Designing Course Guidelines for Language Communication of the Faculty of Environmental Studies: Part II- Needs Analysis

Masako MATSUDA*

Abstract

The first part of “Designing Course Guidelines for Language Communication of the Faculty of Environmental Studies” (FES) was published in the Journal of Environmental Studies, Nagasaki University, No. 5, Vol. 2, in 2003, however, Part II and Part III have not continued successively. Although the survey reported there seems out of date as of 2010, it is necessary to keep records of the data from the early stage of English education in this Faculty.

In this Faculty, research on English education had not been conducted until Ro Koryo finished his master’s thesis in 2009 on how to develop English speaking ability at the university level (Ro 2009). Now in 2010, two graduate students are engaged in studies on English education. One of them is focusing on how to help promote English learning for Specific Purposes in the Science Course, for which she will conduct needs analysis this year. Considering these circumstances, it would have been essential to publish the author’s survey in 2001 in order to compare it with the new research outcome.

In this survey, questionnaires were used for needs analysis of subject teachers in FES, first-year students, third-year students, and English teachers. The result showed that students preferred to study English through movies, songs, and games, whereas subject teachers emphasized particularly reading academic essays. Finding out how to integrate these two drastically different needs into syllabus design became a challenging task. It was concluded that to enhance learners’ motivation, a learner-centred approach using aural-oral media in speaking and listening activities should be adopted in Language Communication. It is recommended that students use CDs at home as authentic phonetic models of English for self-study of listening and speaking; however, teachers’ important job is to find appropriate CDs recorded with a high quality of spoken English to set up a system to encourage students’ self study.

Key words: guidelines for Language Communication, ESP, needs analysis

1. Needs Analysis

Needs analysis has been regarded as a starting point for a course designer in order to find learners’ backgrounds, knowledge, preferable learning methods, and actual needs as to what to learn (Graves 1996: 13), ever since it was adopted from other areas of adults’ learning during the 1970s (Nunan 1988: 43). In many cases, there might be a gap between students’ expectations, and the goals, methodology, resources, and objectives of their courses. It is desirable to minimize these differences when designing a syllabus guideline effectively.

Identifying the local needs in FES is the first step before moving to ways of meeting these needs. Moreover, ES is a rather up-to-date discipline and it does not have any ready-made course designs which lecturers could rely on. Until quite recently there were no so-called specialists in ES, as a result, most of the teachers were expected to develop their own course by adapting their original field into this new area. Strictly speaking, it has not yet been established
what ES consists of; therefore, it is helpful to gather information from teachers and students about what they think is particularly needed in studying English for ES. Thus, a needs analysis is required not only on a general theoretical basis but also by the practical and local one specific to ES.

1.1. Theoretical Basis for Needs Analysis

There are mainly two kinds of theoretical bases for a needs analysis: one is that if there is inadequacy in a course and it is considered a problem that can be solved, it should become basic information in decision-making for betterment. The other is that the act of learning depends on the person who learns, and therefore a course should be designed that is appropriate to his/her needs.

McKillip (1986: 7) asserts that needs arise from problems that can be answered, and that unsatisfied feelings of users originate from a falling-short of their expectancies in the human services and education. Therefore, needs identification, that is, “a process of describing problems and solution to these problems” and assessment of “the importance and relevance” of them is indispensable in adopting policies for improvement. Furthermore, as stated above, limited class time could be used as effectively as possible, if learners’ urgent needs are recognized.

In order to illustrate the part which is played in identifying a learner’s needs, Richterich (1977: 4) drew a diagram, where he/she holds the central position. In this dissertation, the author adopts the similar figure with slightly different ideas and terminology in Figure 3.

Different from Richterich, the goals, courses, and their objectives are prescribed and given in the documents of FES. Although resources do not indicate those of the individual learner, but those which belong to FES, such as teaching and studying materials, the learner still occupies the central place even in the new figure.

