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# Opinion and Perspective

## Curriculum Development and Implementation of an EGAP Program at a Japanese University

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This article details the evolution of a university-wide English program at Utsunomiya University in response to the changing landscape of tertiary TEFL education in Japan. This development was motivated by factors including the internationalization of university education, globalization, and the rise of English as a lingua franca. In response to these factors, the English Program of Utsunomiya University (EPUU) pivoted from a focus on English for General Purposes (EGP) to an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) approach. This paper outlines the rationale and reasons behind this shift and explains how the specific context informed the type of EGAP implemented. Subsequently, the article describes the development and realization of the new curriculum within the EPUU integrated first-year courses. Finally, teacher training and curriculum alignment are discussed, highlighting the need for ongoing growth to prepare students for success at university and in a globalized workplace.

### Introduction

In 2009, Utsunomiya University underwent a significant transformation with the initiation of a university-wide English program, replacing the previous system in which English language education was managed separately by each of the five faculties. This centralized approach aimed to standardize and enhance the quality of English education across the university. The newly initiated English Program of Utsunomiya University (EPUU) became mandatory for all first- and second-year students and embraced a progressive agenda aligned with contemporary pedagogical approaches at the time. The first-year courses focused on English for General Purposes (EGP) and the second-year courses targeted academic

skills such as essay writing, presentations, and debate. However, with the rapidly evolving landscape of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), numerous pedagogical and theoretical shifts prompted a major transformation in 2022, shifting to strengthen the English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) approach at all levels. This paper describes this recent curriculum development and implementation of this approach at the first-year level.

To enhance global integration, the Japanese government aims to promote the internationalization of higher education and to create global-minded human resources (MEXT, 2003; 2009; 2018). Universities are recognised as fundamental in providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a globalized world. Consequently, there has been a growing demand for universities to revise, develop, and modernize their instructional approaches. Taking the pedagogical and theoretical shifts in English education into account, EPUU administrators decided to develop an EGAP program for its first-year curriculum. In 2009, EPUU had implemented academic skill courses in its second-year English program, and consequently, transitioning from an EGP to an EGAP-focused curriculum was viewed as a necessary step to prepare students for second-year courses and a proactive step towards pedagogical alignment.

There has been a move to implement EGAP curricula in Japanese tertiary institutions at the undergraduate level since the early 2000s (Iijima et al., 2021). However, the uptake in many universities has been slow as evidenced by a JACET 2018 survey which found that only 232 out of 848 teachers polled had taught EAP courses at the tertiary level. These findings by Terauchi et al., (2021) surmised that although there were some university-wide EGAP curricula already in place in Japan, this type of education was still in a developmental infancy stage.

First, this paper outlines and details the reasons and rationale for the adoption of this EGAP approach in the first-year program with reference to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) policy and current literature. The paper then explores how Utsunomiya University's English program was developed to meet the specific demands of the context and student body. In the subsequent section, the development of an

EGAP approach for the first-year curriculum is described. The key components discussed include (a) development of a Can-Do framework with unified syllabi and grading, (b) selection of appropriate course materials, and (c) measures to promote autonomous learning. The paper concludes with a description of future challenges and goals for the development of EPUU.

## **The Reasons for Curriculum Development**

The Japanese government has emphasized the importance of internationalizing higher education, aiming to equip Japanese students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in an increasingly globalized world (MEXT, 2003; 2009; 2018). This has resulted in a noticeable shift within Japanese universities, where the focus has moved from general English programs to those with an academic orientation or a specific purpose (Ruegg & Williams, 2018). Consequently, there is a growing demand for English programs and educators to adjust their instructional approaches, placing greater emphasis on teaching specialized English (Kobylinski & Prasad, 2018).

Related to globalization affecting tertiary education, the trend of glocalization and the rise of English as a lingua franca which has led to shifts in teaching pedagogy and theory. These approaches have challenged antiquated ideologies of “native speakerism,” and concepts such as “the setting of non-negotiable norms and conventions, or the training of speakers of other languages to adopt the culture of English-speaking countries.” With increasing attention on globalization, there is a prevailing understanding that students will need to “interact within and between a range of cultures, as well as operate within academic and professional discourse communities both locally and internationally” (Terauchi et al., 2021, page ix). Therefore, it is important to consider local needs and contexts while also maintaining a practical focus on how students will need to connect to the wider world using English. A further priority when implementing curriculum development at EPUU was related to the need for integration and coordination. The program oversees language classes for all first- and second-year students from six faculties. Students require eight credits (which equates to eight English classes) to graduate from their respective

undergraduate degree. In the academic year, there are 66 first-year classes taught by 17 teachers, and there are 36 second-year classes taught by approximately 21 teachers. From 2023 another level was added, with two full-time staff teaching third- and fourth-year students (Figure 1).

