

A Proposal for Improvement of English Education

— The Case of the Faculty of Regional Development Studies, Toyo University —

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Language is a fundamental tool in international relations. For Japanese people whose mother tongue is not an international language, it is necessary to learn English as a communication tool to get along with the outside world. English education in Japan, however, has failed to live up to expectations and has not produced the desired results. Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, who died several years ago, proposed that Japan adopt English as the second official language. Some companies already require certain levels of English language abilities for promotion to the position of manager or general manager. In NISSAN Co. Ltd. they began to use English in meetings. In the days of international relations and IT (Information Technology), Japanese people need to command English as a communication tool. As to the score of TOEIC, Japanese are ranked at 18 among 21 countries in Asia. According to a TV program on English language in Japan, the average Japanese businessmen's score is 450, and they need 1,000 hours to reach the level of 700, which is the fluent speaker's level in business. In Japan, there are 6,000 language schools and 800,000 students there. English language education is in vogue and a 2 trillion-yen business in Japan.

I would like to consider the endless theme of English language education under the title of "*A Proposal for Improvement of English Education.*"

1. Internationalization and Japan

Japan closed its door to the world for over two hundred and fifty years by the separation policy of Tokugawa shogunates. When opening the door wide to the world in 1858, Japan noticed that in all the fields of learning and technology, she was far behind those of Western countries. Then she started to absorb them with surprise and impatience to make up for the delay. That was Westernization, not

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what we now call Internationalization. Even now some people still think that internationalization is equal to Westernization. It was an one-way absorption not a bilateral intercommunication with Western nations. Foreign languages were important measures to import or absorb huge amounts of knowledge in science, medicine, technology, politics, law, philosophy and other fields. Therefore, reading, writing and grammar were the main tasks for the language education. This tendency is still alive in English language education in Japan.

Now with the rapid economic advance, Japanese people need to speak foreign languages, especially English as the international language for direct communication with other peoples. In this Globalization, it is not enough for Japan to have a handful of government officers, businessmen, scholars and intellectual leaders who command English or other languages. It's time for people in general to speak English. Almost all Japanese have realized that speaking English is a vital and important skill through their linguistic experience in business, traveling abroad, or even coming across foreigners on the street and accepting someone from abroad as a home stay guest.

There are certainly some people who is still insisting that people from abroad speak Japanese when they come to Japan. If we waited for them to be able to speak Japanese, the world will go ahead, leaving Japan far behind. Japan cannot go along on the double standards any longer : global standard and domestic standard. We can no longer act purely in our own narrow self-interest, but must cooperate with other peoples to approach many problems in the economy and politics, in a more international way as responsible world citizens. The problems we face are admittedly global and cannot be solved by one nation alone. Especially the economic and politic matters are in global relations. All nations need to take action for greater economic cooperation and worldwide cultural contacts. Each of us naturally feels powerless in the face of such great forces. We are apt to think that international matters should be entrusted to a small number of our country's elite. But basically, it is the mass of individual people who decide what a country should do. Any determination fundamentally depends on individuals. Nothing is more important than the attitudes of individual people. In the long run, what is the most important is that individuals widen their focus of vision and see the world as a whole. The citizen-level communication with the outside world in various levels is fundamental and important for mutual understanding. Admitting we are world citizens, we need to have a common language. It is inevitably English for Japanese

people now. Japanese people have really been driven into the situation that they must study English seriously as an international communication tool.

Hereafter, I would like to consider why Japanese are slow and unsuccessful in learning English.

2. Japan as a group-oriented society

We know that European and North American nations are horizontal, individual-oriented societies, but Japan a vertical, group-oriented society. If you trace far back to the ancient days, you will find that Japanese are a rice farming people, while Euro-Americans are nomadic peoples. In the long history of rice farming, Japanese people have acquired typical features of a group-oriented culture, which are opposed to those of the individual-oriented culture.

