

A Sign of Things to Come: Introducing the Communicative English Program

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Abstract

The Communicative English Program is a dream taken form through the efforts of the Department of Information Culture at Niigata University of International and Information Studies (NUIS). Two years since its inception, the Communicative English Program (CEP) is starting to come into its own as a language program. This paper introduces the present structure of CEP, and suggests that the time and effort invested in this program are reaping educational benefits for the learners. The latter part of this report considers the long-term viability of CEP.

Introduction

In the late 1990's, private and national universities across Japan instituted sweeping reforms and began experimenting with new language curricula. In Niigata Prefecture, several colleges and universities created innovative language programs that have attempted to shore up the weaknesses observed in Japanese traditional language education courses (Hadley, 1999; Oishi et al, 1996; Nozaki, 1993; Anderson, 1993; Helgesen, 1993).

One of these courses, known as the Communicative English Program (CEP), began in April 2000 at Niigata University of International and Information Studies (NUIS). In two years, CEP has developed into a distinctive semi-intensive language program that is gaining attention throughout the region. This paper introduces CEP in its present form, highlighting its goals,

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methodology, materials and organization. Statistical and ethnographic research investigating the potential of CEP's educational value will be discussed. A consideration of issues that may determine the Communicative English Program's long-term success or failure will conclude this paper.

The Communicative English Program

The Communicative English Program is a semi-intensive course in International English. Students are encouraged to learn how to confidently and effectively communicate their concerns, cultural viewpoints and personal interests to non-Japanese speakers of English. CEP upholds clear academic standards, is highly coordinated and is a consistent program of study that seeks to satisfy the primary needs of the students, teachers and various levels of administrators at NUIS. In order to meet these needs, a departmental steering committee, together with major stakeholders, reached a consensus in 2001 on goals for CEP. From this foundation, a methodology, materials and distinctive organization were formed to complement those objectives.

Goals of CEP

CEP is unique from many language programs in Japan, in that its guiding principles are clearly stated. Presently, CEP has five major objectives.

1. Language Instruction in CEP Concentrates on International English

For the moment, International English is roughly defined as English that is free from the cultural and linguistic influence of any one particular country, and which can be used to successfully communicate with other educated native or non-native speakers of English in any country of the world (Suzuki 1999). In CEP, students are encouraged to communicate as Japanese speakers of English on issues that are of interest to them. Recognizing their identity and language egos as Japanese students, they are welcomed to take ownership of the English

language as their vehicle for international expression. Instead of expressing the belief, “I am Japanese, so I *can't* speak English”, students are reminded to say, “I am Japanese, *and* I speak English.”

2. CEP's Pedagogy Motivates Japanese Students

Following the program of instruction in CEP, Japanese students should be motivated to actively seek out opportunities to communicate confidently with non-Japanese. The CEP curriculum strives to re-motivate students who associate English with the unpleasant classroom atmosphere and grammar-based testing experiences of their Junior and Senior High School days. Classroom techniques, administered by professional, caring language instructors, create a positive classroom atmosphere. Methods aimed at helping students gain self-confidence are emphasized.

3. CEP is Based on Reliable Language Teaching Practices

CEP utilizes effective language teaching practices that draw from the latest developments in Second Language Education research. To those ends, CEP Instructors are encouraged to attend language teacher conferences as a form of continuing professional development. The goal is to maintain skilled teachers that can help students raise their overall language proficiency. In addition, learners in CEP also receive training in study skills such as regular attendance, active classroom participation, asking questions in class and completing homework assignments on time.

4. CEP Provides a Healthy Environment

CEP provides an environment where students and instructors alike receive the resources for success. Students are given the chance to excel through intensive language study, and are regularly observed and encouraged in class. Because CEP is staffed by instructors who may change every few years, considerable attention needs to be given to their working conditions. For years, many colleges in Japan have opted for a system of hiring cheaper, temporary instructors on a contractual basis. Often these schools have little in the way of expectations for

these teachers other than filling their teaching posts for the prescribed period of time. In CEP, we understand that term-limit work can be very demotivating for teachers unless they are working towards certain professional goals. Recognizing the damaging effect that teacher demotivation could have on the success of the entire program, instructors are hired who see CEP as a step in their career development; these teachers are also given time for research and rest in order to avoid stagnation on one end and burnout on the other end. The hope is that instructors will find permanent positions on the tertiary level upon finishing their contract period.

5. CEP Upholds Clear Academic Standards

Fair and achievable academic standards are decided by the CEP Steering Committee for the learners, based upon their levels of language proficiency. Special exceptions to these standards are considered extraordinary, because a standard that is created and then regularly compromised, is in fact no standard at all. This effectively demotivates both students and teachers alike. An aim in CEP is to maintain secure and lasting criteria for the students to achieve. The result is an increased level of stability in the program, and greater effort on the part of the students.

CEP instructors and students are given these goals at the beginning of the first semester, and are encouraged to internalize them over the space of the academic year. In the days ahead, the CEP Steering Committee will form concrete tasks that will work towards the further realization of each of these goals. The power of having clearly defined objectives lies in the fact that any innovations proposed are measured against the existing vision of the program. They have been, in effect, the first major step in forming CEP's identity and focus.

