

11<sup>th</sup> Annual Hawaii International Conference on Education, January 6-9, 2013

**Title of the submission:** Revitalizing the English Intensive Course and Study-Abroad Program at Konan University

**Topic area of the submission:** ESL/TESL, Higher Education, Language Education

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Revitalizing the English Intensive Course and Study-Abroad Program  
at Konan University

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how Konan Institute for Language and Culture has revitalized the EIC (English Intensive Course) and study-abroad program at Konan University over the past few years. Previously many students enjoyed studying in the EIC, and according to the survey results they felt classes were useful and beneficial. However, only a small percentage of the EIC students actually studied abroad. For this reason, several attempts were made to revitalize and improve the EIC and study-abroad program. The author has made further suggestions for revitalizing the program in order for EIC students to have better learning experiences at the EIC, while abroad, and after returning from the study-abroad experience.*

**Introduction**

There are many Japanese college students who are interested in studying in English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. In addition to improving their English skills and learning about the target culture, there are many other benefits for college students who study abroad. Gesinski, English, and Tyson (2010) point out that study-abroad experiences in college have many positive effects on students' learning, self-awareness, and growth. Braskamp, Branskamp, and Merrill (2009, p. 101) also made the following statement:

Education abroad has become an increasingly important educational program (experience) in global learning and development, intercultural competence, intercultural maturity, and intercultural sensitivity of students.

Furthermore, according to research, study abroad experiences in college enable students to better prepare for work, since many employers "value the skills and knowledge potentially gained from study abroad and these competencies are transferable on the job" (Franklin, 2010, p. 169).

Even though there are many positive effects of study abroad, until the beginning of 2000 students at Konan University had not received much support from the school for studying abroad. As a result, the number of students who studied in English-speaking countries drastically decreased around that time. For this reason the

Konan Institute for Language and Culture at Konan University established an English Intensive Course in order to help students improve their English and prepare students to study abroad. Since then, more and more students have gone to English-speaking partner schools. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the Institute has revitalized the English Intensive Course and study-abroad program and how the school has helped our students prepare for valuable linguistic, cultural, social, and various other learning experiences at our partner schools abroad.

### **English Intensive course**

In 2006 Konan University established the EIC (English Intensive Course) for freshman students who would like to improve their English and study abroad in their sophomore or junior year. The enrollment of this course is about 100 students: three classes for Humanities and Economics students and two classes for Law, Business, and Science students. The enrollment had been almost the same for the last few years, except that more than 150 students applied for this course in the academic year 2011.

At the EIC the curriculum focuses on linguistic competencies such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in the freshman year. In the sophomore year, the subjects are geared toward more academic skills and content-based learning. The following is the curriculum for this course.

#### Curriculum in 2006

Freshman Spring	Freshman Fall
-Introductory Oral Communication and Listening -Introductory Reading	-Intermediate Speech -Intermediate Reading

Sophomore Spring	Sophomore Fall
-Intermediate Writing -Intermediate Listening	-Advanced Speech -Advanced Global Topics

#### Curriculum in 2011 and 2012

Freshman Spring	Freshman Fall
-Introductory Oral Communication and Listening -Introductory Reading	-Intermediate Speech -Intermediate Writing

Sophomore Spring	Sophomore Fall
-Intermediate Reading	-Advanced Speech
-Advanced TOEFL iBT	-Advanced Global Topics

Freshman students take four ninety-minute English classes (meeting twice a week for each class) in one academic year instead of two introductory English classes a year as in the regular freshman curriculum at Konan. In the sophomore year, students will take four additional English classes and they can also sign up for more English classes outside this curriculum, such as TOEIC and Oral Communication classes, according to their needs.

In addition to this curriculum, the EIC offers non-credit-bearing nine-day summer and spring intersessions. Students attend the intersession class for three ninety-minute class periods every day for eight days and take the TOEFL test on the last day. In the summer of the year 2011, we offered an ITP TOEFL intersession in the middle of August and an iBT TOEFL intersession in the beginning of September. The total enrollment for the two sessions was 91. The average ITP TOEFL score for the last five years was about 450. In the academic years of 2010 and 2011, students who were enrolled in the iBT TOEFL intersessions took the Complete iBT TOEFL Test, which is an unofficial computerized test for the iBT TOEFL. The average score for 2010 was 47, and for 2011 it was 46.

For the first three years, teachers in the EIC instructors taught their classes very diligently and survey results showed that students felt that they enjoyed their classes and improved their English skills. However, teachers did not seem to emphasize studying abroad for each student. As a result only 24%, 28%, and 18% of students who entered the EIC course in 2006, 2007 and 2008 studied abroad for one semester or a full academic year. Another important reason for many students who did not study abroad was that since the EIC is run by the Konan Institute for the Language and Culture, not by each department such as Humanities and Economics, studying abroad is not mandatory. For these reasons some students dropped out of the course after one year, and others decided not to study abroad due to financial difficulties or because they were pursuing other interests.

