

Senior language education managers' cognition in the context of globalization and neoliberalism: Views from Taiwan

Her, Jia-Huey

Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, Taiwan

[misty@mail.wtuc.edu.tw]

Abstract

Globalization and neoliberalism have had a major impact on the teaching of international languages, particularly English. In this context, research on language teacher cognition, which explores the interaction between what language teachers actually do and what they think, know and believe, has a great deal to offer in terms of uncovering teacher perspectives on the complexities of the situation in which they find themselves. It is, however, equally important to understand how educational managers view the current situation and how they are attempting to cope with the operational pressures they face. I report here on some of the issues that arose in the context of semi-structured interviews involving senior educational managers in one tertiary-level institution in Taiwan that focuses on language education. All of these educational managers have a background in language teaching and some of them were directly involved in the teaching of English at the point when the interviews were held. They were therefore in a position to understand the pressures under which language teachers operate on a day to day basis. The primary focus here is on the ways in which they attempt to balance the needs and interests of language teachers and language learners with the need to compete as an institution in an increasingly complex and demanding context.

Introduction

In common with other institutions involved in higher education, *Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages* (Wenzao) is in the process of reviewing its approach to English language education. Like other institutions in Taiwan and elsewhere, it must consider global and national processes in the context of its own unique circumstances. Its future, its aims and ambitions, its problems and possibilities, are bound up with its past. Nevertheless, many of the issues it faces are the same as, or similar to, the issues faced by other institutions of higher education in Taiwan and elsewhere. When institutions are undergoing a period of major change, all staff members are involved in one way or another. It is, however, those who are directly involved in management and governance who set the agenda for change and manage its overall direction. It is therefore important to understand how they view change and change processes. I report on a series of semi-structured interviews with five people involved in the management and governance of Wenzao. All of these people have been involved with Wenzao for a considerable period of time, all are familiar with its origins and its development, and all are fully aware of the pressures (global and national) that are currently impacting upon the provision of English language education in their institution and in other institutions in Taiwan.

A review of selected literature on the impact of globalisation on language education

As Graddol (2006, p. 70) has observed: "Almost everywhere educational systems are in a state of rapid change. Globalisation has led to a desperate race in many countries to upgrade the skills of their workforce faster than their economies are being forced up the value chain." The ongoing democratisation of tertiary education which has

accompanied the ever-increasing urgency to raise the educational level of the workforce, particularly in countries such as Taiwan which have limited natural resources, has not only led to growth in the number of tertiary educational institutions, it has also led to growing competition among them.¹ As student numbers fluctuate, as governments become more cautious about educational spending, as students and their parents become more informed about the cost and quality of educational options, and as staff become more mobile, tertiary institutions are increasingly struggling not only to compete but also simply to survive. Many no longer have the luxury to impose the type of entrance standards that once characterised the tertiary education sector. Thus, teaching has become more demanding at the same time as research excellence has become more critical, both in terms of perceived quality and, related to it, in terms of the ability to attract students and external funding. In such a context, attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff (including staff who teach English and staff who teach other subject areas through the medium of English) with the required combination of skills and knowledge is becoming increasingly difficult. In such a context, too, distinctiveness and the ability to attract international students can be critical factors in success. As Coleman (2006, p. 3) notes:

The combination of higher individual fees, greater student mobility, and excess of supply over demand has accentuated the market character of HE: the student has become the customer. Universities are no longer institutions but brands. University rankings, modelled on North America, and which already inform student choice in the UK, Germany and other European countries, have now gone global thanks to Shanghai's Jiao Tong university <<http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/rank/2004/top500list.htm>>.

In terms of perceived quality, English-speaking universities continue to dominate the international league tables (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 2006) and they, and other English-speaking educational institutions such as polytechnics, continue, in general, to have more ability to attract international students than do Asian universities (Institute of International Education, 2006).

As Harris, Leung and Rampton (2001, p. 31) note, “[globalization] . . . is inextricably linked with the developments and demands of free market capitalism”. Coleman (2006, pp. 5-6) observes that “the recruitment of international students and international staff, which English facilitates, leads to enhanced institutional prestige, greater success in attracting research and development funding, and enhanced employability for domestic graduates” so that “[institutional] and individual self-interest . . . coincide both for academic staff, whose international careers depend on a demonstrated ability to teach and publish in English, and for students whose access to a good employment track on graduation also depends heavily on their proficiency in English”. Furthermore, “[thanks] to universities’ dual function as teaching and researching institutions, a powerful impact is exerted by the language of academic publication. . . . and the research which teachers cite in today’s classrooms is increasingly in English, not only in sciences but across the disciplinary panoply (Hoberg, 2004, p. 91, citing Ammon, 1998)”. Discussion of the changing character of English (or Englishes), and of the unequal distribution of power and control in relation to what is included in the English curriculum and how achievement is assessed has thus had little impact on the problems faced by educational managers, academics, teachers and students in Asian countries who are increasingly obliged to

