The English Language Passport Program: A Practical Review

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Abstract：There has been a recent shift in language education towards standardizing proficiency descriptive measures for foreign language acquisition through the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Whereas proficiency classified as "beginner" or "intermediate" may vary broadly depending on the institution, CEFR allows people across national and institutional lines to more accurately define language ability. Moreover, by being specific in the linguistic tasks that can be accomplish at each CEFR level, learners are able to complete self-assessments that realistically reflect ability and set explicit learning goals for the future. The English Language Passport (ELP) Program at Osaka-Shoin Women's University has taken steps to incorporate CEFR and accompanying individualized student work portfolios into the curriculum in order to assess students' linguistic abilities, create a concrete record of student achievement, increase motivation for learning, and connect language learning to the completion of real-world communicative tasks. This paper will outline how CEFR relates to the teaching philosophy of the ELP Program and describe the integration of CEFR in teaching methodology and assessment.

Keywords：CEFR, ELPP, Structure, Assessment

Introduction

Several major attempts have been made to reform English language education in Japan over the years. Even with the curriculum reform that the Ministry of Education has passed, many people are skeptical of the successes that these reforms can bring. The main concern is the method of teaching English that is being used by most educators in the primary and secondary school system. Krashen (1982) argued that there are two distinct language acquisition methods: the "learned method" and the "acquired method." The learned method, which is the method that the public school system follows, is when the focus is on student learning through understanding the structure and rules of the language through the application of intellectual and logical deductive reasoning (Krashen, 1982).

The problem with this method is that the student can be overly concerned about language rules prior to using the language, causing the student to be limited in their ability. The result is that when students enter the university level, their English ability is low, and their new teachers face the challenges of increasing the students' English ability and teaching a new learning method. The new method defined by Krashen is the acquired method (1982). In this process, the new language is used in a process of natural assimilation involving intuition and subconscious processes. Krashen describes this process as being similar to the way a child's first language process produces functional skill in the spoken language (1982).

Unfortunately, compared to other countries, Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) have low proficiency (JAPAN

TODAY, 2014). One reason for this is that the current system introduced by the Ministry of Education does not have a clear linkage between the English that is learned in the classroom and real-life situations that a student deals with in daily life (Butler, 2005). To combat this, Osaka-Shoin Women's University created The English Language Passport Program (ELP Program). It was based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and later refined to follow the CEFR-J, for English language teaching specifically in Japan. The main intention of CEFR is to provide a generic framework of language proficiency for teaching, learning, and assessment. The CEFR-J extends this idea with "can-do" descriptors adapted to a Japanese context. CEFR-J is divided into the following divisions based on the student's level of English ability:

- Pre-A1 was created for students of English who have the English ability of a Japanese elementary school student in the Grade 3-6 range.

- A1 is divided into three levels: A1.1, A1.2, and A1.3 and was created for students of English who have the English ability of first-year junior high school students.

- A2 is divided into two levels: A2.1 and A2.2 and was created for second and third grade junior high school students. The A1-A2 levels are designed for beginners of English and account for 80% of Japanese students of English.

- B1 is divided into two levels: B1.1 and B1.2. These levels were created for students of English who have the English ability of first-year high school students.

- B2 is divided into two levels: B2.1 and B2.2 and is for students of English who have the English ability of second- and third-year high school students. B1-B2 level students are

considered independent learners, meaning less teacher-led instruction and more concentration on independent learning. These groups account for less than 20% of Japanese students of English.

- C1 and C2 have no subsections. C1-C2 level users are classified as proficient in English, and only a few students are at this level in Japan (Negishi, 2014).

Shoin Women's University has embraced the concept of CEFR, this paper will give a practical review of how CEFR was implemented into the ELP Program, an overview of the ELP Program, and discuss the use of assessments within the program.

Passports

The use of language passports is a key part of the ELP Program's efforts to foster student-centered learning with clear learning outcomes while also following the CEFR. Each student in the ELP Program is given a language passport upon entering the EPL program. These passports are designed to follow the CEFR portfolio system that documents students' accomplishments in language study by combining student self-assessments with teacher inputs (Council of Europe, 2006). The students use this passport for all four years of the regular ELP Program classes. Within each semester, the passport is broken into five skill sections: reading, writing, listening, speaking production, and speaking interaction. At the end of a semester, students reflect on their progress by looking at the CEFR skills in the syllabus and how they relate to the quizzes and exams taken throughout the semester. After reviewing this information and the work they have done throughout the semester, students choose the CEFR can-do statements that they are confident they can successfully do and write those can-do statements in the passport. Instructors then collect the passport and add their written evaluation of the students' CEFR level and any special notes on their achievements. Thus, the

students can reflect, self-assess, and match their self-evaluations with that of the instructor. This passport is kept as a log of student progress and is designed to maintain student motivation throughout the entirety of the ELP Program.

