An Integrated University Language Curriculum

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For the average university language teacher, the thought of integrating the curriculum at their school can be overwhelming. Perhaps they feel they have no power to undertake such a dramatic reform, or they simply do not know where or how to begin such an ambitious undertaking. This paper will explore three types of integration (horizontal, vertical, and mirrored) that were implemented as part of a department-wide reform at this author's university. An example of each of these types of integration will be offered. Furthermore, the practical aspects of integrating a university language curriculum that arose during this experience will be detailed. This will be followed by a broader examination of the different options available to language program faculties when considering integrating classes at their school. This will start with simple teacher-to-teacher integration before moving on to department-wide reform.

大学で外国語を教える多くの教師たちが各クラスのカリキュラムの統一を困難に感じている。組織の中ではそれをするのが難しいと感じているか、その責任が重すぎるので避ける傾向にあるのではないか。本論文では、著者の実際の体験をもとに、カリキュラムを統一させるうえで色々な種類の効果的な方法など、個人個人との情報共有から学部全体での情報共有まで、さまざまな規模のカリキュラム統一のアイデアや方法を提供する。

Integration in education curriculums is defined in several ways. Malik and Malik (2011) viewed integration as the organization of teaching matter, allowing subjects usually taught separately to be joined. Shriner, Schlee, and Libler (2010) defined integration in language teaching as an examination of a topic through the application of skills and content from multiple subject areas. The integration discussed in this paper is a fully-integrated language curriculum in a university English department. This paper will define integration in the language classroom as the joining of different classes, EFL and/or content, with common goals and related content, so that language learning is more structured and efficient.

When considering why curriculum integration is beneficial, it is useful to consider the problems associated with a disjointed approach. Oxford (2001) noted that many traditional language classrooms teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing as distinct skills in isolation. This segregated-skill approach "is contrary to the integrated way people use language skills in normal communication" (p. 2) and "restrict(s) language learning to a very narrow, noncommunicative range that does not prepare students to use the language in everyday life" (p. 3).

An integrated curriculum allows students to make a stronger connection between the content and skills being learned (Costley, 2015) because it applies skills and vocabulary from more than one subject area to examine a central topic (Shriner et al., 2010). Watkins and Kritsonis (2011) believed this allows students to realize why they need to know certain skills or knowledge. This improves motivation, helping learners master the content and understand it at a higher level.

Studies examining student achievements resulting from integrated curriculums have found it to be beneficial. While most studies focus on integration in secondary schools (e.g., Bolak, Bialach, & Dunphy, 2005; Decorse, 1996), at the university level, Campbell and Henning (2010) examined the benefits of an integrated course compared to a traditional course. Their study found that the students enrolled in the integrated course outperformed their counterparts on end-of-year assessments.

Another benefit to an integrated curriculum is that it will better prepare students for the skills needed to succeed in the world today. Almost three decades ago, Benjamin (1989) understood that the movement toward a global economy as well as rapid changes in technology would make integration in education necessary. For future success, he

felt students would need to be able to make connections, solve problems by looking at multiple perspectives, and incorporate information from multiple sources and fields. Understanding that education would have to change to meet these demands, Humphreys, Post, and Ellis (1981) said that students "tend to learn what we teach them. If we teach separation and discontinuity, that is what they learn" (p. xi).

Finally, looking more directly at the language classroom, Oxford (2001) championed the need for more integration because it "exposes ESL/EFL learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturalistically in the language" (p. 21). She went on to contend that students will come to understand that English is "not merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people" (p. 21).

For those considering integration in their university, the first step is to understand what options are available. The three basic types of integration that have been implemented at Shujitsu University, a small private university in Western Japan, will be explained below. Some examples of the material or content which would be most suitable for each will be offered. These will allow readers to consider which options best meet the need and constraints when implementing curricular reform in their unique environments.

Types of Integration

There are three basic types of integration at Shujitsu University, which university stakeholders have termed *vertical*, *horizontal*, and *mirrored*. Each is explained below along with an example given of how it was implemented. These examples illustrate to the reader how the different types of integration look in a practical sense.

Vertical Integration

Vertical integration refers to content that is integrated chronologically such as semester to semester or year to year. Essentially, the material that was introduced in the previous year is reviewed in subsequent years before being developed with new, more challenging content and skills.

Material vertically integrated makes the content more manageable for the learners, and thus makes learning more efficient and effective. This is accomplished through the gradual and structured building of a skillset from one semester or year to the next. The students have the chance to become familiar with the terminology and strategies used in one class before expanding on this knowledge in a connected class. According to Stewart (1997), this assists the learners in better understanding content by allowing them to "focus on key concepts, connections among concepts, the structure of the information being presented and the language that goes with that structure" (p. 9).