Methodology and Materials

CEP relies on the following to facilitate improved language learning: Placement of students according to their level of language proficiency, materials to complement the goals of CEP, and a system of cyclical instruction and testing.

Placement Test

In the first semester of the academic year, all first year students (and students who failed CEP in the previous year) are given a standardized placement test measuring the students' level of general language proficiency (Turner, et al., 1997).

Based on their scores, students are placed in a class roughly at the same proficiency level as 20 other students. The levels range from “A” through “F”, with the “A” class being the most challenging level, and the “F” class being the most basic level. These levels have nothing to do with the students' grade. An “F” level student does not automatically get an “F” for a grade. The more challenging levels are not viewed as better than the more basic classes. Different levels in CEP simply allow students to study in a class that is not too easy or too difficult. In this way, it is believed that motivated students will feel less inhibited in class, knowing they are with students who are their equals in language proficiency. The placement makes classes easier for the CEP Instructors to teach, and students appear to learn more quickly. Learners in CEP can move to more challenging or more basic classes later in the school year, based upon their progress.

Materials

New Interchange: English for International Communication (NIC)— the Student's Book as well the Video Activity Book (Richards, et al 1997) are used as the base texts for the homework, listening and speaking activities. However, the Atlas 2 Video (Wholey, 1996) materials are used for the higher proficiency levels — as upper level video materials are not yet available in the NIC series. NIC is used because its underlying philosophy is consistent with the objectives of CEP. It lends itself to the facilitation of “meaningful conversation”, and is not “limited to any one country, region or culture” (1997, iii). Other texts and teaching materials that deal with Japan-specific/international issues are also used to further complement the goals of the CEP curriculum.

CEP Class Cycles

The CEP Cycles are at the heart of the program's methodology, and are similar in function to

the class cycles employed in language study programs found in England, Canada, and the US, among others. These three-week lesson cycles were designed to meet the needs of our students and achieve many of the goals of CEP. The cycles are repeated four times during the first

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Teacher	Teacher 1 A Teacher 2 B Coordinator	Teacher 1 A/B Coordinator	Teacher 2 B/A Coordinator	Teacher 1 B Teacher 2 A Coordinator	Coordinator
Week 1 Chapter 1	Check Homework Ex 3, pg. 3	Check Homework Ex 10, pg. 6	Check Homework Ex 1, pg. 32; Ex 1, pg. 36; Ex 2-3, pg. 37 (J)	Check Homework Ex 1, pg. 44; Ex 2, pg. 45 (AV1)	Reading Quiz Ex 11, pg. 7 (NIC)
	Ex. 1-2. pg. 2; Ex 4, pg. 3 (NIC)	Ex 5-6. pg. 4; Ex 8, pg. 5; (NIC)	Ex 18, pg. 32; Ex 2, pg. 33; Ex1, pg. 34; <i>Ex 2, pg. 35 optional</i>	Video Ex 1-2, pg. 45; Ex 3, pg. 46; <i>After you watch, pg. 46 optional</i>	SRA Reading Lab
Week 2 Chapter 2	Check Homework Ex 3A, pg. 9; Ex 4A, pg. 10 (NIC)	Check Homework Ex 8A & 8B, pg. 11 (NIC)	Check Homework Ex 1, pg. 38; Ex 1A & 1B, pg 42; Ex 2- 3, pg.43 (J)	Check Homework Ex 1, pg. 47; Ex 2, pg. 48 (AV1)	Reading Quiz Ex 12, pg. 13 (NIC)
	Ex 1-3B, pgs. 8-9 (NIC)	Ex 7, pg. 11; Ex 10-11, pg. 12 (NIC)	Ex 1-2, pgs. 40-41; Ex 2-3, pg. 39 (J)	Video Ex 1-3, pgs. 48-49 (AV1) <i>After you watch, optional</i>	SRA Reading Lab
Week 3	Listening Test	Review Day	Speaking Tests		SRA

Code: *Homework* = Preparatory work assigned to students the night before and checked at the beginning of class.

NIC = New Interchange Textbook

AVI = Atlas Video 1

IC = Interchange Communicative Activities at end of NIC

J = J-Talk (Sub-Text)

SRA = Scholastic Reading Aptitude Laboratory

Figure 1

semester (called CEP 1 for first year students and CEP 3 for upper level students) and four times during second semester (called CEP 2 for first year students and CEP 4 for upper-level students). During a cycle for first year CEP 1 and 2, students complete two chapters from the core textbook and are exposed to Japan-specific issues. For CEP 3 and 4 (C and D levels), the same objectives are accomplished with Interchange 3 and the limited use of other texts, which may be used to teach presentation skills or debate. CEP 3 & 4 (A and B levels) uses the most advanced texts, *Passages One and Passages Two* (Richards and Sandy, 1999). After two weeks, all students are given listening and speaking tests. The students are tested every week during the first two weeks of the cycle in the reading course. The whole process, if maintained, is systematic, semi-intensive and academically sound. A sample of a typical cycle can be seen in Figure 1.

Regular Instruction and Testing

During the 2000-2001 academic year, three surveys were administered in the beginning, middle and end of the year to discover the interests and language learning needs of the students (Hadley, 2001). Based upon those results, the regular instruction of CEP was developed with the needs of the students in mind. Instruction in CEP centers on oral and listening skills that utilize video. Regular homework assignments keep students on-task, extrinsically motivated, and prepared for each day's lesson. Students are constantly exposed to new ideas and vocabulary through graded reading.

