

# University Teaching in the Internationalized Era

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## Reference Data:

Haswell, C. (2015). University teaching in the internationalized era. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *JALT2014 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

Beginning in 2014, the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) introduced the Top Global University Project (MEXT, 2014), a new round of funding to assist universities in their efforts to internationalize. MEXT has given universities directions regarding the expected changes at both the faculty and administration levels in advance of the apportionment of these funds. These changes include the increased use of English in university courses and on campuses, as well as the hiring of more foreign and foreign-educated professionals. Such changes will affect the roles of university educators over the coming years. This paper covers MEXT efforts since 2008 to internationalize universities and suggests how teachers might be expected to react to the integration of international students into their classes. Using the results of an online survey, testimonies from EFL teachers at an international university are introduced, aiming to help university educators and policymakers in their efforts to work in an increasingly internationalized profession.

2014年から文部科学省 (MEXT) はトップ (スーパー) グローバル大学プロジェクト (MEXT, 2014) という大学の国際化を支援するための新たな資金を導入した。MEXTは、これらの資金の分配に先立って、教員の能力と管理レベル双方で、予期される変化について大学に指示を与えた。これらの変化は、大学コースとキャンパスにおける英語の使用の増大、および外国人や外国で教育を受けたプロフェッショナルな人材の確保を含んでいる。これらの変更は、将来的に大学の教育者の役割に影響を与える。本稿では、大学の国際化と最近の文部科学省の取り組みをカバーし、留学生を含むクラスで教師がどのように対応するのかを説明する。オンライン調査の結果を使い、実際に国際的な大学で働いている教師からの証言を紹介し、ますます国際化する職場で働くための努力と大学の教育者や政策立案者を支援することを目的としている。

**S**INCE THE early 1980s, policy initiatives from the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) have promoted an increase in the number of international students in Japan. In 2008, MEXT instituted the Global 30 project with a target of having 300,000 international students in Japanese universities by the year 2020. The upward trend in the numbers of international students in Japan means that, depending on their respective university's policies, university teachers in Japan will increasingly be required to work with students from other countries. Prior research has found that both international and domestic students at international universities find benefits, particularly with regard to their study of English, in their university environments. However, little work has been undertaken involving Japanese university teachers' opinions regarding their students' experiences on an international campus. This paper looks at how the experiences of students are reported by their EFL teachers at an international university in Japan and how the opinions of these teachers could assist teaching professionals in similar educational environments.

# JALT2014 CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



## Reasons For Rising International Student Numbers

The Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) publishes statistics on international students in Japan. These figures show that the number of foreign students in Japan has grown from 55,755 in 1998, the beginning of a surge in international student numbers, to 139,185 in 2014, a near tripling in the last 15 years. Although the number of international students in Japanese universities has regressed slightly from its peak of 141,774 in 2010, if the students studying in language institutions are included, the total number of international students in Japan is at its highest level ever at 184,155 (JASSO, 2015, p. 3).

The growth in the number of international students has been fueled by evolutions in government policy which led to expanded funding of universities for the purposes of internationalization. However, this growth in international student numbers cannot be attributed to government policies alone. Independent of government encouragement, some institutions have viewed a growth in their international student population as a solution to falling long-term domestic intake and poor international university rankings. The latter of these points includes increasing international outreach and improving the international reputation of the university. Both of these factors are used in the methodologies of ranking companies such as Times Higher Education (THE) and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS; <http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/rankings-indicators/>). The THE and QS rankings play a substantial role in the decision-making processes of universities that are seeking to internationalize and relate to student intake, faculty hiring, course contents, and beyond. For this reason, internationally active universities are motivated independently from MEXT policies to make changes to their institutions.

Current Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) policies to boost internationalization will likely fail to reach their stated goal—the Global 30 Initiative's target of 300,000 by the year 2020 seems some-

what unrealistic based upon the current figures of less than 185,000 quoted above. However, the failure to meet this goal may not be the fairest manner by which to evaluate internationalization efforts. The fact that this student target was set, and set so ambitiously, is an indication of the importance placed upon the recruitment of international students in Japanese higher education policies.

