

The Implementation of Extra-Curricular Programmes: TOEIC and TOEFL Intensives in University Vacation Time

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Abstract

Recognizing the importance of responding to student needs, these frequently reflecting changes in the wider context of education and employment, this paper explores the need for extra-curricular courses, and details the experience of organizing and teaching TOEIC and TOEFL extra-curricular programmes for university EFL students. In so doing, it is intended to illuminate an often-overlooked aspect of curriculum development at an institutional level; the implementation of extra-curricular courses, the development of which is often integral to the process of implementation, and to seek to identify factors influencing the successful achievement or otherwise of the learning objectives set. Describing the processes of course proposal, approval, financing, student and teacher recruitment, student assessment

and course evaluation, the paper then seeks to account for the programme's success. Key features that emerge as facilitating the organizational process are the devolving of responsibility to teachers, trust, and the making of minimal demands on the financial and human resources of an institution. Educational achievement is facilitated by a clear focus on student needs, a direct benefit to student motivation, learning and the achievement of course objectives. Educational achievement is further facilitated by the commitment of teachers, by the use of technology and by the fostering of a purposeful and supportive environment.

Need and Instigation

Extra-curricular programmes are common throughout the educational world, serving to supplement or make up for omissions in the regular curriculum of an institution. Demand

may exist but a course is not offered. A proposed course may not meet the minimum quota set for enrolment. A course may exist. However, demand may exceed the places available or curriculum conflicts prevent students enrolling. Additionally, students may wish to enrol once again to further enhance their knowledge or skills. Extra-curricular courses also provide an opportunity to circumvent the rigidity of a fixed curriculum, often monitored by central government bureaucracies. In Japan, once a curricular cycle has been negotiated between a university and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), no changes are permitted until the next curricular cycle—usually four to five years. On occasion, courses are accidentally left out of a curriculum or national standards modified. In these cases, extra-curricular classes can be used to overcome deficiencies, fulfil requirements and meet changing needs.

In the instigation of extra-curricular programmes three primary stakeholders can be identified: the students, the institution, and the teachers. The students are the beneficiaries of a course and often act as instigators. They may identify knowledge and skills needed for the achievement of future goals, or simply of interest, and not available in the regular curriculum. They may then enquire through official and unofficial channels as to how these needs and interests can be met. By so doing, they create an impetus for course creation.

An institution, or a department, may also be an instigator. As plans for short- and long-term goals are developed, courses may be tested prior to implementation. Institutions are also influenced by external factors such as governmental ministries, economic conditions, employers, and other educational institutions,

providing extra-curricular courses as they seek to comply with regulations and respond to environmental change. In addition, institutions may be required to support extra-curricular programmes initiated elsewhere, and involve any or all of the following: planning and organization, administration, funding, and the provision of staff and facilities.

Finally, teachers may also be instigators of extra-curricular programmes. It is one of the roles of a teacher to both respond to needs demonstrated by students and to anticipate needs. This perception, whether gained directly from the students or from familiarity with the wider world of education and employment, can be an important impetus to the development and implementation of extra-curricular courses. Indeed, teachers are frequently the primary instigators and supporters of such courses, identifying needs, alerting the administration, and making suggestions for curricular change.

Despite the above noted widespread prevalence of extra-curricular offerings, literature dealing with the organizational processes involved and seeking to identify features influential in programme success or otherwise is relatively scarce. This paper, therefore, seeks to address this shortcoming by examining the development and implementation of two extra-curricular courses, summer and winter TOEFL and TOEIC intensives, provided by the World Language Center (WLC) at Soka University. In doing so, the paper also seeks to judge the programme through the eyes of its students, those stakeholders most engaged, and to determine whether they regard it as one meeting their needs.

Context and Response

The summer and winter intensives at Soka University have been offered every year since summer 2000, a response to needs demonstrated by the students and recognized by teachers and the university's administration. The university, however, and its students, do not exist in a vacuum. It is then appropriate, briefly, to consider the wider context within which these initiatives arose.