There are various data collection methods available for needs analysis, for example, questionnaires, interviews, keeping diaries, and sample studies. Among them, giving questionnaires is perhaps the easiest when collecting information from many people, and “the data themselves are more amenable to quantification than discursive data, such as free-form fieldnotes, participant observers’ journals, the transcripts of oral language (Nunan 1992: 143). For these reasons, questionnaires became the instruments of choice in this study.

2. What Needs are Necessary to Know?

Hutchinson and Waters conceptualise needs by using target needs and learning needs (1987: 54).” Target needs are “what the learner needs to do in the target situation,” and learning needs are “what the learner needs to do in order to learn (Hutchinson and Waters 54).” As a result, it is necessary to know what is the target situation for users in FES, what they need to do, and what are their favourite learning methods, etc.

Another way of making a distinction is dividing them into objective needs and subjective needs (Brindley 1989:70 in Graves 1996:13). Objective needs are mainly “factual information about learners, their use of language in real-life communication situations,” “current language proficiency and language difficulties” (White 13). In contrast, subjective needs are regarded as “cognitive and affective needs of the learner in the learning situation, derivable from information about affective and cognitive factors such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners’ wants and expectations with regard to the learning of English, and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies” (13).

3. Subjects

First-year students in FES were asked to answer a pre-course questionnaire. It was hoped that they would give useful pre-course background information about themselves and also their expectations, favorite learning style, etc.

As of the fall of 2001, there are no graduates from FES; however, third and fourth-year students have already finished LCS AI or both LCS AI and AII respectively. Therefore, questionnaires for them were end-of-course evaluation procedures.

Also, the teaching staff in FES were asked for their opinions about how they understood and expected the purpose of English courses in the department as lecturers, and what kinds of English
abilities were needed to study their subjects for the analysis of real target situations. At the same time, the author collected some English research essays on ES from teachers, as materials to make a corpus with which students can have access to the vocabulary and expressions specific to ES. Perhaps this analysis involving teachers in FES could constitute a major aspect of what ES requires.

Finally, English teachers’ opinions were important for the success of teaching English in FES. It was worth getting information about what concepts of teaching they had, their expectations for students, problems they had, if any, and the activities which they preferred to use in the classroom. If their ideas about teaching did not quite agree with students’ anticipations, there was some room for both teachers and students to negotiate for improvement. Besides, it gave the researcher further material for designing a better course if the teachers reported difficulties in designing their own syllabus because of using the current course descriptions. Thus, there were mainly four groups of people whose needs should be examined for this survey.

3.1. First-Year Students: a Pre-course Questionnaire

3.1.1. Questions
First-year students were asked about the following:
1) What kinds of subjective or objective motivation students had;
2) Which skills they wanted to learn;
3) Which official English qualification examinations they were interested in taking;
4) To what degree they used English in everyday life;
5) How long and how they studied at home;
6) What kinds of learning methods they preferred;
7) What activities they preferred in class;
8) How they evaluated their English skills.

3.1.2. The Questionnaire Form and the Results
Thirty-four students answered the questionnaire and the results are shown in Appendix I and their comments in Appendix II of the author’s Master thesis.¹

3.1.3. Students’ Expectations
1) Twenty-eight students out of 34 expected to study speaking and listening in specialized education; 26 wanted to practice speaking in class, and nine wished to emphasize listening.
2) Thirty-two thought that English was necessary for their future job and research.

3.1.4. Self-evaluation of English Ability
1) Twenty-four students thought that they could understand simple conversational English.
2) Twenty-eight considered themselves able to communicate only a little.
3) Twenty-seven thought that they could read high school textbooks and those used in General Education (GE) at the university.
4) Twenty-one thought that they could write simple letters and e-mail messages.

3.1.5. English in Everyday Life
1) Thirty-three students answered that they have no chances to speak with native speakers of English.
2) Twenty-nine students did not read English magazines or newspapers.
3) Twenty-nine students neither watched English TV programmes nor listened to the radio.
4) Thirty-one students did not write letters and/or e-mail messages in English.
5) Twenty-nine students did not gather information written in English.
6) Thirty students did not go to any language schools in town to learn how to speak English.