### **Revitalizing English Intensive Course and Study Abroad**

As we can see from the outcomes of the EIC, there was great cause for concern

about this course, and something had to be done to increase the number of students studying abroad. Consequently, after the first three years, the following reforms were made in order to revitalize this course:

#### 1. Individual Conferences

EIC teachers are responsible for holding individual conferences with their students every semester. Each conference may last about 20 to 30 minutes. Teachers talk with students about individual goals for studying abroad and about their classes. Through these conferences teachers get to know their students well and find out more information about students' plan for studying abroad as well as their needs for improving their English skills. Individual conferences also allow teachers to give students guidance and motivate them to improve their studies and study habits.

#### 2. Student Information Sheet

This is a three-page information sheet for EIC freshman concerning studying abroad and their studies for each class. Students fill in the sheet, and their teachers keep the information in the file. This information sheet is a valuable tool when each teacher has individual conferences with students.

#### 3. Classroom Visitation

The coordinator of the EIC visits all freshman classes a few times a year to give students information about study-abroad program at Konan University and answer any questions from students. The coordinator also gives information about summer and spring TOEFL intersessions and circulates flyers with application forms to students.

#### 4. TOEFL Criterion

The TOEFL Criterion is an e-rater composition developed by the ETS (Educational Testing Service) in the late 1990s. They offer various essay questions similar to iBT TOEFL independent essays. Students type their essays on the computer, and a few seconds after the submission of their essays, the computer evaluates their essays and give them a score scaled from 1-6 (the same standard as the TWE TOEFL). The students are able to see their score as well as their mistakes in subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, redundancy, sentence fragments, etc. There are three main reasons for using the criterion:

- 1) To review paragraph writing skills such as listing, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect. Many TOEFL independent essay questions deal with these writing skills.
- 2) To help students prepare for the TOEFL independent essay writing test (get used to the format of the test and working on a computer). The iBT TOEFL writing test consists of two essays: one is an integrated essay that combines reading an academic

passage, listening to a lecture and then responding to a question (a short essay requiring about 150 to 225 words). The other is an independent essay which is exactly the same format as TOEFL Criterion (an opinion essay requiring about 300 to 350 words) (Sharpe, 2010).

- 3) The TOEFL Criterion promotes students' *jikokanri* (probably equivalent to "self-discipline," "self-management" or "autonomy" in English). Nowadays, many Japanese college students lack this skill. For example, whenever the teacher gives students assignments, reports, etc., some students tend to give an excuse such as "I was sick." "I forgot to bring my assignment today. Can I turn it in for the next class?" "My printer was broken." In the criterion the teacher gives students the procedure and guideline a few weeks before the first deadline. Then they are reminded that there will be no excuse because all the essays are submitted online. *Jikokanri* is a very important skill that students need to acquire, since instructors at most universities in North America and the UK will not accept any late work (or will penalize it heavily). Moreover, once students get a job after graduating from college, they will be expected to finish their assignments on time.

In addition to the changes made above in 2010, the following reform was also made in 2011 in order to revitalize the EIC and promote the study-abroad program for our students:

1. Free ITP TOEFL

All freshman are required to take the ITP TOEFL (free of charge) in April. The score helps students to understand their English proficiency level as well as their strengths and weaknesses in listening, structure, and reading. Once they find out their English proficiency level in spring, they will be able to set their own goals and recognize how much effort they need to put forth to prepare for studying abroad. The score also helps teachers to make adjustments in their teaching and give appropriate advice to students during the individual conferences. In April 2011 93% of EIC students took the ITP TOEFL. Their average score was 430.

Sophomores also take the ITP TOEFL (free of charge) in July to see how much they have improved their TOEFL score after a year and a half in the course. In July 2011, 65% of EIC sophomore students took the ITP TOEFL, and their average score was 461. The 35% of students who did not take the test seemed to feel that they had already obtained the TOEFL requirement for study abroad or that ITP TOEFL was not significant since they aimed to study at partner schools that required the iBT TOEFL not the ITP.

2. Subsidizing iBT TOEFL

If the EIC students obtain an iBT TOEFL score above 45 or an ITP TOEFL score above 470, they may receive financial aid (once a year) from the school after taking the iBT TOEFL.

### 3. Visiting partner schools

KILC (Konan Institute for Language and Culture) did not have much information about how students in the EIC were doing in our partner schools even though some faculty members had interviewed some EIC students after they returned from study abroad. Now, the faculty at KILC visits several partner schools to interview students, take a campus tour to get familiar with the school, and talk with faculty and administration about improving their study abroad program. Furthermore, teachers at the EIC will receive information and photos of partner schools and can utilize them when they have conferences with students.

### 4. English supplementary materials

KILC purchased materials such as TOEFL prep books, English novels, magazines, and DVDs for the EIC students to utilize. Students use those materials outside the class to facilitate their learning. Many students have used those materials to date.

## **Formative Evaluation of the English Intensive Course and Study Abroad Program**

Genesee (2001) says that “an important purpose of evaluation is accountability: to demonstrate that students are learning to the standards expected of them and/or that a curriculum or programme of instruction is working the way it should” (p. 146). Worthen, Sanders and Fitzpatrick (1997) state that there are two types of evaluation: formative and summative evaluation. In the formative evaluation, we are interested in what is working, what needs to be improved, and how it can be improved. In the summative evaluation, we tend to make judgments about the program’s worth or merit. According to Torres, Preskill and Piontek (1996) “its focus is on continuation, termination or adoption of a program” (p. 46).