compete in the international arena. As Canagarajah (2005, p. xiv) notes, although “there is an emerging consensus that we need to relate to language norms differently”, and although “it is increasingly accepted that we have to relate to Global English as a plural system with heterogeneous grammatical and discourse conventions” (p. xxvii), it is nevertheless still the case that “the way knowledge is spread . . . [displays] a one-sided imposition of homogeneous discourses and intellectual traditions by a few dominant communities”.

There are significant problems for Asian tertiary institutions which are attempting to enter the global educational marketplace, a major barrier being English language proficiency. Thus, for example, Farrell and Grant (2005, p. 6) report on interviews with 83 human resources professionals, noting that in eight out of nine occupation areas investigated, there would be resistance to hiring Chinese graduates for work in a foreign company, the main reason being poor English. Even so, the situation is changing. Efforts are being made to encourage international students to study in Asia. Thus, for example, in September 2004, Ko Kheng Hwa, Managing Director of the Economic Development Board in Singapore, reported that Singapore aimed “to develop . . . into a thriving international education hub offering a rich spectrum of academic and specialty courses from secondary school to university levels”, the expectation being that “the number of full time international students [would triple] to 150,000 in about 10 years' time”. Furthermore, in December 2005, at the 11th meeting of the ASEAN in Kuala Lumpur, the Indian Prime Minister proposed setting up “Centres of English Language training in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam” (Graddol, 2006, p. 115). In Singapore, English has gradually shifted from being a second language to becoming the main language of the home. In Malaysia in 2003, basic proficiency in English became a requirement for all foreign employees (p. 38). As Graddol (p. 45) notes:

One of the most significant educational trends world-wide is the teaching of a growing number of courses in universities through the medium of English. The need to teach some subjects in English, rather than the national language, is well understood: in the sciences [where], for example, up-to-date text books and research articles are obtainable much more easily in one of the world languages and most readily of all in English.

So far as Taiwan is concerned, Jong-Tsun Huang (2003, October 13), former Minister of Education, noted in *The Current Development and Challenges of Higher Education in Taiwan* that the number of foreign students coming to Taiwan for study increased from 5,440 in 1992 to 7,331 in 2002. In order to further expand this number, the government is establishing scholarships to encourage foreign students to attend Taiwanese universities, creating joint university degree granting programs with foreign universities and encouraging the development of courses that are taught in English. In the academic year 2005 – 2006, twenty Taiwanese universities offered a total of 18 undergraduate programmes, 62 Master's programmes and 31 Doctoral programmes through the medium of English (Her, 2007, *Appendix 2*).

In common with many other countries in Asia, Taiwan is in the process of reforming and liberalizing its education system. This liberalization is intended to “give students the ability to meet the challenges caused by globalization, and therefore continue increasing Taiwan's international competitiveness”, and to ensure that they have

“analytical thinking skills’, ‘innovative skills’ . . . and ‘viewpoints that are global in nature’” (Department of Statistics, (Ministry of Education (Taiwan)), 2005, p. 4). In 1998, Taiwan set aside NT\$150 billion to be spent over five years on education reform projects which covered all levels of education (Department of Statistics, (Ministry of Education), 2005, p. 6). A significant aspect of the reform and the 2005 amendment to the University Act which provided for the establishment of an evaluation committee which would “entrust academic organizations or professional evaluators to carry out regular evaluation on the universities and publish the results as reference for educational subsidies from the government” (Article 5), and also required that universities should establish review systems relating to “teaching, research, instruction and services” (Article 21) (Ministry of Justice (Taiwan), 2005, December 28).

Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages

Established in 1966 in Kaohsiung (the location of Taiwan’s largest port, currently the fifth largest port in the world) by the Sisters of the Roman Union of the Order of St Ursula as the first five year junior college of languages in Taiwan, *Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages* (then named Wen Tzao in commemoration of the first Chinese consecrated as a bishop in the history of the Catholic Church in China, Wen-Tzao Lo 1616-1691) has traditionally been highly regarded as a destination for language education and liberal arts. It began as a college for girls, offering four languages: English, French, German and Spanish. In 1980, however, the Ministry of Education requested that it extend its mission to include the language education of boys in order that it could play a more central role in a national project involving the promotion of languages generally in Taiwan. In 1999, the college changed its name to *Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages* (hereafter Wenzao) and extended its range of activities to include a four-year degree-granting college. Since then, it has introduced a number of Masters level programs and its current aim is to become a university, still with a primary focus on language education.