Rice farming requires settlement at a place and cooperation within a family and among neighbors. Until some decades ago, with no modern agricultural machines, farmers needed as many hands as possible to plant rice plants in spring and harvest crops in fall. You often hear in Japan, "I'm so busy that I want to use the hands of a cat," when one is very busy and short-handed. Without a sufficient supply of water, you cannot grow rice plants. In the days when the rice fields were not well irrigated, without canals and ditches, there were many bloodshed troubles among individual farmers and groups or villages, especially in drought-stricken areas. The members of the group were required to strengthen solidarity and conform to the group in order to maintain the strength and peace of the group. They should not be aggressive or different from others in the group or community. Conformity and solidarity were essential attitudes for harmony within the group, and strength against the outside. If people live in a place for long years, there occurs a vertical human relationship in the group. If you are of a quiet and submissive nature and fade into the society, you are a good member. The way of thinking is affected much by the values of the group. Everybody is likely to be the same as others. If you are too conspicuous, you will feel shame. If you are too apart from the sameness, you will feel uneasy or shameful. Dependence on the group is not thought to be bad. This is the Japanese society. Japanese culture, therefore, is called a shame culture. Japanese people's nature of conformity and reticence is thought to be originally caused by the rice farming society and reinforced by the long history of the feudalism.

On the other hand, nomadic life requires movement, independence and self-defense. It gives you a quite different nature. Nomads are rather independent, self-centered, talkative and aggressive. On top of that, Greek philosophy and Christianity valued the self and independence of individuals. These features are still alive in the characters of European and American nations.

Whether a society is group-oriented or individual-oriented affects the attitudes to their ways of communication. In group-oriented Japan, people are quiet and reserved, and their speech is quite indirect, while in individual-oriented countries, people are rather frank, and their speech is quite direct. Such levels of directness and frankness can be explained by what anthropologist Edward Hall calls high- and low-context societies. A high-context society is one whose people are homogeneous and highly familiar with each other's way of thinking. This familiarity allows people to communicate effectively with facial expressions, silence, and gestures. Words serve as only part of the message. This ability to communicate large parts of a message without words is a result of living closely in groups, without interruptions, over hundreds and thousands of years. In Japanese culture, a typical type of high-context society, it is the listener's responsibility to understand the speaker's message. In contrast, the style of communication in Euro-American culture is much lower context because of a long history of movement and intermixtures. Although homogeneous groups did develop in the continents, there was much contact between these different groups that forced people to communicate clearly. Otherwise, misunderstanding would arise. In low-context societies, where English is used, it is the speaker's responsibility to be clear and direct, mostly by using words. This is a great cultural barrier for the Japanese to get over when they learn English.

3. Japanese language and its features as barriers

The question naturally arises why Japanese have special difficulties in learning foreign languages. There is a combination of factors, which answers this question. Many people say that there are faults in the methods of teaching foreign languages. Schools are still using the classical method of reading and grammar. The oral method should be adopted. In fact, many universities and schools have English classes taught by native speakers of English, but have not obtained satisfactory

results. Here I would like to observe some fundamental causes that come from Japanese language and its linguistic situation.

(1) Prevalence of translation versions

In many countries, education has not developed enough to offer advanced instruction in all fields, and publishing is not sufficiently advanced to produce books and periodicals which give up-date information in their own languages. In Japan, if we wait some months, the translated version will become available. If our need for the book is to get information, we need not waste arduous time for reading the original with a dictionary.

Take the case at universities. If you use a textbook that has not been translated into Japanese, there will appear a translated version in two or three months. I hear there is a business to meet with students' demand. There is in Japan a profitable market for translation, because Japan has a sizable reading public. Commercial development of translation is one of the things that discourage the Japanese from being eager to study foreign languages.

(2) Phonetic differences in English and Japanese

All languages have certain things in common. These include (1) sound patterns, (2) words, and (3) grammatical structures. A sound pattern is a group of sounds that the human speech organs can utter. Most languages have from 20 to 60 of these sounds. Words are sounds or sound-patterns that have a meaning. Words may stand for objects, actions or ideas. Grammatical structure is the manner in which certain elements of language are related to others in forming larger, meaningful units such as sentences. All languages have grammatical structures. Linguists commonly identify two aspects of grammatical structure, called syntax and morphology (parts of speech). Syntax involves relations among elements of a sentence, including the arrangement of words in a particular order. Morphology deals with elements, the building blocks for sentences. The English language has nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions, conjunctions, etc.. It uses variations in the form of a word to show the function of the word in a group. For instance, singular and plural forms for nouns, and the *-s* that signals a third-person verb form and the *-ed* that signals past tense.

