

2. Intercultural competence for English teacher education

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Abstract

This paper proposes an English teacher education program in intercultural competence in a university. It takes an English teacher certificate program in a Japanese university as an example to discuss issues related to setting up the new program. First, it overviews the current status of the English language as well as purposes of learning and teaching English in Japan. Second, the paper describes the components of the existing English teacher education program. Third, it proposes a series of agendas to create a new English teacher education program in a university.

Introduction

Browne and Wada (1995) describe the backgrounds of current English teachers in Chiba Prefecture in Japan.

EFL teachers in Japan typically major in English literature in college, a trend that holds true in Chiba Prefecture where between 63% (*ippan*¹) and 75% (*jitsugyo*) of the teachers reported that they majored in literature. In most cases, prospective English teachers studying in literature departments are not required to take any additional courses in second language acquisition theory, ESL methodology and techniques, or testing. The only major requirement for becoming an English teacher beyond taking the prerequisite English literature department courses and passing a written test is to complete two weeks of practice teaching, usually with another teacher who has also majored in English literature (101).

They surveyed the background and training, the priorities and the problems 228 high school English teachers face in the classroom and the influence that the 1994 Ministry of Education Course of Study Guidelines have actually had on teaching practice. The results indicated "that the type of response a teacher was likely to give varied clearly according to the teachers' major in college and the amount of previous team-teaching experience she or he had" (98). This study shows that the

current practice of individual teachers is based more on what they have learned for the preparation to become a teacher than on what they are advised by the guideline after they became teachers. Thus, it is necessary to point out that what a teacher has to acquire for teaching in a teacher preparatory course in a university has a primary importance in shaping her/his way to teach English at school in the future. This paper first looks at the current status of English in Japan in order to find out what kinds of elements should be included in the preparatory course for a teaching certificate in Japan.

Current Status of English in Japan

Hoffer and Honna (1999) describe the current status of the English language in Japan.

Japanese has primarily absorbed loanwords from China and, more recently, from English. Over the past five decades, the number of English loanwords has grown geometrically from near zero to over 30,000. Clearly, English has diffused into almost all aspects of Japanese society, from ordinary conversation to governmental documents. Yet in neither the Chinese nor English borrowing situation was there any strong or prolonged intimate contact between the two cultures. Perhaps the voluntary nature of the absorption has muted, to at least some degree, the reactions against the pervasive presence of English in the school system and of borrowed words in almost all areas of Japanese life (48).

English was introduced to Japanese education as a required subject in junior and senior high school about 50 years ago. There has been an increase of emphasis on understanding written texts of English as well as the role of English among all subjects that students have to take for entrance examinations for high schools and universities. "The use of Chinese did not extend beyond the élite classes to the ordinary farmers and others" (50). The use of English texts includes textbooks of subjects such as science and social sciences in all educational settings. Also, English loanwords appear in international travel books, advertisements and popular magazines with for example, new words with Japanese inflectional endings such as "daburu" from 'double' (increase) plus the verbal ending 'ru' or as acronyms such as ABC for American or Australian Broadcasting Company (50-52). As a matter of

fact, because these acronyms have been used both orally and in texts with Japanese translated words only, not many people know how they were formed originally without referring to dictionaries of new words in Japanese published annually.

However, neither Chinese nor English have changed the syntax or phonology of Japanese. None of the loanwords are pronounced in the original Chinese nor English but in Japanese ways. When it comes to using these words in communicating with speakers of Chinese or English, the Japanese way of pronouncing these words is not comprehensible to the speakers of either of the languages. With regards to reading the texts written in Chinese and English, it is not possible to understand the exact meaning of the text in Chinese or in English because of the syntactical differences between the three languages. With regards to writing in English, one's knowledge of Chinese and English loanwords can rarely go beyond already acquired skills in translating Japanese to English sentences.

This raises a key question: Does a resident² in Japan need to use English in everyday life and if so when? Since a standardized variety of Japanese was created and taught in the new school system under the Meiji (1868-1913AD) government in the latter half of the 19th century, it is rare that a standardized variety of Japanese is incomprehensible in Japan. However, many learners abroad who studied this standardized variety of Japanese through textbooks have found out that there are no native speakers of this variety to whom these learners can talk. In other words, most of the Japanese outside of the Tokyo metropolitan area are aware of the fact that they have to use the standardized variety when traveling outside of the area where they speak their own variety of the language. There is no need for a resident in Japan to use any word of English to live, shop and work as long as they can speak the standard variety of Japanese in addition to a regional variation of Japanese in their own community.