Wenzao has always required its students to study at least two languages and it has gained a reputation for producing graduates who are able to use these languages productively. In this sense, it has been ahead of its time. It was one of the first Taiwanese institutions outside of the compulsory education sector to recognise the significance of the globalisation of English and to act on it, insisting that English should not be treated exclusively as an academic subject, but should play a central role in vocational, skills-centred education. It also recognised that students who could offer more than one language in addition to Chinese were likely to be sought-after in an increasingly global market place, one that required inter-cultural literacy and practical skills as much as, or more than, the primarily academic focus that then dominated Taiwanese educational institutions. It also gained a reputation for producing graduates who were aware of, and responsive to, issues of social and environmental significance.

Background to the interviews

The five people interviewed had the following roles at Wenzao at the time when the interviews took place, that is, in the period from February to April, 2004: the President, The Dean of Academic Affairs, two heads of department (the English department and the Foreign Language Instruction Department) and the Chairperson of the Board of Governors who was President of the college for over twenty years. Two

of those interviewed – the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees and the then Chairperson of the Foreign Language Instruction Department, are Sisters of the order of St Ursula and have been involved in the college since its establishment; two others – the Dean of Academic Affairs (then also the Vice President) is a former student of the college and has been associated with it for many years. The then Chairperson of the English Department has been associated with Wenzao since 1971. The then President, someone who has also had a long-term association with the institution through membership of its Board of Trustees, oversaw many of the recent changes and sought to ensure that these changes were consistent with the college's overall mission.

All of these people were interviewed according to an interview schedule. That interview schedule was, however, designed to refer to their specific areas of interest and expertise and so was slightly different in each case. Common to all of the interviews, however, was a request that these managers should identify and reflect on issues (social, economic, educational) that were impacting on their institution and, in particular, on the English curriculum, the English language proficiency achievements of students, and the education and training of teaching staff.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Although every effort was made to stick as closely as possible to the actual wording of the responses, some changes were made – changes that preserved the full meaning of the original but removed any material that was clearly not intended for publication (such as, for example, references to particular people by name). Interviewees were given copies of the transcripts and asked if there were any additional comments they wished to make. The material was then revised and resubmitted to the interviewees who were advised that they could make any changes they felt necessary in order to ensure that the final version of the material was a valid representation of their views and did not include any information that they would prefer to be omitted. All changes suggested by the interviewees at that stage were incorporated into the final version of the text. Where interviewees suggested different wording, the wording they suggested was included in the final version.

Although the interviews focused on a wide range of issues, including issues that were specific to Wenzao, only those issues that have widespread applicability (either within a national or an international context) are reported on here.

Reporting on the interviews

Main changes and factors influencing change

Former President and Chairperson of the Board of Governors: The main factor that has influenced changes is the changing pattern of economic development in Taiwan. In 1966, Taiwan was only just beginning to emerge as an economic force in the world; the 1970s, however, saw very major developments. Other major changes were: the end of martial law, the emergence of Kaohsiung as a free industrial processing zone (leading to greatly increased need for people with foreign language skills, particularly English), and the need for more personnel in the diplomatic/ foreign service (leading to the admission of boys in Wenzao from 1980 on); the growing need in the 1990s for more provision for two year post high school education (which led to the opening of a two year Junior College facility); the major changes that took place in Taiwan from 1999 (the first year of the implementation of a five year Action Plan

for educational reform).² In addition, there is technology – global improvements in technology have had a positive impact on school administration and management and on classroom practices. Technology inevitably influences both teaching and learning. A major shift is the shift towards the perception that students must accept responsibility for their own learning. Leading students towards sources of information and understanding, getting them to experiment and discover things for themselves is important and technology has an important role to play in this.

The negative aspect of the influence of the external environment, of economics and enterprise, has become such a leading power in our world that education is losing its independence in the area of educational policy and social conventions. This includes:

- Business and enterprise decide what is and who are most useful to them. As a result currently Humanities, because it is not “practical,” is losing its ground. Even the Ministry of Education has announced that universities will be evaluated on the basis of graduate employment figures. This perspective is spreading in Taiwan and it is a dangerous one because it ignores the intrinsic value of education.
- Rating scales dominate all sectors: beginning from enterprise, down to universities, high schools, junior high schools, elementary schools, and even kindergartens.

