta, 1992). The following section explores how a pilot curriculum at Ryukoku University was conducted following the principles of needs analysis, implementation practices, and program evaluation.

New Challenges at Ryukoku University

The year 2000 English program at Ryukoku University, Fukakusa campus, is in the first stage of its innovative curriculum implementation. The new curriculum was developed based on a pilot curriculum conducted by the English teachers in the Business Administration Department in 1999. The 1999 pilot curriculum was introduced in the FD (faculty development) conference at the Kyoto University Consortium (Lee & Takahashi, 1999). The following is the content of the 1999 pilot curric-
Key points: needs analysis, placement test, streaming, self-access, vocabulary acquisition, accountability, web-based rationale and feedback, orientation video.

First, a need analysis was conducted to investigate the students' linguistic needs and affective characteristics. Linguistic needs were measured by TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and affective characteristics were investigated using a questionnaire. The data obtained from the needs analysis was analyzed and interpreted and "Kaizen ten " (points for reform) were found in the resulting information. The more upbeat "Kaizen ten" (points for reform) was used in the curriculum development process instead of using the term "mondai ten" (problems) which sounds rather negative. The following three points were focused as Kaizen-ten:

(1) students’ side — They are poorly motivated and some of them study English for credits
(2) teachers' side — Poor communication and coordination between teachers need to be improved.
(3) learning environment — computers, CALL software, and the Internet access should be effectively used in the curriculum.

The needs analysis revealed that students have a definite desire to learn English, but have very low confidence in their learning ability. TOEFL, ITP (Institutional Testing Program) was used as a placement test, and the new curriculum created four different levels, A, B, C, D (in line with the "upbeat" philosophy, the classes were called "Achievement, Benefit, Challenge and Departures"), and students were placed based on the results in the TOEFL (ITP ) test:

A pre-test and post-test were implemented to measure the students' linguistic improvement (Lee, 2000). The post-test was implemented twice, once at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the second
semester. The self-access materials were assigned to the students and two quizzes on these materials were conducted in each semester. The summer vacation assignment was to master a 1,000 TOEIC vocabulary list with a test on the first day of their return.

In the pilot curriculum, accountability, in that teachers and students needed to understand and accept their roles, was stressed. These should be as explicit as possible and clearly understood. Scheffner, who reported Lee and Takahashi's presentation on his Web, interpreted the importance of accountability as a contract, related to the lines of a management contract in which expectations and duties are spelled out for both the managers and the managed.

The students' achievement and other relevant information were publicly disclosed on the Web (Keiei Eigo Hotline) (http://www.biz.ryukoku.ac.jp/~lee/hotline/) and the students and teachers were encouraged to read the page in order to share the information. The classes provided for the Departures level were conducted in computer labs, and it was found in the evaluation that the CALL classes were particularly popular among poorly motivated students. Student feedback evaluation was also web-based, and the results of the on-line questionnaire have also been posted on the website, divided into "warm" and "dry" comments (amakuchi comments and karakuchi comments). The feedback sheet included questions such as "Do you feel that you came to like English?" and "How much time did you spend on self-learning materials?" The result of the questionnaire was revealed on a five point Likert scale and the mean scores of the question items were helpful to investigate the learners' perceptions about the new curriculum. The result of the questionnaire also indicated that the teachers' teaching method would need improvements. Also on the website information for students, such as the answer to the question "What level of English is needed to work in a company?" with TOEIC scores, was provided. Orientation video was played in all classes on the first day of a new semester. One reason for playing such an orientation video is the large number of part-time teachers employed, over 90. It is obviously difficult to organize a meeting with so many teachers at once, and a letter or phone
call is not sufficient to ensure understanding and cooperation. A video was made for each level, and contains information regarding achievement and objectives, such as "Your level is Benefit. Your average TOEIC score is _____. Many companies require a TOEIC score of _____." Other objectives include a reading speed and vocabulary acquisition. Finally, it was found that teamwork and communication between teachers are the most important factors for successful innovations.

Conclusion

The pilot curriculum in the Department of Business Administration was designed as a systematic approach. The result of the needs analysis was reflected on the program development. Communication among the teachers was found to be an essential element to implement a program effectively and efficiently. However, due to the limit of time for having meetings, curriculum designers never felt completely satisfied. The disclosure of the informative data on the Internet gathered attention from not only other departments at Ryukoku University, but other schools as well. The program evaluation indicated that the curriculum would need to be improved further in various aspects, especially in terms of teaching techniques, for the larger pilot curriculum in the year 2000. The teachers' untiring team spirit will be tested in the new continuing challenges.

References


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