3.1.6. Contents of English Classes
As for activities in class, 24 students preferred role-plays, 20 of them did language games, 28 using English songs, 27 talking with and listening to other students, 21 memorising set phrases in conversation, and 23 wanted to hear talks by invited guests.

3.1.7. Learning Methods
1) When they learned English, 24 students preferred listening, reading, and copying from the board.
2) Regarding audio-visual equipment and other materials, 31 students liked learning from television, videos, and films, and in addition, 21
like using pictures and posters i.e. visual media methods.

3.1.8. Learning Time
1) At home 16 students learned English 1-2 hours per week (9-17 minutes a day), and 10 students 2-3 hours a week (17-26 minutes a day).
3) Six students did not study English at all.

3.1.9. Students’ Comments
Some of the students made comments on English classes and their subjective needs, and they are shown in Appendix II. The following are some of the representative opinions:
1) I enjoyed playing games with partners such as crossword puzzles and others,
2) I cannot communicate in English so much, so I want to practice it more,
3) I want to be able to speak in English,
4) In English Speaking Society Club, we had discussions, sang songs, watched movies, etc. I think we had better do such things now,
5) I want to improve my speaking ability,
6) I want English teachers to use up-to-date materials.

Figure 3.1.3: Which skills do you want to practice in class?
A: Speaking
B: Listening
C: Writing
D: Reading
E: Presentation
F: Others

Figure 3.1.4: When you speak English
A: you cannot express your opinions and ideas at all
B: you can communicate only a little
C: you can communicate pretty well
D: you can communicate without any problems

Figure 3.1.5: When you read English
A: you can read high school textbooks.
B: you can read textbooks used in GE at the university.
C: you can read English books relevant to your field.
D: you can read English newspapers and magazines.
3.2. Third-year Students

Sixteen third-year students answered the questionnaire and the results are shown in Appendix III and their comments in Appendix IV.

3.2.1. Questions

Third-year students were asked about the following:
1) What kinds of subjective or objective motivation they had for learning English;
2) Which skills they actually needed in their specialised field;
3) Which official English qualification examinations they took;
4) To what degree they used English in everyday life;
5) How long and how they studied at home;
6) What activities they did and liked in the class;
7) How they evaluated their English skills and improvement.

3.2.2. Students’ Expectations

1) Eleven students wanted to learn listening skills;
2) Eight students wanted to practise reading;
3) Seven students wanted to practice speaking.

3.2.3. Needs of English

1) Ten students thought that English was necessary for their future job and research.
2) Eight students needed to read academic essays written in English, in their course.
3) The other eight did not need to read academic essays.
4) Ten students felt that it was difficult to read academic essays.
5) Eight students needed to listen to and speak English in their course.
6) Seven students did not need to listen or speak.
7) Six students felt that it was difficult to listen and speak.

3.2.4. Self-evaluation of English Ability

1) Eight students thought that they could understand simple greetings in English.
2) Twelve thought that they could communicate only a little.
3) Eight thought that they could read high school textbooks.
4) Eleven thought that they could write simple compositions.

3.2.5. English Qualification Tests

1) Eleven students thought that high scores in English qualification tests would enable them to find a job easily.
2) Eleven students planned to take some English qualification tests.
3) Ten students planned to take TOEIC, and three students TOEFL.
4) Six students had already taken TOEIC.

3.2.6. English in Everyday Life

1) All the students (16) answered that they have no chances to speak with native speakers of English.
2) Sixteen students did not read English magazines or newspapers.
3) Fifteen students did not watch TV programmes in English.
4) Fourteen students did not listen to radio programmes in English.
5) Thirteen students did not write letters and/or e-mail messages in English.
6) Fourteen students did not gather information written in English.

7) Thirty students did not go to any other schools in town to learn how to speak English.

8) Eleven students liked listening to English cassette tapes and singing English songs.