International

Of the influences that can be identified, one stands out—that of globalization, a process that in recent years has affected cultures (Appadurai, 2001), economies, commerce and competitiveness (Boudreaux, 2008), as well as the world of higher education (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). It is a world in which business and governments value ever more highly the role of tertiary education in an increasingly competitive, technological, and knowledge-based international economy (Stromquist, 2002). As a result, the world of higher education has itself become increasingly commercialized, competitive and international, responding to the flow of capital and students, the needs of commerce and industry, and the calls of governments (Bok, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1999; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). These developments have in turn been accompanied by the growth of English as an international language (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 1999, 2006), the use of English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007) in business, commerce, politics, science, technology, and in higher education. Consequently, in an effort to maintain the competitiveness of Japan on the international stage, the Japa-

nese government has responded with a series of initiatives to reform the teaching of English throughout the educational system from primary to tertiary levels. In an *Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities*, MEXT addresses English levels desirable in Japanese nationals to be attained in junior and senior high schools. Additionally, in order to achieve 'English levels desirable in personnel who work in an international community' the Plan requires that 'each university should set achievement goals in order to cultivate personnel who can use English in their profession' (MEXT, 2002).

Institutional

In the mid- to late-1990s, within the above context, Soka University expanded its overseas exchange programme, a response to a rapidly changing international educational environment; a global knowledge economy of increasing student mobility (Gürüz, 2008) and academic globalization, a 'free trade in minds' (Wildavsky, 2010) in which both Soka University and its students wished to participate. However, a stipulation for a student to be accepted for most exchanges was a score of 500 or more on the paper-based TOEFL (PB TOEFL). As Soka University did not offer TOEFL preparation courses within the regular curriculum, students were unfamiliar with the test and few were able to attain the scores required. In 2001 the opening, in California, of Soka University of America to which many students at Soka University in Japan wished to apply, compounded this situation. Acceptance also required a score of 500 PB TOEFL or 173 on the Computer-Based TOEFL (CBT).

Of further concern were course offerings within the WLC, and restrictions on language

study imposed by some academic departments. Within the WLC primary focus was given to general communication courses with writing only offered to advanced level students. No preparation classes for external examinations were provided, a significant handicap for students wishing to study overseas. Additionally, some students were only able to take designated courses related to their major areas of study, for example, business English. For students wishing to pursue personal goals, there was then a need for courses supplemental to those then on offer. The university administration became aware of the need for TOEFL specific courses as students failed to qualify for the exchange programmes. Students unable to meet the requirements also raised the issue, as did teachers providing out of hours assistance. Additionally, unofficial records comparing the TOEFL-ITP scores of incoming freshmen with scores at the end of their first year of study revealed no significant increase. That is, the English communication courses offered were ineffective in building skills required to achieve a satisfactory TOEFL score. However, due to a fixed curricular cycle, one monitored by MEXT, it would be three years before new courses could be initiated.

Students began to seek assistance to prepare for TOEFL, teachers tutoring individuals in their offices. Additionally, in the spring of 2000, one teacher was allowed to offer TOEFL preparation in normal class time by changing the content of two sections of an existing course. However, the level (elementary), the year (freshmen), and the limited registration (a total of 48) did not include most students with a pressing need for TOEFL preparation. Consequently, that spring, two part-time teachers proposed to offer an extra-curricular

intensive TOEFL course during the summer break. Permission was granted by the university with the stipulation that the course be self-financing, and that, beyond the provision of minimal administrative support, notably the collection of fees, the provision of facilities, and the payment of salaries, the course was to be administered and organized by the teachers themselves. Successful conclusion of the summer intensive led to a winter intensive with a focus on the Test of Written English (TWE), newly introduced as part of TOEFL in autumn 2000. This dual format has evolved into a Winter Intensive offering iBT Writing and TOEIC tracks, and a Summer Intensive offering iBT (Listening/Reading/Speaking) and TOEIC tracks (Table 1).