From the linguistic point of view, another reason for the poor showing of

Japanese as students of foreign languages is the relative poverty of the Japanese phonetic system. This situation forces the Japanese to face more unfamiliar sounds in learning foreign languages than is the case for most other peoples. Japanese has five vowels (a, i, u, e, o) and the consonants are combined with the five vowels (eg. ka, ki, ku, ke, ko ; sa, shi, su, se, so. . . .). “brother” is pronounced “bu-ra-za” (three syllables), “wait” is pronounced “u-e-i-to” (four syllables).

The Japanese Language has no sounds of ‘*th*’ of “this” and ‘*th*’ of “think”, which are likely to be pronounced ‘zi-su’ and ‘su-i-n-ku’. Japanese people have endless confusion of *l* and *r*, because Japanese lacks any real *l*. There are no sounds of *f* and *v*: In the way of Japanese utterance, “friend” will be “hu-re-n-do”, “violin” will be “ba-i-o-ri-n”. Untrained Japanese will say “Rub me tender” for “Love me tender”. Consonant clusters and syllabic endings, as in “craft”, “dog”, or “cat” are unpronounceable to untutored Japanese.

As to the intonation and the accent in Japanese, the former is almost flat and the latter is not so strong as English.

Adding to these basic differences of sounds, amazing numbers of borrowed words from European languages often make Japanese people pronounce English loosely and incorrectly.

(3) The isolation of Japanese Language from major languages of the world

The Japanese Language is very different type of language from those spoken by most of the other peoples of the world. It belongs to a relatively small linguistic group called Altaic, which includes Korean, Mongolian and Turkish. Japanese is isolated far from the English language that belongs to the Indo-European family of languages.

There are conspicuous differences between Japanese and English in their syntaxes. The Japanese language has no articles or plural forms of nouns. It uses postpositions but no prepositions. It makes frequent abbreviation of subjects and objects when they are apparent in context. The greatest syntactical difference is in the basic structure of a sentence. In contrast to an English sentence in which the verb is located just after the subject, a Japanese sentence has the verb at the end of the sentence.

1. Watashi wa Miyauchi desu. (Subject + Complement + Verb)
I am Miyauchi. (Subject + Verb + Complement)

2. Kare wa hon o kakimashita. (Subject + Object + Verb)
He wrote a book. (Subject + Verb + Object)

In Japanese, there are usually abbreviations of the subject and object words, if the listener can understand the meaning in the situational and textual contexts.

1. When I went to Tokyo yesterday, I met John. (*Kino* [*watashi ha*] *Tokyo e itta toki*, [*watashi ha*] *Jon ni aimashita.*)

In this sentence, the subject 'I' is not used. If this sentence is pronounced with rising tone at the end, it becomes an interrogative meaning: 'Did you meet John when you went to Tokyo yesterday?'

Lastly I'd like to mention another difference. Comparing English and Japanese, the former is "a noun language", while Japanese is "a verb language." In English, you tend to express your ideas tangibly, concentrating on nouns as the nucleus. In Japanese, sentences expressed by using verbs are natural. This fact has a close connection to the fact that Japanese doesn't have the equivalents of Relative Pronouns and Relative Adverbs (who, which, where) which are frequently used in English sentences.

There is another difference. In English, inanimate things are often used as sentence subjects. Roughly speaking, English sentences seem more humanistic, and logical and tangible, while Japanese ones are more animistic, and emotional and fluidic.

1. A few minutes' walk brought me to the park.
Walking a few minutes, I reached the park. (*Japanese would say it like this.*)
2. A closer examination of it would reveal such is not the case.
If you examined it more closely, you would know such is not the case.
(*Japanese would say it like this.*)

In the above, we have observed that the Japanese language differs radically from most of the other major languages of the world because of the cultural, geographic and linguistic isolation of Japan. We know some features of linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies that are thought to be barriers when the Japanese learn English. These differences reveal why Japanese find it difficult to study English. And they also serve in reverse to explain why the Japanese language is not likely to become a great international language. So, not as many other people as expected, except

those who have special concerns with Japan in culture or business, will study the Japanese language.

Summing up the actual situations in which Japanese students are placed,

1. Most Japanese students are naturally quiet and passive, sometimes shy because of their cultural heritage.
2. They are dull and passive in the too peaceful homogeneous circumstances, because Japan is economically rich, and there is almost no need for English in the everyday life. They don't feel an urgent necessity for English in their peaceful, extravagant lives.