Given the extensive scope of the program, there is a need for efficacy, coordination, transparency, and standardization. Appropriate academic course objectives were developed to establish and coordinate a fully integrated curriculum from first- to fourth-year both within the program and between the program and faculties. The result is integration between all sectors of the program; horizontal integration, which connects the differing classes at the same levels, vertical integration, which connects the program at different levels or years of study, and intra-university integration, which connects the program to each faculty's English education (Figure 2).

Why is this kind of curriculum integration necessary? Without a transparent program strategy, teachers are not adequately supported and potentially left to their own devices in deciding key areas such as program content and assessment. In this situation, it is difficult to determine what skills or content a student

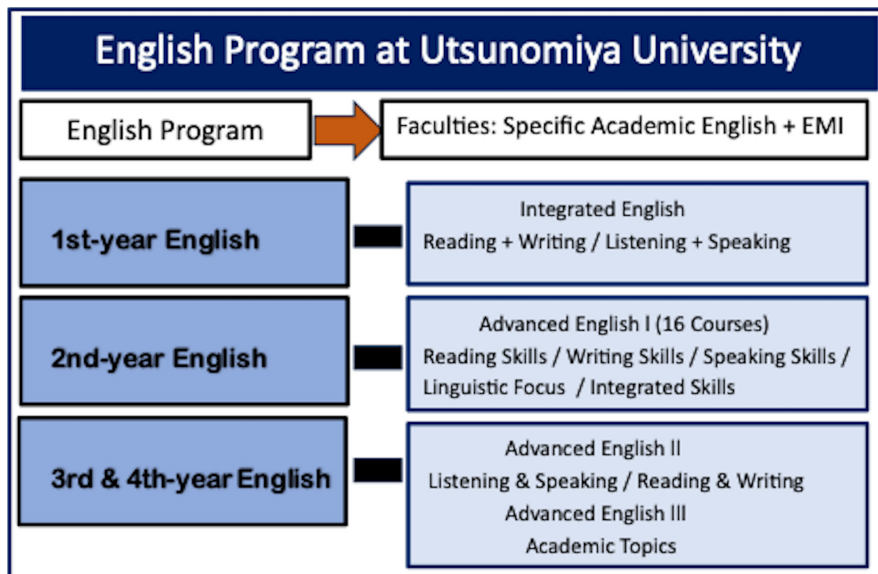


Figure 1. EPUU Structure.

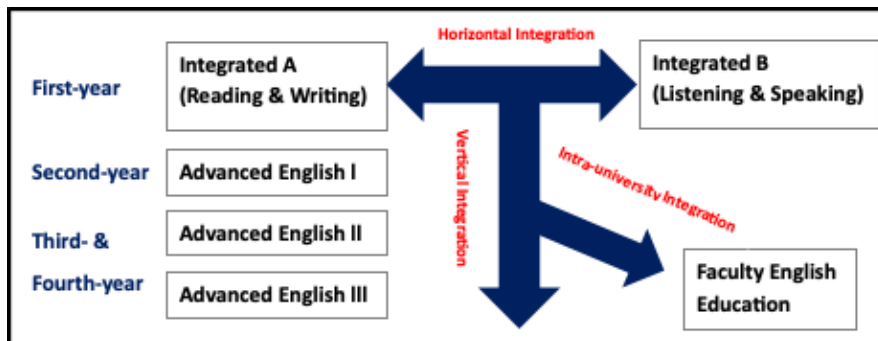


Figure 2. EPUU Program Integration.

has acquired on completion of their university English language education (Townsend, 2018). In short, a coordinated approach in language programs can help ensure that different courses of a program are integrated to maximize student learning at university (Prichard & Moore, 2016).

