A Level- and Proficiency-based English Language Program of a Science University in Korea

Dong Wan Cho
(Pohang University of Science and Technology)


This research introduces an English language program of a research-oriented science and engineering university in Korea. The university had established a PBT TOEFL score of 550 as one of its graduation requirements in 1995, implementing it for fifteen years. The policy, however, created problems such as students’ learning focus on receptive skills of the language and the discrepancy between the English curriculum and the graduation requirement. In addition, students who were unable to graduate on time due to not meeting the graduation requirement had increased. Facing these issues, the institute abolished the TOEFL policy and developed a new English program, which is characterized by a level-based curriculum, the implementation of an in-house placement test, mandating a number of courses to take, focus on productive skills, and teaching both general English and ESP-oriented courses. With the aim to introduce its rationale, placement test and curriculum, this study also reports on the results of questionnaires designed to determine students’ perceptions of the new English program and main issues raised in a panel discussion designed to examine the program. Limits and suggestions for the program are lastly presented.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since around the mid-1990s, universities in Korea have started to set up a certain level of English proficiency as a graduation requirement. Many of them, with some exceptions, have adopted the standardized tests of English such as the TOEIC (Test of English as an International Communication), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or TEPS (Test of English Proficiency). Out of 201 four-year universities surveyed, sixty-four have used a TOEIC score as a graduation requirement (Use of the TOEIC to intensify the potential of Korean colleges, 2011), which was termed an “English Certificate Program.” In a study (Joh, 2002), thirty-one universities out of sixty-seven surveyed were found to
implement an English certificate program and fourteen out of thirty-one adopted the TOEFL, TOEIC and/or TEPS for their graduation requirement. The trend, spurred by the competition between universities and the globalization or internationalization of the time, however, had created drawbacks of English education in higher education settings of Korea, such as the focus on receptive skills of the language, and the discrepancy between the English curriculum and the graduation requirement (Cho, 2004). Bang (2004) expressed a negative opinion of adopting the standardized English tests as a replacement for graduation requirement. Sung (2005) also mentioned a worry that an English certification system may place an extra burden and mental pressure on students, even forcing them to quit school.

The problems witnessed in some universities in Korea by implementing the standardized tests as a graduation requirement were also found in one of the research-oriented universities in the country. The university was the first one to start an English Certificate Program in 1995 in the country, the basis of which was 550 on the PBT version of the TOEFL. When the English Certificate Program of the university was initiated, no curriculum to support it, however, was prepared. Before the program was developed, the English curriculum of the school had focused on writing and speaking skills, the productive skills. The TOEFL administered in the mid-1990s measured perceptive skills such as grammar, listening and reading comprehension, thereby creating a discrepancy between the graduation requirement and the English curriculum offered at the university. In fact, the TOEFL had long been criticized since the test did not measure any skills from the actual production of language (Duran, 1988; Duran, Canale, Penfield, Stansfield & Liskin-Gasparro, 1985). As the English Certificate Program has been running, the university started to teach the TOEFL as a non-credit course in the summer and winter sessions.

Secondly, a number of students have failed to meet the graduation requirement since the implementation of the English Certificate Program. In 1999, when students who began studying in 1995 should have been on schedule to graduate, about 10-15% of them did not satisfy the requirement and could not graduate on time. As of 2012, some students even belonging to the class of 1999 have not received a university diploma due to the failure to meet the graduation requirement. The English Certificate Program, originally intended to boost the English proficiency of the students and their competitiveness, turned out to be an impediment to their career (Cho, 2004).

Thirdly, the English Certificate Program did not successfully perform its own goal of increasing the English proficiency of the students. In 2009, the Center for Excellence in Education of the university surveyed how the graduates of the university perceived the education offered by the university. About 62% of them responded that the English education offered at the school did not help improve their general English proficiency and
that the current English proficiency they had fell much shorter than the level of English that their jobs required (Kim, Jung, & Park, 2009).

Facing these problems, the university revised the English Certificate Program in 2008 abolishing the TOEFL as a graduation requirement and set up a new English program. The new English program is characterized by the implementation of a speaking- and writing-based placement test, and a proficiency- and level-based curriculum. In addition, the program teaches both general English and English for Academic Purposes, in particular, English for Science Purposes, to help students successfully complete their further study. In the new program, a placement test is administered to all freshmen during the orientation period and puts them into an appropriate level, ranging from Level 5 to Level 1. Completing courses belonging to a lower level, they then can take the next higher level courses. Lower level courses in Levels 5 and 4 focus on teaching general English, while academic writing for publication purposes is taught in higher levels such as Levels 1, 2 and 3. The goals of this research are to introduce the rationale, placement test and curriculum of the newly developed program.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Placement Tests

Placement tests are administered to identify the knowledge or skills test takers have and to assign them to the appropriate levels or classes they are supposed to take. Compared to other types of tests such as achievement and proficiency tests, placement tests stand out in terms of their having more than one goal. In language testing, placement tests with their initial aim to identify test takers’ current proficiency also function to boost the efficiency of teaching by putting students with similar language proficiency into the same class and help them, particularly those with low English proficiency, to successfully complete a class (Fulcher, 1997; Wall, Clapham & Alderson, 1994). If students with a wide range of language proficiency are taught in the same class, it would be hard to expect a desirable teaching and learning outcome since the difficulty of choosing the levels and skills on which the class focuses will arise. If a class targets students in the middle range of language proficiency, students having high language proficiency are likely to have little motivation, which thereby leads them to have less interest in class. Low level students also will likely struggle to keep up with the class. Placement tests through assigning students to appropriate levels will help augment teaching and learning outcomes (Bachman, 1990; Brown, 2005).

