

Assessing the Efficacy of English Language Curriculum Reforms: Teacher Insights

MORIKAWA, Sarah

Chiba University

Abstract

Four years after the 2020 introduction of a revised Universal (Fuhen) Education English curriculum at Chiba University, a survey of English teachers was administered to elicit their views on the new curriculum. As the delivery of a curriculum is dependent on the teachers, their lived experience of the curriculum in the classroom is invaluable when assessing the efficacy and practicality of the curriculum. The survey responses of 39 teachers were collected and analysed. Descriptive content analysis was used to investigate teachers' responses to the survey and the transcriptions of semi-structured follow-up interviews, by coding and grouping responses into categories such as "curriculum design", and further categorising themes such as "first-year courses", and sub-themes such as "materials" and "input vs output courses". The findings suggest that teachers are predominantly in favour of the revised curriculum, particularly the increase from 4 to 8 compulsory English credits. However, issues, such as the focus on output-based courses in the first year and the difficulty of ensuring a vertical progression through first to third year courses were raised. The report concludes with a discussion of measures that can be taken to address the major issues highlighted by teachers and enhance the Fuhen English curriculum.

Keywords: university English teaching, English curriculum reform, teacher insights

1. Background

In 2020, under the Chiba University ENGINE (Enhanced Network for Global Innovative Education) programme (Chiba University, 2020), the Chiba University General Education English curriculum underwent a radical revision involving changes in the type of compulsory English courses on offer, an expansion of the years in which students need to take compulsory English courses, and increases in the number of compulsory courses needed for graduation, the number of classes taught, and the number

of teachers teaching them, particularly an increase in the number of dedicated full-time teachers from 3 to 12.

The current General English curriculum consists of eight compulsory English courses awarding one credit per course. Students take four courses in the first year: Discussion and Writing (DW) in one semester, and Interaction and Presentation (IP), which may be replaced by a double-credit CALL course on student request, in the other semester. There are also two courses in the second year, Critical Thinking in English (CTE), which could also be replaced by a CALL course, and English for Specific Fields (ESF). Finally, each department provides two English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses, which are supposed to be more specifically related to each student's field. In 2024, there were 71 Interaction, 71 Presentation, 24 CALL, 98 Discussion and 98 Writing classes for first-year students and 84 ESF, 73 CTE and 8 CALL2 classes for second-year students.

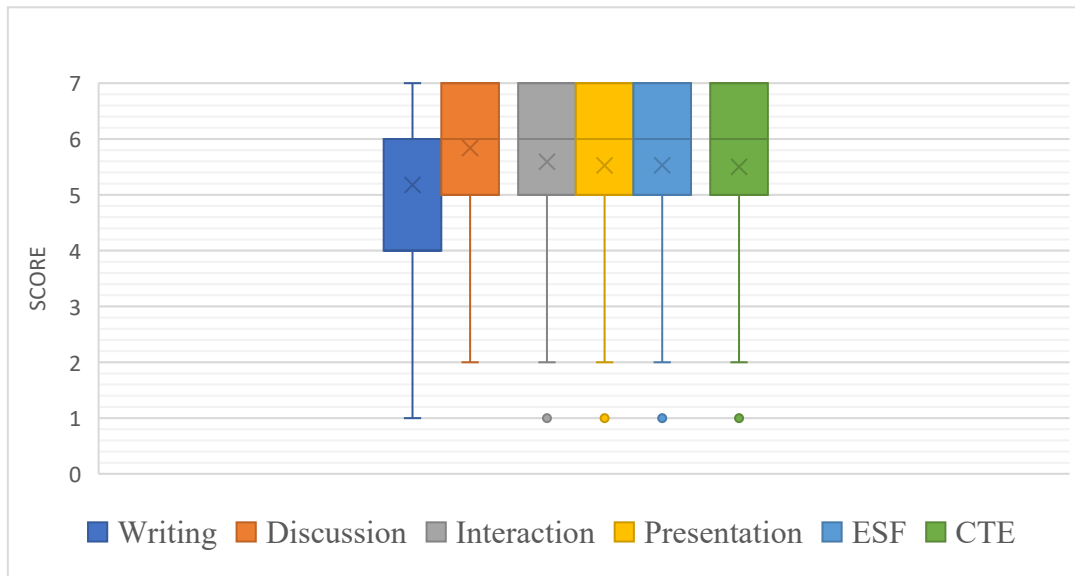
Currently, the English curriculum administration is divided between two interacting groups: the Centre for English Language Education (CELE), which oversees the direction of the English curriculum in General English, Departmental English for Specific Academic Purposes courses and General graduate school English education, and the English Education Group, which is responsible for the everyday administration of General English undergraduate courses. Both groups are part of the International Future Education Core, which also directly hires the full-time English teachers delivering General English education courses.

The aim of the revised curriculum is to create a pattern of vertical integration. In detail, in the first year, students gain a foundation of productive skills that may have been neglected in high school, such as speaking and writing, while building upon their reading and listening skills, and the vocabulary and grammar range which they are likely to have covered in their studies for the university entrance examinations. In the second year, students move towards more subject-specific content in their ESF courses, for both practical and motivational reasons. These courses have aims related to learning English and are taught by English teachers rather than subject teachers. They are not Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses, as it is not learning the content of the specific field, but rather improving English skills that is the main aim of the courses, and teachers are not experts in the fields of the students. However, because the content is related to the students' own fields, this should increase students' motivation as they will be able to recognize the immediate relevance to their studies. Students also take CTE, which is a necessary and transferable skill. The course includes reading and listening

input and, along with the ESF courses, provides a chance for students to review what they learned in the first year and practice the abilities they developed at that time. Finally, in the third year, each faculty is required to provide courses with more subject-specific English language content that is necessary for students in each particular field. This is provided by individual faculties, or in some cases departments, as they are in a better position to judge what content is necessary for students.

The previous curriculum included four compulsory English classes: two Listening and Speaking, or CALL, and two for either 2 Reading or 2 Writing classes in the other semester. Teachers had autonomy in choice of aims, materials, and assessment and there was no attempt at standardization. For example, reading courses for students in the first year of the same department could cover anything from a commercially produced reading textbook to news articles to a Tolkien novel to movie subtitles. After the first year, those students who wished to take English credits could take elective classes, of which there were approximately 64 at levels ranging from Elementary to Advanced. For a more detailed account of the development of the new curriculum, see Morikawa (2024).