The Organizational Process

The following describes the implementation of a typical summer intensive. The chronological order, however, is the same for both summer and winter courses. The process opens early in the semester with preliminary discussions between the intensive course coordinator and the WLC office. Contact between the WLC office and teachers who assist the course coordinator is the only area in which the university administration is involved. The preliminary discussions take place in late April or early May and deal with dates, classrooms, the times and locations for orientation sessions, estimation of enrolment, and availability of teachers. Provided the courses fall within the parameters previously agreed no permission is needed from the university. The main requirements are that the courses be self-financing, and consist of 24 ninety-minute periods of instruction, inclusive of pre- and post-course

Table 1. Soka University Summer and Winter Intensive Course Statistics 2000-2010

Intensive	Year	Type	Students	Credits*	Teachers
Summer	2000	PB TOEFL (TOEFL-ITP)	36	N/A	3
Winter	2001	TWE Writing	49	N/A	3
Summer	2001	PB TOEFL (TOEFL-ITP)	79*	N/A	*
Winter	2002	TWE Writing	53*	N/A	*
Summer	2002	PB TOEFL (TOEFL-ITP)	49	N/A	3
Winter	2003	TWE Writing	44	N/A	3
Summer	2003	PB TOEFL (TOEFL-ITP)	115	N/A	5
Winter	2004	TWE Writing	42	N/A	3
Summer	2004	TOEFL CBT	123	77	4
Winter	2005	TWE Writing	40	31	3
Summer	2005	TOEFL CBT	112	54	4
Winter	2006	TOEFL CBT	42	20	2
Summer	2006	TOEFL CBT	74	42	3
Winter	2007	iBT Writing / TOEFL-ITP	60	41	4
Summer	2007	iBT (Listening / Reading / Speaking) / TOEFL-ITP	162	95	7
Winter	2008	iBT Writing / TOEFL-ITP	60	33	4
Summer	2008	iBT (Listening / Reading / Speaking) / TOEFL-ITP	156	98	7
Winter	2009	iBT Writing / TOEFL-ITP	61	59	4
Summer	2009	iBT (Listening / Reading / Speaking) / TOEFL-ITP	150	90	7
Winter	2010	iBT Writing / TOEIC	67	49	4
Summer	2010	iBT (Listening / Reading / Speaking) / TOEIC	122	31	7
	Totals		1658	720	63

* The option of a credit for the courses was introduced in 2004

assessment.

In late May, a written proposal is submitted to the WLC Coordinators' Committee comprised of the WLC Director, Deputy Director, and teachers with administrative responsibilities. The proposal details the time, location, general content, projected numbers, basic organization, and staffing of the intensive. Permission to proceed has never been refused. Following receipt of permission, faculty are officially approached and asked if they wish to participate. In the past, recruiting staff for an in-vacation course was sometimes problematic. In recent years, however, a small core of faculty has formed. In late May, faculty are offered a provisional teaching slot. The offer,

however, does not guarantee a teaching place. The number of classes cannot be finalized until shortly before the intensive begins.

To lighten the preparation and teaching load, teachers are usually asked to specialize in one skill area. Consequently, a teacher can normally expect to teach one lesson a day to four different classes. As an example, in the summer of 2010, there were 122 students (96 iBT, 26 TOEIC) in 7 classes: one TOEIC, two upper-level iBT, and two lower-level iBT (Table 2). The four lower level classes had four teachers, each specializing in one skill area and teaching one lesson each day to all four classes. The TOEIC class had one teacher for both listening and reading. The two upper-

Table 2. 2010 Summer Intensive Class Organization

Teacher	Course	Skill area
Koike	TOEIC	Listening/Reading
Chirnside	iBT (upper classes)	Independent/Integrated Speaking
Hansford	iBT (upper classes)	Listening/Reading
Daugherty	iBT (lower classes)	Listening
Fearn	iBT (lower classes)	Reading
MacDonald	iBT (lower classes)	Integrated Speaking
Sasaki	iBT (lower classes)	Independent Speaking

level iBT classes had two teachers, each specializing in two skills.

In the middle of June, posters are put up around the university and fliers distributed by WLC teachers in class. These give basic details such as dates, focus, cost, and the times and locations of orientation sessions. The course coordinator conducts two orientation sessions in early July. The two tracks, TOEIC and TOEFL, and their general content are described, teachers named, conditions for entry detailed, and method of payment explained. For entry to the iBT course a minimum ITP or TOEIC score is set. The TOEIC course is open to everyone. Students are informed of the option to obtain a credit.