3.2.7. Contents of English Classes

As for activities in class,

a) Ten students liked role-plays;
b) Eleven liked language games;
c) Eleven liked listening to English songs;
d) Fourteen liked talking with and listening to other students.

3.2.8. Learning Methods

1) When they learned English,
   a) eleven students liked listening;
b) ten liked reading;

2) Methods which they did not like were
   a) learning by memorising (10);
b) problem-solving methods (11);
c) getting information for themselves (11);
d) copying from the board (9);
e) listening and making notes (9);

3) Regarding audio-visual equipment and other materials,
   (a) fourteen students liked learning from television, videos, and films,
   (b) ten students liked using cassette tapes,
   (c) ten did not like listening to radio,
   (d) nine did not like studying from written materials.

3.2.9. Learning Time

1) Eight students learned English at home; the other 8 did not study at home.

2) Five students did not learn English outside their classes at all.

3) Eight students spent 1-2 hours per week (9-17 minutes a day).

4) Two students spent longer than 4 hours a week (29 minutes).

5) Six students prepared for their English classes.

3.2.10. Favourite Ways of Assessment

1) Thirteen students wanted teachers to evaluate them by written tasks set by their teacher.

2) Eleven students wanted teachers to evaluate them by their oral English ability.

3) Ten students wanted teachers to evaluate them by how they could use English in real-life situations.

3.2.11. Their Comments

Some of the students made comments on English classes. They are attached as Appendix IV; however, representative ones are shown below.

1) I want to see movies. (Two students)

2) I want to prepare for TOEIC tests.

3) I want to practice something practical such as daily conversation.

4) I want to study by using easy English songs.

5) I enjoyed the class, because we played some games.

6) I want to study English pertinent to Environmental Studies.

---

Figure 3.2.2: Which skills do you want to practice in class?

A: Speaking
B: Listening
C: Writing
D: Reading
E: Presentation
F: Others
Figure 3.2.4-1: 2) When you speak English
A: you cannot express your opinions and ideas at all
B: you can communicate only a little
C: you can communicate pretty well
D: you can communicate without any problems

Figure 3.2.4-2: 3) When you read English
A: you can read high school textbooks.
B: you can read textbooks used in GE at the university.
C: you can read English books relevant to your field.
D: you can read English newspapers and magazines.

Figure 3.2.9: How long do you study English in a week besides learning in class?
A: 0
B: 1-2 hours
C: 2-3 hours
D: 4 hours
E: longer than 4 hours

3.3. Fourth-year Students: an End of Course Questionnaire
Results of the end of course questionnaire for nine fourth-year students are attached as Appendix V.

3.3.1. English in Research
1) Six students needed to read English essays for their studies.
2) Seven students did not need to listen or speak English for their studies.
3) Eight students took some English qualification tests, such as the English Licensing Examination (Eiken), TOEIC, or TOEFL.

3.3.2. English in Everyday Life
1) Eight students answered that there were no chances to speak with native speakers of English.
2) Eight students did not read English magazines or newspapers.
3) Seven students did not watch English TV programmes.
4) Eight students did not listen to English radio
programmes.
5) Eight students sang English songs.
6) Six students did not write letters and/or e-mail messages in English.
7) Seven students did not gather information written in English.
8) Three students said they attended other schools in town to learn how to speak English.

3.3.3. English in Class
1) In English classes, eight students practised speaking, and six listening.
2) Seven students were satisfied with pair work and practising in small groups.
3) Seven students enjoyed learning about culture and history, and six liked practising listening and speaking.
4) Seven students enjoyed language games in English.
5) Seven students got a sense of satisfaction by listening to English.
6) Eight students' favourite way of learning was with television/videos/films.

3.3.4. Self-evaluation of English Ability
1) Five students thought that they could understand simple conversational English.
2) Seven thought that they could communicate only a little.
3) Three students thought that they could read textbooks used in General Education at the university.