The latest round of government funding has widened the criteria for the success of universities included in the project. The Global 30 project focused on a core of 13 universities that were targeted for additional funds to facilitate bringing more students into Japan from other countries. The Top Global University Project (TGU), previously known as the Super Global University Project (a title still used when the project is referred to in documentation published in Japanese), was launched in spring 2014 and subsequently populated with universities in the summer of 2014. It is a project to further internationalize universities in Japan, with the explicit intent of improving the university rankings of leading Japanese institutions. TGU Group A universities will aim to have 10 in the world's top 100; TGU Group B universities are expected to undertake internationalization projects that could be used as examples for other universities to follow. It can therefore be said that the Group A universities are the image of what MEXT would like to project onto the world stage as the best examples of Japanese universities; Group B universities are how MEXT would like to encourage internationalization among other institutions in Japan.

These new targets suggest a change in MEXT's concept of internationalization to include not only international student recruitment but also following global education policy trends. Having 10 Japanese universities in the world's top 100 is a truly ambitious target, made even more so by the fact that Asian universities in general, and Japanese universities in particular, have not performed particularly well in the most widely respected rankings. Of the TGU Group A universities, only Tokyo University and Kyoto University rank in the world's top 100, according to the THE index, and only

Tokyo University, the highest ranked Asian university, makes the top 25. By comparison, of the top 25 in the world, 23 are from North America or Europe (Times Higher Education, 2014).

## Relation to Teachers

In an interview promoting the TGU, Japan Education Minister Shimomura Hakubun stated that participants in the new project had to be “strongly committed to advancing internationalization by collaborating with overseas universities, hiring more foreign faculty members, [and] increasing the number of degree programs in English” (Shimomura, 2013, p. B1). This should be of interest to university teachers in Japan for the following reasons:

1. Foreign teachers are to be recruited for their English ability, potentially for their use of English varieties viewed as norm providing, such as those from the USA, Britain, and Australia, rather than for their teaching qualifications;
2. Foreign-educated Japanese faculty members are to be recruited for the same reason; and
3. English use on campus and in non-language-based major courses through English-mediated Instruction (EMI) is to be increased, requiring changes to EFL programs to support EMI. Currently only 20 universities offer fully English taught programs (ETP), but this is set to rise (Brown, 2014).

In short, the internationalization of universities in Japan will be facilitated by a reappraisal of the role of English for university students and faculty, both in class and on campus. This means that the future campus environment may be unfamiliar to teachers recruited before the start of these current efforts.

## Research Location

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) can be considered a microcosmic experiment of the above-outlined policies and therefore

a model international university. APU was selected for TGU Group B funding, and the promise from the university in relation to this funding was to conduct “trailblazing” projects to demonstrate how internationalized universities can succeed (Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 2014, para. 3). Students at APU study in mixed ethnicity EFL classes including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Mongolian, and Myanmar students. They must also take 20 credits of their major-credit courses in EMI classes.

The label *international* in this context is taken to mean a university that actively recruits students to the institution from overseas in order to create a learning environment different from that at a university that follows a more traditional, domestic-student-based recruitment model. The classification of universities as international or domestic can never be binary. Foskett (2010) categorized universities globally into five groups with regard to their level of internationalization:

1. Domestic universities—“focus on their own local ... context;”
2. Imperialist universities—“have strong international recruitment activities . . . but have done relatively little to change their organization;”
3. Internationally aware universities—“are changing their organization and culture;”
4. Internationally engaged universities—“driving an agenda of internationalization;” and
5. Internationally focused universities—“the level of progress and achievement in internationalization is strong in many dimensions” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 3).

The TGU Group B universities are intended to be examples to other universities in Japan interested in internationalizing their student populations. APU is an outlier in terms of its aims for its students and also the makeup of its student population. What makes the ethnic makeup at APU especially remarkable is that the proportion of foreign students is so large. Close to 50% of its students are

from overseas compared with the national average of less than 3% (Shimomura, 2013). To put this into clearer perspective, the stated aim of the TGU for Waseda University, for example, is to increase its proportion of international students from 8% (already above the national average) to 19% over the next 10 years (Nikkei Asian Review, 2014). As an example to other universities, APU represents the extreme end of the spectrum of international recruitment. To use the Foskett terminology, APU is arguably the most internationally focused university in Japan.

## Research Project

My project follows up research regarding the benefits and problems faced by both domestic and international students at an international university where English is used as a medium of interaction (Bradford, 2013; Haswell, 2014; Hicks, 2013). As university EFL teachers and their employers are the agents of change for the internationalization required by MEXT, I approached this research from their perspective.

