

A Top-down Approach to Globalization in Japan: How Today's Change to a Fall Start May Affect Education in Japan

Joy JARMAN-WALSH

日本の学校に於けるグローバリゼーション

ジャーマンウォルシュ・ジョイ

The University of Tokyo, or *Todai* as it is often called, is considered to be the most esteemed, highest caliber university in Japan. It acts as a role-model for most educational institutions across the nation, so its decisions have a great effect over other national universities and schools. It also influences aspects of educational policy, immigration and language policy across the country. Since coming to power at the end of 2012, the Abe administration has set targets to make Japan more globally competitive. This aim includes promoting English in school as well as introducing an IB curriculum. Policy change at *Todai* has a definite influence on curriculum for English teaching at all levels of education in Japan. In recent books on English education in Japan, academics such as Gottlieb (2012) have called for an upheaval of the existing language education status quo. This paper will discuss how the changes of *Todai*'s school term, hand in hand with government policies regarding globalization, may affect English education and an international mindset in Japan.

In early 2012, *Todai* announced a plan to change their school year to begin in Fall instead of the usual April (fiscal) start to the year; to go into effect as early as 2014. The main reason for the proposed shift is to make study in Japan, not only more assessable to international students, but also to coincide with most institutions worldwide. It will also allow and encourage more Japanese students to study abroad without a gap. Gottlieb's recently published book on Japanese official language policy argues the need for a top-down approach to language policy in Japan. Gottlieb has researched English education in Japan for many years and claims that without radical changes in the scheduling structure like this proposed change at *Todai*, there can be no possibility of improving English language education (2012).

Professor Amano Ikuo made a strong case for university reform in his 1999 article on the "University in Crisis," and has since gone to work for the University of Tokyo and perhaps been a part of recent globally-minded decisions (Poole, 2003). As predicted by Amano, this decision to change timing of *Todai*'s plan is having a great influence on all levels of education from curriculum development to testing and textbook selection; it may also influence the international make-up

of teaching staff. It may also be drumming up support for internationally minded programs and government scholarships. Programs are being set-up for students who will have a gap in studies from Japanese high school Spring graduation before the start of the new autumn term. Companies are also discussing ways to hire recruits twice a year to accommodate the new system.

There is still great criticism over the change. However, Today's long-term view is to prepare Japanese for a more global work environment worldwide. This would demand a more international workforce if Japan is going to retain its position as a world-class economy. However, this change may not be easy for traditional Japanese companies. According to Tabuchi's New York Times article, "Young and Global Need Not Apply in Japan", corporate Japan is still reluctant to accept globally-minded workers as they do not "fit" into the mold of a typical Japanese company (2012).

It may be easier for younger, globally-minded Japanese companies to adjust. In 2011, Japanese companies like Rakuten and UNIQLO began actively seeking globally-minded staff among international students and Japanese returnees. UNIQLO's CEO, Tadashi Yanai says,

"Any Japanese person will find themselves out of a job in 10 years if they cannot functionally communicate in English." ... "If people cannot speak English in business in the future, it will be tantamount to not having a driver's license even though they have to drive." (Asahi, 2011).

Tertiary-Level International Students

As previously mentioned, one of the reasons Today is changing the timing of the school year is to attract more international students at the tertiary (3rd stage of education; i.e. post high school) level and to encourage more Japanese students to study abroad post high school. According to UNESCO's institute for statistics, Japan is sending fewer and fewer students abroad each year (2012). In fact, compared to Japan's nearest neighbor, South Korea, which has half the population size of Japan - they sent almost three times as many students to study in America. Compare South Korea's 71,514 students to Japan's 24,622 who went to study in the US in 2010. In total, Japan had just 40,487 students abroad whereas S. Korea had 126,447, India had 200,621 and China had 562,889 students studying abroad: 126,498 in the US and 86,553 in Japan. There is also a gender differentiation of 2 to 1 with twice as many female students studying abroad than males. Companies are also complaining that fewer new recruits each year are willing to take job responsibilities abroad (CPHRGD, 2012).