There are two types of classes in CEP: A class which focuses mainly on Speaking and Listening, and another focusing on Reading and Study Skills. Each class is run differently, but all are based on the concepts of regular attendance and a system for encouraging in-class participation.

Speaking/Listening Class (50 Minutes/Four Days a Week)

When the class begins, the student receives a participation point for coming to class on time. The students' homework is checked to see if it has been finished before class. Students who

brazenly complete their homework in the classroom minutes before the start of class do not receive credit.

The homework comes from the pre-task activities of the student book. It is designed to help students develop the proper foundational knowledge and vocabulary needed to speak with others and to understand the focus of the lesson. During in-class speaking activities, instructors go around the class and award participation points to students who are speaking or who are asking questions in English. After 45 minutes, class instruction will finish. The next homework task is assigned, the participation points are collected and students leave the class quickly, because another group will be waiting outside to take their CEP class. The reason behind this is to cause students to do as much of the preparatory work for language study outside of class. When they do come to class, the students are putting into practice what they have studied. This allows the instructors to work with the students proactively, and maximize class time for language use instead of language study.

Reading Class (90 minutes/One Day a Week)

On the first day of the reading class, students take a short placement test designed by the makers of the Science Research Associates (SRA) Developmental Reading Laboratory (Parker, 1987). This is followed by an orientation session to introduce the students to the methodology of the materials. After that, class often begins with a short reading quiz from their readings in New Interchange. Following that, the students begin working in the reading lab, where they are assessed weekly by the classroom teacher.

The basic process in the reading class is simple. Students choose from a wide variety of small booklets to read in class. At the end of each booklet are questions about the reading. Students write their answers in their student record book. Afterwards, the students find the answer key and check their answers. Finally, students record their scores on a Progress Chart in the back of the Student Record Book. The teacher also checks their progress every two weeks. When they improve, the teacher asks them to go to a more challenging level of reading. Over the year, students can see how much they have improved. Students often feel encouraged and motivated after seeing their progress in CEP.

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance and participation are vital in CEP. Students are expected to come to every class on time, and when they do so, receive one participation point to encourage punctuality. Students who have more than 20% unexcused absences cannot pass CEP without taking an Intensive Course. Students with more than 30% absences will fail the class.

CEP uses a point system for participation. Every time a student asks questions in English, participates in class activities in English, or answers questions that the Instructor asks the class, the student will receive points in the form of coins. White coins are worth one point, blue coins are worth two points, and red coins are worth three points. Students can receive up to five points per class. Because some students may switch off, or try to manipulate the system by not participating after getting a certain level of points, instructors are free to take points away. However, they are instructed to do this sparingly, as it can demotivate some students who have unresolved emotional and academic issues in their lives.

Students bring their participation points to the instructor at the end of each class, who records how many points they have earned that day. Students who have come to class late but have absolutely no points (including the one point awarded only to students who came to class on time) are counted as absent. This is to insure that students who come to class remain active and participate. It is firmly believed in CEP that language study stands somewhere between academic subjects requiring cognitive skills (e.g. Cultural Studies) and those that require physical skills (e.g. Physical Education). We believe that no student, no matter how gifted, can learn a language studying one day a week for 90 minutes. Like sports, s/he must practice at short intervals on a regular basis. Even a few absences will severely affect their performance. It is for this reason that students are not allowed simply to come to class and sleep. CEP is committed to providing students with a quality language education, so students who attend must use their minds and bodies to participate in class.

The system of attendance and participation has its critics, who accuse the method of merits and demerits as Pavlovian or Behaviorist in nature. However, this methodology works in modifying the passive behavior that many students have employed in previous language courses. It is a means for students to see in a concrete manner that their attendance and participation are

rewarded, and that their actions visibly count towards their grades. It should be mentioned that the participation points system is not used in the CEP 3 and 4 classes. By this time, students are older, more mature, and usually able to participate in class on their own without extrinsic rewards. However, the low tolerance for absences is strictly upheld in all CEP Classes.

Tests

Students take listening and speaking tests every three weeks. Listening tests, which are based on the video and other class materials, differ little from those found in classes worldwide. The speaking test, however, is unique to CEP, and requires some explanation.

On the day of the speaking test, groups of three students are chosen at random. They enter the testing room and sit at a small table. One of the evaluators chooses one test question at random from a set of test questions, which have been written on cards and placed face down on the table. Without showing the card to the students, the students must discuss this question in English with each other for about three minutes. The CEP Instructors and Coordinator will listen and