3.3.5. Sense of Progress
1) Four students found it hard to say yes or no, when they were asked if they had improved their English by taking English courses in the university.
2) Three students thought that their English had not improved much.
3) Only one student estimated that his/her English had improved.

3.3.6. Contents of English Classes
As for activities in class, 5 students preferred role-plays, 7 of them language games, 6 talking with and listening to other students, 5 memorising set phrases in conversation.

3.3.7. Learning Methods
1) When they learned English, 7 students preferred listening, and 3 did reading.
2) Regarding audio-visual equipment and other materials, 8 students liked learning from visual methods such as television, videos, and films.

3.3.8. Learning Time
At home, four students learned English 1-2 hours per week (9-17 minutes a day), and three students 2-3 hours a week (17-26 minutes a day). One student did not study English at all.

Figure 3.3.8: How long do you study English in a week besides learning in class?

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>longer than 4 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.9. Students' Comments
Some of them made comments on English classes and their subjective needs. The whole list is attached as Appendix VI; however, representative ones are shown below.

1) The number of English classes was very limited. To learn English is essential for our future, if we become specialists on environment problems in international society; therefore, more classes are necessary.
2) It was desirable to prepare learning resources for students, such as tapes and movies, in the faculty.
3) I wanted to learn speaking instead of studying grammar rules.
4) I wanted to see movies and dramas on DVDs in class.
5) I wanted to study English to prepare for TOEIC tests while having fun in class.
6) I wanted to be able to understand English by watching and listening to videos instead of reading written material.
7) Basically, the level of English classes was low.
8) I wanted to study English in smaller-sized classes.
9) I wanted to have time to speak to my teacher, instead of talking only with students.
10) I studied English mainly by reading at home, or at a private school by myself. I was not so good at speaking Japanese, not to mention English. In other words, it was generally difficult for me to communicate with others, therefore, it was a big task to talk with my classmates.
11) I understood that practice in giving a presentation was important; however, the level of evaluation did not seem standardized, which I could not tolerate.
12) It was necessary to introduce a system where students were forced to take a certain score in TOEIC or TOEFL. Compulsory English learning was needed.
13) A system which enabled students to develop their language ability should be sought after, since they would play an active part in international society.

3.4. Teachers in the Faculty
The number of faculty members is 56 as of September 2001, with two chairs in science and another two in social and cultural studies. Most of the teachers, especially in the scientific field, expected their students to develop an ability in reading academic essays.

3.4.1. Questionnaires for Teachers in FES
The questionnaire was distributed to each teacher in the middle of September, and the answer sheets were submitted during the following two weeks. Answers came from 23 teachers out of 56 staff. These questions and answers are attached to this dissertation as Appendix VII.

3.4.2. Questions
The following were some of the questions asked for the teachers in FES:
1) Which skills are most important for students to study your subject, speaking, listening, writing, or reading?
2) Which skills are most important for students to study ES?
3) What type of English do you think students should concentrate on in studying ES, Academic English, spoken English, or general English?
4) Are there any essays you want students to read for your subject?

3.4.3. Results of Questionnaires for the Teachers
The questions and answers of the teachers in FES are attached to this dissertation as Appendix VII.

3.4.4. Teachers’ Opinions
Teachers’ comments are attached to this dissertation as Appendix VIII. Some of their representative opinions are as follows:
1) Reading and learning one issue from environmental problems in English, a group discussion, or a group project about the issue, would help students to learn effectively,
2) Students need to learn more reading,
3) It is doubtful that students can acquire speaking ability in college education considering its study environment. At the very least, it is necessary to be able to read academic papers and books,
4) How about making two kinds of classes: one for learning conversational English and the other for reading academic English?
5) I want students to get familiar with special terms common to many areas of ES, although it is difficult to cover all of them considering the diversities of ES. In addition to learning vocabulary, students should learn English for communication in general situations,
6) In studying ES it is important to understand scientific English. The level I hope students to
reach at the end of the course is to understand *Scientific American*,

7) Not only in the field of teaching English, but also within other areas teachers must develop students with an independent spirit,