Not surprising to many university educators, most international students studying in Japan come from other Asian countries. The only non-Asian country represented in the top 10 is American students who rank sixth at just over two thousand overseas students in Asia in 2010. Australia, which is ranked the 3rd most popular country to study abroad in (2,413 Japanese students studied down under in 2010), only sent 319 students to study in Japan in that year (UNESCO, 2012).

One reason for the lack of international students in Japan is arguably due to timing. According to the Yomiuri, 70% of all universities worldwide start their year in the Fall. The Today president

has lamented that Todai has been sinking in the international rankings. This is despite Todai's much lower international tuition fees than other universities of equal caliber worldwide. It was most recently ranked 25th on last year's QS rankings. This is a decline from the top 20 and Todai is now ranked lower than other universities in Asia for the first time. It seems unlikely to hold even that position unless changes are made (Quacquarelli, 2012). By changing to the Fall start, Todai is expecting to attract more students from European and North American countries that share the same timetable.

The shrinking student population in Japan is a major concern. Despite more than 50% of all high school students entering university in Japan, schools are finding it difficult to get enough high level students to fill the openings at the best universities. There has been a "brain drain" in not only the student population, but for faculty as well. Many professors at the top of their field in Science and Technology have been recruited to foreign universities in recent years.

It is expected that Todai's decision to change the calendar will be followed by the other top public universities in Japan. Kyoto, Kyushu, Tohoku, Hokkaido, Hiroshima, Tottori, Tsukuba, Keio, Kanazawa, Chiba and Osaka have all said they will follow Todai's lead.

In fact, only a few private universities like Waseda have shown resistance to the change. Their argument is that they don't want to make students suffer a gap of time after graduating from high school before university. However, if national universities change, it is likely that high schools which aim to get students into these schools would also change or provide prep programs during the interim for their students so no time is wasted.

There is also concern that the national exams such as the medical exam would have to be changed or else medical students from some universities may have to wait 6 months to get licensed. Apparently the highest pass rate of the exam goes to recent graduates. However, university medical heads argue that if autumn enrollment allows medical departments to compete better at global levels, they will support it. There have also been suggestions for national tests like these to be given twice a year to accommodate the term difference and be fair to all students.

It is also likely that Todai's decision is related to the enrollment (and rank) drop post March, 11, 2011. The Tohoku disaster itself, as well as continuing radiation scares, Tokyo blackouts and food safety issues caused many foreign student and faculty to return home or cancel upcoming enrollment. Todai has less than 2% international student enrollment which is low compared to similarly high level public universities abroad: Harvard has 10% and USC's (the University of Southern California) has 17%. There are some very successful universities within Japan that are much more successful at gaining international enrollment: Asia Pacific University (APU) in Beppu (Oita prefecture) boasts over 50% enrolment of students from outside of Japan. Another institution tackling the problems of brain drain is the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology (OIST) graduate school which not only has half of its students from abroad, but its faculty as well.

It can be argued that compared to English language universities, (internationally as well as in Asia) schools in Japan which require students to take most of their classes in Japanese cause a significant hurdle to interested applicants. However, Todai is tackling this barrier to entry by starting a new program this year (starting in October, 2012) called PEAK- Programs in English at

Komaba. Two courses (Japan and Asian studies as well as Environmental studies) will be offered as a part of the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) “Global 30 Program.” As previously mentioned APU and OIST graduate school do not ask for any previous knowledge of Japanese of their applicants.

International Education to boost the Global workforce in Japan

Attracting more international students may not only encourage a more internationally-minded institution, but is also a way to boost the global workforce in demand in Japan. Whether international students begin studies with any knowledge of Japanese or not; during the course of their studies, most can gain at least a working knowledge of Japanese. This skill will help them enter the job market easier than some of their fellow Japanese students who do not have a functional ability in a foreign language. International companies in Japan like UNIQLO (Fast Retailing), Rakuten, Panasonic, Sony, Lawson, Yamato and Nissan have said they are increasing the number of non-Japanese students they will hire this year. Some of these companies claim they will increase their hiring of non-Japanese to 30–80% of all new hires across Japan.