Despite the functions and significance of placement tests, some placement tests
implemented in higher education settings in Korea are unable to correctly measure the skills students are supposed to learn in their future class due to the discord between the skills measured in the placement test and the ones targeted in classes. For example, universities in Korea have adopted the TOEIC and TEPS as a tool of placement tests and applied the results of the tests to the teaching of freshmen English courses, whose goals are normally to improve speaking skills of English (Song & Park, 2004). The TOEIC and TEPS, which represent paper and pencil based tests dealing with listening and reading skills mostly, however, do not directly measure speaking and writing skills and thus fail to serve as an indicator for the productive skills of the language. Yu, Moon, and Shin (2007) commented that TOEFL and TEPS scores adopted as a placement purpose at a university can be misleading since they do not properly reflect the proficiency of productive skills of English. In Cho and Park’s study (2011), the instructors of a freshmen English program teaching speaking and writing skills of English reported that about 43% of the students were misplaced due to the discrepancy between their TOEIC score and general English proficiency. Viewed in the validity of testing, this type of placement practice does not secure construct validity since the skills measured in the placement test are not the same ones targeted to improve and taught in a future class. The test also may fail to procure the predictive validity of testing since a high reading skill identified in the placement test does not imply a high speaking skill. As often witnessed in an EFL context like Korea, it is quite plausible that people with high reading skills are poor at speaking skills. Along with the problem, a high percentage of universities in Korea has not implemented placement tests for their freshmen who are going to take freshmen English courses and placed them into English courses without taking into account their English proficiency. Out of nineteen universities and English language institutes surveyed, only six were found to have administered English placement tests for their English program (Yu et al., 2007).

Reasons for not administering placement tests at universities in Korea and having students take the standardized tests for a placement purpose lie in the lack of human and financial resources. Big universities in Korea accept more than 3,000 freshmen every academic year. If a placement test consisting of an oral interview and a writing test were given to incoming freshmen, a lot of human resources and budget would be required to administer and score the tests. These circumstances have made it difficult or impossible to administer placement tests at universities in Korea (Cho & Park, 2011).

2. College English Programs in Korea

Communicative language teaching has started to influence English teaching in Korea since the mid-1990s. Realizing the limits of the unbalanced focus on the teaching of the receptive skills and the written form of English, and reflecting the social atmosphere for
globalization of the period, university English curriculum has changed to develop so called “practical English,” which emphasizes listening and speaking. Research on college English programs from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s pointed to the issues of the English curriculum of the period: the teacher-centered classroom, the curriculum not reflecting the practical needs of students, the focus on accuracy, and the weight on reading skills (Park, 1994); unpreparedness to accept the new teaching trend and teaching hours insufficient for students to reach a high level of English proficiency (Kong, 1996); the discrepancy between the needs of students and English programs provided at colleges (Kim, 1996); teaching environments not meeting the demands and expectations of students (Cho, Moon, & Lee, 1997); and the inescapable trend of the communicative approach to teaching English in Korea (Kwon, 2000).

In the meantime, some universities had carried out college English programs or curriculums to boost the communication skills of their students since the mid-1990s. Park (1997) reported on the use of native speaking instructors in a university English curriculum and its positive effects on listening and speaking skills. Cho (1998, 2006) reported the results of an English immersion program in which the program participants had to use English all the time. Song and Park (2004) presented the effects of a newly developed program at a university on the development of speaking, listening and writing skills of English. Kim (2004) suggested a college English education program combining classes taught by native-speaking instructors and Korean faculty with on-line learning. Joh (2002), based on a comprehensive survey on college English education, reported that many new programs aiming to develop communication skills of English had been implemented in Korean universities.

Investigation into college English programs further suggested level-based English programs. Sung, Pyo and Lee (2004), Jo and Ha (2007), and Kim (2009), with the survey results from university students, suggested running a proficiency- and level-based English curriculum. In doing so, the English program was expected to accommodate the demands and expectations of students with high English proficiency. Chong and Kim (2001), Park (2004), and Lee and Im (2005) also suggested a level-based curriculum and small class size to achieve effective teaching and learning outcomes. In fact, Jung (2010) reported on the positive effects of a level-differentiated college English program on fostering confidence, promoting classroom participation and easing classroom management.

Taken all together, the college English curriculum in Korea has shifted its focus toward language skills which could actually be used for communication purposes, and one way to satisfy the goal was to develop a level-based curriculum and to reduce class size.
III. THE NEW ENGLISH PROGRAM

1. Changes of the English Program and Graduation Requirement at POSTECH

Reflecting its diverse uses in academic settings, English has been a graduation requirement for students since the establishment of the institute in 1987. Its English curriculum has experienced four major changes in terms of the number of courses required to take, additional graduation requirements and components of the placement test. In Stage 1, which lasted from 1987 to 1997, three English classes were required as a graduation requirement and no placement test was administered.

In Stage 2 from 1998 to 2004, the number of required English classes remained at three as before and 550 on the TOEFL was mandated by the university as a graduation requirement. Setting up the TOEFL as a graduation requirement reflected the social trend of that time when globalization started to sweep all over the world. The government and the education sector in Korea have regarded English as a panacea to cope with the worldwide trend and universities in the country have adopted scores of the standardized tests of English such as the TOEIC, TOEFL and TEPS as a graduation requirement. In fact, the university in this study was the first one to set up the TOEFL as a graduation requirement in Korea, influencing others to adopt the test as a graduation requirement.

Stage 3, lasting from 2005 to 2007, kept the same number of required English classes for graduation and developed an in-house placement test consisting of an oral interview and an essay. In 2005, the placement test was first administered to all incoming students to place them into appropriate levels for the courses provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes of the English Program and Graduation Requirement at POSTECH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of required English classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional graduation requirement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage 4, which started from 2008, has gone through drastic changes by eliminating the TOEFL requirement, developing a new curriculum, and implementing a modified placement test. The TOEFL requirement was abolished from the spring semester of 2008 since it did not meet the intended goals of the English program such as developing communication skills of English, particularly speaking and writing, and contributed to creating a number of students who could not graduate on time even after they had completed the other graduation requirements. About 10-15% of the university students did not graduate due to not obtaining the required score on the TOEFL. Table 1 summarizes the changes in the English program and the graduation requirement of the university.