In order to evaluate the curriculum, each semester, students are asked to provide feedback on their English courses. The feedback survey was developed by teachers specifically for General English classes and is conducted in addition to the more generic, university-wide survey. Figure 1 shows student satisfaction rates for each course in the first semester of 2024. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied). Numbers for students in IP and DW courses differ because the response rates of the various classes differ.

Figure 1*Students' satisfaction rates in the first semester of 2024*

Note. Writing: n = 746, Discussion: n = 769, Interaction: n = 685, Presentation: n = 443, ESF: n = 831, CTE: n = 512

Teachers were also surveyed at the end of the first semester in 2024 to inquire about their experiences teaching the courses and to gather suggestions or comments about the courses or curriculum. In this paper, using both survey responses and follow-up interviews with teachers, we investigate teacher opinions related to the curriculum, including a comparison of the post-2020 curriculum with the pre-2020 curriculum. Key areas covered include what the curriculum changes meant for teachers, the introduction of compulsory English credits spread over three years, the first-year course structure, content and materials, ESF course content and factors for success, CTE course content, standardization and whether teachers prefer the new or the old curriculum overall. The results are followed by a discussion of the possible approaches to addressing the issues which the survey results brought to light.

2. Method

2.1 Instrument

At the end of the semester in July 2024, English teachers were sent a link to an English language Google form survey consisting of 49 items: 30 items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale; 11 were open questions inviting a personal written response; 6 requested personal information such as email address and other current workplaces and 2

were multiple choice questions. The survey was not anonymous as teachers were asked whether they would be willing to expand on their responses in an interview.

2.2 Interviews

Those who indicated they would be willing to be interviewed ($n = 27$) were emailed in early August to discuss a mutually convenient time and place. Eight teachers responded, and 6 interviews lasting on average 38 minutes (ranging between 51 and 26 minutes) were conducted between August 15th and 27th. Of the 6 interviewees, three were full-time English teachers (2 British and 1 Australian) and three were part-time (2 Japanese and 1 British). The interviews were semi-structured, conducted online in five cases, and recorded and transcribed using Google Meet in all cases.

2.3 Participants

Currently, 53 part-time and full-time English teachers are employed to teach General Education English classes. The 12 full-time teachers, and many of the part-timers hold both a Masters in TESOL or Applied Linguistics as well as practical English teaching qualifications such as a DELTA (Cambridge, 2024). All 53 teachers were asked to complete the survey, and 39 responses were obtained, a response rate of approximately 74%. As CALL classes use a different survey to obtain student and teacher feedback, those teachers who solely teach CALL were not included in this investigation. The respondents have been teaching at Chiba University for various lengths of time. See Figure 2 for a breakdown of teacher numbers and years of service. Each respondent was allocated a number to preserve their anonymity. Therefore, teachers are referred to as (T1) – (T39) in the Results section below.

Figure 2

Teachers' Length of Service at Chiba University

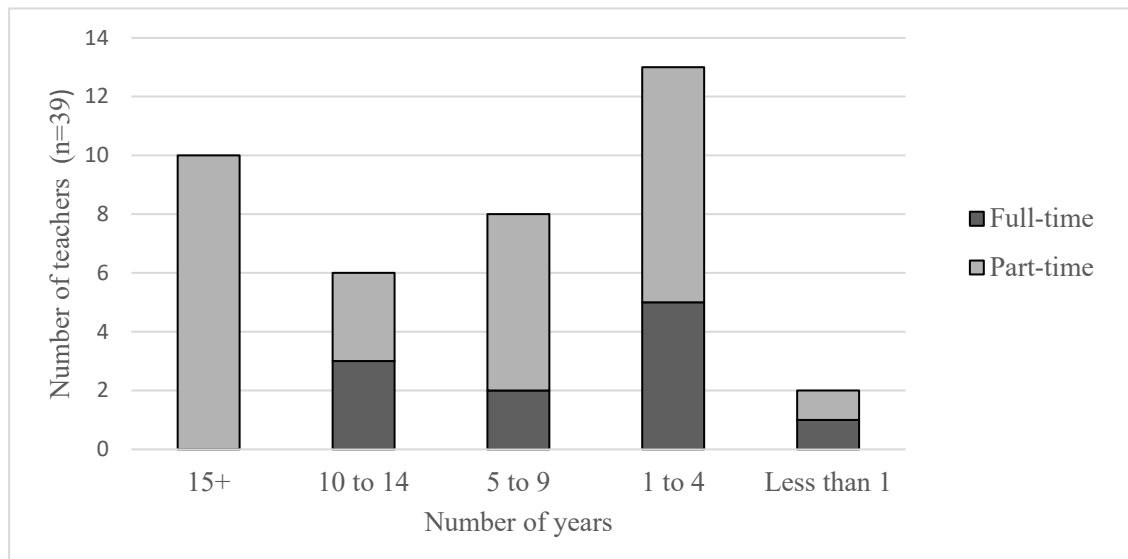


Table 1

Overview of the Participants

	length of service (years)	FT / PT		length of service (years)	FT / PT
<i>T1</i>	1- 4	FT	<i>T21</i>	> 15	PT
<i>T2*</i>	10 - 14	FT	<i>T22</i>	1- 4	FT
<i>T3</i>	1- 4	PT	<i>T23</i>	< 1	PT
<i>T4</i>	> 15	PT	<i>T24</i>	> 15	PT
<i>T5</i>	< 1	FT	<i>T25</i>	> 15	PT
<i>T6</i>	5 - 9	FT	<i>T26*</i>	1- 4	PT
<i>T7</i>	> 15	PT	<i>T27</i>	> 15	PT
<i>T8</i>	1- 4	FT	<i>T28*</i>	5 - 9	PT
<i>T9</i>	10 - 14	FT	<i>T29</i>	1- 4	PT
<i>T10*</i>	1- 4	PT	<i>T30</i>	5 - 9	PT
<i>T11</i>	10 - 14	PT	<i>T31</i>	1- 4	PT
<i>T12*</i>	> 15	PT	<i>T32</i>	5 - 9	FT
<i>T13</i>	> 15	PT	<i>T33</i>	1- 4	PT
<i>T14</i>	5 - 9	PT	<i>T34</i>	5 - 9	PT
<i>T15</i>	10 - 14	PT	<i>T35</i>	1- 4	PT
<i>T16</i>	> 15	PT	<i>T36</i>	1- 4	FT
<i>T17</i>	1- 4	PT	<i>T37</i>	1- 4	FT
<i>T18</i>	10 - 14	PT	<i>T38</i>	5 - 9	PT
<i>T19</i>	10 - 14	FT	<i>T39</i>	5 - 9	PT
<i>T20*</i>	> 15	PT			

Note. Teachers marked with an asterisk participated in the interviews.