Statistically speaking, the number of residents of Japan travelling abroad has been increasing year by year. But even when they travel, they tend to travel less than a week at a time and in an extreme case³, they do not even stay in a foreign country long enough to speak a word of English.

Since Japan was considered a country with great success in business in the 1980's, the number of people who are able to communicate in Japanese has increased

significantly. By any account, opportunities for speakers of Japanese to communicate with speakers of English in everyday life is in a way an illusion. For example, if they pay tuition to speak English in a private English school, then, what would be the purpose of learning English at school? The foremost reason for learning English is to pass an entrance examination for high schools and to eventually secure a better salaried job or to advance one's economic status.

Hoffer and Honna (1999) describe the situation as follows:

Competence, in at least written English, became a critical factor in a pass or fail at the entrance examinations for higher education and, for many Japanese students, a high test mark is almost exclusively the only purpose for study (52).

Therefore, a common claim that the Japanese know how to read and write English but not how to communicate is far from the actual situation. What they are required to know at school is to read English texts through constant translations from English to Japanese based on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in English. What's worse is that even one's knowledge of IPA (International Phonetic Alphabets) about how a word should be pronounced is more important in distinguishing two underlined words in a multiple choice test than in producing these words orally!

Intercultural Competence

Let us look at what an English teacher does in any class every day. The teacher presents new material to her/his students. Second, s/he makes students practice new material in the classroom. Third, s/he explains the grammar rules behind the material. But usually in a class in Japan, teachers do not use new material in freer, less controlled contexts and more spontaneous conversation than the first three steps above. Fantini (1997) goes beyond these three steps to make language teachers "Interculturally competent."

4. transposition and use of new material (in accumulation with other materials previously learned by the students) into freer, less controlled contexts and more spontaneous conversation
5. sociolinguistic exploration of the interrelationships of social context and language use, emphasizing the appropriateness of specific

- language styles (as opposed to grammatically)
6. culture exploration for determining appropriate interactional strategies and behaviors, while also learning about values, beliefs, customs, and so on of the target culture
 7. intercultural exploration for comparing and contrasting the target culture with the student's native culture (40-41).

Fantini (*ibid*) goes on to explain in his article that "one need not necessarily follow the sequence of the stages as they appear in the framework itself"(41) and suggests that one could "start with Stage 6 (or possibly 5 or even 7) to provide a target cultural event as a starting point for the language lesson that follows and flows from it" (42).

English has become an international language in the last two decades. But this does not mean that a learner can learn just grammar and pronunciation of English without understanding at least one English speaking culture such as that of the USA, the UK, AU, NZ, India, Singapore, or South Africa. An artificially developed language, Esperanto⁴ has already shown us that a language is not able to develop new words without social context, i.e. having its own culture. Unfortunately, the English language learning agenda set by the Ministry of Education (MOE hereafter) in Japan does not really specify which cultures are involved in learning English. Although the 1994 MOE Course of Study advocates the development of students' communicative ability, every MOE-approved "textbook comes with a teacher's manual that has detailed lesson plans emphasizing translation and drill-focused teaching techniques, it is not surprising that a wide gap exists between the communicative goals of the guideline and actual classroom practice" Browne and Wada (1995).

The concept of "communicative competence" was first described as ability for use by Hymes (1972). Speakers of a language develop their ability in using a language in socially appropriate matter. This does not mean all native speakers of a language are equally communicatively competent. One purpose of language education therefore is for children to develop their native language's communicative competence to live in and to cope with their own community. Exercises in classrooms can make learners more aware of the appropriateness of their speech in communicating with others from different ages, sex, ethnic origins,

socio-economical status and so forth. Explanations can be given about the differences in appropriateness manifested between Japanese and English as well as among different varieties of Japanese.