2. Placement Test

The placement test of the university has been administered since 2005. Before that, incoming students were placed randomly based on their ID number. The random assignment of the students to freshmen English courses without considering differences in their English proficiency had brought about several problems such as difficulties in setting up target groups for a class, unfairness of grades caused from initial differences of language proficiency among the students, and a lack of interest in classes felt by students with high English proficiency and low English proficiency as well. These problems had led the university to develop and implement a placement test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary of English Placement Test Results from 2008 to 2012</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 5-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 5-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 4-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L 4-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*When placing students, only five levels from Level 5 to Level 1, not seven levels indicated above, were given.

The placement test in Stage 3 had three levels of “below average,” “average,” and
“above average.” Students placed into “below average” had to take one or two additional classes. Students of “average” took two English courses and those of “above average” had to take only one English course or could be totally exempt from taking English classes. Currently, the placement test has five levels in accordance with the number of courses students have to take. Students placed into Level 5-1 should take nine courses; Level 5-2, eight courses; Level 4-1, seven courses; Level 4-2, six courses; Level 3, five courses; Level 2, three courses and Level 1, one course. Please see below the summary of placement test results from 2008 to 2012.

As seen in the table, the majority of students, 60-70%, were placed into Level 4-2 every year, and the proportion of Level 4-1 has been increasing since 2010, from 7.8% in 2008 and 3.6% in 2009 to 19.9% in 2010 and 18.6% in 2012. In contrast, the proportion of Level 5-1 ranged from 15% in 2010 to 21.8% in 2011. Only a few percentages of students was placed into Level 5-1, 4.1% in 2008, 4.0% in 2009, 3.3% in 2010, 2.7% in 2011 and 2.3% in 2012. Likewise, only a few students were placed into Level 3, Level 2 and Level 1: six in 2008, three in 2009, eighteen in 2010, five in 2011 and three in 2012.

When designing the placement test, validity was considered to be the most important factor. Since the English program of the university aimed to improve writing and speaking skills, the placement test was designed to measure writing and speaking skills through essay writing and an oral interview. Essay writing was based on a ten-minute taped lecture given by one of the instructors of the university English program and the students had to summarize it in forty minutes. Since freshmen of the university had to take freshmen English taught by native-speaking instructors and one of the main goals of the program was to train them on how to write essays, the writing component of the placement test reflected the situation students would experience and the task they would have to fulfill in freshmen English courses. The taped lectures used in the placement test were concerned with “English as an international language,” and “Relationship between technology and underground rock music,” which were similar to the contents and difficulty level of the textbooks for freshmen English, Mosaic I and II.

The oral interview was given by an instructor of the English program and lasted about five minutes. In order to reduce the effect of question differences on students’ responses, similar questions were used by the interviewers. The typical questions used were as follows:

Where is your hometown?
Which high school did you attend?
Tell us about your family members.
What do you do in your free time?
What did you have for breakfast (lunch) today?
What made you apply to this university?
Why did you choose your major?
What is your life goal? How could you achieve it?

The interviewers, however, had the flexibility to ask their own questions in accordance with the level of students.

Both writing and oral interview results together were considered to judge the level of students. If there was a big discrepancy between the level of writing and speaking, writing proficiency was given more weight than speaking proficiency since the curriculum of the university has put more emphasis on writing than speaking. About 60% of the students of the university go on to graduate school, which demands a high level of writing for the publication of research outcomes.

It must be noted that a single instructor was in charge of making the final judgment of the writing and the oral interview. From the perspective of the fairness and reliability of testing, having only one rater may lead to an unfair judgment caused by the instructors’ different perception of writing and speaking. The issue, however, could be moderated by the fact that all the raters, who were the instructors of the English program, have been teaching at the university for a long period of time from at least three years to more than ten years and were quite familiar with the level of courses that the students take. Thus, it could be said that adopting a single rater could be resolved by the concept of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The instructors also, being aware of this potential problem, have actively performed some cross-checking of random students. In addition, the students had a chance to be reassigned in the first class by taking an essay test. Every year about ten students out of 300 freshmen were reassigned to a higher level course through this process.

Having one single rater is also an issue of practicality. If two raters had to judge the oral interview and writing test of a single student, the amount of time and human resources required would have been doubled. Thus a compromise between the reliability and practicality of testing was made. Considering that the placement test was not a high-stakes test and an initial placement could be corrected in the re-evaluation process, a single rater is believed to not harm the reliability of the test too much.

3. Curriculum

The English program of the university has been designed to mainly improve the writing and speaking skills of the students with science and engineering majors. This is because about 60% of students go to graduate school, and writing and speaking skills in graduate school are needed to publish research outcomes in English, to facilitate communication
with scholars in other countries and to present papers at international conferences.