ELP Program Overview

The ELP Program has gone through several revision processes. In the beginning, the organizers of the ELP Program decided to try independent learning with many students who were in the A1-A2 level. The students were given a list of descriptors, performance, criteria, and conditions that needed to be fulfilled for the learner to pass the assessment at the end of their studies. The process entailed giving students the freedom to choose what and when they wanted to learn. The students were given a list of can-do statements that needed to be completed by the end of the semester. In theory, students would choose a can-do statement that interested them. They completed all the related materials concerning those can-do statements and then requested an evaluation of their ability to perform those actions. If the students were able to satisfy the requirements of the descriptors, they would then be allowed to proceed to their next can-do statements. If they were not able to fulfill the requirements of the assessments, the students were asked to review, practice, and show their work related to the can-do statements to the teacher before requesting another assessment evaluation.

Advantages

One advantage of independent learning is that the student can work at his or her own pace. Students were able to ask the instructor for help when they had trouble understanding the subject matter. Students could also choose the topic that they found interesting or could choose a topic with a friend and work on the can-do statements as a team. By moving away from a teacher-led classroom, a student is able to take on more responsibility and mature as a person as well as an English learner.

Disadvantages

Unfortunately, for the ELP Program, the idea of independent learning for A1-A2 learners was a difficult concept for the students to understand and or follow. Independent learning is that the students need to have a minimal amount of knowledge about the subject to be able to work alone. If the students are still at an early stage in the learning process (i.e., A1-A2), then they have still not learned proper techniques to be independent learners, and they do not have enough vocabulary to proceed without the assistance of a teacher. Many students tried to skip steps in the learning process and just proceeded to the test stage, with many students becoming frustrated and disinterested in English due to their inability to pass the evaluation. This resulted in stagnation of the students' TOEIC scores at the end of the school year.

Current Class Structure

To help elevate the concerns of teachers and students alike, adjustments were made to the lessons toward establishing a more traditional method while continuing to be student-centered. Classes at the A1-A2 level were given three-week cycles to concentrate on one descriptor at a time. Classes as a were first taught a teacher-led lesson, and when the class had a better concept of the material, the students would be given more independence in the learning process but with the teacher still being the focal point of learning. The class as a whole would then be assessed on the same day and at the same time. By adding regimented routine to the ELP Program classrooms, students knew what to expect and when to expect it. The results were also seen at the end of year in the TOEIC test results, where scores increased to expected levels.

The ELP Program planners decided to follow the same structure for all of its courses. Students who entered the ELP Program knew that no matter the course, the same format would be followed. The format that was created was a three-cycle structure for each can-do statement.

The first lesson would be presented in a teacher-

led class. The lessons began with establishing an understanding of the vocabulary being used in the three-week cycle. This was followed by the teaching of an educational point. Practice and repetition of the point was done during the class. At the end of the class, the students were given homework assignments. For the second class, a task-based approach to the lesson was taken so that students could were involved in a process of natural assimilation, as Krashen suggested (1982). In the final lesson of the cycle, the students were given time for independent learning. This process entailed having the students choose an activity that they believed needed improvement. This was done alone with a worksheet or in pairs or groups with a tasked-based activity. At the end of the third lesson, the students were assessed based on the guidelines given to them at the beginning of the can-do cycle.

Students would practice this point and then do a homework assignment based on the main point of the day's lesson. In the second lesson, the students would review the vocabulary from the previous week, but the students would not be allowed to use a dictionary at that time. If the students had trouble remembering the vocabulary word, then they would be allowed to ask a fellow student. The speech or grammar point from the previous class would be reviewed and expanded. A task or independent assignment would be given in class. The students would then be given homework based on the class and previous classes' can-do statements. The third lesson of the cycle would consist of an assessment of the can-do statement, bringing the three lesson cycle to an end.