Four formative evaluations were conducted in the EIC and study-abroad program: 1) a TOEFL Criterion survey 2) a sophomore students survey 3) a mid-term student evaluation and 4) student interviews at partner schools.

The TOEFL Criterion survey was conducted in one class (19 students) in January 2011. In this class, the students completed nine TOEFL criterion essay assignments. Their initial average score was 3.79 (on a scale of 1-6) and their average score on their eighth assignment was 4.26.

In February students of this class signed up for the iBT TOEFL intersession. Their average TOEFL score on the writing section of the Complete iBT TOEFL Test was 15.

Some of Konan's partner schools' iBT TOEFL requirement for enrolling in academic courses is 61 and their writing requirement is 15, so the students were able to meet the standard of our partner schools' TOEFL writing requirement by the end of the intersession.

The survey results revealed that in general students strongly liked the criterion because it allowed them to practice essay-writing of a sort similar to the real TOEFL; they could get the result right away; they could clearly see their mistakes; and they seemed to feel a sense of accomplishment when they obtained a decent score.

Regarding what students did not like about the criterion, representative comments were as follows: "I felt that good evaluation depends on the length of the essay." "I wanted to have more comments about the content of essays." "We can only work on the criterion on the web-based environment." "It is difficult to see comments." "Some essay topics were somewhat similar, so it was difficult for me to come up with an idea to write essays." "Some essay topics were difficult to handle." "Sometimes it is difficult to access the site. I could not resubmit the essay." "Even though I wrote an introductory paragraph, the computerized evaluation said that there was no introduction." "Graphs of grammatical errors were difficult to comprehend." "My essay disappeared from the screen all of a sudden."

Although some students made negative comments, more than 90% of the students said that the criterion was useful and most of them agreed with the score they obtained. In this class the teacher used the criterion near the end of the semester, as a review. In order to get a decent score, students need to know how to write a paragraph well (including an introduction, topic sentences, supporting sentences, a conclusion, and signal words, and organizing the essay coherently). For this reason, using a textbook that dealt with paragraph writing and supplemental material that dealt with TOEFL essay writing seemed to work very well. By the time students started their first assignment, they basically knew what was expected of them in the TOEFL independent essay. Nation (2009) states, "Writing is most likely to be successful and meaningful for the learners if they are well prepared for what they are going to write" (p. 93). In conclusion, using the criterion alone does not seem to be very useful, but utilizing the criterion properly strengthens students' writing skills. Thus, the teacher plays a significant role in implementing the criterion.

In July 2011, a survey was conducted of all the sophomore students who were enrolled in the EIC in order to find out how they felt about studying in the course for a year and a half. Altogether 62 students participated in the survey. A similar survey was conducted in July 2010. In response to a question concerning whether they felt satisfied



with the course, 92% of the students responded that they felt very good about studying at the EIC for the last year and a half. The main reasons given were: 1) Students could finish up classes (get credits) faster than in regular classes. 2) They could learn better (better retention). 3) They felt that they had significantly improved their English.

In response to a question regarding the individual conference, 65% of the students (80% in 2010) felt that it was useful and helpful because they could get information about study abroad and learn about how to study effectively in and outside the class. Students made the following comments: “I learned how to study English at home and obtained detailed information about partner schools.” “The teacher gave me more information than the study abroad brochure, and it was very helpful.” “The conference was beneficial because I was motivated to study harder.”

Those who responded “not useful” or “hard to tell” said that they did not seem to get much information about study abroad. Students said: “I’d already applied for the study abroad program, so the conference wasn’t that useful for me.” “The teacher didn’t talk much about my plan for study abroad.” “I don’t know whether the conference was useful or not because we didn’t get into details about my specific planning for study abroad.”

Regarding the curriculum (two classes per semester), 90% of the students felt it was about right. This result is similar to the 2010 survey. Therefore, this curriculum seems appropriate for the students. Most students (84.7%) were taking two classes. However, 15.3 % of the students were enrolled in only one class because some students had a scheduling conflict with their major classes and others decided not to study abroad. As for scheduling conflicts, we need to coordinate with each department to streamline the schedule.

In response to a question regarding whether students would continue studying at the EIC for the fall semester or not, about a half of the students said that they would continue taking classes, but the other half would either discontinue or “sleep on it.” Those who responded “discontinue” or “sleep on it” gave the following reasons: 1) They would either study abroad or not study abroad. 2) They had fulfilled English requirements for graduation or they would like to save English credits for studying abroad so that they could transfer their credits to Konan University.

For these reasons, we need to reconsider whether our two-year EIC curriculum is appropriate or not. From a realistic viewpoint, rather than having a two-year curriculum, a year-and-a-half curriculum might be better for students because some study abroad in the fall and others can save credits when they study abroad. For those who are motivated to study more English, we can offer some English classes in the fall.

