

Development of a Coordinated General English Education Curriculum at Chiba University

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Abstract

It is probable that graduating Japanese university students will need English in their work, further study or as a lingua franca in a society that may increasingly accept immigrants as the population ages. English education should aim to enable students to not only understand and translate articles and other reading texts, but also to communicate their ideas both orally and in written form. This is one of the goals of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) education reform plans for schools, but as yet, success has been limited. Therefore, with the goal of increasing students' communicative competence at Chiba University, the English curriculum was revised to expand the number of compulsory English classes and to increase the focus on productive skills. This paper describes the previous curriculum, the revised curriculum introduced in 2020, and the process of its development.

Keywords:

English curriculum reform, Japanese university English education, coordinated curriculum, higher education

1. Introduction

In 2020, Chiba University started the ENGINE (Enhanced Network for Global Innovative Education) programme. This programme, utilizing three approaches - English language education, smart learning and study abroad for all students - aims to foster a more international outlook among students in both undergraduate faculties and graduate schools. With this change, a review of the university-wide general education English curriculum became necessary. A proposal was made and was considered to align with the ENGINE program goals of Chiba University, specifically the goal of raising the students' communicative competence so that they would be able to use English as an international communication tool. To address the role that English education plays in the ENGINE programme, an expanded, more standardised curriculum was developed with a greater focus on productive skills. Additionally, a vertical progression toward specialization in students' fields of study over three years was envisaged. The basic outline of the new curriculum can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Outline of the Revised Compulsory English Curriculum at Chiba University from 2020

Faculty	Education	LAS	Horticulture	Law, Politics & Economics	Engineering	Science	Letters	Nursing	Pharmacy	Medicine
3rd Year	More technical - specific English courses arranged by each department									
2nd Year	English for Specific Fields									
	listening note-taking summarising speaking	research reading note-taking presentation discussion	field-related presentation note-taking reading strategies listening vocabulary	discussion	reading note-taking vocabulary Maths - Writing	research presentation	discussion communication vocabulary	research discussion presentation	writing	
1st Year	Critical Thinking in English (or CALL)									
	(Presentation Interaction) or CALL					(Writing Discussion)				

As can be seen in the diagram, the compulsory component of the general English curriculum at Chiba University is spread over three years, with four classes focusing on productive skills in the first year: Interaction, Presentation, Discussion and Writing. This is followed by two classes in the second year: one pertaining to students' fields and the skills required by each faculty, and one focusing on the transferable skill of critical thinking. Finally, there are two compulsory classes in the third year directly related to students' fields of study, which are conducted by each individual department. This paper describes how and why the curriculum, specifically for the first- and second-year courses, was developed in this manner.

2. Curriculum Development Theoretical Background

When developing the new language curriculum, the curriculum design theory of Nation and Macalister (2010) shown in Figure 2 was adopted as a theoretical framework. This model outlines factors to be considered when developing a curriculum. The smaller outer circles represent considerations underlying the courses. These comprise the environment, including that of the students, the teachers and the situation; the needs of the students and other stakeholders, including necessities, wants and lacks; and the principles by which the curriculum will be developed. When these factors have been considered, goals for the curriculum are developed along with the content, sequencing, lesson format, monitoring and assessment that may provide the best hope of achieving the goals. The process is accompanied by evaluation of all facets of the curriculum.

In early 2019, the decision was made to revise the curriculum and over the first few months of that year, based on Nation and Macalister's model model, the environment, needs and principles were considered. The following sections focus on these factors in relation to English language learning and learners at Chiba University.

2.1 Environment

2.1.1 The situation at Chiba University

All General Education English courses at Chiba University consist of fifteen 90-minute classes. The day and period of each English class is determined by the availability of students as circumscribed by each faculty or department. Each student enrolls on two compulsory English classes in one semester, which are usually taught by different teachers. This is because most of the part-time teachers, who account for the majority of taught classes, are not available to teach both classes for one group of students.