2.4 Analysis

The Likert scale questions in the survey provided data that was analysed and depicted in graphic format. Responses to open questions were translated from Japanese into English if necessary and interview transcripts generated automatically by Google Meet were checked for accuracy against the original recordings. Using descriptive content analysis (Birgili et al., 2021) to identify teachers' attitudes toward the new curriculum in terms of general curriculum design, first and second year courses and materials, CALL classes, class size and standardization, responses were coded into categories for each of these groups. For each category, responses were further categorized into themes.

3. Results

There were many aspects concerning the new curriculum about which teachers' views were sought. These aspects will be addressed in the following order: how the teachers view the new curriculum overall, vertical integration of English courses in students' first to third years, first-year courses including content, materials, and substitution of CALL for Interaction and Presentation courses, ESF courses, CTE courses, class size, standardization, and finally, preference for the old or new curriculum. It should be noted that many teachers did not respond to all questions as they may have had no experience teaching particular courses, or they may not have been teaching at Chiba University before the new curriculum was implemented.

3.1 How Teachers View the New Curriculum Overall

One recurring theme was that teachers felt the new curriculum was more directed and cohesive. Comments such as "Now, there's a curriculum. We have aims now" (T19), "It's easier to grasp an overall picture of how students at Chiba University learn English" (T34), "There's a clear path as to where the students, where the university wants the students to be" ... "Everyone's pushing the students towards a certain direction" (T11), indicate that these respondents appreciate having a unified curriculum.

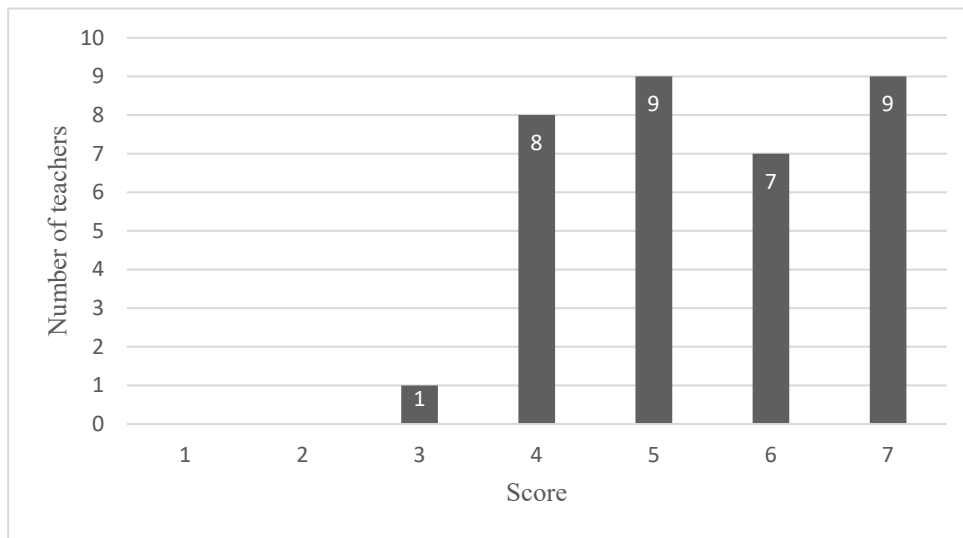
Additionally, there was a feeling that the new curriculum has been beneficial for students. "Course development, content and structure are designed to increase the English ability of each student. Students are able to progress in their studies effectively" (T20) was one comment. Another teacher commented that "students actively try to speak English and express their opinions compared with students before" (T16).

Some teachers mentioned that the new curriculum has brought opportunities for professional development, as teachers have been able to develop materials, use new textbooks and ways of teaching, and be more creative (T2, T9). Although this was possible if teaching an elective course pre-2020, the range of ESF courses that were developed and are still being developed and updated, means that teachers are constantly able to use their expertise and creativity in connection with materials development. Connected to this is the issue of teamwork. One of the full-time teachers commented that there has been more of a team feeling after 2020 with teachers working together on materials development and being able to capitalize on the broad range of experience that the increase in full-time teacher numbers has brought (T2). However, the same teacher lamented that this team-working does not usually carry over into the working relations between the full-time and part-time teachers.

Finally, one teacher mentioned that a big change for her had been the necessity to use English in class (T26). Pre-2020, there was no policy on classroom language, whereas post-2020, particularly for the classes that focus heavily on spoken production, the instruction is supposed to be provided in English to allow more exposure to spoken English and an English-speaking environment for students. This protocol was at first a little difficult for the teacher; however, she stated that she now enjoys using English in class.

3.2 Vertical Integration of English Courses from First to Third Year

Figure 3 shows responses to the statement “Overall, I think the current system of 8 compulsory English credits spread over three years is better than the previous system of 4 English credits taken in the first year.” Teachers were asked to score between 1 (completely disagree) and 7 (completely agree). It should be noted that among the teachers who responded with a score of 4, 5 out of 8 were not teaching at Chiba University before 2020, which could be why the median score was given.

Figure 3*Teachers' views on the three-year eight-credit curriculum.*

Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

Many teachers felt that the three-year eight-credit curriculum is a constructive change for students. Comments included “The more English they can do, the better for them because they're very limited in their exposure to the language in their daily life” (T2), “It will be very helpful because it's so the students have to survive in a global society” (T25). One teacher pointed out the possible usefulness in future careers.

