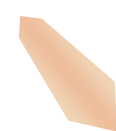


The Creation of an Internal Quality Assurance System for Performance Evaluations of Japanese University Students based on the British Model

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Contents

- Purpose of this presentation
- Current problems with grading practices at Japanese universities
- The internal quality assurance system for grading process in the UK
- Curricular of Japanese universities
- Conclusion



PURPOSE OF THIS PRESENTATION



Purpose of this presentation

- In Japan, assessment criteria are generally determined at the discretion of individual academics. Hence, grading process tend to be largely inconsistent and ambiguous.
- As such, trust in marks remains very low—regardless of whether individual levels of attainment (student achievement) are clearly reported—and society has little confidence in them.
- Using the British system as an example, I will describe the environment and infrastructure needed to construct an internal quality assurance system for grading process in Japan.



CURRENT PROBLEMS WITH GRADING PRACTICES IN JAPANESE UNIVERSITIES



Problems with grading practices

- When examining the results of evaluations across modules in Japanese universities, glaring inconsistencies are immediately noticeable.
- For example, at Hirosaki University, even in the general education or liberal arts modules (which have detailed grading guidelines), the marks are likely to be extreme (i.e. either the majority are failing grades or over 50% of students receive the highest grades).
- This is widely recognised as a problem in almost all Japanese universities (Amano 1999, Fujimura 2004, Nishiyama 2005, Tatematsu 2008).



The Report of the Central Council for Education in Japan

- The Report, entitled ‘Toward the Creation of an Undergraduate Curriculum’, by the Central Council for Education in Japan (2008: 26) points out:
 - ‘In our nation’s universities, assessment criteria are assigned fully to individual academics, and systematic methods of handling them are inefficient’.
- To encourage reform, the Report (2008: 26) calls for
 - ‘an objective, systematic method to evaluate learning—with mutual understanding among academics—that starts with the introduction of the Grade Point Average (GPA) system as well as **the establishment of assessment criteria and final objectives** for each module or subject’.



Detailed improvement plans

- As part of the detailed improvement plans, the Report (2008: 26-27) states:
 - ‘In order to see if the results of the evaluations are in accordance with the assessment criteria, **a systematic follow-up check** should occur. To improve the validity of the grades, a mechanism to request **the participation of third parties** unrelated to the academics involved should be examined’.



Three steps for reform

- Ultimately, the Report suggests three steps to create an internal quality assurance system for performance evaluations of students:
 - ① The establishment of assessment criteria and the clear statement of these criteria
 - ② The systematic follow-up check of assessment results
 - ③ The participation of third parties to enhance trust in these results
- However, it is challenging to implement these steps in Japan.
- I will focus on the British case as an example of how these three steps can be effectively carried out.



THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR GRADING PROCESS IN THE UK



The establishment of assessment criteria

- Assessment criteria and goals of learning outcomes are written on programme specifications.
- These specifications are determined at programme meetings. Similar documents are drawn up at faculty meetings in Japan as well.
- However, at British universities, programme meetings determine assessment criteria at not only a programme level but also **a module level**. In Japan, academics independently design assessment criteria for their classes.



Double check

- In theory, all teachers in the same programme agree on assessment criteria for every module. Hence, teachers **can divide up** their teaching duties: conducting a lecture, preparing an exam about the lecture, marking the exam and offering a grade. In Japan, one teacher usually performs all these duties alone.
 - It is a rule that **two teachers** mark an exam and offer a grade in order to avoid arbitrary decisions. One of these teachers is often chosen among those who do not give the lecture.
 - In cases where two teachers offer different grades to the same student, a third teacher acts as an adjudicator and judges the final grade.



The systematic follow-up check

- At British universities, educational standards and assessment results are systematically checked using the following methods:
 - A) **Regular monitoring** or annual reviews conducted at the department level every year
 - B) **Periodic reviews** conducted at a university level every five or six years
- Regular meetings focus on the following issues:
 - A) Changes in an assessment method
 - B) Changes in the content of an examination
 - C) Confirmation of the standards of exam results and their time series variation
 - D) Changes in the tradition, process, and rule of an examination



The participation of third parties

- At British universities, an external examiner system exists, in which teachers from other universities check the appropriateness of educational standards and assessment results and provide some advice for their improvement.
- For example, external examiners
 - A) Check whether educational contents and standards are proper, according to the goals of learning outcomes and subject benchmark statements;
 - B) Check whether levels of student achievement are equal to their counterparts at other universities;
 - C) Check whether exams and their assessment are done fairly and transparently.



Suggestions from external examiners

- External examiners check exam papers (10%–25% of them as samples) to judge the propriety of exam results and their marks.
 - In particular, they carefully scrutinise the exam papers with scores that fall on the grading borderline between first and upper second class or between pass and fail.
- When an external examiner questions the assessment results of a module, a programme meeting is required to reconsider the results and these results are sometimes amended.



A simple question

- In the UK, why is it possible to—with the participation of third parties—systematically facilitate the formation of assessment criteria of **all modules** and the investigation of their assessment results?
 - In Japan, the introduction of such a system might be very unlikely due to the heavy burden it would place on teachers.
- One possible answer is that the number of British modules and exams are noticeably smaller in comparison with those in Japan.