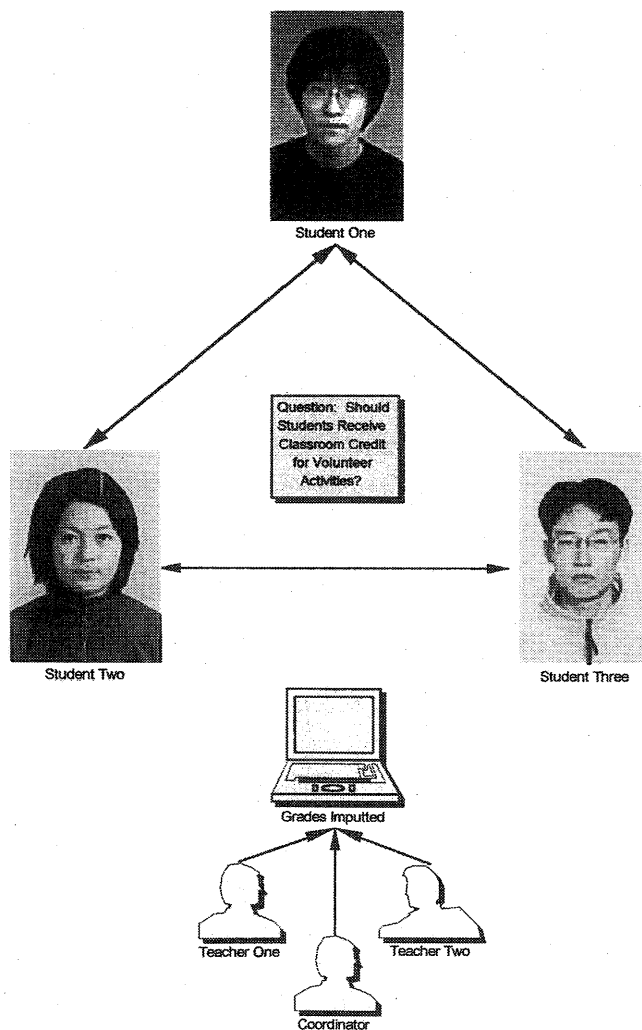


Figure 2

give each student a grade. The students' score is an average of all three teachers' grades (see Figure 2). In this way, the speaking test is fairer for the students. After the three minutes are up, the students are asked to stop. A new group of students will be called to the room, and the process continues until all the students have been tested. It usually takes two days to test about 130 students.

Grades

Students' grades are figured from tests, homework, participation and in-class assessment from the SRA class. The scores are tabulated using a large database file (affectionately known as the Super Giant Monster File, or SGM File). Because of the goal to maintain a good atmosphere and to give students as much personal attention as possible, it is necessary for CEP Teachers to keep their data updated on a weekly basis. In this way, instructors know almost immediately the progress of all the learners, and can work with those who are having difficulties before it is too late (see Figure 3). An appealing aspect of the grading scheme is that everything is interconnected. Students who attend regularly and excel in one area tend to well in other areas

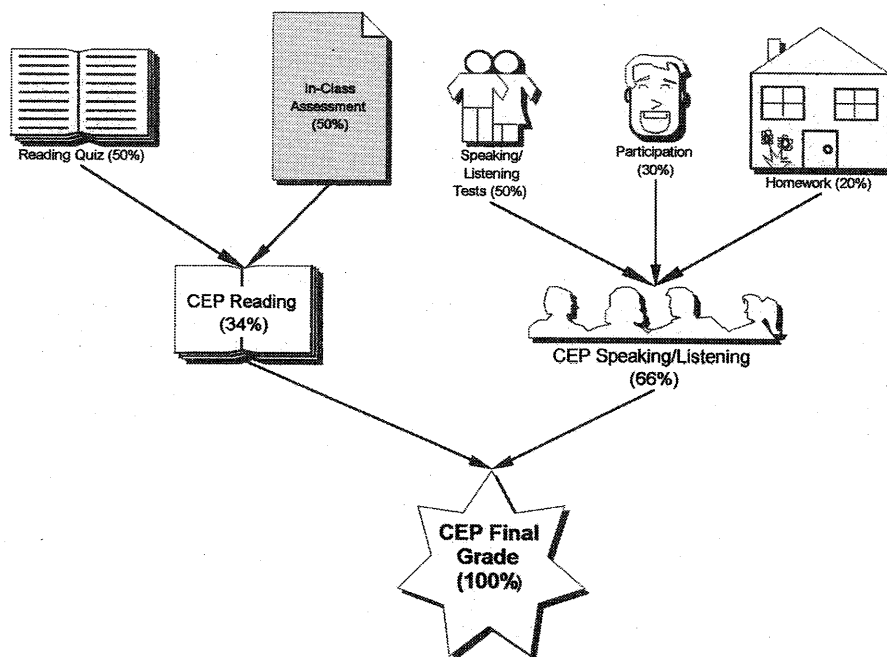


Figure 3

also. Students who, for example do not participate in class will see a ripple effect throughout their grade, as homework, speaking and listening tests are affected by the students' work in class.

Summer/Winter Intensive Course

This is a special course lasting for one school week after the first and second semester. It is open to motivated students wanting further English study, but it is mainly intended for students who are on the borderline of failing CEP, and are in need of more practice. The materials used in the Intensive Course are known as the Talk Tools (Junge, 2000). A video orientation for teachers is held a week before the Intensive Course so that teachers can understand how to use the materials. A similar orientation is used with the students on the first day of the Intensive Course.

The following CEP students can or must attend the Intensive Course:

- Students who have passed CEP with a score of 60% or above, and who want to study English in a more relaxed atmosphere.
- Students who had over 20% unexcused absences (but no more than 30%).
- Students who had a total grade of 59% to 50%.