Although the courses are self-financing, students paying for both tuition and textbooks, no profit is expected. Fees are collected electronically on a machine called Papyrus Mate with the deadline for payment kept as late as possible. Only when the deadline has passed can the coordinator determine how many students have enrolled and how many classes can be formed. To break even an average of fifteen or sixteen students per class is required. Often, in summer, this number is exceeded with the university absorbing any profit thus incurred. There is, however, an unwritten agreement that a profit-making summer course is allowed

to subsidize a loss-making winter one.

The final part of the organizational process involves the allocation of students and teachers to classes. There are usually around 150 students in summer and 60 in winter, but, as these figures cannot be guaranteed, planning is a fluid process. The two variables of number of students enrolled and the ratio of TOEIC to iBT students are wild cards. The final act is to update the intensive website by posting class lists, class schedules, classroom and teacher allocations, and information as to where and when the opening ceremony will be held.

Assessment and Evaluation

Very early in a short course it is essential to form as comprehensive a picture as possible of student ability in order to present a course of instruction of an appropriate level, one making use of suitable materials, instructional techniques and activities. Additionally, it is equally important that there exist means of continuous assessment informative of student learning and needs. Only by so doing can a programme adjust itself quickly to a student body and teachers refine their practice. Furthermore, there should exist a means by which the effectiveness or otherwise of a programme might be evaluated and areas for improvement

identified.

Student Assessment

Assessment begins at registration. Students are asked for their most recent or highest proficiency score on the TOEFL-ITP, TOEFL iBT, or TOEIC test. Scores are used to allocate students to class. Additionally, on the first morning, students take a TOEFL or TOEIC style pre-test to verify placements. The results will also be used to make a comparison with end of course test scores to assess individual progress and to evaluate the course—the degree to which the intensive has achieved intended learning outcomes.

Continuous assessment is based on daily attendance and homework. Attendance is crucial, one day of absence accounts for 6 hours of missed instruction, 16.6 per cent of total course time. Absence also means a student is unlikely to complete homework, assigned daily by each teacher and a core component of the programme. Attendance and marks for homework are reported to the course coordinator daily and entered that day onto Gradekeeper, a grade book programme available online. Students are then able to check their grades daily online. Quizzes may also be used but, with limited teaching time, are optional.

On the afternoon of the final day, students take an end-of-course test to assess their ability to utilize the knowledge and skills emphasized during the course. The final test for TOEIC is a complete test taken from a TOEIC textbook, grading facilitated by the use of scan cards. For the summer and winter TOEFL courses sections of a textbook TOEFL test are used together with original materials prepared by the teachers. All tests are corrected by the teachers, essays and speeches graded

by two or more teachers with scores compared for consistency and inter-rater reliability. Marking is done immediately, one section of the test being marked while students complete another section. The aim is to get final grades to students with minimal delay.

In addition to formal assessment procedures, teachers and students benefit from informal assessment that is a constant throughout the course. Class sizes are relatively small permitting the teachers to gain an understanding of the abilities and needs of individual students. Much time is spent with students working in pairs and groups, the teachers monitoring and assisting where appropriate. It is an approach that encourages students to support each other, the excellent working relationships formed visible during student-student feedback sessions. This sharing of knowledge and provision of support creates a positive learning atmosphere, each student another teacher in the class, allowing the teachers time to monitor and attend to individual needs.

Homework

All teachers assign homework daily. It is an essential element of the programme; vital to the achievement of course aims, continuous assessment, and as a tool informing classroom practice. It provides the teacher with a daily means to assess progress, for students to assess their own progress, and is a valuable source of material for review and further learning. All homework is marked on the day handed in, frequently in the lesson. Feedback is provided promptly, during class, after class, or by email, and may take the form of individual guidance or all class feedback.