My data collection medium was an online survey tool containing a series of six propositions followed by four open-ended questions. The respondents could also enter comments after Likert-scale responses to the survey propositions. I promised the 13 respondents anonymity and therefore specific demographic information cannot be revealed here. However, I can report that they included both male and female respondents and included Japanese and non-Japanese respondents of both genders. I am confident that they are a representative sample of the faculty at APU. What follows is information on the research subjects and their comments regarding four items from the survey—two propositions and two questions.

## Demographic Profile: Length of Time at the University

The 13 respondents had an average experience of teaching 6.8 semesters, or more than 3 years, at the university. As regular EFL teachers at the university have 5-year contracts, this would place them just past the midpoint of their time at the university. The shortest period was a single semester, and three teachers had been teaching for over 5 years (10 semesters) at the university, meaning that at some point these teachers recontracted or changed jobs within the university.

## Proposition One: “My Students Think That Studying English Is a Good Idea”

All the respondents agreed that their students thought studying English was a good idea, selecting either 4 or 5 on the Likert scale in which 4 was *somewhat agree* and 5 was *agree*. Of those respondents who gave a reason, most commented on the utility value of English, using words such as *travel* or *work*. Even the comment “I think most of them would say that if I asked them” suggests that the responding teachers believe their students understand the benefits of studying English. From my own observations, it seems that the students do feel that there is a benefit to their studies, even if they cannot always elucidate what that advantage might be.

## Proposition Two: “My Students Use English Outside Their English Classes”

This proposition addresses two central questions when it comes to evaluating the effect of increasing the size of the international population of a university. From the university perspective, does having international students on campus equal more English use? From the students' perspective, are they possibly going to be required to use more English on campus than they feel able to perform?

Although students may choose to come to the university because of its international atmosphere and a perceived greater opportunity to use English, they may not be prepared for a fully internationalized university environment.

The teachers who agreed with the proposition gave some interesting insight into the opportunities to use English that are available to motivated, higher level students. These teachers commented, “At APU it is hard not to use English outside of class” and “Given APU’s environment, students might use English if their social or part-time work activities occasionally require them to use English.” Neither of these comments could be made about a Japanese university that is in the first two grades of Foskett’s scale. However, this proposition was not universally agreed with, and the teachers who did not agree commented, “Only those who take the initiatives and have access to English-speaking environments (e.g., clubs and organizations, and dormitories) do” and “Some very motivated students used [English], but it was not the majority of the students.” These responses suggest that the teachers feel it is the students’ responsibility to find opportunities to use English on campus and that students who lack such motivation will not.

*Question One: “What Would Your Advice Be for a New Student Joining Your University to Help Them Prepare for Their University Life?”*

This question was included to encourage teachers to give advice to students who may choose to come to the university but are not fully prepared for the environment. The majority of comments reveal that although one cannot avoid having an “international experience” at the university, it cannot be fully operationalized without noticeable effort. Nine of the 13 respondents to the question used words like *join* and *active*, suggesting that students should be prepared to do something to make their time in an internationalized university environment more rewarding. The clearest statement of this idea was in the following: “Do not expect that getting into APU means you can be fluent in English. . . . APU provides opportunities

for you to have international experiences, but you are the one who can maximize the opportunities.”

In combination with the previous proposition, the impression formed is that APU has an on-campus environment that is unlike that of the majority of Japanese universities, and as such, has opportunities that are not available elsewhere. However, from the perspective of both the teachers and the students, the experience does not match the overall rhetoric of the university itself, as APU’s website reports “With almost half of the faculty and student body comprised of foreign nationals from all over the world, the University has achieved a truly international campus environment of cultural coexistence” (Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, n.d., para. 1). It appears that more needs to be done in order for the students to take full advantage of their experience. As such, the teachers’ comments serve as a warning for other universities seeking to internationalize by increasing their number of international students: Increasing the numbers of international students does not automatically increase the international nature of the campus environment.