Students with grades lower than 50% or more than 30% unexcused absences (approximately equal to one month of absences) cannot take the Intensive Course. They will receive an "F", cannot move to the next level of CEP, and must start again next year. Students taking the Intensive Course for credit must pass a speaking test at the end of the week. Upon passing the test, students receive 60% for that semester's CEP class. Those who fail the test receive an "F" and cannot continue to the next level of CEP until they pass the class next year.

Investigating the Effectiveness of CEP

It can be seen that CEP requires a high level of commitment, both for students and for teachers alike. In the past two years of its existence, the majority of the students participating in CEP

have demonstrated a high level of attendance, participated regularly in class, and some have continued their language study in the overseas programs offered at NUIS. Regardless of the country, they find ample opportunities to use International English with non-Japanese speakers of English.

Despite the hard work and thought that has gone into this program, are the students learning anything? Has their English language proficiency improved? Are they able to communicate with non-Japanese on issues that are of interest to them? In a search for possible answers to these questions, a two-year study was conducted using both statistical and ethnographic research methodologies.

Statistical Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the question of whether the language proficiency level of CEP students had significantly improved over a two-semester period of semi-intensive study.

Method

The study was conducted by comparing the paired means of students in CEP 2 on a measure of language proficiency. The students who participated in first year of CEP (CEP 1 and 2) were chosen because if there was any difference in the level of language proficiency, it was expected to happen with learners in these classes. Other reasons were that a majority of the time and effort into instruction and curriculum building went into these courses. Learners spend significantly more time in CEP 1 and 2 than the other CEP courses (135 hours of instruction in the lower levels, as opposed to 90 hours of instruction in the higher levels).

Subjects

In the 2000-2001 pilot study (n = 118) included all of the students in CEP 2. This study was replicated in the 2001-2002 academic year, again using the students of CEP 2 (n = 113) for this research. In both studies (n = 231), the students seem to be similarly distributed in terms of

language background, sex and academic status (Table 1).

Language Distribution, Sex and Academic Status of Subjects				
	<i>CEP 2 Students (2000-2001)</i>		<i>CEP 2 Students (2001-2002)</i>	
Language	Japanese (100%)		Japanese (100%)	
Sex	<i>Male</i> 47%	<i>Female</i> 53%	<i>Male</i> 53%	<i>Female</i> 47%
Academic Status	Undergraduate 1 st year students		Undergraduate 1 st year students	

Table 1

Materials

The students were separated into six groups based on their proficiency scores from a criterion-referenced placement test, which was developed specifically for use with the New Interchange teaching materials (Turner et al, 1997). The placement test consists of 70 multiple-choice items measuring listening, reading and grammatical knowledge. It seems to be a valid measure of proficiency because of its consistent success in placing students of similar levels, and its moderate reliability coefficients using test-retest ($r = .75$ and $r = .79$, respectively).

Procedures

In both the pilot study and the second experiment, the learners took the pretest during the first week of April 2000 and 2001. The posttest was administered in the second week of January 2001 for the pilot study, and the first week of December 2001 for the second group. During the pretest, all students took the test in a large lecture hall designed for the testing of large groups. During the posttest, students were reshuffled into different groups, and took the test in a smaller lecture room. Administration of the test was identical in both tests, with the listening section given first, followed by reading, and then by grammatical knowledge. Students were given 15 minutes to complete the listening section, 20 minutes for the reading section and 15 minutes to complete the grammatical knowledge section, for a total of 50 minutes of testing time. The tests were graded and then double-checked by the CEP Coordinator and Instructors. The results for the listening, reading and grammar section were then entered into an Excel spreadsheet and

tabulated by computer to avoid the potential of human error in figuring the scores of so many tests. The pretest scores of any students who dropped out of the course or who were absent from the posttest were excluded from the data analysis.

Analysis

The results were examined using a parametric matched t-test, which studied the two means of the pretest and the posttest. It was hoped that one academic year of semi-intensive study would result in an improvement of an average of up to 10 points on the mean score of the posttests. Consequently, the null hypothesis no difference between the means of the group during the pretest and posttest was adopted, and the level of significance was established at a $< .05$, one directional.

Results

The descriptive statistics for both the pilot study and the second experiment (see Table 2 and Table 3) show that, in both cases, there was a significant difference in the mean performance of the students from the time they entered CEP (Pretest) to the time they finished their first year of study (Posttest). In both cases, the differences are all important at below the .05 level of probability that the differences in the means are by coincidence. It is safe to reject the null

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means
CEP 1 & 2 Academic Year 2000-2001

	Pretest	Posttest
Mean	0.676271186	0.741646489
Variance	0.012113101	0.007914098
Observations	118	118
Test-Retest Reliability	0.751512805	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	10	
df	117	
t Stat	-1500.312041	
P(T<=t) one-tail	8.7138E-253	
t Critical one-tail	1.657981556	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.7428E-252	
t Critical two-tail	1.98044745	

Table 2

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means
 CEP 1 & 2 Academic Year 2001-2002

	Pretest	Posttest
Mean	65.05689001	71.3147914
Variance	156.7797157	111.4847519
Observations	113	113
Test-Retest Reliability	0.799926407	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	10	
df	112	
t Stat	-22.9407191	
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.95944E-44	
t Critical one-tail	1.658572728	
P(T<=t) two-tail	3.91888E-44	
t Critical two-tail	1.981370588	

Table 3

hypothesis of no statistical difference between the two means in both experiments. The results are not only statistically significant, but the average mean of the learners in the posttest increased by six to seven points. Although this did not meet our ambitious expectations of an average of 10 points of improvement, the increase was nonetheless very encouraging.

