

英語カリキュラム共通課題としての TOEIC練習問題、多読、e-ラーニングの実施について

Online TOEIC, extensive reading, and e-learning: Implementation of common, curriculum-wide English assignments in a Japanese university

マーク D. シーハン

文化政策学部国際文化学科

Mark D. SHEEHAN

Department of International Culture, Faculty of Cultural Policy and Management

杉浦香織

文化政策学部国際文化学科

Kaori SUGIURA

Department of International Culture, Faculty of Cultural Policy and Management

ジャック ライアン

文化政策学部国際文化学科

Jack RYAN

Department of International Culture, Faculty of Cultural Policy and Management

本稿では、静岡文化芸術大学における英語カリキュラム共通課題である1)TOEIC練習問題、2)多読、3)e-ラーニング、の実施目的、内容、方法について報告する。特に2011年度より開始した多読とe-ラーニングについては、効果的な実施方法を探るために学生を対象に予備的に行ったアンケート調査の結果を報告する。主な結果として、課題量については調整が必要である一方、多読やe-learningの課題そのものに対しては有用だという印象をもっていることが明らかになった。また、今後、より効果的に共通課題を実施する方法についても議論する。

This paper describes the implementation of three curriculum-wide assignments for all students enrolled in English courses at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (SUAC). After explaining the rationale behind this undertaking, information on the measures taken to coordinate the assignments across the curriculum is provided. The type of homework required: online TOEIC exercises, Extensive Reading assignments, and E-learning homework, and the intended goals of these tasks are discussed. Furthermore, methods used to confirm student completion of the assignments are explained. To conclude this preliminary study on the process of assigning common homework in an English curriculum, a survey was taken to measure student experiences and perceptions; results from the survey are presented.

Introduction: Curriculum-Wide Implementation of Common Assignments

This preliminary study explains how the requirements for three common homework assignments in all SUAC English courses were put into practice starting in April 2011; however, the groundwork for this type of coordination had been laid prior to the current academic year. Since 2008, English teachers at SUAC have required all students in English Communication 1 through 4 and Upper English Communication 1 through 4 courses to complete approximately eight to ten hours of online TOEIC exercises for homework each semester; the system also includes extra credit options for students who do more than the required work. The progress made using the online TOEIC system has proven that coordination and cooperation in the area of common homework can increase student contact hours with English learning materials and help teachers form a united front for their course requirements; it has also paved the way for an expansion of more assignments in English courses in order to provide students with greater options and more resources to improve their language skills. While

each type of assignment and the intended goals will be described below, an overview of the two new assignments and brief comments on their genesis follows.

In a discussion of common educational frameworks and syllabus design, Marsh states that, "curriculum starts as a plan. It only becomes a reality when teachers implement it with real students in a real classroom" (1990, p.65). Working with a team of cooperative part-time English instructors at SUAC, the authors of this study were able to take the first steps toward implementing new educational initiatives to meet the goals of improving English education at SUAC. One area of focus is the improvement of English reading proficiency. To study ways to foster better English reading habits among Japanese university students, a special research grant from the Dean of the Faculty of Cultural Policy and Management was received in the spring of 2010; the funding was used to start an extensive reading program aimed at strengthening the reading skills of SUAC students. The funds were used to significantly increase the stock of English graded readers in SUAC's library and undertake other measures to

promote extensive reading. To utilize these new materials, curriculum-wide reading requirements were devised to ensure that all students enrolled in English courses read a required number of words each semester. These assignments were the second item added to the list of new, required homework for students in English courses.

The third item, and perhaps the most complex to implement, is a commercial electronic learning system, hereinafter referred to either as e-learning or ALC. Access to the system, which is called *ALC NetAcademy2*, has been funded by SUAC since the spring of 2011 in conjunction with other official measures currently underway to improve English education at the university.

Armed with two online systems, and a new stock of stimulating English library books, the tasks for the authors of this study were to devise ways for students to make use of these materials and for teachers to incorporate them into their courses. Persuading students to shoulder new homework burdens, and requiring teachers to amend their grading schemes and assignment plans was no mean task; the process will be described below followed by survey results that may be instructive for educators involved in curriculum design and the coordination of common educational materials.