“It's difficult to know what jobs they're going to get once they leave. but if most of them are shooting for ... Toyota, Lion, some of the other big chemical companies, they are going to be bound to do emails in English. If they go on overseas trips it's going to be an inevitability whether it's Mainland Asia, or even to Indonesia or Malaysia, they are going to have to deal with English speakers at some point” (T11).

On the other hand, concerning the idea of progression, building upon the skills and knowledge learned in the first year to inform and aid performance in the second year and thence to the third year ESAP courses, teachers, especially full-time teachers, pointed out that there is a lack of communication which hinders smooth progression from one year to the next (T1, T2, T9).

One issue is that part-time teachers are not likely to be aware of the syllabi of second-year courses that they do not teach, and therefore may not recognize how the content of

the first-year courses such as Presentation fits with that of the second-year courses. Similarly, students may not perceive the integration of first-year skills into second-year courses and the teacher may have to remind students of the content of their first-year presentations course. Similarly, for CTE courses, which require discussion, students should have been introduced to basic discussion skills in the first year and be able to build on them in the CTE class. “Sometimes you really have to remind students or make them aware of this fit and each year isn't actually discreet. And that what they did last year is relevant to this year,” said one interviewee (T10).

In addition, those full-time teachers who are responsible for course development of ESF courses are not aware of the aims and content of the third-year departmental courses. This makes it virtually impossible to provide a smooth progression from second to third year courses. As one teacher said,

“If you're going to do first, second, and third years, I think there needs to be some kind of connection between them. I mean building skills upon skills. Yeah, but you can see it kind of happening in one and two, but the third year, who knows what goes on?... You know what students have been exposed to, but in most third courses, it could be an off-campus teacher coming on campus and doing something that's completely out of step with what's happened in first and second year, ... for me, that's a major issue” (T2).

3.3 First-year Courses

3.3.1 Curriculum content

The current first-year curriculum comprises Interaction and Presentation (IP) courses in one semester, and Discussion and Writing (DW) courses in the other semester. For practical reasons such as grading time constraints, some students take IP before DW and vice versa. Students can apply to take CALL instead of IP, but places are limited.

Teachers were asked to agree or disagree on whether taking IP and DW in the first year is beneficial for students. The responses can be seen in Table 4. The mean, median and mode scores have been provided for each of the data. In each case, some teachers did not respond, possibly because they had no experience teaching that class.

Table 2*Teachers views on whether it is beneficial to take these courses in the first year*

	Interaction (n = 32)	Presentation (n = 35)	Discussion (n = 36)	Writing (n = 35)
Mean	6.15	6.41	6.27	5.94
Median	7	7	7	7
Mode	7	7	7	7

Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

Teachers were also asked whether they see an improvement in their students' performance in each of the first-year courses by the end of the semester. An example question item is "At the end of each Presentation course, I feel that I can see an improvement in my students' presentation skills." Table 3 shows teachers' responses to this item for all four first-year courses, and the number of teachers responding in each case. The chart provides the mean, median and mode for a clearer view of the range of responses.

Table 3*Whether teachers see an improvement in their students' performance at the end of each course*

	Interaction (n = 33)	Presentation (n = 32)	Discussion (n = 35)	Writing (n = 34)
Mean	5.7	6.2	6	5.9
Median	6	7	6	6
Mode	5	7	7	7

Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

From the above, it seems that teachers find the current course offering both beneficial and effective in improving students' skills. However, three main issues arose from the responses given by teachers to the open-ended questions and in the interviews.

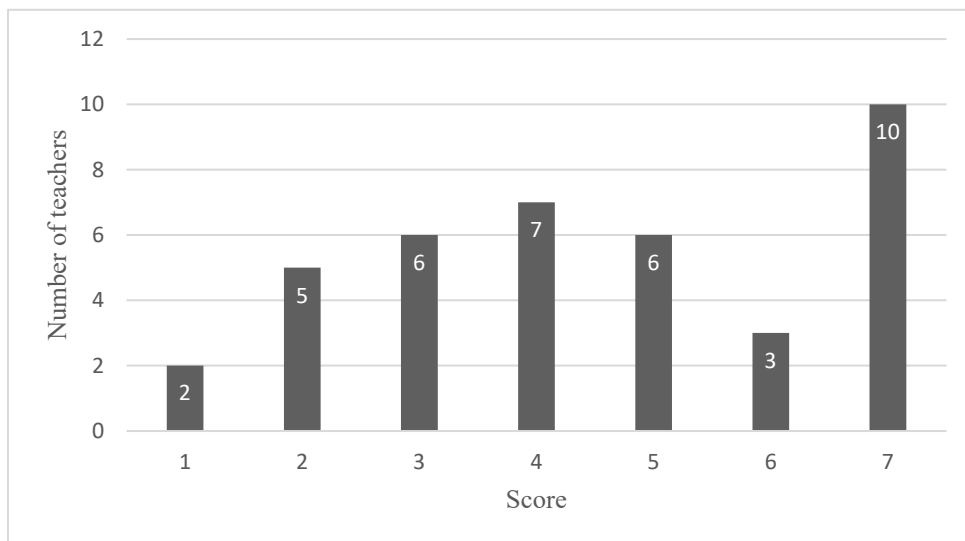
One criticism was that all the first-year courses are output-based. Many teachers agree that there should be more reading in the first-year courses so that students do not lose their hard-won reading ability gained by studying for the entrance tests in high school or cram school, and so that they will be able to cope with the reading demands in the second and third year. One teacher who has been teaching for more than 15 years at Chiba University summarized his view as follows:

“I think that (academic) reading courses should be taken in the first year. In the current curriculum, too much emphasis is placed on production (especially oral production), and as a result, it seems that students are not able to maintain their English reading comprehension. If students do not continue to practice reading English, they will not be able to read English papers or books in their major subjects” (T21).

Figure 4 depicts teacher responses to the survey item “Students get reading practice in their Discussion, Writing, Presentation, CTE and some ESF courses. However, I feel that they should also take a course specifically to improve reading skills.”