Discussion

This research suggests that students' language proficiency may be generally improving as a result of their studies in CEP. This claim can be backed up by the fact CEP is an EFL program in a monolingual environment (Japanese), situated in an area of Japan where there are relatively few foreigners. The main, if not only, source of repeated second language study and exposure, comes from the learners' participation in CEP. It should be noted that CEP 1 and 2 provides only 4.5 hours of class instruction for approximately 30 weeks (135 hours in total), so an increase in the students' means of even six or seven points under these conditions is significant. Those who have taught in language education at Japanese schools adhering to a traditional curriculum of one 90 minute class per week know that it is common for the students' level of language proficiency decrease after a year of study. With that situation sadly being the norm in many schools, the fact that the student scores in CEP are improving is a hopeful sign.

Nevertheless, even though this study suggests that the majority of learners in CEP may have

improved because of the structured guidance and classroom instruction provided, it does not prove that the learners are able to effectively communicate with non-Japanese speakers of English. To explore that question, another method of inquiry is needed.

Ethnographic Study

In order to find out whether CEP instruction may have a positive influence on the students' proficiency in communicating with non-Japanese, an ethnographic study was conducted with CEP students who went overseas for five weeks in the Department of Information Culture's American Studies Program.

Method

The first author of this paper accompanied the subjects (n = 17) to the United States and spent nearly three weeks observing them and their behavior as they lived and studied at Northwest Missouri State University (NWMSU) in Maryville, Missouri.

Subjects

Of the seventeen students who participated in the summer study program at NWMSU, thirteen studied in either CEP 1-2 or CEP 3-4. The majority of the students were female second-year students, though the two male students, who were second year students and who also participated in CEP 1-2, were very representative of the male students taught in CEP, in terms of academic proficiency (Table 4). A significant number of students who participated in the overseas program came from the lower proficiency levels of CEP (2 D, 2E and 2F).

Percentage of CEP Students		Sex		Academic Level	
<i>CEP</i>	<i>Non-CEP</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>2nd Yr</i>	<i>3rd /4th Yr</i>
76%	24%	18%	82%	70%	30%

Table 4

Procedures and Analysis

Field observation of the subjects' interaction with non-Japanese was conducted in-class, on campus, in restaurants, with native speakers in the community and while on cultural tours to cities near NWMSU. Note taking and videotape were the main methods of data collection. A survey was administered to the learners about their perceived level of interaction with non-Japanese speakers of English during their stay overseas. Fifteen of the seventeen learners responded to the survey. Teachers and facilitators who worked with the students were also interviewed to gather their insight on the proficiency of the CEP students.

Results

What was discovered from the video footage and field observations was that the students were uninhibited when communicating with people in restaurants, students on campus and with service personnel in shops and in museums. The students actively introduced themselves to people with whom they were staying for home visits, and quickly adopted other culturally accepted non-verbal modes of communication common in the rural Midwest, but uncommon in everyday Japanese conversation (i.e. physical contact such as touching and hugging).

Students who had not participated in CEP appeared to have greater difficulty in the beginning with communicating with others, but soon caught up with their peers. In some cases, the CEP students helped these classmates out until they could function on their own.

Interviews with teachers and administrators revealed that, based upon their experiences with past Japanese students, their expectations for the students coming from NUIS were low. Many admitted they were expecting a group of shy, introverted students who would not



Figure 4: CEP Students Ordering Food in a Restaurant while Overseas in America

speak in class. However, all were surprised with the active, outgoing group dynamic of the students. The students were, in most cases, spontaneous in communicating their wants and needs (Hadley, 2001).

In one incident, a student experiencing a severe case of homesickness called one of the teachers at NWMSU at home on the telephone in English in order to get help and counseling. Her ability to successfully get help in English during a time of stress was only one of several examples of how students who had finished CEP instruction appeared to overcome passivity and engage in successful communication with non-Japanese speakers of English.

The students' response on the survey showed that a vast majority felt they had interacted with native speakers of English, made friends with non-Japanese, and experienced many opportunities to engage in cross-cultural communication (see Appendix).

Discussion

The ethnographic study suggests that constant interaction with native English speakers, together with regular speaking and listening tests in CEP may be helping some of its students with gaining the confidence needed to interact with others in an English-speaking environment. For those teachers who personally know the students who went overseas, and remember what they were like as EFL students a year earlier as they entered CEP, the video footage provides compelling evidence that the effort put into this program may be paying rich education dividends for many of its participants.

The Future of CEP: Important Factors to Consider

The early signs from CEP lead us to believe that promising developments are taking place. However, can the innovations started through CEP survive in the days ahead?