Courses in Level 5 are basic courses to develop writing and speaking skills. Students learn the fundamentals of sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary, with the paragraph concept introduced late in the second course. About six to eight writing assignments are required. Speaking-wise, the students give two or three oral presentations every semester. Level 4 courses also emphasize writing skills beginning with paragraph-level organization and structure and the basic five-paragraph essay in the first course. The second course continues the focus on essay writing, with eight assigned essays using various organizational patterns such as argumentation, description and cause-and-effect. The same speaking load is given in Level 4 courses as in Level 5. Campus English is an English immersion program in which the students speak English all the time. Level 2 is designed to improve both writing and speaking. One of the writing-focused courses such as Intermediate Writing, Intermediate Reading, and Grammar is required and one of the speaking-focused ones such as Advanced Conversation, Advanced Speech, and Advanced Audiovisual English is also required. In terms of course load, for example, Intermediate Writing demands four to five writing assignments. In the first half of the semester, the focus is on essays and in the second one on research papers. The final project of the course is to write a 2,000 word research paper with references, mainly based on library research. Some students write an authentic research paper from their lab work. Two out of three courses in Level 1 are writing-focused: Advanced Writing and Thesis Writing, or Technical Writing. It is expected that by completing Level 1 courses the students should be ready to write research papers in graduate school and to not experience difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Courses offered</th>
<th>Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>English 1, 2: Writing and speaking focused courses</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>English 3, 4: Writing and speaking focused courses</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Campus English, Intermediate Conversation, Intermediate Speech, and Intermediate Audio-Visual English: Speaking focused courses</td>
<td>2 out of 4 required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Intermediate Writing, Intermediate Reading, and Grammar: Writing focused courses</td>
<td>2 out of 4 required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced Conversation, Advanced Speech, and Advanced Audiovisual English: Speaking focused courses</td>
<td>required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Advanced Reading, Advanced Writing, Thesis Writing: Writing focused courses</td>
<td>1 out of 3 required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communicating in English with students and researchers from other countries. Listening-focused courses are not separately offered since the students are naturally exposed to native-speaking instructors. A detailed description of each course is provided in Appendix 1.

4. Curriculum Management Policies

Several policies have been established to accommodate the original purposes of the level-based placement and curriculum. First, the completion of lower level courses was required to take the next higher level courses. Students initially placed into Level 5 should first take and finish courses in the level and then are allowed to take courses in Level 4. Then the completion of Level 4 is needed to take Level 3 courses. At the end of this process, students can take one of the Level 1 courses as the final stage of completing the English curriculum. Second, students who think their English proficiency is enough to take the next higher level courses may apply for a level-up test consisting of an interview and a writing test. Typically, students who have been in English speaking countries as an exchange student, worked abroad as a replacement of the mandatory military service, or served in KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) have applied for the test and were permitted to take the next higher level courses. In 2010, one student applied and passed the level-up test; in 2011, eighteen; and in the spring semester of 2012, eight. Third, an S/U grading system has been implemented because the system was believed to be more appropriate for language courses. The grading system based on criterion-referenced testing concept aims to measure to what extent students have achieved goals set up by a class, and what they can and cannot do. In contrast, a letter grading system based on the concept of norm-referenced testing aims to differentiate students’ performance in relation to others. In addition, an S/U system was believed to encourage low level students to strive for an S. It should be stated that this decision was also motivated by internal university politics in that many parties outside the English program were concerned that an increase in the number of English courses could inappropriately increase the weight of English in students’ GPAs. Fourth, a strict attendance and tardiness policy has been established to make up for a lack of motivation caused from an S/U grading system. Lastly, classes with less than twenty students have been offered to boost the teaching outcomes and to promote students’ participation in class.

5. Curriculum Change Committee

The English curriculum change of the university was successfully made by going through several steps. In the first step, the coordinator of the English program initiated it
and launched an English curriculum change committee consisting of Korean faculty and native-speaking instructors in the program. They were asked to investigate and report on the English curriculum of other universities in Korea and they and the researcher agreed to implement a level- and proficiency-based program. In the process, no sincere objection to the curriculum was raised since they all had been teaching at the university at least five years and familiar with the situation.

In the second step, the revised program needed to obtain approval from the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences of the university, where the English program belonged to. This process also did not meet with any objection due to the fact that all English courses were supposed to run on an S/U basis, not a letter-grading system. This implied that the expansion of the English program did not affect other courses in the division in terms of the credits of other humanities and social sciences courses that students had to take as graduation requirement.

The final stage was to get approval from the University Curriculum Change Committee. The majority of the committee was from science and engineering faculty. Even though many of the faculty members supported the revised English curriculum, it took about one year to acquire the final approval from the committee. Concerns raised were the increased demand for English, effectiveness of the new curriculum on the development of the English proficiency of students, etc. The final decision of the revised program was made with the strong support of the university president.

The curriculum reform of the university English language program was initiated by the researcher and English teaching faculty, without taking into account the opinion of the major recipients of the curriculum reforms, students. This top-down approach of the curriculum change seemed to be behind the times (Macdonald, 2003) and would bring about “slippage” between the reform and its actual practice (Fullan, 1999). Collaborating with other groups, in particular, students in this context, should have been made before the curriculum reform. In doing so, resistance, unanticipated outcomes and incorrect implementation (Macdonald, 2003) could be lessened. However, it must be noted that the questionnaire survey to determine the perceptions of the program was carried out later and its results could be used for a further reform of the program.

IV. STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEW ENGLISH PROGRAM

In order to collect students’ perceptions of the new English program, a questionnaire survey was carried out. In addition, a panel discussion hosted by the university newspaper was held to look into the issues related to the program.
1. Questionnaires

The questionnaire addresses the following issues: students’ perceptions of the importance of English education, the comparison between the old English Certificate Program and newly implemented program, the contribution of the English program to the improvement of English proficiency and the English skill most improved through the program, the appropriateness of the placement test, the opinion of the placement assigned to them, the factors to consider when choosing a class, and the preference of a grading system between the S/U and letter grading system. With the help of the POSTECH Times, the university newspaper, the questionnaire in Korean was sent to all undergraduate students. The responses were sent back to the newspaper by email. The questionnaires were collected from the end of November until early December of 2011. Out of a total of 1273 undergraduate students enrolled in the 2011 fall semester, 632 undergraduate students responded to the questionnaire, a high response rate of 49.6%. See Appendix 2 for the questionnaire.