Figure 4

Teachers’ views on whether students need a course that specifically focuses on reading



Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

Despite the evident enthusiasm for an input-based course, there is disagreement about how the reading input should be delivered. Of those who commented on how a reading course could be implemented, five teachers recommended replacing either the first-year Interaction, Discussion or Writing course with a Reading course, while 6 teachers recommended creating a Reading and Writing course to take the place of the current Writing course.

Some teachers did not see the need for a Reading course at all as they perceived their students as having “strong reading skills” (T10) and supported the integration of more reading skills into other courses (T19). One teacher (T27) mentioned the pervasive use of

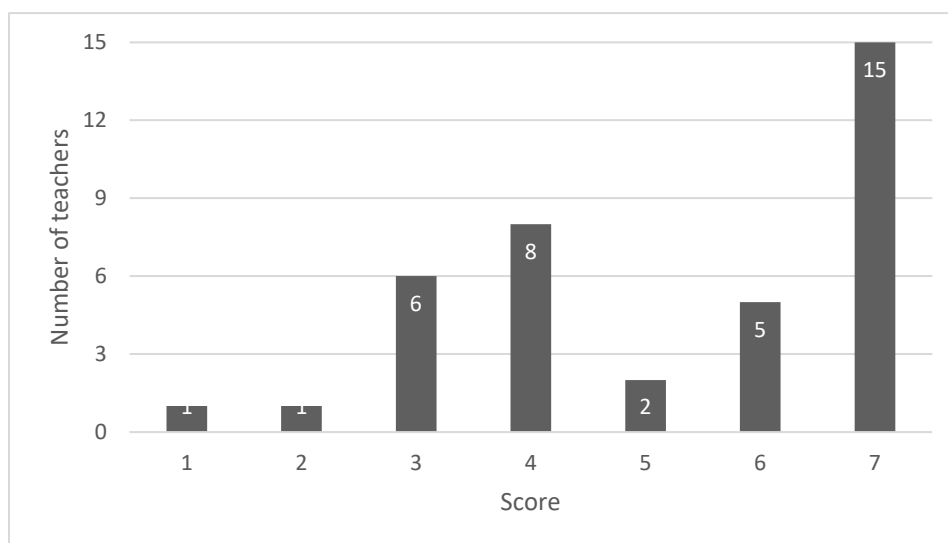
software when reading in a foreign language, which may make it difficult to convince the students of the usefulness of honing their reading skills.

Another issue was the overlap between Discussion and Interaction courses. Four teachers (T 13, 14, 24, 25) claimed that they were not able to clearly differentiate between Discussion and Interaction courses and that Interaction is “redundant” or “too easy”. On the other hand, two teachers (T6, 37) remarked that the Interaction course helps students to gain confidence in speaking English.

The third main concern was the content of Writing courses. As can be seen in Figure 5, it seems that the majority of teachers agreed that students should study academic writing in their first year.

Figure 5

The number of teachers who agree with the statement “Students should study English academic writing in their first year.”



Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

However, views on the course content were contradictory, and several issues related to the writing course emerged, particularly the extent to which the writing course should be “academic”. One of the main points was that instead of being academic with a focus on essay writing, the course should have a more practical focus. A representative comment was, “Introduce a reading and writing course that focuses less on academic writing and more on research, note-taking, summarising/paraphrasing skills” (T2). There were several comments of this type, while others such as the following highlighted the

limitation of time and the likelihood that many students will not need to write an academic essay in English.

While academic writing is a useful skill, most of the students in the future will more than likely not require this skill. I think it would be more beneficial to ingrain the basics of writing that would help the students be able to feel comfortable with writing anything in English. In a 14-week course, there is not enough time to effectively teach academic writing.

(T15)

3.3.2 Textbooks

One of the biggest changes for teachers when the revised curriculum was introduced was the provision of a list of textbooks for each course from which the teachers can make their choice instead of there being free choice of materials. Of the 35 teachers who responded to the question item “Instead of using textbooks, it would be better to use in-house produced materials for each course”, 14 were not in favour, while 12 were in favour and 9 were neutral. There were a variety of comments regarding textbooks, with some teachers calling for “free choice of materials to accommodate teachers’ teaching styles and assessment preferences, as long as the aims and outcomes were standardized” (T37), and others advocating for free choice of materials but with both standardized aims and assessment procedures (T30). A few teachers made comments to the effect that “it is good to have a set of textbooks and not entirely free choice” (T27).

Other factors that teachers mentioned were matching textbooks to a range of student levels, updating the textbook list, and supplementation. Further, with regard to in-house materials replacing the use of a textbook, as one teacher succinctly put it “GOOD in-house materials would be better than a BAD textbook, but a GOOD textbook would be better than BAD materials” (T19) while another similarly pointed out that “In-house materials vs textbooks really comes down to their quality and implementation” (T11).

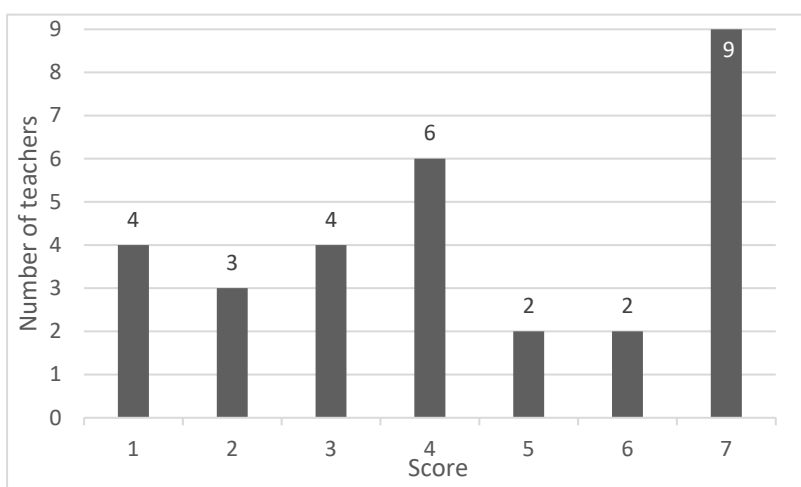
A negative point in any materials use that arose, but particularly textbooks which students need to pay for, is that incoming students may buy a used textbook from a second-year student, which contains answers and notes (T27). This of course, might happen with in-house produced materials too, but these are more easily updated if cheating seems to be occurring.