In the years before 2020, students were required to take a minimum of 4 credits of English. These credits were gained by taking classes called Listening and Speaking (L&S), CALL, Reading, and Writing. Each course was held twice a week and was worth two credits. Students were able to take L&S or CALL, as CALL classes at Chiba University focus on listening skills and vocabulary

Figure 2

Nation and Macalister's Model of Curriculum Design (2010)



development, and either Reading or Writing. This meant that a student taking CALL and Reading classes could progress through the first year without having to produce either written or spoken English. There were no compulsory English courses beyond the first year. Elective courses at four different levels were offered; however, the number of students taking the courses was limited, and the courses were a mere 22.5 hours long, precluding any noticeable increase in the overall English proficiency of the students.

As can be seen in Table 1, in total, there were 380 classes conducted by Chiba University teachers in the first year, comprising 132 L&S courses, 129 Reading and 23 Writing courses as well as 32 CALL classes, and a total of 64 elective courses. An additional 32 Communication courses, which are not included in Table 1, were outsourced to a contracted English school. In contrast, the revised curriculum called for a total of 462 classes in the first year, partly because the class sizes

Table 1*Numbers of Classes Before and After Curriculum Reform*

Time	Compulsory classes		Elective classes	Total classes
2019 Pre-reform	132 Listening and Speaking 32 CALL 129 Reading 23 Writing		64	380
2020 Post-reform	1 st year classes 71 Interaction 71 Presentation 24 CALL 98 Writing 98 Discussion		100	458
After 2021	1 st year classes 71 Interaction 71 Presentation 24 CALL 98 Writing 98 Discussion	2 nd year classes 76 Critical Thinking in English 81 English for Specific Fields 14 CALL2 16 Classes for students who did not complete first-year courses	34	583

were reduced. The number of classes further increased in 2021 to 583 with the addition of the second-year compulsory classes and repeat classes for those who did not complete the first-year curriculum. As a result of this reform, the number of English courses has increased by 1.5 times, which necessitated the hiring of many new English teachers and a considerable increase in expenditure on the English curriculum.

Before the curriculum reform, the overarching aims for the English curriculum were unclear. Teachers were able to choose their own course aims, materials, methodology, teaching language (Japanese or English) and evaluation methods and criteria, which varied widely across classes. Courses taught twice a week, if they were taught by two teachers, would usually be unofficially divided into two separate courses with different aims, different materials, and different evaluation and assessment methods. At the end of the term, one teacher would collect both sets of scores and average them to give the final grade for each student.

There were advantages to this system in that teachers were able to teach a course they were familiar with in their preferred style. For students, they were able to read the syllabi in advance of the start of term and choose the courses in the English time slots for their faculty that they were

most interested in, in order of preference. The 2,300 first-year students were then sorted into classes based on their preferences. However, from an administrative standpoint, this was rather time-consuming.

The major drawback of this system was that there was no standardization; therefore, no way of predicting what English skills the students would take into their second year where they may need to use English in their department. There was also little control of class content, with courses being entirely left to the discretion of teachers so that students in a single department taking Reading for example, could experience courses with widely differing levels of difficulty, input, and output such as reading and translating a novel, reading and discussing news articles, or using a published reading skills textbook. There were also few guidelines related to evaluation methods and criteria.

In addition to the uncoordinated nature of the curriculum, there was a further problem in that four English credits could be gained by achieving Grade 1 in Eiken, 730+ in TOEIC, 510 in TOEFL ITP, 64 in TOEFL iBT or 6 in IELTS, which meant that students may not have needed to take any English classes at all. As each of these tests evaluates a different ability and in some of them, productive skills are not evaluated at all, there was a great deal of debate as to whether the score on these tests were equivalent to four class credits.

The third problem was that many students took all their English credits in their first year; thus, they did not study English again before they graduated. This meant that they did not have enough opportunities to develop their skills and often did not have the English they needed when applying for jobs or in the workplace.