According to the survey result, about 70% of the students said they would study abroad in 2012. Schools they want to go may change because some students would continue taking iBT TOEFL during the summer vacation. As a result of their TOEFL score, they might narrow down which school they will go to.

In our 2010 survey, 54% of students responded that they would study abroad and 39% of the students said they were not sure. In our 2011 survey 23% of students said they were not sure. This “not sure” does not necessarily mean they were thinking about whether they would study abroad or not. Individual conferences with the sophomore students showed that most students said that they would study abroad, but they were not sure which school they were going to.

The mid-term student evaluation was conducted during spring 2011 for all the EIC freshman reading classes, and some other EIC classes were also surveyed. At the EIC, there are five freshman reading classes in spring and students meet twice a week for 90-minutes’ instruction.

Regarding evaluation, Konan University and most universities in Japan administer a student evaluation survey at the end of the semester or year. The results of the questionnaire are usually analyzed statistically and given to the teachers. However, the purpose of this kind of quantitative survey is merely to give information to the teachers, and the school never follows up on improving the teacher’s performance (Tsuda 2004). Sanders (2000) points out that getting information alone is not adequate for evaluation. Moreover, this type of survey gives students’ overall impression of the class, but never provides enough information to the teacher to improve his or her performance, due to the closed-response questions. According to Brown (2001), “closed responses are responses for which optional answers are presented as part of the question, and the respondents are required to select the answer of their choice” (p. 35). For example, if the survey results show that 60% of the students are not satisfied with the class, how can the teacher improve his or her teaching without knowing the reasons for students’ dissatisfaction (Tsuda, 2004)?

Regarding the limitations of the survey method, Patton (2002, p. 193) states:

What did people really mean when they marked that answer on the questionnaire?  
What elaboration can respondents provide to clarify responses? How do the various dimensions of analysis fit together as a whole from the perspective of respondents?

Concerning our mid-term evaluation, we decided to use a web-based survey in which students can access the survey on the internet by computer or by cell phone to

respond. The survey format included both closed and open responses for each question. For example, one question asks students whether the class is useful. They are required to choose whether the class is “very useful,” “somewhat useful,” “not very useful” or “not useful at all.” Then there is a space below the choices where students are able to include their own responses in detail. This allows teachers to find out about the reasons for their choices.

As soon as the students responded to the survey, the computer analyzed the data (closed responses) and provided the statistical data automatically. As for the open responses, the computer accumulated and laid out all the data (open-ended responses) for each question. Afterwards all the teachers got together and talked about the results of the data and things they wanted to improve in their classes. Since the survey was conducted in the middle of the semester, teachers were able to make some adjustments in their teaching. For example, one teacher gave his feedback to his students concerning the students’ survey results. He showed the students the statistical data and all the students’ comments, explaining what he would or would not change in his class. For example, one student gave the teacher a suggestion about how to deal with vocabulary. The student noted that often the teacher pre-taught vocabulary before students read the passage. The student suggested that the teacher instead give students opportunities to figure out the meaning from the context. The teacher mentioned in class that due to time constraints, sometimes he did not have much time to let students guess the meaning of the vocabulary in context, but from then on he would incorporate the student’s suggestion in class.

In one of the open-ended responses, most students in the class indicated that they really liked the music the teacher used in class. However, one student addressed a question in the survey: “Why do you use music in the reading class?” The teacher explained that the purpose for using music in the class is to develop students’ multiple intelligences rather than to entertain. Then he went on to define the MI theory and how effective it is to implement music and other intelligences in classrooms (Armstrong, 2009; Christison, 2005; Gardner, 1999; Puchta & Rinvoluceri, 2005). Afterwards, students were given an opportunity to work on the MI inventory and became familiar with their own intelligences. Thus, by clarifying students’ responses in the survey and by actually incorporating students’ feedback in the classroom, students seemed to feel that the teacher was more responsible for his teaching and cared about students. This is quite different from the end of the term or year survey. In this type of survey, students often feel it a waste of time to respond to the questionnaire because they will never know if the teachers incorporates their opinions and improves his or her teaching

performance in the future.

In March and July 2011 the author visited four partner schools and participated in a campus tour, interviewed Konan University students and talked to faculty and administrative members at each school in order to improve the study abroad program and the EIC. At the University of Queensland in Australia, the author interviewed 15 Konan students who were studying ESL at UQ (eight students on the first day and seven students on the second day). Each interview session lasted about an hour and permission to use a recording device was granted by the students. Unfortunately, these students were not previously enrolled in the EIC, so I could not ask them any EIC-related questions. However, they were enrolled in the same program as our prospective EIC students will take at UQ, so their responses to my questions are relevant and useful. There were mainly six questions in this interview, as follows:

- 1) Is the English program appropriate to your level?
- 2) Are the classes useful and helpful for improving your English? Are there any classes that are not useful? How much homework do you have every day?
- 3) How do you like your homestay?
- 4) Do you have any chances to get to know UQ native speaking students?
- 5) Have you ever had any experience that made you feel afraid of been in any kind of danger?
- 6) Do you have any other comments or suggestions for improving this study abroad program?