3.3.3 Substitution of CALL for Interaction and Presentation courses

Finally, if students apply to take CALL in their first year, they do not need to take IP courses and as such can move into the second year without having taken a course in how to present in English, which for many ESF courses is a necessary skill. Many teachers were in favour of students having the option to take CALL (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Teachers who agree with the idea that it is beneficial for students to be able to apply to take a CALL course instead of Interaction and Presentation in their first year.



Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

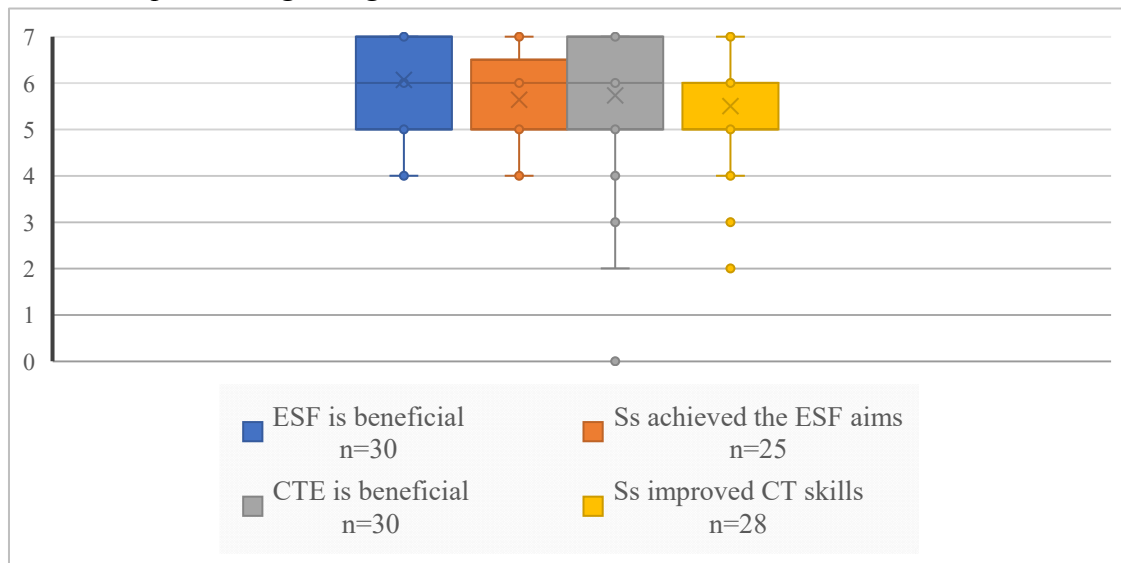
On the other hand, the idea that if students progress to second-year classes without having Presentation input, they may be at a disadvantage compared to their classmates who took the Presentation course and the teacher may need to spend time reviewing first-year content, was expressed and some teachers were against the IP/CALL choice. “It’s a shame that not all of the students actually take Interaction and Presentation - not to devalue the CALL courses, but I don’t think they’re equivalent, and one really doesn’t replace the other” said one teacher (T19). Other views related to CALL were that CALL is more difficult for students than other first-year courses (T25) - this was said in a positive light. Also mentioned was the idea that there should not be a clear dichotomy between CALL teachers and IPDW teachers as there is at present, but that all teachers should gain experience of teaching both kinds of course (T37).

3.4 Teachers’ Views on Second-year Courses

Generally, teachers’ opinions on the second-year courses were positive. Figure 7 shows the average scores for answers to questions concerning whether taking the ESF and CTE courses was beneficial in the students’ second year and whether students appeared able to achieve the ESF course aims and improve their critical thinking skills.

Figure 7

Teachers’ opinions regarding ESF and CTE courses



Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

3.4.1 ESF courses

The ESF courses received positive comments such as the courses being “very beneficial” (T5), “well-structured” and having “good materials” (T17). “So far I have been very appreciative and impressed with the in-house materials” said one teacher (T11). It was also mentioned that it is good that students are able to progress from the first year and review what they learned in the second year (T25).

Naturally, with so many courses, a number of issues have arisen, and these were all expressed in the teachers’ feedback. One key problem is the lack of communication concerning course content. Course developers, usually the full-time teachers, are not certain what the departments require or are expecting from the ESF courses and how they fit with the department-driven third-year courses. As one teacher said, “It would help to plan these courses if I knew what outcomes each department wanted for the ESF courses” (T1). Another pointed out that teachers “need more feedback from the departments about what kind of ESF materials and topics would benefit the students” (T2), as the English

teachers are not experts in the various fields such as Law, Politics, Chemistry and are not aware of what the students are learning or have learned in their own field.

This issue is connected to the choice of materials. In some cases, where a textbook could be found, for example for ESF Design, or for ESF Nursing, a textbook is used. However, in some cases, the textbook used is either too difficult or not directly relevant to the students' fields. As one example, the textbook used for four departments in the Faculty of Engineering covers general engineering concepts and vocabulary, but teachers complain of the level being too high and the units not directly matching the content of the departments using that book.(T3, T11, T25) In another case, the faculty in question requested general skills content such as note-taking and listening. Teachers who are used to ESF courses that are related to "specific fields" complain that the textbook does not address the Education students' needs and is not relevant to the students' field (T25, T30). One teacher commented, "In the ESF (Education) course, I think it would be better to have materials that focus on education-related materials as opposed to the current materials which do not have that specific focus" (T30).

Finally, teachers pointed out that while creating the ESF courses is rewarding and interesting, it is a very time-consuming process and materials, for example reading texts, need to be constantly updated, necessitating updating of tasks and worksheets (T17, T35). Some teachers recommended having more time set aside for materials development. "There should be one 2nd or 3rd period per week in both semesters that none of the full-time teachers have a class. This time could be used for ... to discuss materials for a course, such as ESF (T37).

When asked what factors contribute to a successful ESF course, the connection of the materials to specific fields and department expectations, students' sense of achievement, student engagement and recognition of the relevance of the materials, and creating materials at an appropriate level were all common themes.