The amount of homework has to be balanced

against the intensive nature of the course and students' perceptions of value. According to feedback (Figure 1), the majority average 2-4 hours of homework a day. Students in more advanced classes in general spend less time than students in lower level classes. Student perceptions of the amount of homework during the Summer Intensive 2010 are presented in Table 3. Overall 57% felt the amount of homework was 'About Right', and 16.8% felt there was 'Too Little'. That is, a majority (73.8%) did not find the homework demand excessive or unmanageable. The figure of 5 hours (Figure 1) for some lower-level students is a reflection of a number of factors; the difficulty of the course, the expectations of the teachers, and the expectations students have of themselves.

Nevertheless, it is excessive, as the students' own perceptions reveal (Table 3) with 21.5% finding the amount 'Too much' and 3.7% 'Much too much'. These were, in the main, less advanced students and call for the programme to give more thought to lower level classes, admission criteria, expectations held, demands made, materials used and teaching approach employed.

The Use of Technology

Throughout the programme, technology plays an important role in facilitating assessment, monitoring, guidance, and learning. Students have full use of the university's CALL rooms. The facilities permit the teacher to access individual student's screens and offer guidance as required. Additionally, the facilities permit whole class instruction. Thus, the writing teacher is able to provide timely feedback on an individual and class basis, instruct students on particular items to be focused upon, and give instruction on how to provide each other with targeted and appropriate feedback. For teachers of speaking, a Soft Recorder programme enables students to record their speeches and submit these directly to a teacher. Additionally, the teacher is able to listen to

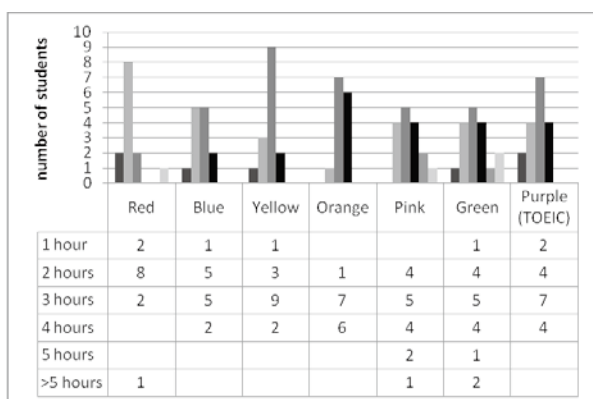


Figure 1. Average Hours Spent on Homework Each Night (Summer Intensive 2010)

Table 3: Student Perceptions of Daily Homework (Summer Intensive 2010)

	Much too much	Too much	About right	Too little	No h/w best
TOEIC Purple	2	9	7	1	0
iBT Red	0	0	2	11	0
iBT Blue	0	1	8	3	0
iBT Yellow	0	3	9	1	1
iBT Orange	1	4	9	1	0
iBT Pink	0	2	13	1	0
iBT Green	1	4	13	0	0
% of respondents	3.7%	21.5%	57%	16.8%	0.9%

each individual student as he or she practises a speech. Once again, this permits direct and timely assistance. Above all, however, the facilities enable students to hear their own attempts to answer TOEFL type questions. Such self-assessment, and the sharing of work with peers, is invaluable in raising student awareness of the demands and difficulty of the speaking task, and their own weaknesses. In short, the CALL room system is an effective tool facilitating the teaching and learning experience, enabling the teacher to monitor, assess and guide individual student development, and enhancing student self-assessment and peer-to-peer assistance.

A further advantage of technology is the access this provides students to monitor their grade, and the effect of this on their engagement. For each intensive a new website is created and, each day, as previously noted, the course coordinator collects all attendance and homework scores, enters these into Gradekeeper and uploads to the Internet. Consequently, students are able to view their progress at any time. This many of them do. Additionally, access to grades is important at the end of the course. Students will need to decide whether or not to accept credit for the course.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the course students complete a course evaluation questionnaire. This seeks to determine how successful the programme has been in achieving the learning goals set, focusing on whether the students themselves feel that the programme has increased their understanding of the TOEFL and TOEIC tests, and enhanced test specific skills. In the first section, students rate the usefulness of

lessons taught on specific sections of the tests based on a 5-point Likert scale. Boxes are provided for additional comments, providing useful feedback to individual teachers and perceptions of the course in general. The second section deals with homework. Remaining sections ask students their reasons for taking the course, ways to improve the course, and suggestions for new courses. In summary, the questionnaire provides evidence for continuation and revision of the programme.