In his research on language curriculum innovations and reforms, White (1995) notes that several dynamics must be considered for an innovative curriculum to survive. These are external support for reforms, internal support for reforms, the clarity of the innovation, and resources and incentives for participating in reform. Curriculum designers will ignore these at

their peril, because if other cultural and political spheres of influence perceive the English Language Teaching (ELT) innovations as disruptive to their agendas, the reforms will be resisted, abolished, or severely curtailed to fit within existing norms (Figure 5). The remainder of this paper will reflect upon these factors as they apply to CEP's present development.

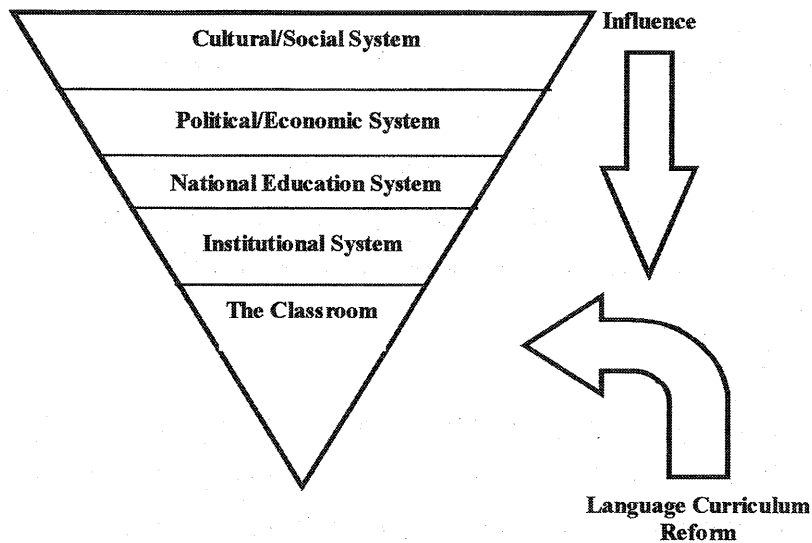


Figure 5: Resistance to Culturally Incompatible ELT Innovations (From Hadley, 1999)

External Support for CEP

External support refers to the backing given by organizations that are isolated from the regular operation and scope of CEP, but who are nevertheless vital for the program's long-term survival. This would include many of the institutions mentioned in Figure 5, specifically, corporations and businesses that hire NUIS graduates, political and educational organizations that define the guidelines and bring in extra sources of funding for the university, and the families of students living in the region who support the school.

At present, external support for CEP is decidedly mixed. Ministry officials, politicians and business leaders have been calling for years for the creation of programs like CEP, in order to produce a creative workforce that is globally-minded and fluent in English (Tanaka 1996, Daily

Yomiuri, 1996). Numerous studies, however, continue to reveal that most college graduates will not need English in their daily work or lives. Even in Tokyo's multinational companies, English, when it is used, is mostly conducted through e-mail, faxes or letters (Kirkwold et al., 1995). Hadley (1997) explored the sociolinguistic domains of the English language in Japan, and found that English is only significant in the domain of Education. Outside this domain, Japan remains a firmly monolingual society. These and other findings suggest that the actual external support for the goals of CEP is not strong.

However, while the real external societal support for CEP's goals may be muted, support for the results that CEP seeks to bring about in the learners is far stronger. Many students who successfully finish CEP are more active, expressive and communicative than when they entered the program. In our private conversations with business leaders and members of the local community, these are qualities that many in society would like to see more of in today's graduates, many of whom are described as "dyeing their hair yellow, wearing rings in their noses and crying into Kirins on the fringes of society" (Roche, 1999, p. 23).

Quite often, personnel managers have shared with us that the English language proficiency level of students working in Niigata is unimportant. What is important, we are told, is whether the students are outgoing, have a positive attitude, and are able to communicate with others. CEP strives to teach these things through the medium of English.

It appears that this message is slowly getting out, as we are seeing more students who are coming to NUIS with the stated goal of studying in CEP. However, in order for CEP to garner greater external support, the benefits of the program for the outside community needs to be targeted and marketed regularly on number of social and political levels.

Internal Support for CEP

Support within NUIS for CEP is currently very strong. This is evidenced by the level of financial support given for the procurement of educational materials and for the recruitment of quality instructors. CEP is given considerable attention in NUIS public relations campaigns and receives a large time slot in Department of Information Culture's class schedule. The

internal debate that surrounds CEP is not over whether it should exist, but why the program cannot be expanded to include students from both departments of NUIS. The paradigm for CEP at NUIS seems to be that it is a vital part of the curriculum, and that in principle, it should continue. Support for this comes from influential members in all sectors of the university. However, internal support often depends greatly upon the interwoven professional relations that exist in highly politicized academic environments. Things can change, and quickly, depending on the shifting sands of political expediency in academic and administrative circles. The internal support that CEP currently enjoys must constantly be maintained in order for the program to survive and thrive.

Clarity of the Innovation

Innovative new curricula find greater acceptance if their goals are clearly defined. Students and teachers alike should be able to explain what CEP is, whom the program is for, and why it is being carried out (White 1995, p. 144). Unfortunately, the goals of CEP still fall short of this ideal. Key concepts, such as *International English*, *motivating*, and *clear academic standards* have yet to be clearly defined. The goals as they stand also lack concrete tasks designed to realize these goals. More work is needed within the CEP Steering Committee to stimulate progress towards the development such tasks, and greater effort will be needed on the part of the Coordinator and Instructors to communicate these goals to the students. Otherwise, the stated goals of CEP will devolve into a bureaucratic artifact that lacks any real power for change.