Assessment

Assessment is a vital aspect of any language program. In the ELP Program, assessment is carried out six times a semester in the form of achievement tests. For each class, four quizzes and a cumulative midterm and final exam are administered. There were three main goals identified when the assessments were created. First, the assessments needed to be based on the CEFR can-do statements that correlated with the class goals stated in the syllabus. Therefore, the assessments needed to have a clear outcome showing whether a student had mastered the CEFR statement. Secondly, all assessments had to be primarily direct tests of the linguistic skill being measured. For example, on a speaking exam, students were required to speak; as opposed to being asked to write a dialogue or to choose the best response to a statement on a written multiple-choice exam. Direct tests are beneficial because they can clearly test the actual student performance of the skill being assessed and focus attention on the communicative linguistic tasks that are the goals of the class (Hughes, 2003). Finally, the assessments were designed to have positive washback, to give students a clear picture of their own ability, and to encourage motivation for continued learning. These three goals were designed to best match the assessment needs of the students in the ELP Program. In addition to these core criteria for assessments, the speaking, listening, and writing classes also have customized aspects for assessment.

Speaking Assessment

When developing the curriculum, the initial focus with the speaking classes was ensuring that the speaking assessments were direct tests and had a suitable level of validity. The focus is on improving the communicative skills in the high school English language learning curriculum in Japan through exposing students to a diversity of language tasks, such as giving presentations or participating in discussions (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2014). Unfortunately, the major standardized tests in Japan, such as the TOEIC or Eiken, do not reflect this goal and have a limited number of direct speaking assessments (Educational Testing Service, 2016; Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.). Likewise, the National Center University Entrance Examination for high school students has none (National Center for University Examinations, 2015). When designing speaking exams, it is therefore safe to assume that university students

entering the ELP Program have limited or no experience with direct speaking assessments. Consequently, the ELP Program designed assessments that can familiarize students with a diverse range of speaking tasks and also provides feedback that can be easily interpreted by students and instructors in a meaningful way.

To provide speaking assessments with a high validity, the ELP Program divides the speaking courses, and thus assessments, into productive and interactive speaking skills. As the communicative skills necessary for completing productive and interactive speaking tasks are significantly different (Hughes, 2013), the class assessments are designed to specifically target these skills. Each speaking assessment is designed with a core can-do CEFR statement. The assessment also identifies what speaking strategies are being targeted. The following table illustrates the requirements for a productive skills assessment for Grade 2 students.

Topic: Exercising	Cefr: "I can give an opinion and explain an activity clearly using a series of words and phrases."	Grammar: Comparatives	Productive skill focus: Explaining the structure of your presentation	Presentation Task: Compare the benefits and disadvantages of two different exercise activities.

Interactive speaking assessments were designed in a similar manner, except the nature of the interactive test necessitates more than one student being tested at a time. The next table gives an example of an interactive assessment designed for Grade 3 students.

Topic: Life Experiences	Cefr: "I can maintain a social conversation about past experiences using a wide range of simple English.	Grammar: Present perfect and simple past	Interaction Skill Focus: Asking follow-up questions that are relevant to the topic and that deepen the understanding of the listener.	Conversation Task: Talk with a partner about an important past experience.

During interactive tests, students speak with each other rather than speaking with the teacher. The teacher makes an effort to equalize the speaking roles for students so that each student can be individually assessed. However, by assessing two students at the same time, there are undeniable disadvantages in terms of the reliability of the test. Students with a higher-level partner may benefit from the conversational skills of their partner. Conversely, students with a lower-level partner may unfairly be given more speaking time. To mitigate some of these disadvantages, random partners are chosen each time for the quizzes to balance out a student's overall performance in the class. In the end, it was deemed that the advantages of maintaining the validity of having a direct speaking test and the practicality of testing multiple students at a time outweighed these disadvantages.

Listening Assessment

Classes focusing specifically on listening are offered to Grade 1 and Grade 2 students. These classes focus on a variety of listening skills, from informational to interactional skills. As there are a variety of listening skills, it is important that students be exposed to more than one type of listening material during the assessments (Hughes, 2013). The listening material for the assessment comes from textbook material and also from authentic listening materials. An attempt was also made to use materials from a variety of settings, such as interviews, conversations, academic lectures, and informational announcements. Since one of the focuses of the ELP Program is to enhance students' ability to use language in real-world situations, an emphasis is placed on interactional listening skills as they relate to the

CEFR can-do statements. The variety of listening material types is a key aspect in improving the listening assessment for the ELP Program.