Japanese students who want to compete in the Japanese job market, therefore, need not only build English speaking ability, but also attain an international understanding. This can only be realistically achievable through international study or work experience.

Mombusho’s Promotion of Global standardized curriculum and testing

At the end of March, 2012- Mombusho announced a plan to encourage the use of IB (International Baccalaureate) in public high schools to parallel English education in Japan with this internationally recognized global standard. At present, there are only 16 schools in Japan certified to teach the IB diploma, but Mombusho plans to increase this number to 200 in the next five years. (MEXT, 2012). There is also talk of introducing the global standard, TOEFL exam, instead of the *sentā shikken* (central standardized test) at the university entrance level. (Yomiuri, 6/6/2012). University professors in Japan have written of the effectiveness of teaching the TOEFL test as a global standard of English which also allows Japanese students access to universities abroad (Obermeier, 2000; Heffernan, 2003). What may be preferable in the TOEFL, that may be lacking in other tests currently given to high school examinees, is the interactive nature of the TOEFL test such as asking insightful questions about listening and reading sections; instead of finding available answers within the text (Longheed, 1997).

Researchers over the years have argued that the only reason to change the assessment test, or indeed to do testing at all, is to improve the teaching and learning that leads up to that point (Courts & McInerney, 1993). Douglas (2010) argues that the most important reason to do any kind of testing is “fairness” and this can be generalized to standardized testing which is edited and adapted by international experts in the English language to be reliable representations of its use.

That may be one of the motivations behind the test change policy as Japan has been trailing

other countries around the globe (including Asia) in TOEIC and TOEFL scores.

Not only would the curriculum have to change, but teacher training and hiring practices would also have to adapt. In the case of IB, the curriculum must be taught by IB certified instructors who are highly functional, if not fluent, in English. According to the Japanese board of education, a further hurdle is to align the IB curriculum with the national guidelines for high school education.

According to the official International Baccalaureate website, it takes most schools 2–3 years to implement the changes necessary to start teaching an IB certified program. The Diploma program (for high school aged students) is currently taught in only 16 institutions in Japan and 2,327 schools worldwide according to the IB website (2012). The aims of the curriculum are to teach “critical thinking” and “international-mindedness” which seems to fall into line with the Japanese government targets to increase global interest with overly “inward” focused Japanese students. The community interaction element of this two year course is another way to get students involved in the world around them even if they never step outside of their hometowns. It seems like a promising move, but it is a daunting task to implement such a drastic change on the nationally accredited high school curriculum in just five years.

Global 30 target: 300,000 international students in Japan by 2020

The “Global 30” is a program designed to host 300,000 international students studying in Japan by 2020 at 13 designated universities. In 2011, there were only 21,429 international students at the Global 30 universities, but numbers are expected to increase sharply once faith is restored in Japan’s safety after 3/11. These universities are setting up recruitment offices overseas as well as making sister school connections to ease exchange programs between the schools. Of course, exchange programs are difficult if the semesters do not coincide. According to MEXT, Todai has more than 40 overseas recruitment offices established, among which many have opened around India and in China.

According to the IIE (Institute of International Education), the number of Japanese students studying in the US has fallen 14% in 2011. Japanese students are currently ranked #7 in international student enrollment rankings. According to the IIE in the US, this number is down 55% from a peak in 1997 when over 47,000 Japanese students studied in the US. According to the Japanese Ministry of Education, the total number of all Japanese students studying abroad has decreased 20% since 2004. It is not surprising that this ministry which created the Global 30 target, among other incentives for schools to globalize, is also in support of Todai’s decision to change to a fall start.

As of early 2012, the *Mombusho* department of Education, is earmarking billions of yen to sponsor high school and university students to study abroad for periods longer than a month. This will of course be an easier choice for students in schools that follow the same academic calendar as the ones they do exchange programs with. In connection with this program, funding priority is given to institutions that have a variety of educational and advisory support for their students.