Online TOEIC homework system

Students in all departments at SUAC have access

to an online TOEIC system designed to improve language skills and provide practice exercises that match the question style and structure of the TOEIC test. Access to the system is the result of a partnership with English instructors in the Faculty of Sciences and Engineering at Ritsumeikan University. The collaboration includes sharing of curriculum-related ideas and content, and the co-creation of materials for the online system. The system was originally used for students in the English Diploma Course, but has been made available to all SUAC students, whether they are enrolled in English courses or not, since 2008. Test structure familiarity is an important element in improving test scores; therefore, one of the goals of the online system is to provide students with practice in the structure of the TOEIC test. Raising awareness of the question types and the various sections of the test is intended to improve test-taking pace and build confidence. The system can also be used as a resource to improve general English skills such as listening, reading and vocabulary.

Since university-wide access to the online system was initiated, each semester the number of students at SUAC doing the exercises averages from 400 to 500; the number of questions answered averages from 160,000 to 200,000 each semester. System data for the fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters is provided in Figure A1. Top scores and test averages from the fall 2010 and spring 2011 SUAC TOEIC ITP tests

Appendix A.

Online TOEIC System statistics and SUAC ITP TOEIC test data

	Number of students using the system	Number of questions answered
Spring 2011	435	177,001
Fall 2010	416	183,759

Figure A1.

Online TOEIC system use

Test Date	High scores	Average Score
July 2011	925, 815, 800	497 (n=138)
May 2011	835, 830, 825	501 (n=126)
December 2010	830, 780, 775	522 (n=147)
Oct./Nov. 2010*	835, 760, 720	511 (n=48)

Figure A2.

SUAC TOEIC ITP High scores and averages

(*NOTE: The SUAC TOEIC ITP test in October 2010 was cancelled due to a typhoon. The number of test takers declined because of an inability to take the make-up test.)

are provided in Figure A2.

The data in Figures A1 and A2 show that not only are a significant number of students at SUAC logging impressive numbers using the online system, but that SUAC TOEIC test score averages have risen above the reported Japanese university student average of 441 (ETS, 2009). Based on official SUAC score data dating back to 2002, the number of test takers has risen at SUAC and in some cases the averages and high scores have also risen. Due to student privacy and limited faculty access to data, official tracking of TOEIC test scores has only recently begun. It is hoped that more detailed data and greater analysis will be possible in the future. Furthermore, as more students take the TOEIC test at SUAC, the data can be used to address the needs of students at various levels of English proficiency. While improved TOEIC scores are encouraging to students and administrators, many educators realize the need to have more balanced students that can develop beyond standardized tests and test-taking strategies and become proficient in other language areas. Gilfert's comment on the negative side of narrow TOEIC test preparation can give educators pause, "examinees become experts in taking language tests, but do not learn how to use the language" (1996). With this risk in mind, and for other pedagogical reasons, different types of English language homework were introduced into the curriculum at SUAC; English reading assignments make up a part of this homework.

Much has been written in the academic literature extolling the benefits of extensive reading in helping in all areas of language development (Krashen 1993; Krashen 2003; Krashen 2008); therefore, it is imperative that students at SUAC partake in extensive reading in all core courses. With this in mind, students have been given greater access to comprehensible and interesting English library books; incentives to read these materials on a regular basis have been incorporated into the English curriculum.

Extensive Reading homework system

Starting in the spring 2011 semester, all students enrolled in English courses are required to read a minimum number of words from the graded readers collection in the SUAC library. The books are "graded", which means that the language and sentence complexity have been

made simple so that second language students can understand them. The library houses six levels of readers from a number of major EFL publishers; the books are graded from elementary level to advanced level.

Students were required to read 15,000 words in the spring and 20,000 words in the fall semester. This averages to about 3 or 4 books depending on the word count of individual books. While studies have shown that reading an even greater number of words is required before seeing significant improvement, after weighing the amount of other homework assignments, it was concluded that setting achievable goals for this assignment was in the best interest of the students.