Writing Assessment

One of the methods for making writing more interactive and communicative is to designate a specific audience (Nation, 2009). To broaden the audience for students' written work in the ELP Program, the students publish a class book at the end of the semester. For this book, students choose one of their writing pieces from the quizzes and exams. The students then make grammar and content revisions and submit the work to the instructor. The instructor then compiles all the writing pieces and gives each student a copy of the class book. In this way, students are able to publish their work and know that their writing will be read by people other than the teacher. Moreover, since the students revise a piece of writing from the quizzes or exams, they get a chance to review the feedback on that piece in depth. Overall, the

and focus on their future studies.

Rubrics have been designed for writing assessments and both the production and interaction speaking assessments. These rubrics break down the CEFR tasks that are targeted in each assessment into grammatical and communicative sections. Each section of the rubric gives a brief description of student performance at that level so that the students can quickly see why their performance is rated at that level.

Generally, the sections of a writing test are grammar, vocabulary, writing mechanics, and understandability/cohesion. For the speaking assessments, the sections are grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, interactive/productive skill focus, and speaking (general understandability and topic appropriateness). Additional categories have been added to match CEFR can-do statements as appropriate. The rubric is given in both English and Japanese to facilitate a better understanding on the student's part. An example of one category of a speaking rubric is as follows:

Grammar Score

0–1	2–3	4	5
The student did not show an understanding of the grammar point. 文法がほとんど理解できてませんでした。	The student was able to incorporate the grammar point in a limited degree. ある程度の文法を理解し、身につけることができました。	The student was able to use the grammar point frequently. 文法を理解し使いこなすことができました。	The student used the grammar point frequently in a manner that was easy for the listener to understand. 文法を使いこなして、聞き手が理解しやすい表現ができました。

goal is for students to focus on writing as a process and have tangible proof of their efforts for the semester.

Assessment Rubrics

Since students entering the ELP Program in general have limited experience with communitive task based tests, it is essential that feedback from these tests is given in a way that is easily interpreted by the students. The intention of the rubrics is to increase the positive washback from the quizzes. *Washback* is defined as the effect that a particular assessment has on the students (Bailey, 1998). By looking at the rubric, students are able to better interpret their performance on the test

A passing score is designed to be a minimum accomplishment of the CEFR can-do statement, whereas additional points on the rubric are designed to show the students the specific areas that they excel in or the points that they need to focus on for future improvement.

Conclusion: Future Steps

As with any assessment for an academic program, there is continually room for improvement. The ELP Program will focus on two main areas for future improvement for assessment. Currently, the ELP Program is in the process of making alterations to the individual tasks in the tests to best match the CEFR skills that are being tested.

As the assessment for this program is relatively new, the ELP Program aims to take qualitative feedback from classroom teachers as well as quantitative data from students' scores and make changes to the assessments that do not appear to be meeting the goals of the ELP Program. Secondly, as the assessment tasks are finalized, the ELP Program hopes to be able to spend time increasing the reliability of test scores by having training sessions to clarify the acceptable responses for each assessment and expectations for each value on the rubric. In this way, by adjusting the assessment tasks and increasing scorer reliability, the ELP Program hopes to increase the quality of its assessment.

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英語パスポートプログラム―調査報告―

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要　　旨

　　近年、言語教育において、CEFR（欧州共通言語参照枠）を使用する傾向がある。従来の言語の運用能力は "beginner" または "intermediate" と位置づける際、機関によって大きく異なったものであったが、CEFR を使用することによってより精度の高い定義づけが可能となった。さらに各 CEFR のレベルを達成できるタスクを明確にすることにより、より正確な能力に反映し系統立った学習目標の設定、自己評価が可能となる。そこで大阪樟蔭女子大学英語パスポートプログラム（ELP）では、学生の言語能力の評価、ポートフォリオの作成、モチベーションの向上、より現実的なコミュニケーションタスクを実現するために CEFR に基づいた独自のカリキュラムに取り組んできた。本稿では、そこで行った教育と CERR の関係性を概説し教育方法および評価法について述べるものとする。

キーワード：CEFR、ELPP、体制、評価