3.4.2 CTE courses

In the first semester of 2024, for the first time, the new in-house CTE course was used by all teachers teaching CTE. As can be seen in Figure 9, teachers' views on the CTE course were mostly positive; however, although there were positive responses such as "The CTE materials have been very useful and appropriate for the classes I taught" (T5), "I think the way is now being content-based is really good. It worked well for me" (T9), and "most of it was pretty well received I think" (T11), many of the comments expressed concerns, and ways of addressing concerns.

The concerns can be categorized into students' critical thinking background, difficulty and assessment. Firstly, some teachers felt that students should be offered critical thinking input in Japanese before tackling it in English as they have not had experience of critical thinking in schools. Comments were, "Critical Thinking is a skill that most Japanese students do not have in their own language" (T32) and "Japanese students have never learned critical thinking in Japanese, unlike my high school experience in the US. Therefore, this should be a Japanese course, rather than an English one" (T37). This view was disputed by another teacher who said that he saw evidence of critical thinking in the way his students worked on tasks and gave the view that "they do do critical thinking in high school... They are actually quite good critical thinkers" (T9).

The difficulty of the course was another theme. Some teachers felt that activities such as evaluating arguments (in English) were too difficult for some students (T8, T25) and that in places the course is "too technical" (T15). There was also difficulty for teachers teaching the course for the first time as comments suggest: "Some materials or vocabulary in PowerPoint slides need to be adapted depending on the students' levels" (T6); "In some cases, I have struggled to provide crystal clear explanations about some answers to some questions" (T28); "Generally I could follow the syllabus and material provided but I would like some more notes and possibly alternatives for lower/higher level groups" (T35). These comments suggest that more teacher support is necessary for this course.

A final problem was the evaluation criteria. In previous iterations of the course, a final review was used to assess students' uptake of the critical thinking concepts introduced in the course. When the CTE course was rolled out, the final review was replaced by final presentations with peer feedback using detailed feedback sheets. This was unpopular with some teachers as students may have taken CALL in the first year instead of Presentation and thus be at a disadvantage in basic presentation skills. In addition, despite the clear grading criteria given to students in advance, it was felt by one teacher that "presentation does not seem an accurate way to assess students' development of critical thinking skills (it will instead favour those who are good at presentations)" (T37). This view was supported by another teacher who said "The final presentation they kind of ...didn't make the connection between all of the critical thinking stuff that we talked about and then using them in the presentation" (T19).

3.5 Class Size

As might be expected, many teachers would prefer smaller classes, although the average agreement score to the statement "I am generally satisfied with the current class

size (given that some classes are larger, and some are smaller.)” was just over 5 with a maximum agreement score of 7. Of those who commented ($n = 17$), 6 teachers suggested a class size of less than 20, while 6 suggested 20 to 25. The main reasons were that with fewer students, teachers are able to give more, personalised comments and more time per student than in larger classes (T6, T15, T21, T25, T28, T31). Similarly, more time can be spent on each student’s assessment, especially as many of the classes involve spoken assessment. A further point raised was that teachers can develop a better rapport with students if there are fewer students in a class (T6), and for larger classes there is a danger of disengagement and discipline problems, possibly because the teacher is not able to adequately engage with all students equally (T34).

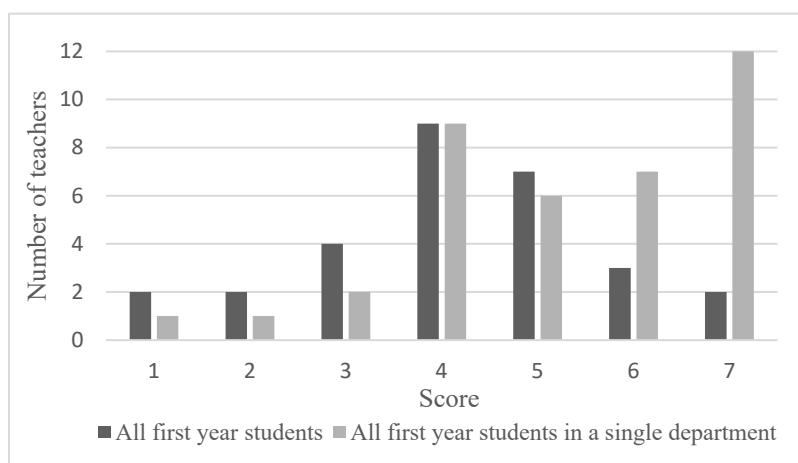
At the same time, there was recognition that there are constraints and that ideal class sizes are not practically an option in the teaching context of this university. “I doubt it is possible but class sizes of 12 students are optimal” (T10).

3.6 Standardization

Figure 8 depicts teacher views on the standardisation of first-year courses. It contrasts responses to two statements: one, for each compulsory first-year English course (such as Discussion), *all* first-year students should take a course with the same aims, outcomes and assessment criteria as their peers, and two, that every student *in a single department*, for example Biology, should take a course with the same aims, outcomes and assessment criteria as their peers. As can be seen, there was greater support for the latter statement.

Figure 8

Teachers views on whether course aims, outcomes and assessment criteria should be standardised.



Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree.

There appears to be general support for standardization to a certain extent. As one teacher mentioned, because everybody's supposed to be "doing something similar, "teachers should be able to rely on students having covered certain aspects of writing, or presentation when they take second-year courses. If the students prove to have not covered the necessary skills in their first-year course that is an issue"(T9). Another commented that there would be better outcomes if there were more curriculum coordination- "I enjoy the current curriculum, but it is very fragmented in that they are getting different outcomes depending on the teacher and if they take CALL courses or not" (T1).

Many comments focused more on the practicalities of standardisation than the desirability. One teacher pointed out, "even if you give the same textbook to ten people, you're going to get 10 different lessons" (T19). Another problem with standardisation is the necessary monitoring. One teacher said "I think it has to be more strict to all of the teachers some teachers just ignore... Some teachers have totally different evaluation percentages, so I don't think it is fair" (27). This kind of difference can only be addressed by more monitoring.