As to students’ perceptions of the importance of English for their future career, an average of 3.97 on a five point scale, in which 1 was “Not important at all” and 5 “Very important,” was reported. About 73% of the respondents chose 4 and 5, implying that three quarters of them considered English “Very important,” and “Important.” In contrast, only about 6% of them selected 1 and 2, which belonged to “Not important at all,” and “Not important.” It is a bit surprising to witness that about 20% of the respondents chose 3, which means that one fifth of them did not realize the importance of English for their future career.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not important at all</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>So so</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>265</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, as to the preference between the old English program and the newly implemented one, 42.8% of the students expressed their preference for the new program, while 15.4% of them preferred the old one. 17.7% responded that there was not much difference between
the two programs. 9.0% answered that neither program fitted the intended goals of the university’s English education. Here it must be noted that the students responding to the questionnaire were fully informed of the differences of the programs, which were explained in detail under the question and were likely to have heard about the differences from instructors and older students.

TABLE 5
Comparisons between the Previous and Current English Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The current program is better</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are similar</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The previous program is better</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither is suitable for our university</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As to the contribution of the English program to the development of the general English proficiency, an average of 3.12 on a five-point rating scale, in which 1 was “Not at all,” 3 “Somewhat,” and 5 “Very much,” was reported. In detail, about 34% of the respondents presented a positive view of the contribution of the new English program to improving their English proficiency while about 23% of them showed a negative view. This was probably because they have not felt much change in the level of the English proficiency through the program and tangible learning outcomes could not be achieved in a short period of time.

TABLE 6
Contribution of the English Program to Improving English Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>103</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>195</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>613</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As to the question of which skill improved the most, 36.2% of the respondents chose
speaking and 31.3% writing, followed by listening and reading. These responses show that the program has met the goals of prioritizing writing and speaking skills of English. In contrast, about 18% of them chose listening, which was not a major focus of the English curriculum. This was probably because all English classes were given in English and attending classes contributed to the increase in listening skills.

**TABLE 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Most Improved through the English Program</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As to the question of the appropriateness of the placement test, 4.1% of the respondents chose “Very appropriate,” and 64.6% “Appropriate.” About 69% of them supported the appropriateness of the content and components of the placement test. The response rate of “Inappropriate” and “Very inappropriate” accounted for 27.9% and 3.4%, respectively. This was maybe because the language skills measured in the placement test, speaking and writing, did not represent the skills they learned in high school, mostly listening and reading skills.

**TABLE 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriateness of the Placement Test</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very appropriate</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very inappropriate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportions above are in line with the respondents’ perceptions of their placement. 66.5% of them answered that the placement assigned to them properly reflected their English proficiency. In contrast, 19.4% of them thought that their English proficiency was underestimated and 3% of the respondents answered that they were overestimated.
TABLE 9

Perceptions of the Placement Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placed too high</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair placement</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed too low</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As to a factor to consider when choosing courses, course content accounted for 36.0%, followed by course load (23.5%), instructors (22.8%), class time (16.6%), and the number of students in class (0.1%).

TABLE 10

The Most Important Factor in Choosing English Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments and work load</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class time</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last question was concerned with the preference of the grading system. Sixty-four percent of the respondents preferred an S/U grading system while 24.5% supported a letter grading system. This was probably because the respondents felt less pressure in the system and wanted to avoid unnecessary competition. It also should be pointed out that it was relatively easy to get “S” under the S/U system and the system could better secure a fair ground between students with high English proficiency and those with low English proficiency.
TABLE 11
Preference of a Grading System between an S/U and Letter Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S/U</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter grade</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>628</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were free to make comments or provide opinions about the questions of the questionnaire. Comments and opinions similar to the questionnaire results are not considered here. Below are the important issues to take into account for the improvement of the current English program.

With regard to the course requirements, the respondents’ comments were as follows:

- Decreasing the number of required courses
- TOEIC, TOEFL and TEPS scores as an alternative requirement of graduation

Since the majority of students under the revised English curriculum, compared to those before the curriculum reform, had to take as many as nine courses, some of them might have felt the requirement was too demanding to complete and wanted to decrease the number of required English courses. This comment was understandable considering that the students were overburdened with a workload from their majors. Adopting the standardized tests as an alternative graduation requirement seemed to reflect the trend that some companies in Korea require certain scores of the tests as a requirement for the application.

With regard to the placement test, the respondents’ comments were as follows:

- A short interview time
- Differences of placement test results depending on interviewers
- Placement test contents not reflecting high school English curriculum
- Need to change the video-taped lecture due to its several years of use

The respondents raised issues of the interview time, inconsistent evaluation of interviewers and use of the same test prompt for too long. In particular, the opinion that the content of the placement test did not reflect the high school English curriculum deserves
attention since the skills measured in the placement test were mostly concerned with productive skills, while those learned in high school focused on receptive skills.

With regard to the grading system, the respondents’ comments were as follows:

- A letter grading system causing unnecessary competitions between students and stress for higher grades
- A letter grading system being basically unfair due to initial differences in English proficiency of students
- An S/U grading system to encourage students with low English proficiency to work hard for an S
- An S/U grading system with less pressure
- An S/U system causing lack of motivation and loose attitude in class

Opinions to support the S/U grading system were based on the belief that it helped to reduce unnecessary competitions between students and stress and to better secure a fair ground between students with high English proficiency and those with low proficiency. In contrast, failing to boost motivation to work for higher grades was pointed out as a drawback of the system.

2. A Panel Discussion

A panel discussion to look into the issues of the new English program, organized by the POSTECH newspaper, was held on December 8, 2011. The researcher, two students representing the student body and two newspaper reporters attended it as panelists in a one and half hour discussion. The survey results were provided to them before the discussion. The discussion was carried out in Korean and recorded with the permission of the panelists. The following shows the major issues discussed.