8) Students should read many more articles on environmental studies,

9) I would like students to read scientific papers in English. I think that they should be familiar with the form of an academic essay which consists of a title, an abstract, an introduction, a method, results, a discussion, a conclusion, and references,

10) Although it may not sound academic, it is a good idea to convince students of the importance of studying English and getting a high score in TOEIC, explaining that English ability is essential for examinations for Master’s courses and for job-hunting,

11) It is best if students can learn how to discuss topics of ES, however, it might be impossible under current circumstances. Therefore, the emphasis should be put on reading and writing. Only written texts can be credible in an academic world,

12) As long as students learn ES in FES, I think reading academic English is important. However, considering the students’ future it is more important to foster their ability to speak and express their opinions,

13) I think that students could learn English from reading academic essays in the fourth year in the seminar for their specific area, instead of studying in LCS in the third year,

14) Competency in English is not necessary for my class, however, it is important if students want to go to graduate school, where almost half of the students in my seminar are planning to go.

3.5. English Teachers in Charge of the Current Classes

In 2000 three native teachers of English and a Japanese teacher began teaching LCS AI and AII to the third-year students. In the year of 2001, two native teachers and two Japanese teachers including the author were in charge. Questionnaires were distributed to two native speakers and one Japanese teacher.

3.5.1. Questions for English Teachers

The English teachers were asked about the following:

1) Do you think some kinds of a placement test are necessary?

2) Did you have any problems in designing your syllabus for English for ES?

3) Which skills do you focus on in your class?

4) What learning activities do you often use in the classroom?

5) What sort of grouping do you prefer in teaching?

3.5.2. Results of Questionnaires for English Teachers

The questions and answers are attached to this dissertation as Appendix IV.

3.5.3. English Teachers’ Comments

The English teachers’ comments are as follows:

1) I found third year classes hard to plan for I could not find a good textbook,

2) I think that the students need to learn minimal conversation abilities in the first-year. There ought to be a plan, rather than each teacher teaching whatever they like, so they can have the same abilities. Also we need a good text for discussion on environmental issues for the third year.

3) In order to stimulate students’ motivation, I take heed of the choice of content, i.e. communicative activities, which allow students to have fun. Also I change the pace of the class, monitor and encourage.

4) I give some points to students who submit assignments.

5) To make students more motivated, I use fun and fear.

4. Analysis

Considering the results of the questionnaires, how to define information on learners’ and teachers’ needs, reveals complicated problems in their interpretation. According to Tachibana (1990), who applied Liebig’s Law of Minimum into solving social
problems, a key to success is to pick up any essential factors, and fulfil all of them. Then, it is necessary to define what these components in the field of ELT are.

The goal of English courses in FES is ‘to develop students’ communicative skills in English to enable them to discuss global environmental issues with people from different countries;’ therefore, this target needs (1) to develop communicative skills including discussion techniques, (2) to learn about environmental problems, and (3) to have a chance to talk with people from overseas about these issues.

According to the results of questionnaires to 59 students in total comprising of the first, third, and fourth-year learners, 57 of them do not have any opportunities to speak with native speakers of English. This indicates one of the biggest problems concerning the students’ environment when learning English as a foreign language. Also, 53 students out of 59 do not read English magazines or newspapers at all. It is assumed that they only read English textbooks which are selected in each class. To cultivate reading abilities including close reading and rapid reading, is the objective of LCS AI; therefore, very limited exposure to English of students’ is a problem, to which some measures should be taken.

4.1. To Realise Students’ Requests

As objectives in English classes, students wanted to learn listening and speaking to be able to do so at the end of the third year. Most of the students wanted to learn by having fun in class, that is, watching movies or videos, and sometimes playing language games. In a sense, they looked forward to being entertained as an audience in class, as they did not like problem-solving tasks as a learning method. In addition, the majority of them studied English only about ten minutes a day in average, i.e. from one to two hours in a week (see Appendix I, III, and V). This amount of time agrees with English teachers’ expectations that their students need to do their given assignments (see Appendix IV). It is probable that students do not learn English voluntarily, even if they understand that it is important to prepare for TOEIC or to practise listening and speaking.