They enter university with a great expectation, but some find that there are no device, no techniques, and no enthusiasm in their teachers. We often hear "My high school teacher is better." or "Why I lost interest in English is that the English at university is easier than that of the cramming school." Probably he meant the textbook used in his class is too easy and uninteresting.

3. There are linguistic differences between Japanese and English in phonetics and syntax.

Now we must make possible devices in teaching English, admitting that we are world citizens and English is the international language as a communication tool. There is no way but studying hard and improving our English. Next I want to show my ideas for improvement of English education at the university level.

4. A trial to improve English education

(1) How to give students motivation

The primal and essential step for the improvement of language education is to give students good motivation. Almost all university students realize the necessity of English in the present days of Globalism. When they enter the university, they say, "I want to study English hard," "I want to be able to speak English." But more than half of them comes to give up their dreams in their arduous process of learning the language. Some students say that the cause is mainly on the instructor's side. Anyway, it is true that most of language teachers cannot succeed in giving them strong motivation, and that students cannot keep up their first decision or motiva-

tion. Once students go out of the classroom, there is no need and no chance for almost all of them to speak English. To give students a good incentive, they should be put at least once in a survival situation abroad, and realize how important English is as a communication tool. So, I recommend that my students travel abroad or join programs to go abroad, such as English Language Programs abroad which are held by almost every university. I sometimes find that my students show a more positive attitude in the classroom after their survival experience abroad. If we could create circumstances where students use their English on campus, they would make greater progress in their English. We need to build “an incentive system,” to spur students, on top of the improvement in teaching methods or techniques.

Next, I would like to talk about how we are teaching English at my Department of Regional Development Studies of Faculty of Regional Development Studies, Toyo University. English is thought to be an important subject by all the staff, but it is not the major subject. We cannot devote the abundant courses only to English education. We reformed the curriculum and started Spring Semester in 2001 with it. In this curriculum, the number of the required English courses is reduced from eight to two courses, and the rest of them are given as elective courses. Some more kinds of languages are added, and there are 10 languages taught : English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Malay-Indonesian, and Japanese for international students. Students can choose one or plural languages for themselves. If students choose English, they can intensively study it. In the present educational situation, it is impossible to give satisfaction to all students. Students are expected to decide themselves what language they choose and how much they study it. There are a considerable number of students who have almost given up their desire to study English because of the slow progress in their six years of junior high and high school English education.

In our curriculum, the hours for English education are limited because English is not a major subject. We cannot help taking the way in which only the students who have an evident motive will study English. Some students like to study French or Chinese more than English. Students should make all their choices for themselves.

As for the class of language education, a small size is better. With students from 30 to 60, the improvement of their English cannot be fully expected. Our

English courses are as follows in the present curriculum.

First Semester	Second Semester	Required or Elective	Student year
English 1A (Oral English)	English I B (Oral English)	Required	Freshman
English 2A (Reading)	English 2B (Reading)		
English 3A (Current topics)	English 3B (Current topics)	Elective	Sophomore to Senior
English 4A (Business E.)	English 4B (Business E.)		
English 5A (Discussion)	English 5B (Discussion)		
Basic English C	Basic English D	Elective	Overseas Beginners
Languages and Cultures	Languages and Cultures	Elective	Sophomore to Senior
Reading of Main subject textbooks in English	Reading of Main Subject textbooks in English	Elective	Sophomore to Senior

* *The Required credits are 10. Each course from English 1A to Basic English 2 gives 1 credit per one semester, and the two courses in the bottom 2 credit is given per one semester. The students have one 90-minute class a week and around 15 class hours in a semester.*

* *The English language staffs are two Japanese and two native speakers of English plus the help of two native instructors of the other department in 2001.*

Considering the nature of our faculty, the ability to command foreign languages, especially English, is the basis of the studies. We attach a great importance to the education of English and other languages. The above number of English courses is not small, compared with that of other Faculties except English Literature Department and English Language Communication Department at Toyo University, but it is still not enough for the students. So, we have prepared an additional program as mentioned below : English Language Program, ELP.