Results from end of course surveys (Figure 2) reveal a high level of student satisfaction. Throughout the years, significant numbers have stated that they were 'extremely' satisfied. When this number is combined with those who were 'very' satisfied, the result is an overwhelming majority more than satisfied. That is, students do find the programme one of value, one meeting their expectations and needs. The survey results make a strong case for continuation of the programme.

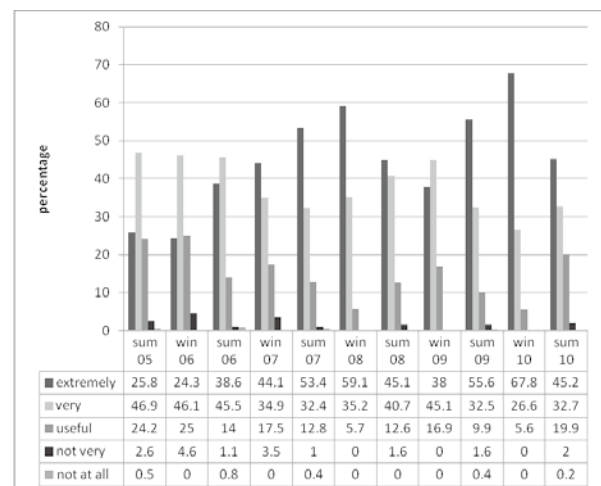


Figure 2. Programme Approval Ratings 2005-2010

Accounting for Success

The programme is successful. Self-financing, it has grown in size and receives high rates of approval. Primarily, however, success is to be measured by the increase in the TOE-

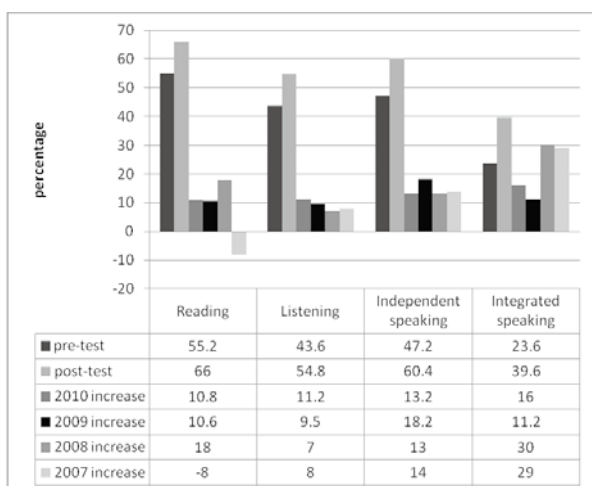


Figure 3. iBT Summer Programme Pre & Post Test Scores 2007-2010

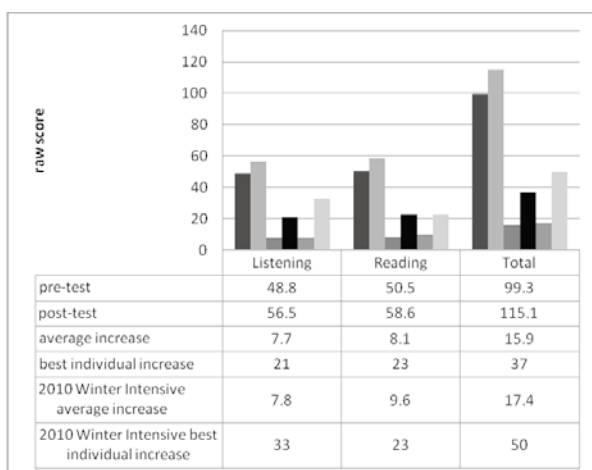


Figure 4. TOEIC Pre & Post Test Scores Summer 2010

FL and TOEIC scores on pre- and post-course tests (Figure 3 & 4).

Across the skill areas the majority of students show improvement, all the more impressive given the short nature of the courses. Success is also to be measured by the results of students subsequently taking the actual tests themselves. Some have informed teachers of their success, others have demonstrated it by admission to the university's exchange programme and by study overseas on graduation.