An example is the 4-year integrated Process Writing curriculum at Shujitsu University (Appendix A). In the initial writing class, students are introduced to the basic stages of process writing. In the next year, students are taught how to make their papers more academic, such as becoming familiar with in-text referencing and citations. On top of this, the students are expected to write longer papers with more detail and information. In the 3rd-year writing class, students are expected to write even longer papers. As well, they further build upon the skills acquired in the previous 2 years by learning how to synthesize information, making their writing more cohesive and coherent.

Finally, in the students' 4th year, they complete their graduation dissertation, a procedure that utilizes all the skills taught in the previous 3 years. The final draft of this dissertation is required to be at least 8,000 words long. While this is very challenging for the students, it is made much more manageable by the system that has been put in place whereby the students work gradually to their end goal.

Horizontal Integration

Horizontal integration integrates content between classes and across skills. In this form of integration, the same content and language are revisited in a different class that focuses on building a different aspect of language. According to Nation (2013), this aids language acquisition in two important ways. First, it provides learners with the spaced repeated meetings of language items necessary for learning. Second, meeting the same language item in a different lesson and varying the techniques can help the repetition while maintaining interest. According to Nation, it is not enough to have the same types of meetings with language, and "items need to be met many times in many different contexts in order for adequate learning to occur" (p. 183).

The example provided in Appendix B demonstrates how three 1st-year classes were integrated at Shujitsu University. The process starts in the Freshman Skills class, which is an intensive introduction to a broad range of skills that 1st-year students will need to successfully complete university. It covers researching, note-taking, summarizing, planning, writing, and oral presentations as well as how to participate effectively in discussions.

In this class, students are asked to research their favorite movie. They are provided a worksheet with specific categories of information. The research is conducted using the

Internet, the library, and other sources of information. Once completed and submitted—but before being graded—the worksheets are photocopied and given to the writing class teachers. Thus begins the next stage.

The writing instructors return them. This worksheet then forms the basis for the writing assignment, a paper of more than 500 words detailing the student's favorite movie. They choose the information from the worksheet that they want to include as the main points in the paper and then organize their ideas by making an outline. Then they complete three drafts with each draft requiring a larger word count.

Finally, once the writing assignment has been completed, the instructor of the Communication class introduces an activity that uses the same topic: movies. The Communication class focuses on building fluency through the promotion of discussion and presentation skills. In small groups, students create a questionnaire using the vocabulary and language they learned in the Freshman Skills and Writing classes. Once complete, the students administer this questionnaire to their classmates, compile the data, and prepare an oral presentation. Finally, after practicing their presentation, the students present their findings to the class.

This level of integration is repeated with another topic later in the semester. As can be deduced from the explanation above, the form of horizontal integration implemented at Shujitsu University moves from receptive to productive skills. The students start with what is relatively easy before progressing to more challenging skills, all the while having the chance to recycle and become more proficient with the language required. Student learning is enhanced because they have a smaller cognitive burden (Kim, 2010); they develop different skills without having to learn completely new language and vocabulary at the same time.

It should also be noted that it is possible to integrate classes diagonally. This would be the same content integrated from year to year as well as between skills. Diagonal integration is a hybrid of the vertical and horizontal integration patterns described above.

Mirrored Curriculum

The third type of integration is the *mirrored curriculum*, in which the same skills and/or content are covered in both English and the students' first language. One example is the basic study skills taught in the Freshman Skills class (required of all 1st-year students) and also taught concurrently in Japanese in the *Kiso Zeminaru* class (Basic Seminar). While emphasizing the importance of the skills by doubling the exposure, students also become aware that the skills learned in either Japanese or English should not be compartmentalized but are mutually reinforcing.

Multicompetence theory (Cook, 1992; Cook, 1999) contends, and research confirms, that students can greatly benefit by developing links between their first and second languages. Cook (2001) maintained that addressing the same content in both the L1 and L2 helps to build up the inter-linked L1 and L2 knowledge in the students' minds and develop their ability at translanguaging for later real-life use. The mirrored curriculum is an attempt to promote these links.

Another example of a mirrored curriculum is two classes covering American Cultural Studies, one taught in English and one taught in Japanese. While these classes have different goals, the instructors of these classes coordinate their teaching content, so there is a degree of integration, mutual reinforcement, and mutual support. For example, after the students have practiced identifying the different states on a map of the United States in the class taught in English, the teacher in the other class uses this knowledge to map out historical events in the early history of the United States after a brief review in Japanese.

While the examples provided above are structured so that the classes are taught concurrently, it is also possible to mirror the content over time. Related content would be first taught in one language, and then introduced in the other language later. Staggering the introduction of the content would allow students to become more competent with the new material in one language before tackling the same content in a different language.