As a result, the following are assumed as the factors which are necessary in satisfying students’ subjective needs in English class:

1. listening practice by using movies or videos,
2. learning by using English songs,
3. speaking practice by playing language games with a partner or in a small group,

At the same time, a number of students were planning to take English qualification tests especially TOEIC, even though the number is very small. The Carrier Planning Committee was advocating students getting a high score, and some of them were willing to follow the committee’s guidance.

One of the students’ important demands is to set up a level of English for each class. As for standards in listening, there is a proposal to use scores of TOEIC. It needs further discussions how to introduce it in the whole department, because TOEIC is a test outside school, and it is an extra expense for students. In speaking, vocabulary, basic sentences chosen for discussion, and situations concerning ES will be selected to learn, and assessed at the end of courses.

A fourth-year student was not satisfied with the content of the English courses since the level was fairly low. In this case s/he might be a very advanced student. However, sometimes even for low level, students’ general intellectual abilities are usually quite high, and there may be an imbalance between their language skills and intelligence. The combination and balance of using easy and advanced materials would be recommended.

4.2. To Comply with the Teachers’ Requests

Most of the teachers especially in the scientific field of ES thought that students needed to read English research papers, because it was essential for scientists to check the most recent ones, and to write about new topics which others never tried. Therefore, skills in reading academic English essays and sometimes those in writing their own, were more important than listening or speaking abilities for students.

Fourteen lecturers wanted students to study reading especially academic papers, articles, and essays on environmental issues. One of them said that s/he had already designed a programme about how to teach English in the specific field. A teacher considered it important to learn vocabulary concerning
environmental problems.

In contrast, there was a minority who wanted emphasis on communication skills. Four teachers put focus on speaking, one on discussion, one on giving a presentation, one on group discussion, and one on listening. There was one teacher suggesting the introduction of TOEIC into the curriculum.

Some of the teachers made the following proposals:
1) To divide English classes into two types; one for learning speaking skills, and the other for reading,
2) To make a class where a lecturer teaches a subject of environmental studies in English.

It seems that there is a gap between the goal of English courses in FES, that is, cultivating speaking and discussion abilities, and the real needs of teachers.

Speaking and discussion skills are considered to be weak points in language activities of Japanese students from their cultural and lingual backgrounds. Therefore, they should be emphasized in English education of FES after re-examining drawbacks of former teaching. However, as the teachers are successful learners of English in traditional teaching style, they might want their students to follow the traditional way of learning.

5. Discussion

Once it was found in the questionnaires that the students and the subject teachers in FES had drastically different needs, finding out how to integrate the two became the most challenging task for the author in this research. At first sight, the methods, with which students preferred to study English, that is, movies, songs, and games, suggested that they were seeking enjoyment and entertainment in learning. Their needs did not seem to agree with their study situation at the university, where subject teachers emphasized reading particularly academic essays.

It seems that these two different approaches reflected contradictory views of language. Children acquire their first language through complete physical involvement and emotional interchange with their caretakers including meaningful input of phonetic information and children’s bodily responses, which automatically turn into vocal exercises. However, Masataka (2001: 171-83) claims that once it is acquired, the ability to command a language turns into an ‘intellectual’ act of reasoning, leaving little trace of physicality. Although our cultural legacy in the form of accumulated written texts is respected at present, it is necessary to return to the physical aspects of speech when learning different languages. In Japan, this point is not being thoroughly pursued in English education.

Considering these circumstances, students’ desires to use audio-visual aids may reveal their unconscious tendency to recover the bodily characteristics of learning a language, which demonstrates the basic nature of language as a method for communication. Although subject teachers emphasise upon developing students’ reading ability, practice in listening and speaking in a meaningful way should come first, because the original attributes of language acquisition was examined.