Student Motivation

Foremost among the factors accounting for

the programme's success are the students. Self-selected from a student body of approximately six thousand, those taking the programme are a small percentage. Furthermore, the students must pay, the courses are optional, and are held in vacation time. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude the students are committed. The high level of attendance substantiates this, as does the high level of completion and standard of homework. Student motivation, widely acknowledged for its influence on learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Williams & Burden, 1997), is a significant factor.

Influencing student choice as to whether to enrol are personal perceptions of need. Undoubtedly these have been influenced by a curricular move within the WLC to place greater emphasis on English for academic purposes (EAP). Compounding this has been the expansion of the exchange programme and the requirement for a demanding TOEFL score. Many students wish to study and travel overseas. Consequently, their motivation to enrol is an extrinsic one, as it is for those with an eye to future employment. Many employers in Japan now ask for TOEFL and TOEIC scores. Additionally, many students enjoy learning languages, their motivation primarily intrinsic. Surprisingly, the offer of a credit does not appear to be an incentive. The number choosing not to accept a credit (Table 1) is indicative here.

Whether for access to the university's exchange programme, for graduate study overseas, travel, employment, or enjoyment, the programme serves the extrinsic and intrinsic needs of a large number of students who make full effort to avail themselves of the opportunity provided. Undoubtedly, whatever the

source of motivation and commitment, the programme has benefitted.

Organizational Factors

Among organizational factors accounting for the programme's success two primary features stand out: the holding of courses in vacation time and the delegation of responsibility to the teachers. Because the courses are held in vacation time, there are no scheduling concerns, no timetable conflicts. Neither teachers nor students have other academic commitments. Isolated from the wider student body and the demands and influences of friends, clubs and major subjects of study, the students are free to concentrate on English in an environment encouraging them to do so. Only English is used throughout the week: both in and out of class, for teaching, socializing and administration. For the majority this is their first exposure to such immersion. It is demanding and exhausting, but it is a situation they respond to. Outside of the scheduled classes, facilities are available well into the evening. The students are to be found completing their homework, developing their skills, and working together in English. The teachers are equally engaged for, with few other commitments, they are able to devote the time and energy required by such an intensive programme. Each evening one or more teachers are scheduled to be available to assist and socialize. This is all conducive to a cooperative, focused and supportive learning experience.

The second feature identified above, the delegation of responsibility to the teachers, should not be underestimated. From the outset the teachers have been responsible for every aspect of the programme, from the initial proposal to the development, organization and

implementation of the programme as it is today. It is one for which they have a definite sense of 'ownership'. With the exception of support from the WLC's office personnel, the programme operates independent of the wider university administration whose involvement is primarily with finance—the receipt of course fees and payments to teachers. It is a situation in which trust has contributed much, permitting teachers to exercise control over course organization, student recruitment, class-size, teacher-student ratio, materials, assessment and evaluation. This delegation of responsibility by the university has permitted the teachers to make full use of their professional training and expertise to initiate and deliver a programme in direct response to needs demonstrated by students and the university itself. It has also meant that administrative and educational issues can be addressed and resolved quickly within the small team. Above all, teachers have been able to focus upon the classroom: course content, instructional techniques and learner outcomes. It is a programme in which the teachers as stakeholders have invested themselves.

The Teachers

The knowledge, skills and commitment of teachers are essential ingredients in any programme's success. Here the programme has been fortunate. The teachers are committed—the programme something they have chosen to do, have organized themselves, and have given up part of their vacation to teach. The hours are long, classroom contact daylong, the marking load heavy, and contact with the students out of class a part of the programme. The teachers are a small group, respect each other's contributions and strengths, work well to-

gether, and are willing to accommodate changes necessitated by family and other circumstances. There is little doubt that the quality of teaching and smooth administration of the programme has benefitted substantially from the close working relationships and professionalism the teachers have brought to the programme.