A recent study conducted by Hinenoya and Gatbonton (2000) revealed that most of the 108 adult Japanese involved in his study living in North America accepted ethnocentric descriptions about Japanese culture and language. For example, the Japanese are shy, introverted and group oriented. However, there is still a danger to conclude that this is true to any resident in Japan. The characteristics of "the Japanese" come from the elite who were able to survive in this severe screening system of education. Mouer and Sugimoto (1985) were the first to challenge this common view. They argued that generalization about the culture and traditions is on the basis of observations of its male elite sector (150). Sugimoto (1997) who looked at Japan's population distribution, argues that the elite (minority) consists of male (49%), university graduates (12%), workers in large firms with 300 or more employees (12%) and unionists (24%) while the majority consists of female (51%), those without university education (88%), workers in small firms with less than 300 employees (88%) and non-unionists (76%). In another words, any teacher for junior and senior high school will work in classrooms with those who will not only become the minority elite (for example, university graduates, 12% of the population) but also those who will become the majority (for example, those without university education, 88% of the population) in Japanese society. What they need to be aware of is that Japan is a multi-stratified and a multi-cultural society rather than the monolingual and mono-cultural society that the elite and the MOE advocate.

The image of multicultural Japan may sit uncomfortably with the relatively homogeneous racial makeup of Japanese society, yet subcultures do proliferate on a number of non-racial dimensions, such as region, gender, age, occupation, education, and so forth. To the extent that subculture is defined as a set of value expectations and life-styles shared by a section of a given population, Japanese society indeed reveals an abundance of subcultural groupings along these lines. As conglomerate of subcultures, Japan may be viewed as a multicultural society, or a multi-subcultural society. Furthermore, most subcultural units are rank ordered in terms of access to

various resources including economic privilege, political power, social prestige, information, and knowledge. In this sense, Japan is a multi stratified society as well. (Sugimoto 1997: 10)

Of course, this is true in all societies. There is no society where everybody shares one social status, one ethnic group and one variety of a language. However, many learners of English in Japan have been instructed subject matters under the image of Japan as a monolingual and mono cultural society. This view is manifested in documents prepared by the Ministry of Education in Japan. According to Hashimoto (2000) who examined the Japanese government's educational policy documents including the one above, the main focus in improving communication skills of the students is that they have to be internationalised so that they can re-establish Japanese identity after the war and be provided a view of self (Japan) and of the other (the rest of the world) (40). She also argues that "internationalisation functions to isolate rather than to integrate foreign cultures" (ibid: 41). In another words, the Japanese need to be communicatively competent in English to promote the authorized view of the Japanese culture and its people to the rest of the world.

Because of this view, what constitutes Japanese history within textbooks is a primary concern of the government. Historically speaking, the textbooks written and edited by private publishers and used at public schools have been screened by the MOE. However, the MOE "intensified the severity of the screening process to make textbooks conform with the standards set forth in the Course of Study"⁵ Horio (1988) and thus the textbook authorization forced the writers of the textbooks to meet the standard of the MOE before any textbook was published⁶. The main MOE argument in textbook authorization is that current textbooks in Japan should reflect contemporary Japanese culture and society Hashimoto (1997).

The practice of teaching as a whole in Japan has been constantly influenced by the changes in the Japanese government's educational policy. However, according to the ethnographic studies of teachers' experiences of schooling by Okano and Tsuchiya (1999), teachers "do possess a certain amount of autonomy in conducting what they believe to be their responsibilities, and will continue to do so despite changes taking place at the national policy level" (191). Because of the fact that individual teachers can practice what they believe in, what they need to know prior to their initial experience in teaching has a primary importance in education.

In summary, what most residents in Japan need to develop in education is not only their reading and writing skills but also a skill on an individual basis to communicate in Japanese in an appropriate way with the people from different ethnic, cultural, socio-economical and language backgrounds residing in Japan. At the same time, what those who advance their studies to higher education need not only the skills above but also reading skills in English and in Japanese as well as writing skills to improve their communicative competence in both languages. From this point of view, the next section examines what is necessary for a teacher trainee to learn in a teaching certificate program before teaching in a school in Japan.

Teaching certificate program

The current categories of subjects that any English teacher trainee has to study in a teacher preparatory course in a university are English linguistics, English literature, English communication and comparative culture. For a teaching certificate for junior and senior high schools, teacher trainees need to take classes in methods of teaching English in addition to general subjects such as principles of education and so forth. Let us look at the components of these four categories one at a time as well as the content of a class in methods of teaching English in order to find out the necessary ingredients for each subject.