Concerning ELS classes at UQ, most students felt the level was about right. Meanwhile some students said that grammar was too easy for them, but they couldn't express themselves well in a speaking class. This is a very typical response from Japanese students who are enrolled in an ESL program abroad. They feel grammar is relatively easy, but speaking is challenging in their assigned level. Besides they often point out that non-Asian students such as students from South America and Arab countries tend to speak well and speak out often regardless of their grammatical mistakes in class, but they do not seem to have good knowledge of grammar.

Most students said that the program was practical and useful for improving their English, as they responded: "The teacher listens to us well and correct our mistakes." "Currently we practice how to make restatements. Since we need to come up with different and appropriate phrases, we can increase vocabulary and refine our English." "We can speak to people from different countries and learn about their cultures." "We can practice pronunciation in different situations."

However, some students mentioned that whether the class was useful or not

depended on the teacher. One student responded this way, "I'm taking an elective pronunciation class. This class is very boring because I have no chance to have any communication with other students in class. All I do is sit in class, wear a headset to listen to English and respond. This class lasts two hours."

Concerning homework, the amount depended on the teacher. Some students said there was hardly any homework while others said they had homework almost every day. However, even if they had homework, they could finish it up in a half an hour or an hour at most.

Most students seemed to enjoy staying with their host family, as they responded this way: "I often have a chance to talk to members of my host family during dinner." "A student from Macao lives with my host family. He's a graduate student at UQ. He and I often go shopping and have a chance to talk to each other at home." "Family is very kind to me and there's a swimming pool at home." "The place is very close to the campus and family members often talk to me." "It's fun and food is very good." The main reason that students liked the homestay is that the host family was kind and there was a good chance to communicate with them.

Some students expressed some negative feelings about the homestay experience, as follows: "The host family's son comes home every once in a while and has an argument with his mom. Then the atmosphere of the family gets worse." "The host father is very strict about rules." "Often times my host family isn't at home. When I get home, there's frozen food in the kitchen and I eat it by myself, so I cannot have much conversation with them." Students do not seem to enjoy homestay or feel uncomfortable living with their host family when they encounter arguments in the family, being restricted by rules and having little communication with the host family.

Another negative perception some students had about homestay arises from cultural differences. Some Japanese students tend to think that their host families should take care of them thoroughly whereas Australian families tend to think that students themselves should take care of things unrelated to host family responsibilities. For example, one student mentioned that when she left her dictionary on the bus, she asked her host family what she should do. The family replied by saying that she should go to the lost and found and find out herself. The student on the other hand expected the family to do something about it. She felt that this family was indifferent and unsupportive, whereas the host family probably meant to encourage the student to be more independent.

Responses to the question concerning opportunities to mingle with UQ native speaking students indicated that nobody had any chances to get to know them.

Nevertheless, they did not seem to be dissatisfied with this missing opportunity, since they only studied UQ for five weeks and they could mingle with other international students. A few years ago, I asked the same question to some EIC students who came back from UQ. They were in a 20-week program and some of them felt dissatisfied with having few chances to get to know UQ native speaking students. It seems that the longer the students study overseas, the greater their desire to mingle with local students and the host community rather than being with ESL international students all the time. According to a study conducted by Tanaka (2007), most Japanese students who studied ESL and stayed with host families in New Zealand responded that homestay was the only opportunity to speak with native speakers. Consequently some of them were very frustrated with this situation.

As for the question related to safety and crisis management, fortunately none of the students had experienced any serious danger, but most students commented on the inconvenience of the public transportation system in the UQ Brisbane area. One student said that she had to walk 40 minutes to the nearest bus station. Most students said that there were not many busses running on the weekends and if they missed the bus, they would need to wait an hour for the next bus. In addition, they said that the cost of transportation was high; one student spent more than 20,000 yen on transportation over five weeks.

There were only a few opinions for any additional comments or suggestions. Most of the students said that were glad that they had come to UQ to study ESL and live in Australia. Some students felt that the cost of transportation was much more than they expected. Others thought that the weather was much cooler than what they heard from students who had come to UQ previously. Especially mornings and evenings were chilly and they had not brought enough warm clothes, and they said that they should have checked the weather by themselves more carefully beforehand.

Following the interviews, I had an opportunity to have a campus tour and become familiar with facilities on the campus. I made copies of the photos I took at UQ and downtown Brisbane and gave them to all the EIC teachers who were responsible for conferences with students. I also videotaped the campus and edited the video to show EIC students.

In order to find out more about ESL classes, I obtained permission from UQ to observe a couple of classes. One class was a communicative grammar class where the teacher explicitly taught some grammar points and later all the students stood up and applied those grammatical points by interacting with classmates. Then the teacher monitored the class and gave students advice and made some corrections. The other

class was focused on listening comprehension, and the teacher used the interactive board to facilitate students' learning. The teacher often elicited answers from students, and there were lots of pair-work and group-work activities in class.