Implementation of Integration

Integration does not have to occur at the department-wide level. It can begin very small, in an informal manner, between colleagues who feel comfortable sharing ideas. Beginning on a small scale has a much greater likelihood of success compared to a department-wide, top-down approach. Rogers (1995) advised that innovation should not be implemented too quickly. Success depends on the innovation being small enough to be easily tried, modified, and if necessary, abandoned. The following are some examples of the ways a school can approach integration at their school, based on the experiences of Shujitsu University.

Informal integration can start with teachers sharing what they are doing in their classes. If similar content is being covered, but the teachers are focusing on different skills, they can work together to implement activities that support horizontal integration.

From one integrated activity in their classes, further integration could be developed later. Likewise, a teacher could approach a colleague who teaches a class with a similar skill set, but a year before or after their[1] own, asking what they are covering. For example, logically, writing classes would seem to be ideal environments for vertical integration. A 1st-year writing class should lead into the 2nd-year class.

Finally, a teacher could approach their colleagues who are teaching a similar type of class but in another language. This could even be done with a teacher in a different department. For example, if an instructor is teaching nursing students conversational English, they could approach their colleagues from the students' core-content areas to inquire what they could focus on in the English classes regarding nursing-related situations, topics, and lexis.

A mirrored curriculum makes English relevant and useful. Many students are forced to take an English component during their university life. Often, they do not see the relevance of taking an English class when they are studying to be nurses, for instance. A mirrored curriculum will help form a connection to their perceived real-world needs and would help make them understand and appreciate their English classes more.

If further integration is required or sought, these initial steps can be used as a launching pad. If it can be shown that integration is possible with a successful model, it is much more convincing. At Shujitsu University, integration was initiated first amongst the English-speaking teachers. There was considerable hesitation among some of the Japanese-speaking staff to coordinating with other teachers as to what content they would teach in their classes.

Bohn (2014) detailed some reasons teachers resist change. These include teachers who don't want the administration to interfere in their classroom, those who lack the confidence to initiate change, and those who prefer the traditional way of doing things as well as those who are simply apathetic. It has never been clearly established why there was this hesitance at Shujitsu University, whether it was a rejection of integration per se or simply a resistance to change. However, after a few years of witnessing the success that was achieved in the English classes, the Japanese-speaking English teachers at Shujitsu became more interested in the perceived benefits of integration and expressed their interest in working together.

Therefore, after some successes are recorded and some examples of how integration can be implemented are established, department-wide integration could be considered. This requires a clear understanding of what the department wants the students to be able to do after they complete their degree. This should be done through a needs assessment, which will be discussed below.

One final area of concern that many teachers have when discussing integration is the perceived adverse effect this might have on academic freedom. It is very important that teachers at university have the ability to shape and conduct their classes as they see fit. There are two reasons for this, both of which should be protected. The first is that university teachers are—or should be—experts in their field. They are uniquely qualified to decide what content should be included in their classes. The second reason, especially important due to the unique challenges found in the language classroom, is that the teacher needs flexibility to be able to provide the right level of instruction for each class. In the same classroom there are students of different language abilities and different skill sets. As well, because students in the language classroom are often expected to engage in pair and group work, a teacher must also consider the personalities of the students. Any ill-conceived attempt to impose restrictions on a teacher could adversely affect their class.

There are, however, compelling reasons why some amount of standardization is beneficial when integrating classes. This is especially true for compulsory core courses, most commonly in the 1st and 2nd years.

Needs Assessment

Before department-wide integration is undertaken, it is recommended that a needs assessment be conducted. This should focus on understanding what knowledge and skills the students should possess at the completion of their degree. Once this information has been ascertained, the curriculum can be designed so that all the important knowledge and skills the needs assessment identified are covered in a logical and structured way with horizontal and vertical integration.

When conducting the needs assessment, as much data as possible should be collected from all stakeholders (Markee, 2001). Apart from the teachers themselves, another potential source of useful information is graduating students. While they will unfortunately not benefit directly from the reforms, they are uniquely positioned to provide insight into how the department met their language learning expectations. This would provide a student perspective that might prove different from that of the teachers.

Next, it is highly recommended that the career center be consulted. They can provide useful and necessary insight into what skills the companies in your area or region are looking for when hiring graduating students. Similar to this, any outside sources of information should be consulted that might help steer curriculum development. One good place to start would be the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT). They routinely issue policy recommendations for improving the nation's English education system.

Another valuable source of information in the Japanese context is the *Keidanren* (Japan Business Federation), which periodically releases reports on a number of areas that affect Japanese businesses and commerce. These reports provide detailed recommendations of what skills Japanese youth need to possess to successfully enter the workforce.

Finally, one last area of insight would be an examination of the questionnaires students complete at the end of semester. These are becoming more and more ubiquitous at universities, and while they narrowly focus on their impressions of individual classes and teachers, they still could be useful. These could be examined over several years to identify trends that could also be used to shape reforms.