### The Rationale for an EAP Approach

An important feature of English education in Japan is that there is no formal continuity between high school and university curricula. University English instruction does not begin where high school courses end (Underwood & Glasgow, 2018), and therefore, there is limited pedagogical guidance for higher education institutions. English for General Purposes (EGP) refers to the teaching and learning of English for everyday communication. It aims to develop general language skills that can be used in everyday life situations, such as social interactions, travel, or personal communication. The goal is to enable learners to communicate effectively in everyday situations. On the other hand, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on developing and practicing language skills that students will need to cope in their academic and professional lives. There are two main branches of ESP: English for Occupational/Vocational/Professional Purposes (EOP/EVP/EPP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP can be divided into two branches: English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) (see Figure 3).

Since the early 2000s, researchers within Japan have highlighted the importance of introducing EAP instruction at the undergraduate level

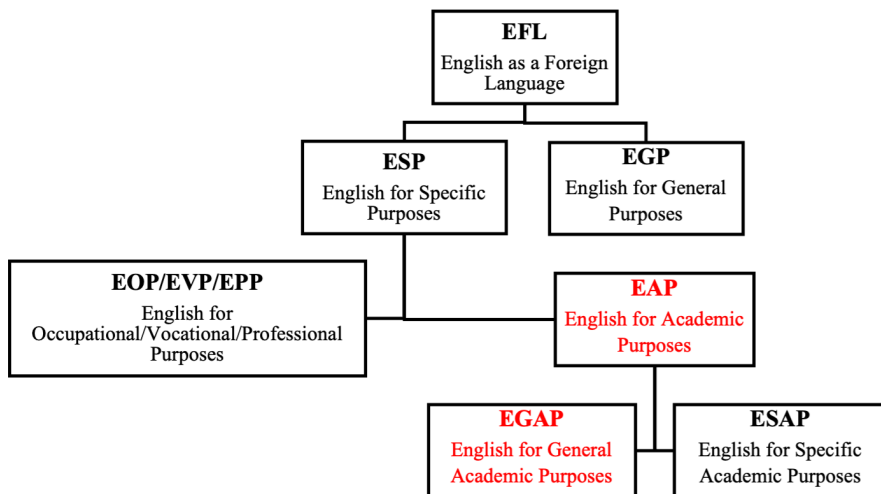


Figure 3. Description of ELT

(Morizumi et al., 2010). A prevalent approach to EAP in Japan involves incorporating it as a central element of the university-wide core English curriculum especially for first- and second-year students. This has been observed in smaller Japanese universities and has now gained traction in larger institutions (Takahashi et al., 2021).

- In the context of EPUU, program administration determined that English education should fall under the rubric of EGAP for several reasons:
- It addresses students' needs and enhances the students' future success by focusing on specific goals and outcomes aligned to their needs whether for higher education or professional settings.
- It is goal directed and time limited – gives students focused, realistic objectives/goals that can be completed within the limited time frame of university English education.
- It promotes learner autonomy, a key component of university education with the goal of promoting life-long learning.
- It promotes global citizenship by teaching students' intercultural communication and core academic skills that can be applied to

international contexts.

- It is a research-driven approach that can be continually developed to meet the dynamic needs of students.
- It aims to prepare students with the multimodal skills they will need for their futures in higher education or professional settings.

In summary, the program's university education is intended to serve as a foundation for students' academic and professional lives

### **What Type of EAP Was Appropriate for the Context?**

First, it was critical that changes to the English program be context appropriate, in other words, they needed to be suitable for the institution, students, and the teachers. Japanese tertiary institutions have their own unique contexts, yet the vast majority of EAP research and pedagogy has been developed according to Western academic practices and does not correspond to the socio-educational and linguistic landscape or the academic practices of Japan.

Therefore, while EAP concepts and pedagogy developed in English-speaking countries offer useful suggestions, their approaches cannot be easily adapted as-is to Japan due to the fundamental differences in students' academic needs and language proficiency. (Iijima et al., 2021, p. 82)

EPUU provides English instruction for all first- and second-year students from the faculties of Education, Engineering, International Studies, Regional Design, Agriculture and Data Science. This diverse student body has varied needs for different knowledge and skills in English. In addition, on the teaching side, while EPUU lecturers are professionals in language education or related fields, they tend not to have the specialized knowledge in content and skills related to the student faculties.