On the second day, I was able to meet with the regional manager for marketing development and the director of studies and reported to them the results of my interviews with students. Concerning getting to know UQ native speaking students, they both mentioned that there are more than 150 clubs at UQ and some clubs such as the Manga Club and the Wasabi Club members are always interested in getting to know Japanese students. They would give us more information about their clubs so that our students can easily access their Facebook pages. Regarding UQ's ESL program, Konan students were taking a General English program that does not require much homework. In this program, both of them said, students are expected to use English to communicate with their host family to facilitate their learning outside the classroom.

After visiting the University of Queensland, the author visited Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, to negotiate a new ESL/exchange program there. For the last few years, Konan University had not been able to send students to Murdoch University because of the high TOEFL requirement (iBT 68). In order to improve our relationship and send more Konan students to Murdoch, the author proposed a program combining half ESL and half regular exchange program. Students who have an iBT score of 54 can get into their ESL program for one semester (15 weeks) and after its successful completion, they become eligible to study in the regular academic program for the following semester. Ultimately, this proposal was accepted, and starting from the fall 2012, this new ESL/Exchange program will begin.

In addition to the campus tour, the author had an opportunity to meet with two Japanese students from different universities and talked with them about their living and studying experiences at Murdoch. Both of them were exchange students (one from a university in Kyoto and the other student from a university in the Tokyo area). One of the students allowed me to visit her dorm. It was very close to the campus and she shared it with three other students at Murdoch. It is like a furnished apartment with kitchen facilities. Each resident has her own private bedroom. There is also a swimming pool outside.

In July 2011, the author visited UBC (University of British Columbia) and UCSD (University of California San Diego) and interviewed Konan students and talked to administrators and faculty members of both schools. Similar to my visit to UQ, I interviewed four Konan students who were enrolled in UBC's 16-week ESL program. Three of them were former EIC students. UBC has ESL programs from level 100 to 600

and our students belonged to the 300 to 400 levels. Basically my questions for the interview were the same as at UQ and their responses to the questions were also similar. At UBC all the international students in ESL do a home stay, so that their living experiences are also similar to UQ. However, some students at UBC expressed dissatisfaction with their homestay experience because they were treated as a student rather than being treated as a member of the family. This is probably due to differences in expectations between host families and students. Some host families consider that their responsibilities are simply providing meals and accommodations. Therefore, some students said that their host family acted more businesslike and never tried to get to know them well. For this reason, one student moved out and moved in with a new host family who were much friendlier and more interested in getting to know her. She said that she really enjoyed being with the new family and that she and her host family were like friends and had a good relationship. Jackson (2008) states, "homestays have the potential to provide a rich, supportive linguistic and cultural environment" (p. 229). However, from interviews I conducted with my students, some host families are too busy to communicate with our students and others are simply not interested in mingling with our students. Therefore, some of our students need to find more opportunities to speak with native speakers outside the class, but it seems very difficult.

At UBC, CA (Cultural Assistants) who are students there are employed to help interact with ESL students. Consequently, ESL students have more opportunities to practice English with Canadians. However, our students said the CA usually goes home after five o'clock. Similar to students at UQ, they had a limited amount of time to speak with native speakers other than their host family.

One difference that students at UBC mentioned was that before coming to UBC, they had a plenty of free time, since their final exams were over in January and they came to UBC in May. However, they never took time to study English seriously and everyone regretted that they should have studied English and prepared well before coming to Canada. Then they could have started at a much higher level at UBC and this would have allowed them to improve their English skills.

According to Tanaka's study of Japanese students' homestay and ESL experiences in New Zealand, the main reason for Japanese students' limited interaction with native speakers was their limited proficiency in English. Even though they wanted to communicate with native speakers, they had difficulty developing conversations in English. Tanaka concluded by saying that in order to mingle more with native speakers including host family and local people, they should try to improve their proficiency as much as possible in Japan before studying abroad (Tanaka, 2007).



One additional question I asked was how the EIC could facilitate their learning and help them prepare for studying abroad, and all of them said that more emphasis on speaking skills would be helpful, since it was the skill they needed to improve the most.

After having some discussions with the marketing manager at UBC concerning their new eight-week study abroad program, I was able to meet with the ELI Head Teacher for the Program. She is responsible for coordinating programs and overseeing all the teachers. We talked about the possibility of creating an eight-week course in addition to the current 16-week course, so our students will be able to study for either the 16 or 24 weeks, total. A few years ago, when our first students went to UBC, we interviewed them upon their return to Japan. All of them expressed their desire to study a little longer at UBC. Then just about a year ago, UBC created an eight-week program, so we asked them if it was possible to combine eight- and sixteen-week programs. Therefore, the main purpose of the meeting was to implement this 24-week program, and we both agreed that this program would work well. This 24-week program will start in Fall 2012, and eight Konan students have already applied for it.