For the homework, students choose to read any book of their liking and level; they are responsible for keeping word count records and reporting them to their teacher to receive credit for the assignment. All work is to be completed outside of the classroom. It is at the discretion of individual teachers whether or not they choose to integrate the books into their course activities. One goal of this assignment is to create more fluent English readers; however, the ultimate goal is to foster a habit of reading for pleasure that will stay with students after formal study has been completed. Data from a survey given to measure student experiences with extensive reading will be discussed following an explanation of the e-learning system.

ALC E-learning homework system

As alluded to earlier, the e-learning component of the common homework assignments has proven the most challenging to implement. The ALC NetAcademy2 system consists of a number of courses including English grammar, vocabulary, listening and reading among others. All students taking English courses at SUAC were assigned homework from the above e-learning courses. Each course has multiple levels and students from both faculties: Cultural Policy and Management, and Design were assigned homework of decreasing levels of difficulty respectively. The homework consisted of completing a certain number of units before a scheduled exam date. Due to the considerable expense incurred by the university to subscribe to the ALC system, it was deemed necessary to ensure students actually used the system. Because self-study alone with no student accountability would likely result in underuse

of the ALC system, a decision was made to administer exams on ALC material throughout the semester to provide additional motivation and to hold students accountable. The ALC administrator function allows teachers to see how much total time students have spent using the ALC system, but it does not provide teachers with more detailed information regarding unit completion and the extent of use in discrete areas of the units.

Three exams were scheduled over the semester with content selected directly from the assigned homework. This choice was made to give students who had diligently completed their assignments a slight advantage over peers who had not done the homework. While the ALC system also has a component allowing administrators to make their own exams, it was deemed inadequate for the purposes of these assignments. As a result, the authors of this study were required to create nine exams (three course levels x three exams) and provide copies of the materials and CDs to all instructors before exam dates. This plan entailed a significant amount of work as well as considerable cooperation from part-time English teachers to administer in-class tests and keep records.

With the benefit of a semester's hindsight, the process, including test format and implementation, was streamlined for the fall semester. Furthermore, the amount of homework was adjusted midway through the spring semester in response to student survey results. As the implementers of this system continue to experiment with the best way to utilize the ALC system, some preliminary benefits are already apparent. While student classroom exposure to English, especially native-English, is necessarily limited, ALC affords students the opportunity to practice their English and hear native-speaker English anytime and anyplace provided they have a computer and Internet access. ALC also allows students to work at their own pace as they review grammar and practice applying new vocabulary. The reading and listening courses allow students to hear native-speaker English and practice their reading skills at their own pace reviewing and quizzing themselves at their own discretion. Implementation of the e-learning system will continue to be refined as SUAC English instructors strive to best serve the needs of their students. Fortunately, students provided survey feedback on their experiences with the new extensive reading and e-learning requirements;

the results are discussed below.

Extensive Reading and ALC E-learning Survey

The authors conducted a survey of the extensive reading (ER) and the ALC e-learning assignments in the middle of the spring 2011 semester to ascertain how the students felt about their current homework assignments and to adjust the course accordingly for the remainder of the spring semester and for the fall semester. All of the students who were taking English Communication or Upper English Communication were surveyed. The ER survey comprised 270 students; there were 272 students in the ALC e-learning survey. The survey results are shown in Appendix B.

Extensive Reading Assignments Survey Results

In relation to ER, as shown in Figure B1, the amount of reading assignments seemed to be appropriate for more than 70% of students, and 87% of the students thought that reading books would help to improve their English ability (Figure B3). In the spring 2011 semester, students were required to read 15,000 words outside of the classroom as part of their common assignments. The instructors are aware that this level of reading is insufficient to improve the students' English skills. However, the intention was to raise the students' motivation to learn through reading books.

A previous study has shown that reading 50,000 words was not enough to improve learners' English in terms of spelling, grammar, and listening (Imamura, 2008). However, another study reported that after reading this number of words, many students began to feel comfortable reading English (Takase, 2007). Thus, in the near future, the number of words that students are required to read needs to be increased, taking into consideration the balance with their other assignments.

In terms of the questions related to students' motivation, although more than half the students (53%) answered that they did not continue to read after their classes were finished (Figure B2), it was encouraging that 68% of the students responded that they enjoyed reading English (Figure B4) and 87% of the students thought reading English books would help them to improve

their English ability (Figure B3). That is, they felt positive about Extensive Reading.