One particular feature that has benefitted the quality of teaching has been the assignment of teachers to teach one specific skill area. This has enabled the teachers to build expertise in that area, improve classroom practice as they benefit in one lesson from previous lessons, and focus their efforts in a way that would not be the case if preparing and teaching all skills. This benefit is passed on in the quality of teaching and by providing a source of authority to which the students can turn for assistance. As the classes are divided by ability, this also allows the teachers to adjust their teaching—their pace, explanations and activities—to the particular level of the individual class. As Littlejohn (2001) noted, how classes are organized can directly impact on student motivation and learning. By being ‘sensitive to the psychology of language learning’ (Littlejohn, 2001, p.7) in programme organization, and adjusting lesson content and demands to student abilities, weaker students are able to achieve a sense of success, able to build their competence, confidence, and commitment.

An additional strength is the use of both native and non-native speaker teachers. However, rather than whether a teacher is a native or non-native speaker, what is clearly of benefit is that, by rotating teachers through the classes, the students benefit from the teaching and linguistic skills of a variety of teachers who all

bring their own respective strengths to the programme. It is this variety and breadth of expertise that is of importance.

‘Market’ Focus

Another reason for the programme’s success is its very specific focus: preparation for the TOEFL and TOEIC examinations. Students take the courses because success in these examinations meets a variety of their needs. That is, it is a programme with a ‘market’ focus, one that directly addresses the needs of its clientele. For the majority, the courses provide a focused introduction to the examinations, to individual question types, and to examination specific skills and exercises. It is a focus the students wish for, are fully informed of, and commit themselves to. Additionally, the programme addresses needs insufficiently catered for within the WLC. To acquire a high level of speaking and writing skills in a second language requires considerable exposure and practise, something rarely achieved in one or two classes a week over a semester. Furthermore, in Japan there is little exposure to English outside the classroom, little opportunity to build and practise skills. Moreover, when exposure has to date been to the general English taught in high school, students may have had little or no exposure to the demanding and academic nature of the TOEFL iBT, to the skills required to write a logical discursive 5 paragraph essay or to complete academic speaking tasks within tight time constraints. This is a situation compounded at Soka University where, for nearly all students, major areas of study are conducted entirely in Japanese. The intensive courses directly address these shortcomings and student needs.

Working Relationships

That the course is supportive of student endeavour can be seen in the relationship established between staff and students, and that between the students themselves. This is another reason accounting for the programme's success. From the friendly opening session to the closing session in which the teachers provide 'well-done' donuts to all, the intent is to create a friendly, purposeful environment. Few students drop out, few fail to complete their homework, and few appear to spend their evenings involved in social activities. They are helpful of each other and make full use of teacher availability. Additionally, because class sizes are relatively small, the teachers get to know the students as individuals. The prompt return of homework on a daily basis is of benefit here. Equally importantly, the students assist each other and get to know each other, and their teachers, in a way not usual during normal semester classes. There is then a sense of camaraderie among participants. It is after all a six-day intensive course in which only English is used, a demanding and potentially stressful experience. The students bear up well and remain remarkably cheerful, not infrequently expressing their appreciation for the experience and the progress made.

Conclusion

In conclusion, where extra-curricular courses arise out of needs enunciated by the students themselves, or out of needs clearly perceived by all key stakeholders—the student body, the teachers, and the administration—there is a likelihood that such courses will be successful, both in attracting students and in achieving desired learning outcomes, even

when conducted at what may appear to be an unlikely time of year, university vacation time. The experience at Soka University indicates that where an institution has trust in its teachers, and is prepared to devolve responsibility, this can facilitate the smooth running and organization of a programme. Such willingness emerges as more likely where extra-curricular courses make minimal demands on the financial and human resources of an institution, and where teachers have the requisite skills required to meet administrative demands, most notably for record keeping, student assessment, and course evaluation. The motivation of the students themselves, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, is also to the fore. Where students are self-selected, fully informed of the nature of a programme, perceive that programme as having focus and meeting their particular needs, they are likely to be motivated and committed. Additionally, where this commitment is supported by a teaching staff willing to invest themselves and their time in a programme, to co-operate closely with each other and give time to the students, the programme is likely to achieve the learning goals set. This, we believe, has been so with the extra-curricular courses at Soka University.

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