The curriculum was the first issue addressed. A student representing the student body mentioned the contribution of the new curriculum to the improvement of English proficiency of the students:

*High school English focused on reading and vocabulary but our university English program mainly teaches speaking, writing and listening. Audio-visual materials used in a class help us actually speak and write. The advantages taught by native speaking teachers in high school are kept here in our school. For these reasons, students seem to appreciate the new English program.*
As to the emphasis on productive skills of English, however, one panelist commented on the lack of teaching reading skills:

*As revealed in the students’ responses, reading skills were least developed but I thought reading is very important and I’m studying reading by myself. Reading skills are the basis of speaking and writing skills, which are emphasized in the new English program and the school needs to devise a way to teach reading.*

Another panelist, a newspaper reporter, suggested that English Grammar, which is now one of the options to choose in Level 2, should be mandatory to all students:

*I was placed into Level 1 and have never taken any English class. When I was helping my friends’ English homework, I felt that their grammar was very weak. When I was taking writing classes in the US, English grammar was mandatory, like the basic theorems of mathematics. I suggest grammar should be required.*

Another panelist expressed the same opinion:

*Since grammar belongs to Level 2, juniors and seniors usually take the course and it is not required. Thus grammar should be required to all students and taught in freshmen or sophomore years.*

The S/U grading system was the second main issue. The panelists in the discussion generally supported the S/U grading system:

*Students’ English proficiency is quite different when they start university and so students with low English proficiency feeling low self-esteem in class are under-motivated and think that a letter-grading system is unfair. The current S/U grading system helps to solve these problems.*

*In an S/U grading system, students with low English proficiency have to work hard to get an S. Some of my friends seem to have had a hard time even getting an S. They even complained that English courses needed more time and effort than their major courses.*

But at the same time, some of the panelists pointed to the lack of motivation for learning invoked from an S/U system:

*In an S/U system, many students are likely to work just enough to get an S. Thus it*
would be hard to expect much progress and their English would remain about the same. This is because the grading system does not contribute to the motivation for work. However, this does not mean that we should go back to the old letter grading system. While keeping the new system, ways to make up for the lack of motivation need to be sought.

Next, unclear distinctions between the levels in terms of difficulty were pointed out. A panelist, who has completed the English program, commented that:

*Except for Grammar belonging to Level 2, Intermediate Conversation and Intermediate Audiovisual English do not differ much from Advanced Conversation and Advanced Audiovisual English. I usually don’t feel a level difference.*

Another point is that there is a great difference in workload and difficulty depending on instructors, which would have caused a big difference in learning outcomes. A panelist mentioned:

*Because I took English 2 and 3 from Prof. XXX, I haven’t felt much difference of levels but after I’ve taken (a class in the) summer session and fall I thought that instructors had quite different teaching styles and the amount of homework varied, and what was learnt was quite different depending on instructors. Thus students were likely to prefer classes where they could get an S easily, especially for English 1, 2 and 3.*

**V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The new English program discussed in the research is characterized by a level-based curriculum, the implementation of a placement test, mandating a number of courses to take, focus on productive skills, and teaching both general English and ESP-oriented courses.

First, the English program of the university consists of five levels from Level 5 to Level 1. Students initially assigned to Level 5 should first complete courses in the level and then are allowed to take courses in Level 4. At the end of this process, the students should complete one course in Level 1 as the requirement of the English curriculum. The five levels were chosen for their wide use in language tests such as the IBT TOEFL and statistics such as the Likert scale. The five-level placement would help students to get a sense of the level they were placed into, such as from “very poor,” which is equivalent to Level 5 and to “excellent,” which is equivalent to Level 1. In addition, the five levels would lead students to choose courses in line with their grades. Courses belonging to
Levels 4 and 5 were designed for freshmen, those in Level 3 for sophomores, those in Level 2 for juniors and those in Level 1 for seniors.

The level-based, or sometimes called level-specific or level-differentiated language curriculum, has frequently been suggested in research (Jo & Ha, 2007; Jung, 2010; Kim, 2009; Lee & Im, 2005; Park, 2004; Sung, Pyo, & Lee, 2004) on university English education in Korea. It is expected to better teaching and learning outcomes due to a similar language proficiency group belonging to the same class. The goals of the class are relatively clear and thus easy to set up, compared to a class consisting of different language proficient students. Level-based classes also could boost the motivation of students and induce positive attitudes toward class. If students with different language proficiency are taught in the same class, students with high language proficiency as well as low proficiency are likely to be less motivated since the class may be easy for high level students and difficult for low level students. A level-based curriculum also benefits teachers in various ways such as facilitating class preparation and class management.

Second, the program has implemented a placement test consisting of an oral interview and a lecture-based writing test. When designing the placement test, whether the test can measure skills which would be actually used and learned in classes was considered most important. Since the English curriculum of the university aimed to mainly improve speaking and writing skills of English and the classes were taught in English, speaking and writing skills were measured in the placement test. In this regard, the components of the placement test reflected the fundamental principle of language testing, validity, in particular, content and predictive validity of testing. It also should be mentioned that initial placement test results could be corrected in the first class by adjusting the misplacement through re-administering a test. In doing so, the fairness of testing could be better procured.

Third, the number of classes students should take before graduation is enough for them to reach the English proficiency the program has established. Students who are placed into Level 5-1 should take as many as nine classes. Every semester they have to take at least one English class consisting of forty-eight hours. There has been doubt whether the English language curriculum in Korean universities substantially contributes to improving language skills of students because most universities require only few courses. The lack of required English courses has long been pointed out as a critical drawback of college English education in Korea (Bang, 2004; Chong & Kim, 2001; Joh, 2002; Kong, 1996; Park, 2004). Joh (2002) and Jung (2010) showed that many Korean universities require just six credit hours, which are equivalent to two courses. This limited requirement would make it practically impossible for students to achieve a proficient level of English through college English education. Despite English teaching faculty’s realization of the issue at higher institutions in Korea, the problem has not been easy to settle due to the difficulty of securing financial and human resources demanded for offering sufficient required English
courses and drawing a consensus of the demand in each college. Increasing the number of required English courses means reducing the number of required courses of other areas of General Education or even in majors. Unlike the general circumstances of other universities, the English teaching faculty of the university discussed here has succeeded in inducing an agreement to increase the number of required English courses since the faculty members in other disciplines and school authorities were in favor of intensifying the English education.