To make students autonomous learners, significant effort is needed by instructors to motivate them to read English books, for example, providing time for reading in class, having students talk about what they read (some instructors conducted this activity in their classes this semester), or introducing interesting books to students, as well as making interesting reading material available in the library.

Ideally, to make ER at SUAC more successful in the future, English instructors need to set up a program focusing on ER within the curriculum and to provide effective curricular guidelines to give the program appropriate structure, rationale, and goals for successful ER instruction (Grabe, 2009).

ALC e-learning Assignments Survey Results

As indicated in Figures B5-B8, the assigned levels in terms of reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary seemed to be appropriate for the students (82 % : reading; 78 % : listening; 75 % : grammar; 66 % : vocabulary). These percentages are the total responses of 3 [appropriate], 4, and 5 [very appropriate]. However, it should be noted that 34% (the total responses of 1 and 2) of the students reported that the level of vocabulary was “not appropriate.” Student written responses to the survey questions about the difficulty of the vocabulary exercises also support this point. When asked about the appropriateness of the amount assigned as homework (Figure B9), more than half (61%: the total percentage of 1 [not appropriate] and 2) of the students responded “not appropriate.” Their written replies confirmed that the amount of work required was too much. After obtaining these results, the instructors adjusted the assigned vocabulary levels and the amount

Appendix B. Extensive Reading Assignments Survey Results

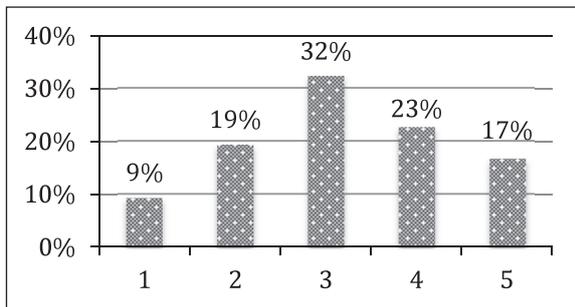


Figure B1.
Q. Do you think the amount of assigned English reading was appropriate?
1 indicates “not appropriate” and 5 indicates “very appropriate”
(n=270)

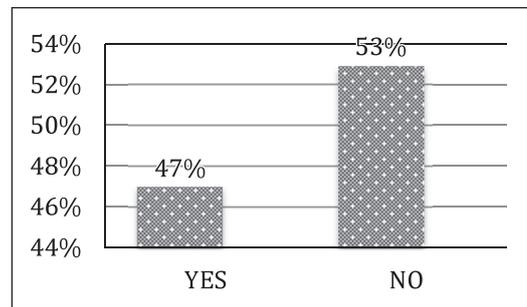


Figure B2.
Q. Would you like to continue reading after your classes are finished?
(n=270)

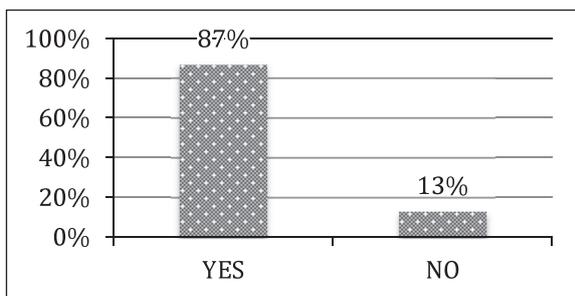


Figure B3.
Q. Do you think reading books will help you improve your English ability? (n=270)

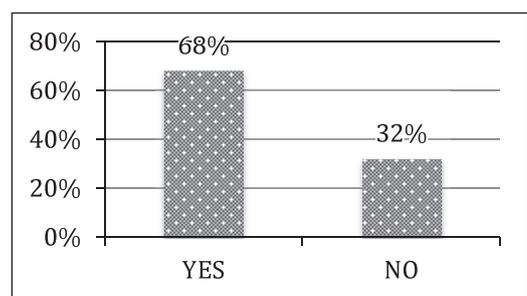


Figure B4.
Q. Did you enjoy reading books in English? (n=270)

of homework (see the details above in the ALC E-learning homework system section) to avoid demotivating the students to study English.