English Linguistics and Literature

Common textbooks used for English linguistics usually contain descriptions of English language syntax, phonology and morphology. In addition to describing the linguistic features of English, a class needs to cover how to facilitate learners of English in acquiring these features in reading, writing, speaking and listening skills for informal as well as formal situations. The most comprehensive English grammar book for teachers to date is written by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999). Their book provides us with a comprehensive grammar of English with very practical exercises.

An instructor for English linguistics should focus on the current status of English in the world and how English is used in texts, mass media and on Internet. The same emphasis can be applied to the class of English literature. Literature should not be limited to only texts because people all over the world are now provided information not only via visual forms of media such as TV and movies but also through music, the performing arts and the Internet.

English communication skills and comparative culture

English communication skill classes need to work on both the integrated skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and also to develop intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence helps students to recognize that all people come from different cultural backgrounds manifested in behaviour and speech. This applies not only to the speakers of the target language, i.e. English, but also to the classmates of the learners. With regards to teaching materials, i.e. the content of the classes as well as the system of evaluation, there should be regular meetings between teachers of these classes and teachers of English classes of communication skills and reading and writing skills (called English Teacher Meetings: ETM hereafter).

Through these communication classes at the end of students' second year, the English proficiency level of teacher trainees should reach the stage where they can use English in writing as well as in communication comfortably at least in informal situations. If this is not possible, how can their future students do it? One possible solution for those who do not reach a required proficiency and performance level is to go to an English as a second language program where English is spoken in a social context. The country where individual students go can be chosen by them as long as they meet the criteria of English proficiency and performance set by their ETM when they return to Japan.

For at least another year, they need to take classes taught in English, for example, subjects with specific content such as "world Englishes" to find out that there are more non-native speakers of English than native speakers of English in the world. Last but not least, teacher trainees should participate in another language class or live in a community ideally of a language spoken in Japan such as Korean, the languages of Okinawa and Ainu or Persian (used by new immigrants). Learning one of these languages can facilitate their understanding of diversity in Japanese societies.

The components of the four categories mentioned above are suggested for the teacher preparation requisite courses based on the discussion about the current status of English in Japan. However, knowledge and experience as a student is not enough for teacher trainees. They need to know exactly both what a beginning level

foreign language learner would encounter in a classroom including evaluation and what a teacher would encounter once s/he starts teaching in a school.

English Tests

One of the reasons why there is a number of English learners who take an English proficiency test such as TOEFL, TOEIC, and STEP in Japan is that many people see these tests as equivalent to school entrance examinations. According to Honna (1995);

more than 600,000 persons have taken TOEIC (Test of English for Intercultural Communication) tests during the period of 1979 to 1994. TOEIC is administered by a corporation endorsed by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. The STEP (Standard Test of English Proficiency), that is supported by the Ministry of Education, is more popular, attracting more than 1,310,000 examinees in the first of a twice-a-year series of tests in 1994...

154,609 Japanese native speakers took TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) in 1990-1991 (57-58).

Although these numbers are impressive, they do not concern the "majority" of the residents in Japan (as of 1990, the population in Japan is about 123,600,000). For example, if we simply divide 600,000 by 15 years, annual examinees would go down to 40,000 per year. Another simple calculation of 40,000 and 1,310,000 and 154,609 (note that years of these tests are different and not all Japanese took TOEFL in Japan) would sum up to 1,504,609, which is only 12% of the population if no one took more than one of the three tests. These numbers reflect a common notion of the "minority" (as Sugimoto calls it earlier in this paper). A good score in these tests might be lead to their advancement to a higher salary job supposedly leading to a better economic situation than that of their current status.

A teacher trainee needs to know not only that there are these kinds of tests, but also that there are other types of assessment available for language learners. Assessment should reflect what learners need at the end of their study. High scores in the English section of university entrance examinations do not concern all of those who graduate from high schools. In other words, assessment depends on the purpose of an individual's study program. Of course, teachers cannot assume the sole purpose of learning English is to pass a test.