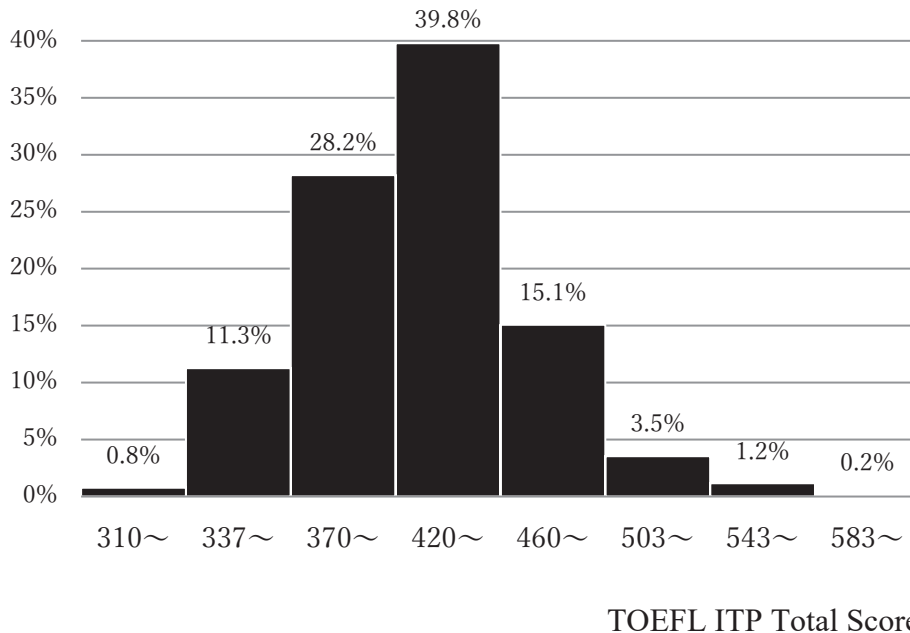
2.1.2 The learners at Chiba University

In the first year, there are approximately 2,300 students in 10 faculties taking General Education courses. In their second year, these students continue their studies in 37 departments within those 10 faculties. When developing a curriculum, ideally, teachers would take learners' knowledge, abilities, interests, motivation, purpose for learning, expectations, and learning styles into account. With a large body of students, such a detailed analysis is not feasible. However, it is reasonably certain that there will be a wide range of English levels between the different faculties and between the students in each faculty. For the past seven years, all students entering the university have taken TOEFL ITP in April. Figure 3 illustrates the range of scores gained by first-year students in April 2023. As can be seen from the chart, scores range from CEFR level A2 to C1.

Furthermore, it is certain that the great majority of the students will be native Japanese speakers, probably aged around 19, and that most of them will have taken 6 years of junior and senior high school English classes in Japan and will have completed the English part of The Common Test for University Admissions and the Chiba University entrance examination, all of which focus on receptive skills. Therefore, it can be predicted that students' receptive skills will generally be more developed than their productive skills. According to a Benesse (2020) survey,

Figure 3

TOEFL ITP Score Distribution for Chiba University First-year Students in April 2023 (n = 2,315)



around 70% of first-year high school students spent less than 5 minutes of English class time speaking. In addition, from their high school English experience, many students may expect English classes to be teacher-directed and may lack motivation (Barker, 2018; Matsuno, 2018).

2.1.3 General Education English teachers at Chiba University

In 2019, there were four full-time English teachers working exclusively as General Education English teachers. This was increased to nine in 2020 with the hiring of five more full-time teachers, further increasing to twelve in 2021 when three more joined the teaching team.

In addition, there were 32 part-time teachers teaching up to 10 classes a year, as well as 17 professors from various departments teaching, mainly, one General English course a year. Nation and Macalister (2010, p. 17) recommend taking factors such as levels of teacher training, teacher confidence, and available time into account when considering curriculum development. The part-time and full-time English teachers teaching General English are a diverse group with varying levels of experience, both at Chiba University and at other universities and schools. Many teachers produce their own materials and are confident English speakers with experience teaching classes in English at a range of levels and using a range of pedagogical techniques. Other teachers are less confident using English, teaching productive skills and employing communicative methodology in class. Before the curriculum review, teachers were hired on the basis of whether they were able to use English and whether they had a Master's degree. It was not always essential that they possessed

any English teaching qualifications. Since the review, all teachers newly hired are required to have TEFL/TESOL qualifications and a Master's degree in an English teaching related field.