Resources and Incentives

CEP has ample resources and incentives to encourage the future success of the program. Time and money has been dedicated to hiring and training expert instructors, who in turn maintain the CEP curriculum as it was designed. Although on short-term contracts, the instructors have full access and input into continuing curriculum development. They can participate and offer

their insights at departmental level planning meetings, and are invited to most important faculty functions, where internal support for CEP can be strengthened. Students receive a quality language education that can motivate them to strive to do their best in life. The language instruction opens up new worlds of knowledge and opportunity for the students who persevere. Incentives for could be improved by taking away the term-limit nature of the Instructors' contracts, and by allowing for the possibility of yearly renewals based upon their continued good performance. In terms of time resources, students would benefit from setting up afternoon classes in CEP 3 and 4 so they would not conflict with other required courses that meet at the same time. Such moves would allow CEP to keep quality instructors longer, and allow more students to continue taking upper levels of CEP after the first year. Nevertheless, it seems certain that the issue of resources and incentives is the strongest plank in the system of support for insuring CEP's survival in the days ahead.

Conclusion

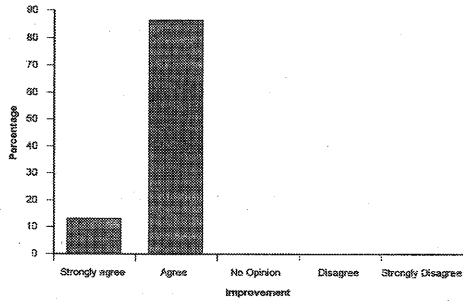
This paper has sought to explain the goals, materials and methodology used to create the Communicative English Program. While a considerable amount of time and effort goes in to maintaining CEP, statistical and ethnographic research suggest that CEP is succeeding as a language program. In order for CEP to survive, however, more work will be needed to gather greater external support, while at the same time maintaining the high level of internal support for CEP. More thought will be needed to better define and realize the goals of CEP. This will be possible because the rewards and incentives given to those who participate in the program will continue to draw top-notch educators. These teachers, together with their learners, will provide the impetus needed for the future success of CEP.

If these factors can be achieved, then we believe that the encouraging developments seen in the Communicative English Program are a sign of things to come. As we seek to create an effective, innovative English language program at Niigata University of International and Information Studies, we can look forward to becoming a showcase to other Japanese colleges and universities as to what is possible when educators work together in a spirit of cooperation

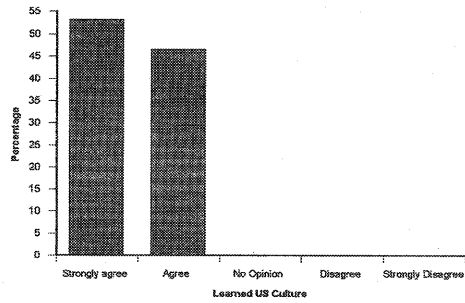
and international understanding.

Appendix: Survey Results of CEP Students Overseas

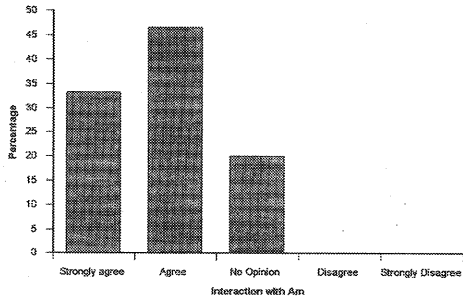
My English language ability has improved.



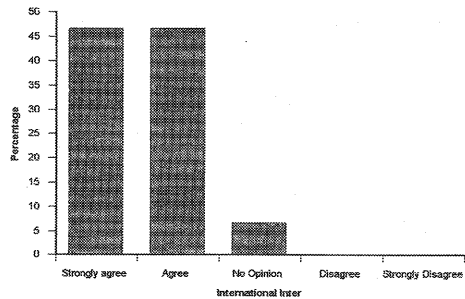
I learned a lot about American Culture



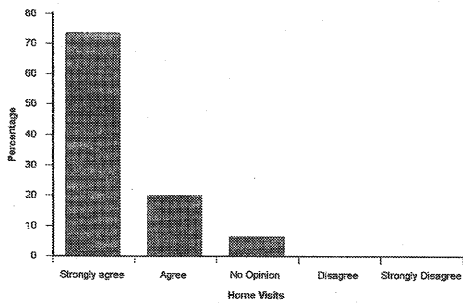
I made friends with American students



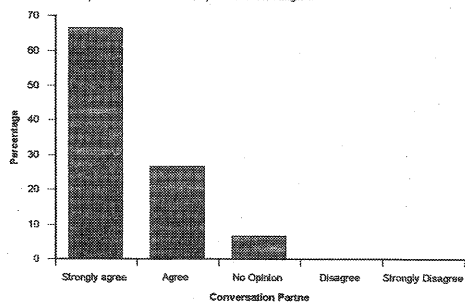
I made friends with international students



The home visits were very good



The conversation partners were kind and helped me to learn English.



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