Second, EAP is generally focused on and designed for higher level learners. The English proficiency of the target students must be considered. Lower English proficiency students often require targeted English language preparation to succeed in more advanced EAP study. This is a common concern in Japanese higher institutions where some universities have reported beginner level students assigned to level inappropriate EAP or English Medium Instruction (EMI)

courses (Ruegg & Williams, 2018). Given that diagnostic testing using the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and classroom-based testing identified the majority of EPUU students at the CEFR A2-B1 level, adopting a level-appropriate EAP approach was critical in order to align course objectives with student's needs.

The third point is that EAP programs have generally been designed and developed in ESL contexts as preparation for English speaking universities. Therefore, most EAP courses aim to prepare students to interact with faculty, classmates, and materials in English speaking countries. Within the context of EPUU this was not a requirement as the students were not intending to transition to English speaking institutes.

Considering these situational factors, an EGAP curriculum was deemed the most appropriate due to its emphasis on general study skills, academic content applicable across all faculties, and its flexibility to accommodate lower-level students. The academic skills and language knowledge acquired through EGAP could then be applied by students in their respective fields or professions.

### **The Necessary Steps**

According to Iijima et al. (2021, p. 86), systematic curriculum management and quality assurance are essential for implementing an EAP program. This process involves establishing and disseminating the program's objectives, such as using Can-Do lists to build a common understanding among students, teachers, and the university, along with utilizing unified syllabi, materials, and evaluation criteria across relevant groups. Additionally, external English exams are employed for student-level placement, gauging progress, and assessing program effectiveness.

EPUU has established unified syllabi, course books, and evaluation criteria for all first-year courses, promoting consistency in academic standards. External English exams, such as the TOEIC, are used for class placement and to assess student progress at the end of each semester. While TOEIC is not necessarily the most effective measure of EGAP skills, it is recognized by the university as valuable for students seeking employment. To address deficiencies associated with relying solely on the TOEIC, EPUU also uses in-house exams to measure

the academic skills of all integrated students.

To effectively implement an EGAP approach, the focus of the new curriculum development includes the following key objectives: 1) standardizing syllabi by establishing course objectives in the form of Can-Do lists with aligned grading criteria, 2) introducing new course materials that support the revised academic approach and objectives, and 3) promoting self-autonomous learning among students.

## **The First-year Curriculum Development**

The first-year course's curriculum has gone through several changes to align with an EGAP approach. Students take three English lessons per week: two reading and writing classes, and one listening and speaking class.

### **1) The Objectives (Can-Do Lists), Syllabi, and Grading**

All the first-year courses are guided by a list of objectives. These objectives, in the form of Can-Do lists, were developed and disseminated to all relevant parties, the students, the teaching staff, and the university administration. Presenting course objectives through Can-Do statements provides clear standards to be attained at successive stages of language learning within a program (Ware, Robertson, & Paydon, 2011). These describe the pieces of a puzzle within each level or course that when put together, reveal the whole curriculum and provide clear goals and measurable achievement for both teachers and students. Using such descriptors promotes transparency and coherence in the development of English language curricula (Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011). More specifically, Iijima et al. (2021) note that to enhance the effectiveness of teaching EAP curricula in Japan, it is necessary to use objective lists because they build a common understanding of educational goals among all involved.

How were the objectives developed? First, an examination of literature was conducted to identify skills that are common to EGAP courses. Skills included academic listening and reading, note-taking, participating in discussions, summarizing, academic vocabulary acquisition, and writing essays. The CEFR(-J) framework was employed as a reference point to determine level-appropriate descriptors. These were then adjusted to the academic needs of the

students. In addition, a comprehensive analysis of students' needs revealed a need to: 1) prepare students to study at university, 2) cover the academic skills necessary for both first- and second-year classes and beyond, and 3) develop an understanding of globalization and build cultural awareness.

More specifically, teacher feedback highlighted the need to systematically target fundamental skills as illustrated in the following comments:

I think it would be great if all the first years could learn to write a basic paragraph in English, with a clear topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. It would also be helpful if they understood paragraph formatting, including indenting, double spacing, and not starting a new line for each new sentence. (Teacher A)

Writing basics so I don't have to start from the very beginning in the second-year English class. (Teacher B)

Based on the literature study and needs analysis, a list of objectives for the first-year program were finalized. These covered a range of basic generic academic skills that provide a base for further study at university and for use within the workforce. These skills are intended for use with basic academic content and are achievable by the entire first-year student body, regardless of their level.