The percentage of courses taught by part-time teachers affects other factors related to curriculum design. For one thing, part-time teachers are paid for two hours for each 90-minute class taught, meaning that they are only paid for 30 minutes' preparation and/or grading for each class, which, for ideal feedback and grading is likely to be inadequate unless the teacher contributes her own time. Teachers may also have crowded schedules, such as one teacher who was teaching 22 classes a week at various universities. These points, and the varied teaching days of part-timers leads to other difficulties, including conducting professional development sessions, collaborating on course development and holding explanatory meetings. This all means that, despite the benefits of the diversity of teaching staff, standardization of all aspects of the curriculum is challenging.

3. Needs

A needs analysis helps to ascertain appropriate curriculum aims and content. Nation and Macalister (2010) divide "needs" into three sub-categories:

- i) necessities – what the students will need to be able to do with language in their short-term or long-term futures.
- ii) lacks – the gap between what the students can do now and what will be necessary in the future.
- iii) wants – what students would like to learn or do on the course.

For the new English curriculum at Chiba University, the needs analysis for the non-subject specific first-year courses was necessarily much more generic than that conducted for the second-year English for Specific Fields courses as it was not possible to collect data for all incoming first-years. The following sections outline both cases.

3.1 First-year Courses in the New Curriculum

3.1.1 "Necessities" considered when developing the curriculum

For the non-subject specific first-year English courses, rather than focusing on the needs of 2,300 individual students, the needs analysis focused on the expected general necessity for English in the future in Japan. According to MEXT, future graduates will need communicative English as well as a passive knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary.

From now on, cross-cultural understanding and cross-cultural communication will become more and more important for each and every citizen. In doing so, improving English proficiency, which is an international lingua franca, is essential for Japan's future, and Japan should aim for top-class English proficiency in Asia (MEXT, 2014).

MEXT promotes higher levels of English ability in both the third and fourth Education Promotion Basic Plan. In the 3rd plan from 2018–2022, the MEXT target was 50% or more of JHS students should graduate with CEFR A1 equivalent for example Eiken Grade 3 (MEXT, 2022). In the latest 4th plan, this has been raised to 60%. Similarly, a target has been set for 60% or more of high school students to reach CEFR A2 (Eiken Pre-2), previously 50%, and a new target of 30% of HS students reaching CEFR B1 (Eiken grade 2) has been established.

In the future, English will become more necessary at work in Japan, as it is commonly used as a Lingua Franca in international business, partnerships, and education (Morita & Sabater, 2017). More than a decade ago, Neeley claimed, “The need to tightly coordinate tasks and work with customers and partners worldwide has accelerated the move toward English as the official language of business no matter where companies are headquartered” (2012). English is the predominant language not only in business, but also in research. English has become “the primary language for science” (Karagiannis & Yamanaka, 2021) and around 75% of all academic journals are published in English (Curcic, 2023).

Even if English is not necessary for individual Japanese citizens’ work or study, a knowledge of English among the local population in Japan could be instrumental in making Japan more attractive for migrants, who are likely to become more necessary as the population ages. In the past, highly skilled migrants have preferred English speaking countries (D’Costa, 2013). Those migrants who do come to work in Japan can find the language, and the local attitudes daunting. For example, Vogt (2017) found that 36.3% Japanese do not want immigrants living in their neighbourhood. However, Green and Kadoya (2015) found that citizens with better English conversation ability appear to have more positive attitudes towards foreigners. Therefore, in the interest of future social integration, a certain degree of English would appear to be helpful.

For business, research and social interaction in a global society, communicative competence is becoming increasingly important, and it is for these reasons that the first-year English courses heavily focus on productive, communicative English skills development.

3.1.2 “Lacks” considered when developing the curriculum

By the time students enter university in Japan, there are several problems that need to be addressed with respect to their ability to communicate. These include a lack of experience actually using the English that students have studied as a result of low emphasis on communicative competence in English in high school, and a lack of motivation to study English. Despite MEXT’s drive to improve the communicative abilities of high school graduates, there has only been slow progress. In 2022, based on a survey of 3,280 state schools, although there was gradual improvement in the percentage of students who gained the equivalent of CEFR A2 when they graduated from high school, the figure was still only 48.7%, with 30.2% having gained a qualification and 18.4% considered to have this CEFR A2 level of English. The figures for those

who reached CEFR B1 were 12.4% and 8.8% respectively (MEXT, 2022).