UCSD offers 14-week, 20-week and 24-week ESL courses and most of our students were enrolled in either a 20- or a 24-week course from spring through summer. They can choose either homestay or off-campus apartment housing. This apartment is not owned by the school and students share the apartment with other international students. Ten Konan students I interviewed had similar feedback to students at UQ and UBC. However, as far as their ESL program was concerned, some students studying at UCSD complained that the majority of international students at UCSD were either Japanese or Korean and they had more desire to get to know students from different countries and Americans. Since they lived in a homestay or in an apartment with other international students, they had a few opportunities to get to know American students and native speakers on campus. Several students belonged to upper-intermediate levels in ESL and a few were enrolled in advanced level. One student was actually born and raised in America and spoke English fluently. However, even at their high proficiency level, they found it difficult to get to know UCSD native speaking students or local people. Therefore, what Tanaka (2007) suggested (improving English will help students to mingle with native speakers) did not much apply to our students. It seems that students need to be provided more opportunities to mingle with native speakers. For example, Central Washington University in Washington State provides a dormitory for our students where they live with American or native-speaking roommates. When I interviewed several students who came back from that school, they said that they were able to make friends with roommates and other American students living in the dorm.

Some of them had a chance to visit their roommates' homes. Their English level was not as high as students at UCSD, so the key to mingling with native speakers seems to be an environment where students can naturally get to know native-speaking students in a partner school rather than simply being proficient in English. Although students had some negative comments about their study abroad program at UCSD, in general they seemed to enjoy living and studying in the U.S.

Unlike UQ and UBC, UCSD offers conversation leaders and conversation partners. Conversation leaders are hired by the UCSD extension center. They are native speakers of English and mostly UCSD students who come and visit ESL classes and interact with international students. Conversation partners are usually UCSD students who meet with international students on a regular basis and talk with them outside the class. They are working on a voluntary basis, so the Konan students I interviewed mentioned that sometimes it was very difficult to get a hold of them, as they were busy with their own classes or for other reasons.

Among the 10 students I interviewed, eight students were former EIC students. When I asked them about their suggestions for improving the EIC program, they said the followings: "Need to strengthen a speaking class." "Global Topics class was very helpful since we had many occasions to give presentations in class." "We didn't have many opportunities to speak in class." "Students shouldn't speak Japanese in class." "Need to be stricter. Native instructors we had were all good, but they weren't very strict in class."

From visiting four partner schools and touring the campuses, interviewing students, talking with administrators and faculty members, I was able to gain knowledge about studying abroad programs and how our students lived and studied at our partner schools. The following are the points I have learned and some observations for revitalizing the EIC and the study-abroad program.

- 1) Our partner schools are very serious about the quality of education and meeting the needs of our students. I have learned a lot more about their programs, facilities, and environments, which helps us give our EIC students updated information about our partner schools.
- 2) There was a big difference between previous interviews conducted at Konan and interviews conducted at partner schools. The interviews at Konan were held a few weeks after students came back from partner schools, and students had to go back to the past and retrieve their memories, whereas the students I interviewed abroad were currently studying. Therefore, they had a lot more to say about their current experiences and feelings. Their information was very valuable and informative to

- our EIC students who are planning on studying at those schools in the near future.
- 3) Giving feedback to our partner schools had a positive impact on them as well as our prospective students. For example, some students complained about the inconsistency of an ESL coordinator's treatment of ESL students when registering for classes. When I brought up this issue, the director was unaware of it. She promised to inform coordinators and other staff members to better serve their students at upcoming customer-service training sessions.
  - 4) Many students who study ESL found that homework was not challenging. Although it is difficult to change partner schools' policy, some partner schools have an ESL course for students who need to prepare before entering an undergraduate or graduate school. Such courses are more challenging and demand a lot of homework. If our students need a greater challenge, they may be able to enroll in such a course as an option.
  - 5) Students who are studying abroad suggested more speaking practice at EIC classes. We revised the curriculum in 2011, so those students interviewed had never experienced the new curriculum. Therefore, after interviewing more EIC students this year and gathering more information at different partner schools, we will analyze their feedback and determine what we need to do to improve our curriculum and the content of learning at the EIC.
  - 6) After having interviewing many students, there were some students who did not seem to fully enjoy their study abroad experience while others were very satisfied with their experience. For example, some students complained about too high a ratio of Japanese and Korean students in the class, which made it feel as though they were studying English in Japan. However, one student said in spite of the great number of Japanese, all the classes were useful and he could always learn something new. It seems that how much our students can get out of this study abroad experience may depend on how they take advantage of what they have rather than blaming their living and studying environments.

## **Conclusion**

Since we started revitalizing the EIC in 2009, the number of EIC students who study abroad has increased. Of the 2009 cohort, about 50% have studied abroad compared to 24% in 2006, 28% in 2007, and 18% in the 2008 cohort. Of the 2010 cohort, 44% have studied abroad. Since a few more students are expected to study abroad for Fall 2012, the percentage for the 2010 cohort will be probably similar to 2009. In 2011, there were only eight students who studied in a one-year exchange

program or an academic program that require a high proficiency iBT TOEFL score. In 2012, however, 21 students will study in an ESL/exchange, exchange or academic program in our partner schools. This means that not only the total number of study abroad experiences has increased, but also more EIC students have attained a higher TOEFL score than in any previous year. This is probably due to individual conferences where students were able to get direction and guidance about their studies and study abroad programs. Curriculum such as teaching four skills and academic skills including the TOEFL criterion and TOEFL intersessions helped students improve their English proficiency. Moreover, some students studied hard outside the classroom to meet goals they had set for themselves, such as iBT 61, and EIC teachers supported their learning.