Our department discussed the future of our department this year, and decided to divide the education into two courses : International Cooperation Partnership Course and Regional Development and Environment Management Course. The former course designed to produce graduates who are expected to launch themselves into international businesses and the international cooperation sphere. Therefore, English is the fundamental requirement to all the students in this course. And all the English language teachers are naturally imposed the duty to improve students' language ability. In the possibly renewed curriculum in 2005, more classes will be given to English education, and a set of classes will be intensively given in the first year as Freshman English. Until this coming reform of the curriculum, we are

trying the following Academic Plan for English Education Program in 2002 on.

(2) Comprehensive English education network

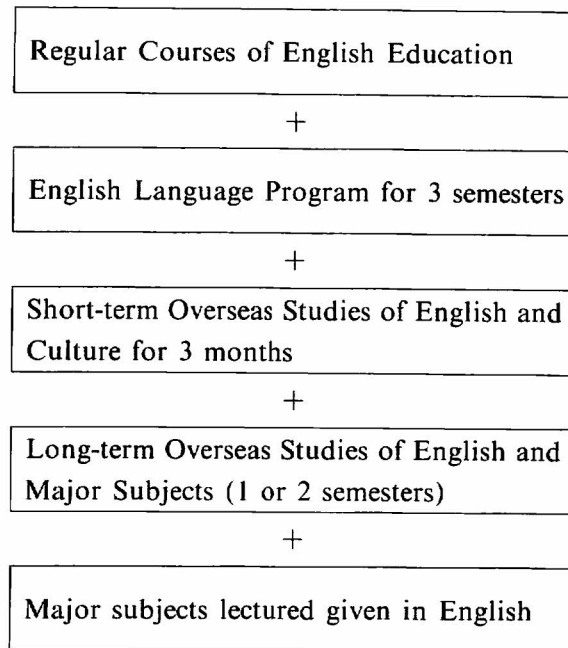
Through my long experience of teaching English, I've come to have the following idea for the progress of education of English. In the education of a language, concentration and survival experience among the native speakers is essential. The hours of our regular courses of English are not enough, and so additional program of ELP has already opened. We expect that at least all the freshman students in International Cooperation Partnership Course will attend ELP beside the regular classes.

They will continue studying English intensively for three semesters. After that, we send them to some universities in the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. We are now making contact with some universities and will choose two or three among them. We should send students separately in small groups to prevent them from making Japanese cliques. Students will go abroad three months, including summer holidays, or three months, including spring holidays.

Qualification tests such as TOEFL, TOEIC and STEP are recommended. They will measure students' progress, and give them encouragement. Before students go abroad to attend the short-term language program, and after coming back, they should have these tests. By the results of these tests, we choose certain numbers of students and send them abroad for one or two semesters as exchange students. Searching for universities that will exchange students is not easy, but we need to find as many as possible worldwide.

In order to carry out the exchange program, we need to have an English Track Curriculum, in which all the classes are given not in Japanese but in English. This curriculum involves the Japanese Language Program, Japanese Culture and certain numbers of major subjects. Our aim is to give 30% of the lectures in English on the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Coming back from the short-term language study abroad and long-term study abroad, students are supposed to be able to attend classes given in English. We can gradually increase the number of major subjects given in English according to student demand.

The outline of our Comprehensive English Education Network mentioned above is diagramed below.



(3) Additional English Language Program [ELP] on the Itakura Campus

In particular, most Japanese students' ability of speaking and listening is weak, and they want to have more Oral English classes. But the university cannot spare time out of the limited hours only for Oral English in the curriculum. There are lots of university students who go to a language school. They judge that it isn't enough only with the regular English classes at their university.

As our campus is in the countryside, there are no language schools near the campus. Therefore, we started English Language Program (ELP) in the beneficiary load in 1999.

The Features of ELP (Spring semester, 2001)

1. There are two courses: English Conversation Course and English for Qualification Examination. (TOEIC)
2. Less than 10 students per class. The classes are in three grades.
3. Twice sixty-minute classes a week. and 30 hours per semester.
4. The instructors are native speakers of English (Three persons).
5. The tuition is about 30,000 yen per a semester.
6. The students are over 130 in number.

It is not easy to find qualified native speakers in the rural area. We employed the teachers who teach English as an AET (English Assistant teacher) in the junior high schools nearby. Most students study satisfactorily and half of them continue to attend the program in the next semester again. Of course, there are some

dropouts along the way, but they have enough and unavoidable chances to speak English in the small intimate classes.