A more general view of English proficiency in Japan, and an indication of the relatively low level of spoken English, can be seen by reviewing test-taker scores in TOEFL iBT or IELTS. For example, the average score of TOEFL iBT test-takers in Japan was 74 overall, with an average of 17 in speaking, the lowest of the countries shown alongside Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, and Mali, while the overall score was 18th from the bottom. Similarly, the IELTS Academic Module mean test taker performance score was 33/39 overall and 39/39 in speaking with a mean score of 5.5 in 2022. Of course, these scores are only indicative of test-takers who are taking these academic tests for a specific reason and do not reflect the overall state of communicative competence among the population in Japan. However, these scores do indicate that in Japan, among those who are motivated enough to take proficiency tests, oral communicative competence appears to be less developed than other skills such as reading. From anecdotal evidence, this trend tends to be reflected among Chiba University students who take either of these tests, with students' reading scores usually the highest of the four modules and speaking usually the lowest.

A lack of communicative competence could be partly attributed to the system of English education in Japan which has focused on breaking down and understanding the component parts of English for the purpose of reading and listening rather than on using English to communicate one's own ideas. English is often seen as a set of rules to be tested rather than as a flexible tool for intercultural communication. Knowledge about the language is practiced through translation of phrases and sentences and tested in the same way, although some schools have started introducing oral assessment in a limited way. In a Benesse survey (2022) of 991 third year high school students, around 85% of the students "often" or "sometimes" translated from English into Japanese in class, and 79% answered grammar questions, whereas only 54% and 46% respectively wrote or spoke their own ideas or opinions.

Additionally, there is a culture of perfectionism in Japan. In a BBC article, Professor of Psychology and Education at the Open University of Japan, Kumiko Iwasaki is quoted as saying "We Japanese have a strong psychological barrier to speaking English. We have an obsession that we have to speak English perfectly" (Pickles, 2017). In July and August 2023, various media outlets were decrying the poor results of Junior High School English speaking test results from the National Assessment of Academic Ability, pointing out that students answered only 12.4% of questions "correctly" (Omoto, 2023). One of these questions was to talk for 30 seconds giving their opinion about the content of a short presentation. The criteria for expressing opinions "correctly" were not explained. Naturally, too much inaccuracy when speaking will lead to misunderstandings and lack of communication. However, being judged to have answered a question asking for an opinion "incorrectly" seems to indicate that accurate form is perceived as more important than communicating meaning, which could prove demotivating for students struggling to use the

language.

It has been shown that high school students lose their positive attitude towards English and their motivation to engage as they go through school. In the Benesse survey mentioned above, of the 991 third year high school students, 332 had been surveyed in 6th grade primary school, 1st and 3rd grade of Junior High School and 1st grade of High School. Of these students, when asked “Do you like English?” the number of participants who responded, “Really like”, halved from 28.3% in primary school 6th year to 14.3% in the 3rd year of high school and the number of those responding to “Are you good at English?” dropped from 25.2% to 9% respectively. This loss of positive attitude towards English and the drop in self-efficacy beliefs implies a drop in levels of intrinsic motivation, possibly caused by the pressure of having to pass university entrance examinations as students enter the third year of high school.

3.1.3 “Wants” considered when developing the curriculum

From experience, although ascertaining the “wants” of 2,300 students is challenging, it is possible to generalize to some extent. At the beginning of each semester, when students are surveyed on what kind of activities they would like to do on the course, or what skills they would like to improve, the most common answer tends to be speaking. This impression is reinforced by a recent survey of Chiba University students done by a graduating student of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Tanimoto, 2023). When asked which skill students most wanted to improve during their high school years, 47.7% of 257 students answered “speaking”.

In Japanese universities at present, it is necessary to create a curriculum for first-year students that will redress the imbalance of English skills and rekindle students’ motivation to learn English by seeing it as a tool to interact and communicate as well as receive information and ideas, rather than a subject to be tested that is not going to be used in the future.

3.2 Second-year Courses in the New Curriculum

For the second-year curriculum, the principles and the environment are very similar to those taken into account for the first-year curriculum. However, as the courses, particularly the English for Specific Fields (ESF) courses, are more subject oriented in the second year, the needs of the students differ between departments.