Figure B10 illustrates how the students viewed the impact of the ALC e-learning system on their English abilities. Twenty-nine percent (the total percentages of 4 and 5 in Figure B10) of the students felt that they had improved. Forty-one percent responded "so-so" and 31% of the students responded "no improvement."

Since the survey was conducted within less than two months after the semester began and they had just completed the first of the three quizzes, the students may not yet have felt any improvement through use of ALC e-learning. However, it is important that students feel positive about the learning materials that they use and that they can help them improve. To encourage use, first of all, workshops on the effective use of the e-learning system will need to

be conducted on a regular basis throughout the year to ensure that the students use the system effectively and improve their English. Although guidance in the use of the e-learning system was provided, the learners did not seem to make full use of the system (based on their written responses to the survey questions) because of the extensive range of activities and materials in the ALC e-learning system.

Another thing English teachers need to consider is students' motivation to learn. According to self-determination theory, a well-developed motivation theory in psychology (Deci & Ryan, 1985) that has also been applied to the study of English as foreign language learners' motivation (Kojima et al., 2010), autonomy, competence, and relatedness should be included as motivating factors in learning. If these three factors are applied to e-learning, the following should be considered: regarding autonomy, for example, learners need to have the freedom to choose

ALC E-learning Assignments Survey Results

Figure B5 - Figure B8 are responses to the question, "Do you think the materials were appropriate for your level?" 1 indicates "not appropriate" and 5 indicates "very appropriate"

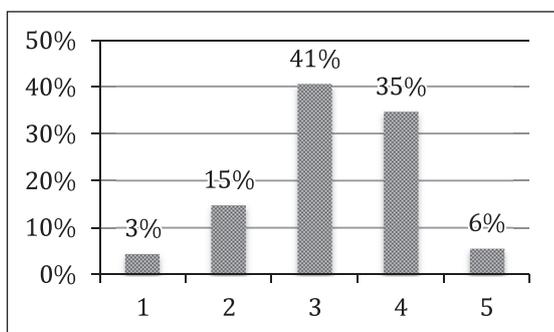


Figure B5. Reading (n=271)

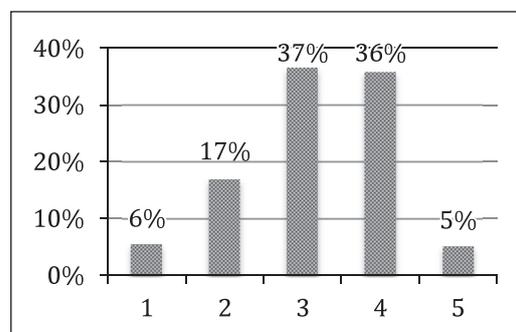


Figure B6. Listening (n=271)

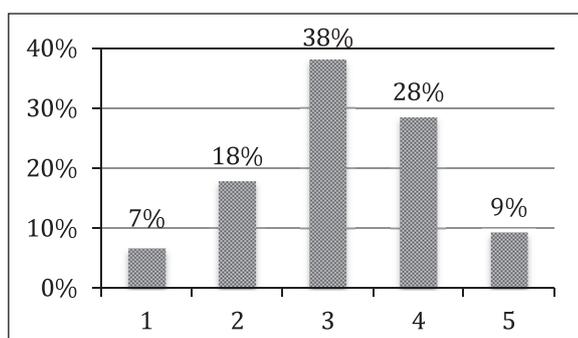


Figure B7. Grammar (n=271)

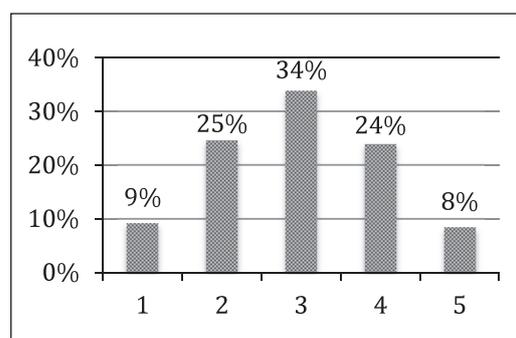


Figure B8. Vocabulary (n=272)