(4) Reciprocal Exchange Program

Some students privately travel abroad in their holidays. If we send students abroad, the number should be as large as possible. For the realization of this program, we must prepare reciprocal exchange program that students can join with moderate expense. This type of program was already attempted several years ago. There are some matters to be settled in the reciprocal exchange. We do not have a dormitory for exchange students yet. We need to build the English Track, including the Japanese Language and Culture Program and English-taught major subjects.

(5) International atmosphere on campus

If we can have on our campus a considerable number of foreign students who speak English, we can conjure up an international atmosphere. It will give a great incentive to Japanese students. We have nearly two hundred overseas students, mainly from Asian countries, but those who speak English are very few. If we could be successful in making an international, multi-cultural atmosphere in our campus, it would be very effective for English education. To realize the international campus, accepting exchange students is indispensable.

(6) Double track curriculum with Corporate Trainee System

There are extremely few foreign students who have already known enough Japanese to be able to profit from the Japanese educational system, and not many who are willing to take the time to acquire the necessary mastery of the Japanese language from A, B, C. They wonder why they have to devote years to this arduous task to study Japanese that they will seldom use after graduating from a Japanese university, unless they will have some opportunity to work in Japan. In order to realize the reciprocal exchange program, we need to prepare a special curriculum for the overseas students.

If we broaden our educational system and have a second track curriculum taught in English, we will be able to exchange students and accept English-speaking students who have not learned Japanese language yet. This system would be good for the returnees whose Japanese is not good enough to attend the classes given in Japanese. It would also attract large numbers of foreign students, especially from

the less developed nations. It would contribute much more than what we now do to the world. And it would, in the long run, give good incentive and profit to both our Japanese students and students from Asian countries. If many students prefer to study in the English track, it is what we desire. As the first step, we should prepare a curriculum consisting of a complete program of Japanese language education including Japanese culture, and from ten to fifteen courses of selected major subjects taught in English for one year. With this program, the students coming for one semester or two will be given minimum choices.

Fortunately, most of our faculty are willing to teach one or two of their major subjects in English. If each of them teaches one class in English, we can design the English track curriculum with ease.

This curriculum could include Internship. It is possible to cooperate with some companies and organizations, and send exchange students to them to have business training for some months. What is called Corporate Trainee System would be attractive for students abroad who cannot afford to stay at a Japanese university for four years, but only stay as short a time as one or two semesters. The bilingual method is another way to give lectures. You use Japanese and English conducting your lectures. You cannot gain the speed in lecturing, but the lectures will be profitable both for Japanese and overseas students.

(7) The integration of class-study and self-study

From 2002, there will be five native English language teachers on our campus, three of whom are assigned to our department. All of the teachers have classes in more than one department. Therefore, the situation is much more improved, but class hours are still in poverty. On the other hand, even if double the number of classes were devoted to teaching English, class-work alone would not achieve the desired goal. The most important thing is students' motivation and their independent self-study. Formally we have given our classes on the condition that they study at home, actually knowing that many of them do not do anything out of the classroom. Substantially students depend completely upon class-work. We need to have students study themselves by integrating class-work and self-work.

We have proposed to make the so-called Learning Centre or Self-access Centre. We can use the LL rooms when they are not used for classes, and audio corner in the library. In the meantime, we should have a collection of language study materials (e.g. CDs, CD-ROMs, videos, Internet materials). This facility would be

useful both for lower proficiency students and more advanced students. Weak students could get extra time and assistance to review their lessons with the centre's tutor, while advanced students are recommended to challenge harder materials.

In this essay, firstly I have considered some of cultural and linguistic disadvantages or barriers that Japanese students of English naturally have. Secondly, I have described what our department is going to do to improve our education of English. In this strategy, I strongly support that at the level of university education, Japanese students should be put in a situation that unavoidably requires them to use English. The survival experience will inspire a strong motivation in their minds. Both language teachers and subject teachers are responsible to respond to students' demands and enthusiasm.

It is impossible to send all our students to countries where English is spoken. We need to create an English-speaking atmosphere on the university campus. We need to invite a considerable number of English-speaking students from abroad on the reciprocal exchange program, and conjure up the atmosphere on our campus with the preparation of a sub-track curriculum taught in English. This English track can be extended for parts of the curriculum. If there is no need and no chance to use the language out of the English classrooms, there is no progress. Practice makes perfect.