Fourth, the English curriculum of the university has put its emphasis on productive skills of English, speaking and writing; in particular, writing skills have been the major teaching focus of the curriculum. This is because a high percentage of its students, about 60% of them, go to its graduate school, where they have to write research papers and publish them in international journals. Thus, writing skills are taught from Level 5 courses to Level 1. It is expected that completing one of the Level 1 writing courses should ensure that students are ready to write research papers in graduate school.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that both General English and English for Specific Purposes are taught in the program. Courses in Level 5 and Level 4 are designed to improve general conversation and writing skills. Some courses in Levels 3, 2 and 1 are more oriented toward English for Specific Purposes. Including the upper level writing courses such as Intermediate Writing, Advanced Writing and Thesis Writing, some speaking courses in Level 3 and Level 2 such as Intermediate Speech and Advanced Speech focus on presentation skills needed at professional conferences.

VI. LIMITS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE PROGRAM

The current program has tried to accommodate the fundamentals of an ideal language teaching program such as a level-based curriculum, the implementation of a placement test, and mandating a number of courses to take. It is, however, not free from some limits. First of all, there is no specified placement test rating criteria and level description. Even though discussion on the rating criteria was made before and after the placement test and the raters were the instructors of the program for a long period of time and thus were believed to be quite familiar with the levels, the judgment was made on the basis of their insight and teaching experience. Under these circumstances, instructor-raters may have different perceptions of the proficiency of test takers, which in turn causes the issue of reliability and fairness of testing. Thus the program needs to develop a detailed level description and apply it to the placement test.

Secondly, there is no way to figure out and objectify the English proficiency of the students who have completed the program. The current program was originally developed
and run to replace a standardized English test set up as a graduation requirement. Thus, the graduates of the university under the old English program could have an objective English proficiency level, which could be later used for applying to graduate school or getting a job. The current English curriculum, however, does not provide any information about the English proficiency of the students who have finished the program. If a method to evaluate the English proficiency of students is to be devised and information comparable to a standardized English test is provided, the program will be better appreciated by the students and the university. For this purpose, students who have completed the program may be advised to take standardized tests measuring speaking and writing proficiency and to report the test score to the school. This information will help identify the general English proficiency of the students.

Another way to determine the English proficiency of the students who have completed the program would be to make them take the placement test they took when they were freshmen after they have finished the English program and compare the results of the two tests. In doing so, how much the English program has contributed to the increase in their English proficiency would be revealed. The comparisons would have to take into account the influence of other factors such as experience studying and living in English-speaking countries and taking classes in private institutes. Carefully designed interviews with them should reveal this information.

Lastly, the program discussed here may have some difficulty being adopted to other universities since running it successfully needs a great amount of human and financial resources, from the administration of the placement test to offering many classes. Fifty two different classes were offered in the 2011 fall semester, fifty-four in the 2012 fall semester, and twenty classes in the 2012 summer session for only 1270 undergraduate students. And the class sizes were not bigger than twenty; the average number of students in each class was seventeen in the 2011 fall semester, nineteen in the 2012 spring semester and twenty in the 2012 summer session. Since the university accepts only 300 students every year, nine English teaching faculty members have been able to provide the above number of classes with less than twenty students in each class. However, other Korean colleges are not likely willing to and/or able to invest that much money and effort in their English program.

REFERENCES


Bang, Y. (2004). Certification of English proficiency, proficiency-based curriculum, and
college English program: A consideration of students’ and teachers’ perceptions. *English Language and Literature Teaching, 9*(2), 193-211.


undergraduate education. Pohang: POSTECH Center for Excellence in Education.


Use of the TOEIC to intensify the potential of Korean colleges. (2011, March). TOEIC Newsletter, 62, 4-19.


APPENDIX 1
Course Description

English I: The first of the two Level 5 courses in the English Certification Program. The course is conducted only in English, and students practice their writing, listening and speaking skills. Writing activities focus on sentence-level structure and grammar. Students will also take part in an intensive reading program designed to improve all skill areas. The course is graded as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory only.

English II: The second of the two Level 5 courses in the English Certification Program. The course is conducted only in English. Students practice their reading skills through both intensive and extensive reading activities. Speaking activities include both informal conversation and formal presentations. Writing activities build on sentence-level skills and begin to consider paragraph-level organization and structure. The course is graded as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory only.

English III: The first of the two Level 4 courses in the English Certification Program. The course is conducted only in English. Students practice their reading skills through both intensive and extensive reading activities. Speaking activities include both informal conversation and formal presentations. Writing activities begin with paragraph-level organization and structure and conclude with basic short essays.

English IV: The second of the two Level 4 courses in the English Certification Program. The course is conducted only in English. Students practice their reading skills through both intensive and extensive reading activities. Speaking activities include both informal conversation and formal presentations. Writing activities develop the organizations and structures for various types of essays.

Intermediate English Conversation: One of the four elective courses in Level 3 of the English Certification Program. This course aims to help students improve their confidence in using conversational English in a variety of situations. A great focus will be placed on everyday idioms and expressions and how they are used in context. The majority of class time is spent talking with classmates in small groups.

Intermediate Writing: One of the three elective courses in Level 2 of the English Certification Program focusing on writing practice. Students learn about sentence structures, paragraph composition, various expressions and how to develop their writings logically. Students utilize these skills to create clear, well-organized essays and research
Intermediate Reading: One of the three elective courses in Level 2 of the English Certification Program. The course is designed to improve student’s English proficiency by using extensive reading materials including literary works. Students also practice other language skills by writing response journals and participating in discussions.