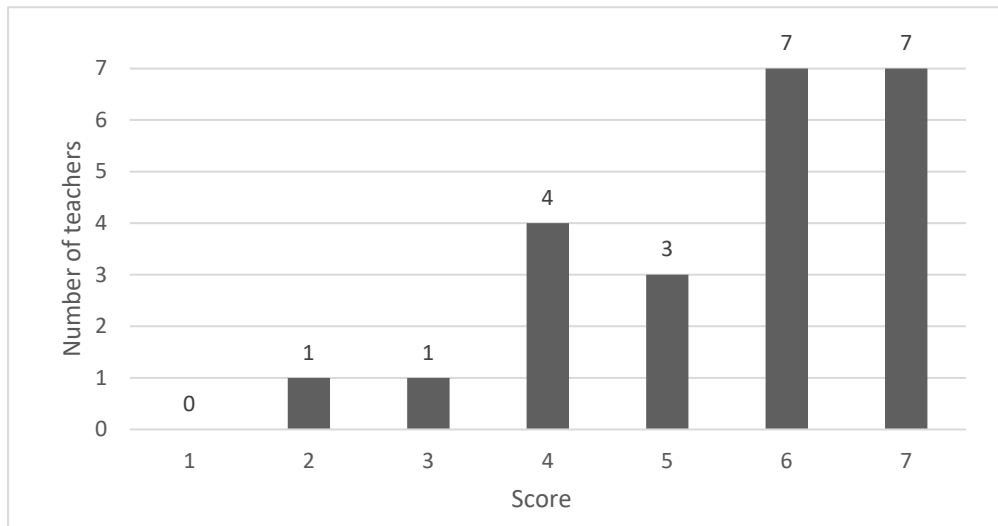
Two teachers mentioned one way of addressing this problem might be to employ more full-time teachers so that there would be a smaller total number of teachers and the range of approaches would be narrower (37). On a related issue, it was pointed out that part-time teachers are paid for two hours of activity for each class, for a 90-minute class, which limits preparation and evaluation to thirty minutes. This means that standardising the detail of feedback and evaluation could be problematic. As one teacher said, "some people aren't being paid to do it and that doesn't seem to be fair. So that's why it's better to have more full-timers" (T9).

3.7 Preference for the old or new curriculum

Overall, it seems that the post-2020 revised curriculum is preferred by the majority of teachers. Figure 9 provides details. The data is limited to those teachers who have experienced both pre- and post-2020 teaching at Chiba University.

Figure 9

Responses to the statement “Overall, I think the new (post-2020) English curriculum is an improvement on the Pre-2020 English curriculum at Chiba University.”



Note. 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree. The teacher count excludes those who had not experienced the pre-2020 curriculum.

Some teachers preferred the previous curriculum for themselves because of the freedom to teach what and how they liked (T25, T28) but admitted that the revised curriculum might be better for the students.

A number of other areas were explored in the survey, namely, the handling of courses for those who did not gain a credit at their initial opportunity (Repeater courses), elective courses, exam scores substituting for credits, class streaming, and the student feedback questionnaire. These areas are beyond the scope of this report.

4. Discussion

This paper reports on the results of a survey investigating teachers' opinions of the 2020 Fuhon English curriculum revision at Chiba University with a view to gaining an insight into teachers' perspectives on the pedagogical approach, curriculum content and challenges that teachers face while implementing the curriculum. From the results obtained from the survey, it can be seen that teachers are predominantly in favour of the revised curriculum, but there are numerous issues that should be addressed.

For first-year courses, teachers call for more input-based activities in the curriculum. Three measures are under consideration to address this point. Firstly, there should be more

reading input in the current course syllabi. For example, the Discussion course, which is currently being developed in-house, features more background reading and note-taking so that students have the opportunity to not only read but use the information which they obtain from their reading to inform their discussions. Secondly, the current Writing course, which focuses to a lesser or greater extent on academic writing depending on the textbook, will be refocused to include a balance of reading and writing, with more basic features such as formation of complex sentences and paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as practical writing areas such as emailing and writing short essays for standardized English tests. Academic aspects of writing such as citation and referencing can be dealt with in more detail in elective academic writing courses. Thirdly, it is possible that the Interaction course will be replaced by CALL so that all first-year students will take CALL, which offers a variety of input-based listening and vocabulary courses on various topics and fields. These courses encompass a wide range of English levels suitable for all faculties. This plan would result in all first-year students having equal opportunities to take Presentation courses, which are often required in second-year courses. Features of the Interaction course, such as being able to continue an everyday conversation with people you meet casually at university, work or overseas, and the current compulsory attendance at the university self-access centre for conversation sessions can be integrated into the Discussion and Presentation courses.

For second-year ESF courses, major points that arose were a lack of communication leading to difficulty in integrating or relating content between the first, second, and third years, and the unsuitability of two of the ESF coursebooks. To address these points, firstly, we plan to initiate more communication between the departments to gain a better understanding of the needs and current aims of each department with regard to English language education. Additionally, more information will be obtained concerning the fit between second-year and third-year course content. Further, in-house materials for the courses using more relevant input will be gradually phased in through a process of materials production, piloting, editing and finally introduction.

For second-year CTE courses, the main problems may have stemmed from it being the first time that the materials had been used by all teachers. Several teachers mentioned the need to get used to the materials and the need to adapt to meet their students' levels. Therefore, any action regarding this course will be delayed until teachers have had a chance to teach the course twice and further feedback has been received.

Finally, with regard to standardization, as teachers pointed out, it is not possible to completely standardize courses because each teacher and each class is different. However,

especially across classes in the same department, most teachers agree that it is fairer if all students are working towards the same aims and have the same evaluation criteria. To this end, although it is not possible for all classes to be observed given the lack of potential observers and the fact that there are more than 500 classes, it is possible to check syllabi more rigorously to ensure that teachers are using equivalent aims and criteria. It may also be possible to arrange for more peer observations, but both part-time and full-time teachers' schedules are busy, so time constraints are a major hurdle.

5. Conclusion

Four years after its inception, the revised general English curriculum appears to have been well-received by teachers and students alike. However, as with any curriculum, syllabus or class, it will always be a work in progress. As such, it is essential to receive feedback from all stakeholders, particularly the students and teachers, so that each course can be regularly reviewed and improved. This feedback and review process will be ongoing with the long-term goal of creating a well-structured curriculum that will help students to develop their English skills throughout their time at university.

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