3.2.1 English for Specific Fields

The second-year English for Specific Fields courses were introduced in 2021 in the second year of the curriculum reform. In order to identify specific student needs for each faculty or department, a representative of each of the 10 faculties was asked to collect opinions from relevant faculty members and provide details on the purposes for which students may need English in the future, the language skills they will need, an estimated level of students’ language skills in their own field, the required focus for ESF courses, both language and content, and how these courses may

lead on to third-year courses in each faculty. The survey results were collected and followed up in interviews with those representatives of the departments who were willing to meet. Based on the results of the survey and interviews, a basic set of course aims was developed for each department and from this, teachers were able to create courses specifically targeting the needs of the student in that department as identified by their subject professors. The students themselves were not polled systematically for the first iteration of the ESF courses. However, students are encouraged to provide feedback in a comprehensive survey at the end of each semester and this feedback has been taken into account as each iteration of the courses is revised to address the students' needs more accurately.

3.2.2 Critical Thinking in English

Most students in Japan enter university after completing the Japanese high school curriculum, which tends to focus on remembering rather than analysing information. Thus, when required to ask their own questions, to evaluate the reasoning behind an argument, or to identify their own biases or assumptions, all useful life-skills, students tend to have trouble as they have had little experience of this type of education. For this reason, instead of developing an ordinary reading course which may end up focusing solely on reading strategies, vocabulary development, or translation, it was decided that a Critical Thinking in English course, which incorporates reading and listening skills improvement but with a clear strand of critical thinking input, would be a more effective use of time. There are different ways of incorporating critical thinking into courses. The approach that we adopted was to explicitly teach certain principles and aspects of critical thinking and then put those principles into practice by having students complete research and discussion activities.

3.3 Principles

3.3.1 A coordinated curriculum

One of the main principles of the new curriculum was that it should be coordinated so that all students would have similar opportunities, and progress to the second year with similar outcomes, allowing for differences in students' language levels and motivation. This coordination takes the form of common aims for each course, common evaluation guidelines, common textbooks, although a choice is available, common rules, and to some extent common methodology. The advantage is that it should provide clearer guidelines for teachers; thus alleviating difficulties that might otherwise be faced when deciding on aims, content and evaluation. This is especially true for incoming teachers. Furthermore, a coordinated curriculum is fairer for students, as the aim is for each student to receive similar input and output opportunities and be tested and graded in a similar way, rather than the wildly differing course content and evaluation procedures of the previous curriculum.

3.3.2 A student-centred curriculum

The second principle is that courses should be communicative and student-centred. As can be seen in Section 3, students' competence in spoken or written English rarely matches the level of their reading skills. To redress the balance, as much as possible given the constraints of time, courses focusing on developing speaking skills should be in principle delivered in English to increase comprehensible input, and student (English) talking time, as well as time spent on cooperative or collaborative student activities should be maximized. This promotes student engagement, and provided the tasks are clear, realistic and achievable, should increase students' motivation to learn.

3.3.3 A work in progress

The revised curriculum at Chiba University is constantly being reviewed, updated and added to as feedback is received from the main stakeholders: the students, the teachers, the departments and the administrators. The university environment may not change dramatically, but it is always possible to gain greater insight into student and teacher needs with the use of feedback surveys and meetings, and by acting on this insight, we aim to meet expectations and desires.

4. The Curriculum Design Process

With the environment, needs and principles having been considered, in September 2019, the design process moved on to the consideration of goals, content, sequencing, lesson format, monitoring and assessment as depicted in the centre of Nation and Macalister's model.

Based on the curriculum principles, along with CEFR level descriptors, course aims and guidelines, including evaluation guidelines were drawn up into a single document for each course, so that all teachers would be able to easily understand what is required. For an example of course aims and guidelines, see Appendix 1. For first-year courses, CEFR A1.2–B1.1 descriptors related to Interaction, Presentation, Discussion and Writing were reviewed and a list of Can-do statements was created for each of the courses. For example, for the Presentation course, a relevant descriptor is "Can give short, basic descriptions of events and activities". For the Interaction course, descriptors include "Can make and respond to suggestions" and "Can agree and disagree with others". From these, course aims were devised.