CURRICULAR AT JAPANESE UNIVERSITIES



Curricular in Japan

- Japanese universities generally follow the semester system; one semester consists of **15 weeks**. Teaching weeks during an academic year are therefore longer than those in the UK.
- Each class typically lasts **90 minutes**, which is also longer than class time in the UK.
- Exams are held every semester and students usually take all the exams in the week that immediately follows the end of the semester.
 - Unlike in British custom, the exam week is not included in the 15 weeks of the semester.
- Japanese universities use the credit system.
 - The requirement for graduation is the accumulation of 124 credits in four or more years.
 - **One credit means 45 teaching hours (one teaching hour is 45 minutes).**
 - Therefore, the calculation of 90 minutes of lectures over 15 weeks is 2 credits.



Lecture schedule sample

(Economics and Commercial Sciences, Faculty of Humanities,
Hirosaki University, first semester of the first year)

| | 8:40–10:10 | 10:20–11:50 | 12:40–14:10 | 14:20–15:50 | 16:00–17:30 |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| MON | | Information Technology I | Basic Seminar | | |
| TUE | | Sports | Introduction to Accounting | Introduction to Economics | |
| WED | English A | Second Foreign Language I | | | |
| THU | | | Introduction to Management | Fundamentals of Mathematics I | |
| FRI | Second Foreign Language I | English B | Introduction to Sociology | Introduction to Pedagogy | |

- Economics students at Hirosaki University are required to complete at least 13 classes a week.
- Almost all the classes are held in the lecture style.



Lecture schedule sample

(Medicine, School of Medicine, Hirosaki University, first semester of the first year)

| | 8:40–10:10 | 10:20–11:50 | 12:40–14:10 | 14:20–15:50 | 16:00–17:30 |
|-----|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| MON | Seminar on Basic Human Biology | | Basic Seminar | Fundamentals of Medicine I | |
| TUE | | Information Technology | | Fundamentals of Biology II(C) | |
| WED | English A | Second Foreign Language I | Introduction to Clinical Medicine | | |
| THU | | | Introduction to Linguistics | Fundamentals of Biology II(B) | |
| FRI | Second Foreign Language I | English B | Fundamentals of Physics I(B) | Fundamentals of Chemistry I(B) | |

- Medical students at Hirosaki University are required to complete at least 14 classes a week.



Lecture schedule sample

(Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Faculty of Agriculture and Life Science, Hirosaki University, the first semester of the first year)

| | 8:40–10:10 | 10:20–11:50 | 12:40–14:10 | 14:20–15:50 | 16:00–17:30 |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| MON | | Basic Seminar | | | |
| TUE | English A | Sports | Fundamentals of Mathematics II(A) | Introduction to Psychology | |
| WED | Second Foreign Language I | | Information Technology I | Introduction to Agriculture and Life Science I | |
| THU | English B | | Fundamentals of Mathematics II(B) | Introduction to Pedagogy | Fundamentals of Earth Science I(B) |
| FRI | | Second Foreign Language I | Fundamentals of Physics II(A) | Fundamentals of Chemistry II | |

- Biochemistry students at Hirosaki University are required to complete at least 15 classes a week.



Class Hours

- 15 classes a week equal $15 \times 1.5 = 22.5$ hours in classrooms. An additional 45 hours must be reserved for self-study outside classrooms, according to the credit system in Japan. However, this is impossible because a student's working time then becomes a total of 67.5 hours a week.
- Japanese students spend more time in the classroom than British students, but their time for self-study is less than British students'.
 - Per week class hours for Japanese (third-year) students are as follows:
 - 45%: more than 20 hours
 - 19.9%: between 16–20
 - 13.9%: between 11–15.
 - In addition, 87.2% of students spend less than 10 hours a week on self-study (Yamada 2010).
 - In contrast, the class hours per week for British (first- and second-year) students are 13.9 on average, while the hours for their self-study is 14.4 on average (Bekhradnia 2012).



Semester examination

- Exams at Japanese universities are given for each module.
 - At British universities, exams are typically offered for each subject; each subject has several similar modules.
- Japanese students are required to take **around 15 different kinds of exams** in the week following the end of each semester.
- Teachers typically have around **8 classes each semester** (these classes include tutorials). Hence, teachers create at least 6 tests every semester and then mark all of these tests.
- Japanese teachers tend to have more classes than British teachers do. This is despite the fact that the teacher-student ratio is almost the same, since there are so many optional modules, especially for general education.



CONCLUSION



Conclusion (1)

- British universities have an autonomous internal quality assurance system for grading process:
 - Teachers in the same departments cooperate in jointly designing assessment criteria for all modules and publish them as examination regulations.
 - According to these criteria, the assessment results of all modules are **systematically checked with** regular monitoring and periodic review.
 - The external examiner system (with the **participation of third parties**) is utilised in order to maintain comparability of the assessment results.



Conclusion (2)

- However, it is difficult for Japanese universities to simply duplicate the British system.
- British universities can sustain the system even though it puts a heavy burden on teachers, because they have fewer numbers of modules and exams than Japanese universities.
- Considering this difference, the introduction of the British system into Japan could be ineffective and might cause unnecessary confusion.
- Thus, although the system needs to be implemented to build trust in assessment results, we first need to design methods to dramatically decrease the number of modules and exams in Japanese universities.



THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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