In the end of March, 2012, it was announced that Mombusho's latest subsidy will be available to 40 universities from this autumn for promoting international study to their students. To be eligible, these universities must supply not only sufficient English language classes, but also employ a larger ratio of full-time foreign teachers on staff. The funding will be prioritized for universities which also provide international study advisors for students wanting to study abroad as well as career advisors to help them find jobs when they return (Asahi, 2012).

Preparing students for an international job market

The Global 30 promotion of international students in Japan as well as the recent announcement of subsidies for 40 universities that encourage their students to study abroad should motivate all higher education institutions to help their students best prepare for Japan's increasing international job options.

Fall enrollment suits international companies, who hire in Spring. Todai and the 13 universities of the Global 30, among others, which offer basic courses in English alongside Japanese classes, are priming international students for recruitment. To be able to compete, Japanese students must similarly show foreign language ability and a willingness to travel, live, study and work abroad.

This, however, may require a change of attitude toward English and its usefulness in life in Japan from earlier education. According to an Education ministry survey, 43% of Junior High School students don't have any interest in getting a job that requires English skills. This is despite 70% acknowledging that English ability would be *useful* in getting a job, and 85% saying it is *important* to study English. In light of this, not only is a willingness to study and use English not common in university students now, but it seems likely to become worse in the future unless changes are made to change current perceptions (McVeigh, 2001). Perhaps a change to autumn enrollment is the type of jolt the education system needs now.

Encouraging younger students to do exchange programs and accepting more international students into Japanese schools may be ways to start changing Japanese student attitudes to English. The latest move to follow the IB program could be a positive development in creating multilingual Japanese students and eventually a Japanese workforce with better English language ability.

Discussion

There are many positive effects that a national change to autumn enrollment could set into motion for students in Japan. It could encourage more international students to study in Japan to integrate and inspire Japanese students as well as learn the language and culture. The necessity of creating IB and higher caliber English courses will also necessitate a change to a more balanced global representation of staff. In turn, this should facilitate changes quickly thus creating more internationally-minded schools in general. There has to be a change in the educational environment (i.e. schools, classrooms and curriculum) to create change in Japanese learners in their

motivation toward English and start to adapt a more global view. Yashima, Cates, Lamb among other teacher-researchers have long advocated teaching a globally-minded curriculum in ESL classes in Japan (Yashima, 2009; Cates, 2004; Lamb, 2004). In the near future, due to effects from Todai's scheduling policy, and the Japanese government's encouragement, real changes allowing more practical internationally focused curricula may now become more commonly accepted.

As we see Japanese jobs move overseas to escape the strong yen and higher labor costs as well as the shrinking population of students; there seems little choice but for Japan to become more internationally focused to remain a leading world economy. This involves not only sending more students overseas and becoming more accepting of international students domestically, but also calls for educating Japanese EFL learners on par with more globally recognized standards here in Japan.

In some ways, the devastation of March 2011, has highlighted imminent challenges for Japan to change in order to thrive. It is not only essential to create some kind of energy independence, but to also establish a new system of education to feed into internationally strong universities that in turn train the population to build stronger industry, technology and a workforce that will strengthen the Japanese economy on a global stage.

There is likely to be a lot of resistance to not only changing the schedule of the school year, but also making major changes to English curriculum; hiring more native-speaking staff and implementing globally recognized standards like the IB. However, as this reform comes from the most reputable university in the nation, it will quickly sweep across the country to great effect.

As language teachers in Japan, we should be keeping an eye on the latest developments regularly highlighted in the news. There are many scholarships and funding available that we should encourage our students and schools to apply for. It is also worth considering how we can help our colleagues with the upcoming curriculum changes and assist in hiring quality staff. On a professional level, there are also many exciting and rewarding opportunities ahead in research and education. Indeed, the Todai decision may have many far-reaching positive, trickle-down effects on all the national systems of education and its related industries.