Intermediate Audiovisual English: One of the four elective courses in Level 3 of the English Certification Program. The course is designed to develop the students’ listening and speaking skills. A combination of visual and oral information from authentic sources, such as movies, situational comedies, commercials, and documentaries will be presented. Students learn useful and practical expressions and participate in discussions of related topics.

Intermediate Speech: One of the four elective courses in Level 3 of the English Certification Program. It is designed to improve the students’ confidence and fluency in public speaking. The course will help students develop oral presentation skills in English including pronunciation, articulation, diction, and delivery. Students gain an understanding of both basic communication principles and public speaking strategies and practice applying these principles to a variety of speaking assignments.

Grammar: One of the three elective courses in Level 2 of the English Certification Program. It focuses on the application and correct use of English grammar. The course will help students acquire the knowledge of basic sentence structures and the skills to build complex sentences and short essays using the basic structures.

Campus English: One of the four elective courses in Level 3 of the English Certification Program. The course is offered every summer and provides a chance to practice common English expressions through live interactions with native English speaking students as peer instructors.

Advanced English Conversation: One of the three elective courses in Level 2 of the English Certification Program. It focuses on conversational skills. Using various reading materials, this course aims to refine students’ oral proficiency by encouraging accurate and fluent speaking skills.

Advanced Writing: One of the three elective courses in Level 1 of the English Certification Program. It focuses on the research skills necessary to write compelling papers.
papers for a variety of situations. Additionally, the editing and revision process is explored as students complete four major assignments and numerous, small practice writings. Students also present their major papers to the class.

Advanced Reading: One of the three elective courses in Level 1 of the English Certification Program. Students improve their reading comprehension and writing skills by using extensive reading materials from various fields such as science, economics, education, religion, and culture. Students read various literary texts, discuss related topics, and write response journals. The reading materials used in this course are more advanced than the materials used in Intermediate Reading.

Advanced Audiovisual English: One of the three elective courses in Level 2 of the English Certification Program. It is designed to develop students’ listening and speaking skills. A combination of visual and oral information from authentic sources, such as movies, situational comedies, commercials, and documentaries will be presented. Students learn useful and practical expressions and participate in discussions of related topics. The audiovisual materials used in this course are more advanced than the materials used in Intermediate Audiovisual English.

Advanced Speech: One of the three elective courses in Level 2 of the English Certification Program. It is designed to improve students’ confidence and fluency in public speaking. The oral presentation skills required for international conferences will be primarily practiced along with the necessary linguistic aspects for academic discourse.

Thesis Writing: One of the three elective courses in Level 1 of the English Certification Program. The course focuses on the major organizational principles and writing techniques involved in reporting technical information. Students practice the techniques by writing academic journal papers and giving oral presentations. Graduate students do not earn credits for taking this course.
APPENDIX 2
Questionnaire

1. Please select the year in which you first enrolled at the university.
   a. Before 2008
   b. 2008
   c. 2009
   d. 2010
   e. 2011

2. Please select the type of your high school.
   a. Regular high school
   b. Science high school
   c. Foreign language or other specialized school
   d. Charter school
   e. School abroad

3. How would you rate the importance of English for your future career?
   Not important at all                  So so                   Very important
   1                           3                          5

4. Under the previous English program of POSTECH, students were required to take 1 to 4 requirement courses (depending on the placement test result) and 2 elective courses and had to score at least 550 on the TOEFL PBT to graduate. However, the curriculum did not fully reflect the university’s goal in English education, which is “to help students foster proficient communication skills required for global leaders.” Therefore, the university has developed a new English curriculum, the English Certification Program. Do you think the current program better reflects the above goal than the previous program?
   a. The previous program is better
   b. The current program (English Certification Program) is better
   c. They are similar
   d. Neither is suitable for our university
   e. Don’t know
   f. Suggestions for improvement: ______________________

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, how you would rate the effectiveness of the English Certification Program on improving your English proficiency?
5-1. Which aspect of your English proficiency (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) was the most improved through the English Certification Program?
   a. Reading
   b. Listening
   c. Speaking
   d. Writing
   e. Don’t know

6. The English level placement test is given to all entering students during the orientation period to place them into the appropriate classes based on their level of proficiency. What do you think about your placement by the English level placement test?
   a. Placed too high
   b. Fair placement
   c. Placed too low
   d. Don’t know
   e. Other: ______________________

7. Currently, the English level placement test has the following two parts: (1) listening to and summarizing a lecture, and (2) one-on-one interview in English with a faculty member. What do you think about the way the current placement test is conducted?
   a. Very appropriate
   b. Appropriate
   c. Inappropriate
   d. Very inappropriate
   e. Don’t know
   f. Other: ______________________

7-1. (Answer this question only if you selected “c” or “d” in Q7.) If you do not think the current placement method is appropriate, what other methods do you suggest?

8. What is the most important factor in deciding which English course to take?
   a. Course contents
b. Assignments and study load  
c. Instructors  
d. Class time  
e. Number of students enrolled in class  
f. Don’t know  
g. Other: ____________________  

9. Currently, all English courses are S/U courses. Compared to letter grades, which grade option do you think is more appropriate for English courses?  
a. S/U  
b. Letter grade  
c. Don’t know  

9-1. (Answer this question only if you selected “a” in Q11.) Why do you think that the S/U grade option is more appropriate?  

9-2. (Answer this question only if you selected “b” in Q11.) Why do you think that the letter grade option is more appropriate?  

10. Please feel free to write any other suggestions or opinions about the English Certification Program, the English level placement test, or the English courses.

Applicable levels: college  
Key words: college English program, level-based English curriculum, placement test

Dong Wan Cho  
Division of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Pohang University of Science and Technology  
Pohang, Gyeongbuk 790-784, Korea  
Tel: (054) 279-2030  
Fax: (054) 279-3699  
Email: dongwan@postech.ac.kr

Received in September, 2012  
Reviewed in October, 2012  
Revised version received in November, 2012