Even in a classroom where everybody has to use the same authorized textbook provided by the government, teachers can have the autonomy to assess their students' performance. Teachers have to know multiple ways to assess this performance on the basis of communicative competence. These multiple ways should include both discrete point pen and pencil type of examinations and performance tests of writing and communication⁷.

Comparative culture

Classes in comparative culture should cover the different facets of the communities that they compare. A simple comparison such as one between the Japanese language and the English language is not enough. This type of comparison can reveal only similarities and differences between the two languages as a whole. As noted earlier, the more we compare the two at a macro level, the more we generalize about the languages as a whole without noticing (1) that there are micro level differences and similarities among individual speakers of these languages and (2) that unique features detected in one language might not be unique at all when compared with another language. For this aspect, projects and reports teach expository writing in Japanese as well as facilitating the communicative ability of learners to deal with people from different backgrounds.

Methods of English teaching

Methods of English teaching should include all the aspects mentioned above so that teacher trainees can be sensitive to individual needs in learning a new language. Professors should cover (1) methods and approaches in teaching English as a second language where there are learners from different language backgrounds and where students share the same variety of a language and (2) approaches in using modern technology such as computers and Internet for learning and teaching. In addition, students should be required to take an English Teaching Certificate course held intensively in AU, the UK or the USA. This type of course can provide practical TESOL training where participants develop skills in planning lessons and teaching speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, and culture. The course should include planning lessons and fifteen hours of practice teaching to ESL students. Trainers observe trainees' teaching and give practical advice after each session.

Seminar class

There are two remaining aspects to be covered in a teacher certificate course:

(1) the ability to cope with different teaching environments and (2) the ability to work with colleagues, administrators and staff in order to develop materials and facilities for an evolving agenda. Teaching environments could include private or public schools, junior or senior high schools, female, male or coeducational schools, schools with different degrees of emphasis for entrance examination or for future jobs. Unless teachers are employed by a private institution, they become a part of the Japanese public school system that can transfer any teacher to a school in any part of a prefecture at any time. Therefore, teacher trainees should acquire the basic principles of teaching as well as develop their skills in responding to the specific needs of the school where they teach.

The second aspect is how to cope with the colleagues, administrators and staff at their school in order to develop materials and facilities for their evolving agenda. For example, based on recent advances in technology, the government encourages all schools to be equipped with computers and Internet connections. However, many schools buy new equipment without sufficient knowledge of how to utilize this equipment for their actual teaching. What's worse is that they buy new books, CD-ROMS and software along with this equipment based on suggestions of independent providers. This was the same situation with language laboratories. Equipment can provide extra help for learners as long as they know how to use it and teachers and learners know the advantage of new equipment over whatever they had before. Some teachers fantasize that these machines can give relief from their teaching load. It is necessary for teacher trainees to understand what is involved in learning and teaching and how to cope with their colleagues, administrators and staff at their school in order to develop materials and facilities for their specific needs when a new budget for a new agenda reaches their school.

Unfortunately, neither of these aspects is covered in a university in subjects taught for general-purpose courses leading to a regular teaching certificate other than for education majors. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, many English teachers graduate with a literature major but not with an education major. For literature majors, these aspects should be covered in seminar classes.

Seminar teachers need to be from the full-time English teaching staff. Before students go on to their second year, the seminar teachers have to describe the list of courses to all students interested in becoming English teachers. They must

provide these students with several short sessions about class requirements, English proficiency and performance requirements⁸, and seminar requirements. Here is the list of things that the seminar classes need to cover:

1. Preparation for taking the examination to become a public and private school English teacher at elementary and secondary schools.
2. Preparation for assisting in teaching the first and second year English classes of communication, reading/writing and computer skills. This can provide students with practice teaching experience prior to the two-week practice teaching period to receive a teaching certificate by each regional government.
3. Preparation to help out in the self-access center and the international center on campus. The self-access center has listening, reading and audiovisual materials and CD-ROMs and DVD-ROMs. The international center has materials to prepare students for study abroad.
4. Preparation for the oral comprehensive examination for the understanding of Japanese society as an alternative to a graduation thesis⁹.