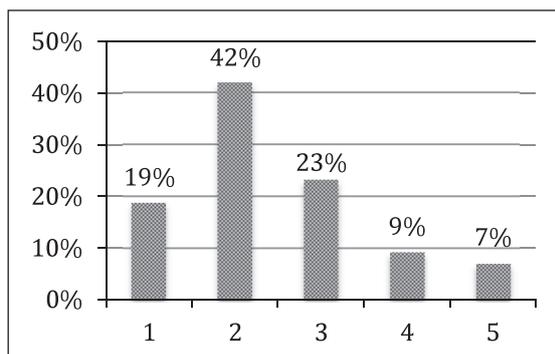


Figure B9.

Do you think the amount of work assigned was appropriate?

1 indicates "too much" and 5 "just right". ($n=271$)

levels or courses in the e-learning system as part of their homework assignments. In relation to the competence factor, teachers need to conduct quizzes that make learners feel that studying through e-learning is improving their English. Finally, in terms of relatedness, learners should have opportunities to receive feedback about their e-learning study from teachers, or to encourage each other in the use of e-learning materials in their English classes, despite e-learning being developed for self-study and homework assignments. By considering these factors in the current e-learning program at SUAC, English teachers will be able to promote greater use of the e-learning system.

Conclusion

The aforementioned three common assignments: Online TOEIC exercises, Extensive Reading, and E-learning, provided the authors of this study with opportunities to collaborate on ways to provide guidelines to English instructors on how to use materials to supplement their own course content. Furthermore, the assignments served students by creating greater access to language learning resources and gave learners the extrinsic motivation to use the materials. "The greatest tragedy of teaching is that so much is carried on in self-imposed and professionally sanctioned isolation" (Lieberman & Miller, 1990, p. 160). Recognizing that such "isolation" is not only detrimental to professional development, but that it can deprive students of educational opportunities and resources that their peers in

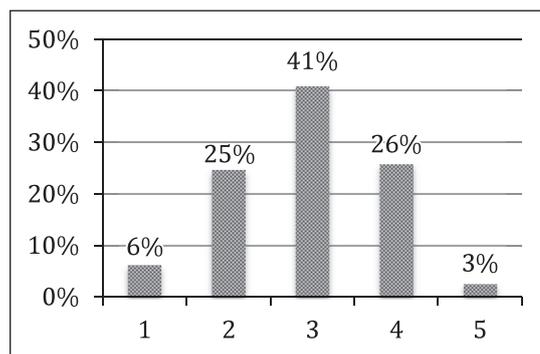


Figure B10.

Do you feel your English has improved?

1 indicates "no improvement" and 5 "very good improvement". ($n=272$)

other classes may have access to, an initiative to implement three common, curriculum-wide English assignments for all students enrolled in English courses at SUAC was started in the Spring of 2011. The steps taken and detailed above are part of the first stages in a process to improve the English curriculum at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture. Lessons have been learned by both instructors and students as a result of this work; nonetheless, there is much more to learn and more work to do.

References

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- ETS. (2010). *TOEIC test data & analysis*. Retrieved from http://www.toeic.or.jp/toeic_en/data/.
- Gilfert, S. (1996). A review of TOEIC. *The Internet TESL Journal*, (8). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Gilfert-TOEIC.html>.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Krashen, S. (1993). *The power of reading: insights from the research*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.
- Krashen, S. (2003). *Explorations in language acquisition and use: the Taipei lectures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Krashen, S. (2008). Language education past, present and future. *RELC Journal*, 39, 178-187.
- Lieberman, A. and Miller, L. (1990). "The social realities of teaching". in Lieberman, A. (Ed) *Schools as Collaborative Cultures: Creating the Future Now*. London, Falmer Press.
- Marsh, C. J. (1990). *Key concepts for understanding curriculum*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- 小嶋英夫・尾関直子・廣森友人 (編著). (2010). 『成長する英語学習者: 学習者要因と自律学習』東京: 大修館書店.
- 高瀬敦子(2007). 「大学生の効果的多読指導法—易しい多読用教材と授業内読書の効果」『外国語教育フォーラム』6, 1-13. 関西大学.