Although EIC students are satisfied with the program and more and more EIC students are studying abroad, there are some issues and problems we need to consider, as follows:

- 1) According to our registration records for the last two years, only 50% of Business and Law students continue the EIC in their sophomore year. In our survey, some students said that since the class was held on Saturday, they were reluctant to come to school for only one class. Others found it difficult to come to the EIC because of schedule conflicts with their major classes.
- 2) Many sophomore students will not continue EIC in fall because they study abroad, because they want to use transfer credits from study abroad to fulfill their English credits, because they have already fulfilled their English requirements, or because they have decided not to study abroad and would rather concentrate on major classes.
- 3) The survey results showed that it is difficult to run the program for combined departments due to conflicts with major classes.
- 4) In 2011, applicants exceeded capacity. We had our students write down their reasons for applying for the EIC and, based on their responses, we eliminated some students. However, this system did not seem to work well, as it was extremely difficult to determine who had better and more convincing reasons than others.
- 5) Many of the students I interviewed who were studying at partner schools did not have many opportunities to get to know native-speaking students on campus. However, Central Washington University provides a better chance for our students to get to know American students because they usually live in a dorm with American roommates. Similar things are happening with our students who study in exchange programs at the University of Victoria and University at Buffalo. They live in campus dorms. Also students studying at Snow College in Utah live in

off-campus apartments where their roommates are usually American students. It seems that partnering with schools that provide an opportunity to live with native-speaking students will create more opportunities for our students to interact with them.

There are several things we could do to improve and further revitalize our current EIC and study-abroad program. First of all, a two-year curriculum is not ideal for many of our students since some students study abroad in their sophomore year and other students who study ESL in our partner schools want to transfer their credits to Konan University for graduation, and still other sophomore students may fulfill their English requirement in spring at Konan University before studying abroad. For these reasons, a curriculum of one and a half years would be more realistic and practical for many students. Those who would like to continue to study English and prepare to go overseas can still study English in regular Konan classes in fall if they want to.

Second, combined departments' classes cause some problems with class schedules. Therefore, the future EIC should be reorganized according to classes for each department. Then the class schedule will be more suitable for each department, as there will be no more Saturday class for Business and Law students. This reorganization should be more appealing to each department and its students as we reschedule the EIC for their convenience.

Third, if EIC applicants exceed capacity, we will simply take students according to their English proficiency. Each year all Konan freshman students at the Okamoto campus (about 2,000 students) take the computer English placement test and according to the results of the test, we can choose EIC students in the future.

Fourth, as we look at the overall picture of the EIC (pre-departure course), the study abroad experience, and the return to Konan, we need to think about more comprehensive program for our students. Peer institutions in the United States such as Beloit College and Kalamazoo College may provide a model. Both send a number of students overseas every year; 40% of Beloit students and the majority of Kalamazoo students participate in one-semester or one-year study-abroad programs. For example, in Kalamazoo's German program, they offer preparatory courses where students learn linguistic and cultural competence as well as critical thinking skills about the country where students are studying. They also learn about the general structure system of German university, how to integrate into a foreign environment (Redmann, 2009). In Beloit's international relations program, upon returning from study-abroad programs, 50% to 75% of the students begin working on seminar thesis topics they developed while they were abroad. They spend a considerable amount of time while abroad

brainstorming and doing research and refining their thesis (Toral 2009). These two examples suggest that it is extremely important for our university to consider what students need to learn in the pre-departure stage, what they need to accomplish during their time abroad, and what they must do to make the most of that experience after returning.

Currently our emphasis on pre-departure is only on teaching linguistic competence and a few cultural elements, and most students think that studying abroad is learning about the target language and culture. However, there are many other things students can gain from study-abroad experiences. Lantis and Duplaga (2010, pp. 93-94) state:

Studies tell us that those who return from study abroad have often achieved key intrapersonal goals and cognitive and social development and maturation. And you probably already noticed that your off-campus experience has helped make you more independent, open, and flexible. ...This concerns not just language ability, but also critical thinking, writing and verbal communication skills, quantitative analysis, literacy, teamwork, and problem solving. The next step in your educational journey is to determine how you can best use these skills and insights in furthering your education and perhaps even your career.

Furthermore, although many EIC students have had valuable and precious experiences while abroad, none of the faculty members seem to keep in touch with our students upon returning and there is almost no chance for the EIC students to share their experiences or take advantage of their overseas experiences in classrooms at our university. Therefore, EIC students will have better learning and growing experiences if we provide a more comprehensive system in our school curriculum.

In conclusion, revitalizing the EIC and study-abroad program has had a great impact on helping our students improve their learning in and outside the class and to have meaningful study-abroad experiences. However, revitalizing the EIC and study abroad is an ongoing process, and several suggestions that were made need to be implemented in order for EIC students to cultivate their learning and prepare for their life in the future.

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