The grading was aligned with the class objectives (Figure 4). All teachers were required to use the same grading criteria and rubrics which were developed by course coordinators in consultation with teaching staff. In addition, quizzes and tests were standardized between classes of the same level.

## **2) The Materials**

The course teaching materials needed to align with the EGAP approach and objectives. Therefore, a new textbook series (National Geographic, *Pathways*) was selected for the first-year courses based on the range of levels, academic content, multimodal approach, critical thinking and basic academic skills focus. The *Reading and Writing* and *Listening and Speaking* series were employed to provide students with exposure to academic skills and content that could be transferred to courses at the second-year level and beyond.

**CLASS OBJECTIVES:**  
**The student can:**

**Listening**

1. understand the main point(s) and details of level-appropriate listening content.
2. answer comprehension questions.
3. use key listening skills and strategies.
4. use note-taking skills and strategies.
5. write summaries of listening content.

**Speaking (Discussions and Conversations)**

1. use English to perform classroom activities in pairs and groups.
2. actively engage in social conversations on topics covered in class.
3. actively engage in class discussions on textbook materials.
4. actively connect the textbook ideas and language to class activities.

**Speaking (Presentation)**

1. give a poster presentation following a presentation template after adequate preparation.
2. give a formal group presentation with visuals following a presentation template after research and preparation.

**Other**

1. increase academic vocabulary.
2. increase grammar for communication.
3. build awareness and knowledge of intercultural communication.
4. apply critical thinking skills covered in the 1st-year program:
  - **Analyze** text in order to identify key points, similarities, and differences
  - **Apply** knowledge to a different context
  - **Evaluate** evidence
  - **Gather** information and apply to a task
  - **Reflect** on information to form your own point of view

Figure 4. An Example of Course Objectives.

### 3) Student Self-evaluation Questionnaires

Self-autonomous learning is a key component of the EAP approach and is linked to student motivation. Hence, the students are given self-evaluation questionnaires on the course objectives at the beginning, middle, and the end of the semester. Both the teachers and students can observe progress throughout the year (Figure 5).

### Future Challenges

When transitioning to an EGAP program, a common problem universities face is the absence of adequately trained or qualified teachers, and the absence of established training programs (Iijima et al., 2021). To deal with this problem, EPUU holds regular faculty development and is in the process of designing a comprehensive EGAP teacher training program that acts as a bridge between

I can understand the main points and most details of textbook listening exercises. 教科書のリスニング問題の要点及び大部分の詳細について理解することができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident
大変自信がある	全く自身がない
7	6
5	4
3	2
1	
I can take notes of listening content and summarize the information. リスニングの問題を聞きながらメモを取ることができ、情報を要約することができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident
大変自信がある	全く自身がない
7	6
5	4
3	2
1	
I can give a poster presentation in English. 英語でポスターを用いたプレゼンテーションができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident
大変自信がある	全く自身がない
7	6
5	4
3	2
1	
I can give a presentation with visuals using presentation software, and take questions about the topic after presenting. パワーポイント等を使用し、視覚情報を活用したプレゼンを英語で行うことができる。また、プレゼン後にトピックについての質問に英語で答えることができる。	
Very Confident	Not Confident

Figure 4. Example of Self-evaluation Questionnaire Questions.

pedagogical theory and practical application in the classroom.

And finally, there is a need to strengthen the EGAP approach, and further align and standardize the second-year Advanced English courses with the first, third and fourth-year courses. This represents a significant challenge as EPUU has 36 classes taught by 21 teachers both from the program and the different faculties. The objective is to ensure consistency, enabling students to use the content and skills they acquire as a foundation for progressing to the next level.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the transformative journey of EPUU reflects a response to the dynamic landscape of tertiary education in Japan. The paradigm shift towards an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) framework, reflects a commitment to equipping students with the skills needed for success in higher

education and the global workforce. The curriculum development, from defining the objectives as Can-Do lists and using them as a base to integrate and standardize the English curriculum, demonstrates a strategic effort to enhance efficacy, transparency, and coordination across all levels. While challenges such as the need for an EGAP teacher training program and ongoing curriculum alignment exist, they exemplify the type of continuous improvement that every language program needs to keep up with the changing landscape. Ultimately, this article describes the process EPUU has undertaken to support the evolving needs of students in an increasingly interconnected world and facilitating the development of global-minded individuals equipped for academic and professional success.

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