To address the course aims, there was a choice of using a proscribed textbook, a choice of textbooks or in-house materials. As the university has such a diverse range of teachers with different backgrounds and experience, it was decided that textbooks should be used for the first-year courses to provide a certain level of content standardization and to provide teacher support, particularly for those teachers who had less experience in communicative language teaching and student-centred classes. Many published textbooks are targeted at specific CEFR levels and refer to CEFR descriptors. This means that they are a ready-made source of teaching material that is easily

accessible.

The full-time English teachers reviewed published textbooks for each course using specific criteria and created a shortlist of coursebooks that were suitable for the level and contained the necessary content and input to achieve the course aims. All full-time and part-time English teachers were sent the documents of course aims and guidelines and polled on their choice of textbook for each course. The responses were collected, and the most popular textbooks were chosen as coursebooks. To take into account teacher preferences, a choice of around three textbooks for each course with similar content was provided. This is also useful to cater for the varying average levels of proficiency between students in different faculties. For each textbook, a sample syllabus was drawn up outlining the required aims and evaluation, but allowing for some freedom for teachers to use the textbook as they saw fit. For an example syllabus, see Appendix 2. Teachers could then copy and paste from the sample syllabus to their own syllabi and add personalized details in the Course Plans and Contents section.

For second-year courses, based on the students' needs as reported in responses to the faculty surveys, course aims were drawn up for the ESF courses in each faculty, and in some cases, for each department in a faculty. For example, the Faculty of Science with five departments, responded that for four of these departments, a course focusing on reading and vocabulary was needed, while the other department required a course based on writing skills. Therefore, two different sets of course aims were necessary for this faculty.

With regard to content, for some faculties, it was possible to find a suitable published textbook that would adequately cover the aims of the course. For others, original materials needed to be created. For example, for the four science courses that required a reading focus, appropriate reading material was used for each of the content areas of the four departments: Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Earth Science. For cases such as this, authentic input materials were found and adapted to correspond to students' expected vocabulary and reading levels using software to identify vocabulary frequency and difficulty. Additionally, teaching materials and supporting slides were created. This was done by the full-time teaching English teachers collaborating in pairs or small groups. Completed materials were uploaded onto a Teachers' Drive so that teachers teaching the same course had access to all materials. For the 10 faculties at Chiba University, ESF courses using original materials were created for Science (5 courses), Engineering (4 courses), Law, Politics and Economics (4 courses), Liberal Arts and Sciences, Medicine, Pharmacy and Horticulture (1 course each). The ESF courses for Nursing, Education, Letters and 5 of the Engineering departments use a textbook. A very basic outline of the focus of each course can be seen in Figure 1.

Concurrently, expected levels of achievement and basic assessment criteria were developed. For each course, a syllabus document was produced outlining the aims, course plans and content, and evaluation procedures and criteria. These were made available to all teachers teaching the

courses, along with the materials.

5. Curriculum Evaluation Process

The main method of evaluation of the curriculum to date has been the introduction of a detailed student feedback form administered using Google forms at the end of each semester. As the generic feedback form used for all university lectures was not specific enough to provide the breadth and depth of feedback required, a new form was developed incorporating questions related to perceived improvement in ability and confidence levels, the syllabus, satisfaction with the textbook and other materials, assignments, the instructor, changes in motivation, and overall satisfaction. It was also planned to introduce class observations both by peers and professors in charge of the curriculum; however, due to time constraints, this has been very limited to date.

In addition, all teachers were asked their opinion of the classes, the textbooks the syllabi and evaluation methods, before, during and after the process of curriculum development. At the end of each semester since the introduction of the new curriculum, teachers have also completed a Google form with comments on these points. They can also directly interact with the professors in charge at any time during the semester. These professors attempt to maintain an awareness of how the curriculum is being implemented in the classroom, and draw upon the expertise of the teaching staff to continually update and improve the curriculum.

6. Challenges and Future Directions

The new curriculum was introduced in April 2020. Three weeks before the new semester started, staff and students were told that all classes would be online as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The first-year textbooks needed to be transferred to Moodle along with all tasks and assignments. To maintain standardization and to aid those teachers who were less familiar with the use of computers in class, the full-time English teachers conferred and designated a single textbook for each first-year course. This made it possible for full Moodle courses including all materials, supplementary materials, and tasks or activities to be created. Unfortunately, the university Moodle system did not accept large files and no classes were conducted synchronously, a severe drawback when 75% of classes are speaking-focused. Thus, a large range of supplementary materials were required. All courses were made available to all part-time teachers and the change to online classes was relatively smooth. Since 2021, General English teachers have been teaching face-to-face, and the curriculum has returned to its originally intended format.