Conclusion

Through this paper, I have tried to examine the current status of English in Japan in order to find out what needs to be developed by individual learners at schools in general and in language classrooms in particular. What most residents in Japan need to develop is not only their reading and writing skills but also a skill on an individual basis to communicate in an appropriate way with the people from different ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and language backgrounds residing in Japan in Japanese. At the same time, what those who advance their studies to higher education need is not only the skills above but also reading skills in English and in Japanese as well as writing skills to improve their communicative skills in both languages. From this point of view, a number of suggestions were made to make a teaching certificate program applicable to the current situation in Japan.

There is a need, however, to find out if any of these claims in this paper reflects current Japanese society. This is done not by questionnaires or surveys but by ethnographic studies to reveal what the Japanese do in everyday life rather than what they believe they do. There is also a need to find out if this proposed scheme can produce interculturally competent English teachers at the end of a teaching

certificate program. Last but not least, there is a need to develop a type of an in-house evaluation system before, during and after teacher training

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(Endnotes)

1 There are two types of high schools in Japan. One type is called "ippan," general subjects are taught at schools while the other type is called "jitsugyo," technical subjects such as agriculture and technology are mainly taught at schools. But both types of schools require their students to take English as a subject matter.

2 Throughout this paper, I use the word "resident" to include everyone living in Japan instead of "Japanese" since there are a significant number of non-Japanese citizens who are entitled to education. These residents include 700,000 Koreans as well as new immigrants such as Iranians in Japan.

3 For example, in a so called "bullet trip" to cheer on the Japanese team in the Olympics or World Cup soccer games, members of this tour leave Japan on Friday night, arrive in a country to sit in a stadium on Saturday and leave the country on Saturday night to come back to Japan on Sunday.

4 According to the Web version of Britannica (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=33601&tocid=0&query=esperanto>), it is "artificial language constructed in 1887 by L.L. Zamenhof, a Polish oculist, and intended for use as an international second language. Zamenhof's *Fundamento de Esperanto*, published in 1905, lays down the basic principles of the language's structure and formation.

Esperanto is relatively simple for Europeans to learn because its words are derived from roots commonly found in the European languages, particularly in the Romance languages. Orthography is phonetic, all words being spelled as pronounced. Grammar is simple and regular; there are characteristic word endings for nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Nouns have no gender and are marked by the ending *-o*; the plural is indicated by *-oj* (pronounced *-oy*), and the objective (accusative) case by *-on*, plural *-ojn*: *amiko* "friend," *amikoj* "friends," *amikon* "friend (accusative)," *amikojn* "friends (accusative)." There is only one definite article, *la* (e.g., *la amiko* "the friend"), and no indefinite article. Adjectives end in *-a* (e.g., *bona amiko* "good friend") and take plural and objective endings to agree with nouns (e.g., *la bonaj amikoj estas tie* "the good friends are there," *mi havas bonajn amikojn* "I have good friends"). Verbs are all regular and have only one form for each tense or mood; they are not inflected for person or number (*mi havas, vi havas, si havas, ili havas* "I have, you have, she has, they have"). There is an extensive set of suffixes that can be added to word roots to allow various shades of meaning or newly derived forms; compound words are also used.

The central office of the worldwide Universal Esperanto Association is in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The UEA has a membership of about 40,000 in over 100 countries with more than 1000 members in Netherland, Poland, France, England, Japan and the USA.

5 The Course of Study is called *Gakushu Shido Yoryo* meaning an outline of curriculum first published in 1947 and edited annually by the MOE.

6 “Professor Saburo Ienaga challenged the MOE’s system of textbook authorization in three court cases... In August 1997 the Supreme Court handed Ienaga another partial victory. It judges that the authorization system itself conformed to the Constitution but that the system could produce an illegal outcome if implemented in an unjust way; for example, if it involved excessive government intervention in the details of the textbook’s content. The Court ruled that Ienaga was not required to rewrite four of the eight sections in the textbook that the MOE had demanded be modified in order for it to receive authorization” (Okano 1999: 42-43).

7 For example, Futaba (in progress) proposes to develop in-house Assessment for English Proficiency in addition to standardized performance tests such as TOEFL and TOEIC.

8 Futaba (in progress) proposes to develop in-house assessment for English performance in addition to Standardized proficiency testing.

9 Futaba (in progress) proposes to develop an oral comprehensive examination for the understanding of Japanese society as an alternative for graduation thesis.