The Shujitsu Example

Perhaps the best way to illustrate how some amount of integration can be beneficial is to detail the situation that led up to the English Department faculty at Shujitsu University reforming their curriculum. It should help alleviate any concerns one might have that standardization and academic freedom are mutually exclusive and cannot coexist.

More than a decade ago, the Shujitsu English Department was staffed by highly competent teachers, but there was very little structure, coordination, or overall strategy in place. The department lacked an identity. Teachers were left to their own devices in deciding what and how they would teach. As such, it was almost impossible to know what skills a student would have acquired by the time they finished their degree. This was most apparent in the writing classes. While some 1st and 2nd-year writing teachers focused on academic writing, other teachers spent time teaching creative writing—how to write recipes or letters to friends. While these are not unworthy of being included in a university curriculum, it could be argued that these students were not given the skills necessary to write their graduation dissertation in English. When it became time for these students to begin writing their graduation thesis, many of them were unprepared. They had not received the skillset necessary to undertake such a rigorous and demanding challenge. Teachers were forced to spend valuable class time teaching these students fundamental skills, and many students expressed frustration with the level of instruction they received.

Understandably, when integration was first proposed some teachers expressed reluctance to cede any control over their classes. However, by deciding what skills and goals should be accomplished, including detailed rubrics to assess if learning goals where met, teachers were free to use any method, with any material, and in any way.

After the writing course was fully integrated, the students beginning their graduation dissertation were much better prepared. To be sure, some students still struggle at times, but overall there has been a marked level of improvement. The students can make the transition from year to year much easier.

Lastly, an additional benefit to a standardized curriculum is that it can offer a tremendous amount of support. When new teachers are hired to teach these integrated classes, it is very clearly laid out what should be taught. They are also given access to an extensive collection of pooled resources. These include complete sets of lesson plans, classroom activities, and supplementary materials that have been tried and tested and proven effective. They can use these in full or take whatever parts they like. They are still allowed to teach using any materials, method, or style they feel best suits the class as long as they work within the integrated curriculum. An integrated curriculum, therefore, can help make the transition to a new university much more manageable for a teacher and allow them to focus on getting comfortable in their new position. In this way, an integrated curriculum can not only be beneficial for the students but also benefit the teachers.

Conclusion

Reforming a university curriculum to include integration can be a daunting task. However, understanding how integration can be beneficial to students and teachers and what integration looks like practically as well as being aware of potential challenges can make the process more manageable. The experience described above, of how Shujitsu University successfully integrated its English Department curriculum, will hopefully prove useful to teachers at other institutions. While many of the benefits are rather difficult to quantify, the teachers at Shujitsu have reported a tremendous improvement in the students completing their graduation dissertations. The overwhelming consensus is that the students are more prepared to begin their dissertations, needing much less guidance. Furthermore, the career center reported that feedback they have received from employers stated that the English Department students performed very well in interviews. This has led to them having one of the highest rates of job placement among graduating students.

Note

1. In this paper, I have chosen to use the pronouns they, their, and them as singular pronouns of indeterminate gender.

Bio Data

David James Townsend has an MA in political science from Acadia University as well as an MA in applied linguistics (TESOL) from Macquarie University. He lives in Okayama, where he is teaching at Shujitsu University. His research interests include the study of the effectiveness of various classroom activities to promote language acquisition as well as peer-assessment of oral presentations.

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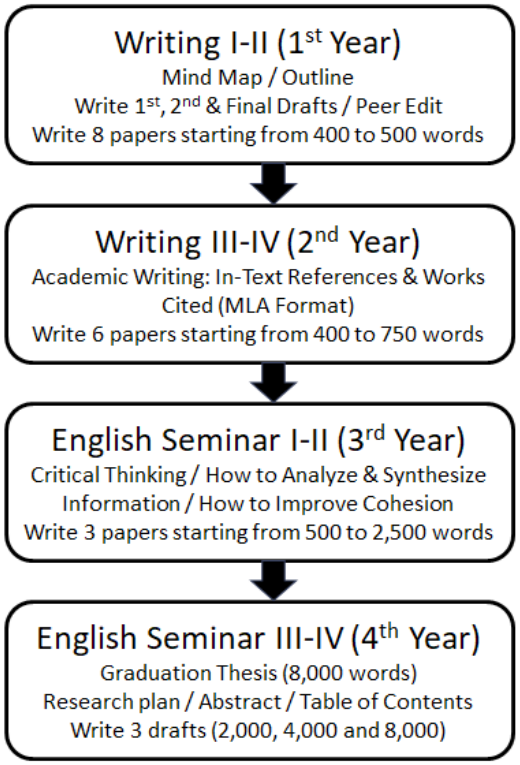
Appendix A
Vertical Integration



Appendix B
Horizontal Integration