References

- Cates, K. (2004). Becoming a global teacher: Ten steps to an international classroom. *The Language Teacher*, 28(7), 31–36.
- Douglas, D. (2010). *Understanding language testing*. London: Fodder Education.
- Gottlieb, Nanette (2012). *Language Policy in Japan: The Challenge of Change* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- The Asahi Shimbun: "Governments try to nudge more Japanese to study abroad" (January 30, 2012) by Yuichiro Oka
URL: <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201201300003>
- The Asahi Shimbun: "Exec: Non-English Speakers cannot do business in 10 years" (November 25, 2011)
URL: <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201111250021>
- The Daily Yomiuri: "Autumn enrollment plan leaves would-be doctors in the waiting room" (Feb 15, 2012)

- <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120214005174.htm>
- The Daily Yomiuri: "Other Universities may follow Today's Lead" (Jan 20, 2012)
URL: <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120119005060.htm>
- The Daily Yomiuri (4/13/2012) "Revitalizing Japan: Nations move toward free trade in brain power"
<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120412006128.htm>
- The Daily Yomiuri (1/29/ 2012) "Students: English useful, but not for me":
<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120128003259.htm>
- The Daily Yomiuri (3/26/2012) "Subsidy eyed to promote study abroad/ 40 universities could receive 5-year grants" <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120325003181.htm>
- The Daily Yomiuri (6/6/2012) "Ministry plans to use TOEFL on univ. exams"
<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120605004572.htm>
- The New York Times (2/20/2012) "Fewer Japanese students studying abroad" Miki, Tanikawa
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/world/asia/21iht-educLede21.html?pagewanted=all>
- Institute of International Education Organization Press Release (11/14/2011) "Open Doors 2011: International Student Enrollment Increased by 5 percent in 2010/11"
<http://www.iie.org/Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2011/2011-11-14-Open-Doors-International-Students>
- International Baccalaureate Organization (viewed 2/20/2012) URL: <http://www.ibo.org/>
- Kantei (PDF viewed 10/30/2012) Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development by the Council on the Realization of the New Growth Strategy (published May, 2011)
http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/global/1206011interim_report.pdf
- Lamb, M. (2004). Integrative motivation in a globalizing world. *System* (32), 3–19.
- Longheed, L. (1997). *Developing TOEFL skills*. Tokyo, Macmillan Language Warehouse.
<http://www.ibo.org/become/index.cfm>
- McVeigh, B. J. (2001). Higher Education, apathy and post meritocracy. *The Language Teacher*: 25(10), 29–32.
- MEXT_1 (viewed 2/24/2012) "Global 30" Project
<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/highered/1302274.htm>
- MEXT_2 (viewed 2/24/2012) international student scholarship details for application:
http://www.ic.keio.ac.jp/en/download/mext/ER/mext_er_application_guideline_english.pdf
- MEXT_3 (viewed 2/24/2012) "Project for Establishing University network for Internationalization – Global 30"
http://www.uni.international.mext.go.jp/documents/Global30_Initiatives_in_FY2011_en.pdf
- Obermeier, A. (2000). Listening training for the TOEFL. Electronic version. *The Language Teacher*, 24(3). [Online] Available: jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/2000/03/obermeier.
- Poole, Gregory S. (2003). Higher Education Reform in Japan: Amano Ikuo on the 'university in Crisis'. *International Education Journal* 4(3), 149–176.
- UNESCO (viewed 10/30/2012) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization- Institute for Statistics. "Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students"
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/EDUCATION/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>
- USC (viewed 2/24/2012) University of Southern California Website: International Students Page:
http://www.usc.edu/admission/fa/applying_receiving/international/
- World University Rankings (viewed 2/24/2012) Top Universities.com
<http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2011>
- Yashima, T. (2009). International posture and the ideal L2 self in the Japanese EFL context. In Z. Dorney & E. Ushioda (Eds.) *Motivation language identity and the L2 self* (144–163). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

[Received September 26, 2013]