However, there are a number of challenges still to be met. With two years of face-to-face class feedback to draw upon, students' needs and wants can be more clearly identified and the courses can be adjusted to meet them more effectively. In addition, a further round of meetings with faculty representatives aimed at confirming the efficacy of the second-year ESF courses is helping teachers

to identify possible needs that are not being satisfied, and the course content of the third-year subject specific courses taught by each department is being confirmed. The curriculum is a continuous work in progress with regular reviews resulting in identification of possible improvements such as the creation of new, more precisely tailored courses which more fully meet the needs of students. To this end, in-house courses for Discussion, Writing and Critical Thinking in English are currently being created or piloted and others are planned, with a view to providing our students with an effective curriculum that addresses their needs, lacks and wants in the most practical way possible in the current university environment.

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Appendix 1:

Guidelines for First-year Interaction courses

Interaction – Pre-Intermediate (A2/B1)

General Aim

Increase in communicative competence.

Specific Aims

By the end of this course, students should be better able to

- maintain short social conversations on topics of interest
- exchange information and opinions on familiar topics
- cooperate to complete a simple task
- perform and respond in a simple way to basic language functions, such as requests or suggestions.
- ask for repetition or clarification as needed

Course Guidelines

- The class should include >50% of student talking time in English
- The class should include a variety of interaction patterns. e.g. S-S / Ss-Ss / T-S / T-Ss / S-T
- The teacher should be actively involved in monitoring and facilitating student production throughout the class.
- Specific feedback should be provided on students' oral production.
- Vocabulary and grammar needed to achieve the aims of the course should be incorporated in the course.
- The class will include 2 sessions of 3:1 conversation with a student assistant at English House per semester. Teachers should check that these have been completed at the appropriate time (to be organized in cooperation with EH).
- Each unit finishes with a "Challenge". Some of these will need to be adapted to conversation format rather than the existing presentation format. The project sections can be left out or adapted.

Assessment

- The main focus of assessment should be students' oral interaction, not presentations.
- Written tests may also be used e.g. discourse or vocabulary tests, but they should comprise less than 25% of the final score.
- The 2 sessions at English House should make up 5% of the final grade.

Grading criteria

- Language use - range / accuracy / appropriacy
- Spoken fluency
- Discourse management e.g. turn-taking
- Communication strategies e.g. asking for clarification / paraphrasing

Appendix 2:*Example Syllabus*

Course title	Interaction
Course language	English
Sub-title	Active Skills for Communication
Brief description	The class will help you to improve your English communication skills. Students will spend much of their time in class speaking with each other in English. You will build on the language you already know and practice using it in everyday situations.
Objectives and goals	<p>By the end of this course, you should be better able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain short social conversations on topics of interest • exchange information and opinions on familiar topics • cooperate to complete a task • use and respond in a simple way to basic language functions such as requests and suggestions • use a wider range of vocabulary and grammar
Course plans and contents	<p>Students are introduced to the language and strategies they need to complete a variety of speaking tasks. Each unit has a final task. In order to help you to achieve the unit goals, there will be input in the form of example conversations, useful expressions and other language input, and fluency strategies to help you keep a conversation going. There will also be many opportunities to practice speaking with different classmates using the language and strategies you have learned.</p> <p>All students will attend 2 sessions of 3:1 conversation with a student assistant at English House during the semester as part of the out-of-class assignments.</p> <p>There will be a mid-term and final vocabulary assessment as well as a final speaking test, which will be conversation-based.</p>
Self-study	Students will be expected to complete assignments most weeks. These may involve going to English House to speak to a student assistant, preparation for speaking, or review.

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Evaluation procedures and criteria	Final communication test – 20% Mid-term vocabulary test – 10% Final vocabulary test – 10% Completion of tasks in the classroom – 45% Completion of English House assignments – 5% Completion of other assignments – 10%
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