However, in the case of the first language, the learners’ situation has a great deal of significance and meanings. It is not an exaggeration to say that infants’ survival in society depends on their success in learning their language. In comparison with this, what could be meaningful for young university students?

One of the characteristics of Japanese study methods for learning English is that these are teacher-oriented not learner-centered. The typical teaching method is to make students sit still while listening to their teachers’ lectures, and memorize what they are taught. Students’ spontaneous attitude cannot be developed using these methods especially in learning languages. Therefore, studying English with audio-visual aids, if they are used properly, can help nurture students’ positive attitude because students find them more meaningful. As stated above, in language learning, aural and oral practices should come first because originally, “language is primarily speech,” and vocal sounds and speech are given more importance. (Nakamura 1980: 4)

Because there is only one English class per week in the third year, it is essential that the students should study by themselves outside class hours to attain the goals of the English courses. According to the results of the questionnaires, however, most students do this work for only one to two hours each week. This
averages out to about nine to seventeen minutes a day, which is not so much. More study hours at home based on students’ own motivation will be necessary in order to achieve better results.  

In addition, students should have access to authentic phonetic models of English for listening and speaking. In 2000, textbooks did not come with CDs, however, around the mid-2000s, CDs began to be attached to English textbooks. It is convenient that materials that can provide authentic phonetic models of English to students are available. At the same time, the quality of spoken English should be high in terms of performance to attract learners’ attention and making the situation more like real life, such as professional dramatic reading and sometimes with appropriate sound effects. In this manner, learning materials can be more meaningful for students.

One of the learners commented that s/he did not like repeating simple sentences, although s/he is not good at speaking even very simple set phrases. There are at least three reasons for this: (1) her/his intellectual level is high in contrast with a low level of speaking ability, (2) s/he is used to studying difficult reading materials that s/he tackled in high school, or (3) s/he does not understand how to use simple English in communication because s/he does not use it in real life. When these factors are taken into consideration, challenging and meaningful materials should be mixed with training for developing basic skills in listening and speaking.

Another student mentioned that the materials used in class were usually old fashioned, which made it difficult for them to be absorbed in the world created by those materials. Up-to-date materials may attract students’ attention more effectively. In order to study environmental problems, it is necessary to obtain new data and information as early as possible, and it makes classes more meaningful if such information is incorporated into teaching.

In conclusion, it is important that learner-centred teaching methods using aural and oral materials should be used in classes to enhance students’ motivation and learning. It is necessary for the students to have a chance to realise that it is interesting to engage in oral communication in English with their classmates. After that, oral homework should be assigned, which may include reading English aloud, repeating after a CD, and recording English speech every day. After practicing speaking individually, the final goal of the faculty, “to give presentations”, can be attempted. These hypotheses may be proved later in the course of teaching.

The following are the goals of English courses at FES: (1) to develop students’ communicative skills, (2) to learn about environmental problems, and (3) to have an opportunity to talk to people from overseas about these issues. Among these three targets, (1) and (2) are being pursued now, however, (3) remains the biggest problem. It is suggested that in the near future a system should be set up in which students can have an opportunity to communicate with English-speaking international students.

6. References
1) Graves, K., ed., 1996, Teachers as Course Developers, Cambridge, CUP.
7) ____, 1992, Research Methods in Language Learning, Cambridge, CUP.
Notes

1 Appendixes are attached to the Master thesis titled “Designing Course Guidelines for English for Environmental Studies” by the author, submitted to the School of Humanities of the University of Birmingham. (2001)

2 In 2009, IC recorders were introduced into the author’s class in Language Communication AI and AII in order to record students’ speaking and reading aloud activities at home for 10 total hours in one semester. This assignment seems to help develop speaking skills and also to enhance students’ motivation. As for the results of the experiment using IC recorders, refer to “Developing English Speaking Ability through Recording on an IC Recorder – A Case Study in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, Nagasaki University by Matsuda et. al. (2010).

3 Not until 2006 did Melodie Cook try a presentation using Power Point in her class while Richard Hodson introduced a poster presentation.