

**研究ノート****A View on Future Directions for Teaching  
College Level English in Japan**

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It is well known that, over the past decades, Japanese English education has been primarily centered on linguistics and literature, emphasizing reading comprehension, translations, and accuracy in grammatical usage. The objective of the English language curriculum has been acquisition of academic knowledge more than communication skills useful in international and intercultural settings. This has proven helpful in Japan's accumulation of foreign ideas and cultures, increasing a general feeling of internationalization among the Japanese, as well as proving useful in English education in general.

If Japanese college level English has proven satisfactory to some until now, how can it be improved upon in the future to fit the global international environment of tomorrow and beyond? What development in language learning might we want to see in order for Japanese to participate more actively in Japan's role in the 21st century?

A more critical view of Japanese college English education might point to certain weaknesses inherent in the system. Among them are:

1. Even college graduates, after studying English from eight to ten years under the current system, have difficulty communicating on profound levels, either verbally or in writing. Soon after college many of them give up using English in their lives and careers, being unable to deal with the difficulties of written as well as spoken English.

2. College English may seem a mere extension of high school English, overemphasizing reading and translation skills, as well as grammatical accuracy instead of fluency.

3. Many Japanese students are encouraged to approach

English as a purely academic study in English linguistics and American or British literature, rather than a practical tool of intercultural communication.

4. After an examination centered high school English curriculum many students may wish to improve their oral abilities in English at the college level. They may be indeed able to do so, but with varying degrees of success.

This last point is particularly true for those who seek more opportunities to be able to improve their English as a means of practical communication between nations and cultures. The students of today are placing a higher demand on college English courses, and they look towards the colleges as institutions which can have a deep impact on society as a whole.

Many colleges realize the public's awareness of its being an institution for change, and know the need to improve their curriculum. But it is not so easy to change the fixed, tradition-bound atmosphere which may exist.

Some understanding of the problems facing English courses at colleges can be easily recognized. What then are the solutions? Solutions are needed to problems such as the optional time needed for English instruction, the intensity of the courses, instructional methods, curriculums to be followed, improving the student environment, the training of instructors, and in general, determining overall goals. Answers to these problems must be found in order to improve the present system. Here, a newly developed curriculum for basic English courses at Keiwa College presents us a brighter perspective in some extent in college level English education in Japan. However, it should not be said that there are no other areas for possible improvements.

In order to improve the condition of college level English courses in Japan, perhaps there is no need for drastic changes away from the accumulated methods and ideas of our forebears. Based on the existing college system, a new field of study "Speech Communication" might well be added to Japanese college level English courses. This may be a relatively new idea

in Japan, but it is not at all new in other countries, especially in America. In the field of speech communication, students could study English in the traditional academic manner, but with the main emphasis on verbal and written communication. In studying English as a foreign language improvements can be made by adding such courses as theory and practice in public speaking, intercultural communication, argumentation and debate, persuasion, group discussion, oral interpretation, small group communication, and interpersonal communication. Additional related courses could be offered such as courses in non-verbal communication and human behavior, cultural studies, world geography, international relations, and cultures both in other countries and in Japan. They too are an important part of learning, and making use of English as a useful communicative tool.

By providing such courses, the colleges not only maintain their high academic levels, but also the students benefit by learning English as an intelligent and useful means of international and intercultural communication.

The barriers and difficulties of adding these additional courses are recognizably great, considering the lack of available teaching materials and qualified instructors, but they are not insurmountable. A few Japanese colleges, such as the International Christian University in Tokyo, have tackled these problems and offer such studies, but the system in general still continues to focus primarily on the traditional literature and linguistics methods.

The outlook for the future, however, will inevitably be towards adopting more speech communication courses, given Japan's new global responsibilities.

The Japanese colleges should be more flexible as the society as a whole depends on them to enable people to participate as more effective world members and leaders.

Increasingly, Japanese people are being called upon to participate in cultural exchanges, international business, technical

and educational exchanges, assistance programs, and other international endeavors. The ability to communicate in English is increasingly essential.

The twin goals of seeking the truth and providing society with skilled manpower remain strong in colleges in Japan. As the need for a more internationally spirited person grows, so should the college English curriculum expand to include courses which produce a more well-rounded, and internationally-minded Japanese citizen.

## NOTES

This is purely a personal view on Japanese college level English education based on the author's academic background of speech communication studies in America as well as English teaching experiences and curriculum studies at Japanese college level institutions.