*Question Two: “What Would Be Your Advice to a New Teacher Joining Your University to Help Them Prepare for Working with Students From Countries Other Than Japan?”*

This question was intended to focus the respondents’ attention on any differences between the teachers’ previous teaching environments and what they had experienced at APU. Nine teachers offered specific advice, highlighting the key differences between teaching classes of a single ethnicity in Japan and those that may have several class members from other Asian countries. It is not always the case that there will be students from other countries in the classes, however, as was succinctly explained in this response: “Often teachers somehow believe classes are mixed, so we explain to them that English classes mainly consist of Japanese students, with some Korean and Chinese [in the standard EFL classes].” However, for those classes with international students present, the advice ranged from

the somewhat light-hearted “Your <insert dialect here>-ben jokes aren’t gonna work anymore; get a new routine” to the more serious “Try to really internalize the fact that not everyone’s L1 is the same and to adapt lesson plans accordingly” and “Be prepared to deal with cultural differences but, most importantly, integrate them in the class and make sure they also work with Japanese students.”

One teacher had experienced difficulty in lesson planning and said, “I would tell [the teachers] to expect the students to be much more challenging in terms of their questions . . . their ability to process and apply the content of the lesson quickly, their expectations of pace in the lesson, the amount of scaffolding they require, particularly for speaking activities, their confidence.” Another teacher made a similar point: “Recognize that there will be particular issues relating to interference from their L1 that may be different from Japanese students. Adjust materials so that they are not culturally inappropriate or depend on knowledge of Japanese culture.” The overall message is that teachers, even those with long professional experience, will still need to add cultural sensitivity to their lesson planning when considering methodology and lesson materials.

## Discussion of Findings and Recommendations

The environment at the international university is clearly different from that of other universities. To use the Foskett terminology, the student population at the university is diverse, and this diversity is continued in the classrooms as well, with mixed populations studying together. As was reported recently in an interview-based study of international students at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, the parent university of APU (Hicks, 2014), this may cause some problems connected to student integration. Nevertheless, there are clearly opportunities for an international experience at an international or internationalizing university.

Internationalization cannot be achieved only by increasing the number of international students on campus. It must be matched with proactive measures by the institution, faculty, and students.

There are both positive and negative connotations for the students attending an international university. Arguably the positive connotation is not one that the university would like widely publicized, as it does not support their published rhetoric: Although opportunities to become more intercultural fluent exist, students are not pressured into these situations against their will or beyond their ability to use English. Therefore, they are not automatically expected to perform in English at a level that are ill-prepared to maintain. The negative aspect is that internationalizing the environment does not lead to an automatic increase in the amount of intercultural interaction taking place. Such an increase will require additional effort.

A response to the question of what teachers’ advice would be for new students to the university brought attention to one of the initiatives that the university already has in place: “[The students] have an assignment called APU notebook. . . . They must find out about each and every country that is represented at APU. . . . I tell incoming students to make use of it and try to make friends with students from all around the world, preferably during the first year.” The university is trying projects that match its vision of a multicultural campus, and teachers are aware and supportive of them. Given that there are efforts being made to support students who are new to the university, there may be a lack of coordination between the actions of the institution and the actions of students. Further investigation is necessary into how the actions of the people involved in the process of university internationalization intersect, and how these actions form concurrent realities on campus.

There appear to be specific issues with lesson preparation and presentation that need to be considered in advance of teaching in internationalized EFL classes. With careful structuring, these points could be dealt with in a presemester orientation or faculty development session for teachers. For this reason, faculty administrators need to be aware of teachers’ testimonies through open communication with their staff and to provide a positive feedback loop in skill development sessions for new teachers.

## Conclusion

Not all universities have international students, but many Japanese institutions will be eyeing international students (to a greater or lesser extent) as a potential source of income as well as prestige with regard to international rankings. The comments of the teachers in this study suggest that there are opportunities, or the teachers believe that there are opportunities, for students to integrate into the available international society if they are active. However, the teachers' comments also led to the conclusion that they believe that students are not yet active enough to take full advantage of the environment that has been created. It will require the concerted action of policy-makers, institutions, faculty, and students to create truly international educational environments that will be of benefit to all.

## Bio Data

**Christopher Haswell** teaches at Kyushu University in Japan. His study interests are world Englishes in the Asia Pacific region and the modelling of worldwide English use. He was formerly employed by Fukuoka University during the preparation of this paper and would therefore like to acknowledge their financial support in this research. <haswell@flc.kyushu-u.ac.jp>

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