The then President: In the 1990s, vocational education changed rapidly in order to accommodate rapid economic development. The increasing need for more qualified professionals meant that schools were constantly encouraged to upgrade, to diversify, to introduce new programs. In response, the number of educational institutions, including the range of programs offered, has grown. At the same time, however, the national birth rate has decreased. Competition among educational institutions has grown. In connection with this, we need to be aware of public perceptions. People want their children to go to university. That is their first choice. After that come colleges, then junior colleges. Similarly, parents generally perceive public universities to be better than private ones. Those institutions that resist change could end up with students who are rejected by other institutions.

The expansion of technology has led to changed expectations in relation to teaching methods and the content of teaching programs. To be part of the developments that are happening, teachers need to constantly upgrade their professional knowledge. To play a genuine part in the rapidly changing world of education, they need to be active in research. In a competitive and fast moving market place, you need to keep ahead. One of the main things that has had an impact on Wenzao is the fact that other institutions have changed.

The then Chairperson of the Foreign Language Instruction Department: In the past, as the entire nation moved toward development, society was simpler and students were more highly motivated and easier to teach. Although the students who came to Wenzao were generally somewhere in the middle (in terms of performance), they achieved well at Wenzao. They had a good foundation in language and their pronunciation, writing and spelling were generally good. Grades became more variable after the college was opened to boys. In the 1990s, as Taiwan became more

economically successful and as the numbers at Wenzao grew, the students became less highly motivated and it became more difficult for the teachers to give them individual attention. At the same time, the learning conditions improved in some ways – with better equipment and more varied teaching methods – although the students' language was generally less accurate. The prevailing mood was that fluency was more important than accuracy. Students became more used to acquiring things, to getting what they wanted without major effort. They became more interested in acquiring money than in getting a good job. As the country's wealth grew, there were more rich people and more middle class people and the gap between these people and the poor became more evident. A crucial factor in all of this was technology. This was the beginning of the technological generation. Necessity shifted from having a pair of shoes to having a cell phone. There were also major cultural changes. Through global technology, Western culture became more influential, particularly among the young people, and students seemed to have less respect for, and confidence in, their own culture. A critical change was the sense of immediacy that came with technology: "Just press a few buttons, and you'll get the information. There's no need to think. The younger generation is geared towards immediacy but learning a language takes time and effort."

Another change is that it is now more difficult to find appropriate staff. There are new departments, new requirements. There is more competition for staff.

The then Chairperson of the English Department: When Wenzao was founded, it was the only languages school in Taiwan. Many people came to study from other parts of Taiwan. One third of the students were from Kaohsiung and the south; one third from Taipei; one third from other parts of Taiwan. There were only 200 new entrants each year, 50 in each class: two classes majored in English, one in French, one in a combination of German (with 25 students) and Spanish (with 25 students). Students had more class contact time in English. The total number of graduation credits required in English was 230; it is now 220. The work schedule was better than it is now. It changed a lot after the tenth year of operation as the institution grew. Because the number of students was smaller in the early years, there was more time to give individual attention to students. There is now a wider gap between students on entry although most of them have a reasonable level. I believe that the best students perform better now than they did in the past but that the least able students perform worse than in the past. The wider gap between students on entry creates more problems for staff. Even so, it is our responsibility to make sure that they all progress to an acceptable level. This is more difficult as our administrative duties expand and as the expectation that staff will do research grows.

Cost is a major factor. . . . Fee increases are now affecting all institutions – public and private.

Retaining aspects of the institution's mission while adapting and changing

Former President and Chairperson of the Board of Governors: Wenzao needs to be creative and responsive in its thinking but it must also maintain its essence. . . . Another is to maintain the focus on liberal arts. Maintaining a liberal arts core, a focus on education rather than simply professional training, is critical. Professional training needs to be built on top of general education. It should never replace it. This is something we need to focus on in this period of transition. In addition, we need to

consider how best to allocate administrative tasks fairly and appropriately, according to the principle of delegation of authority. We cannot expect senior managers to do everything. . . . All in all, it is important to ensure that growth does not undermine quality. We need to be clear about our teaching objectives. We need to focus on what education, in the broader sense, is for.

The then President: Our graduates need to be employable in a range of areas so they need to have professional knowledge in other areas. This means that our staff members need to have knowledge and skills in a range of areas. We need to focus on extending our capacity.

The then Dean of Academic Affairs: An important aspect . . . is size. . . . The larger an institution becomes, the more diffuse it is likely to be.

Preferred changes

Former President and Chairperson of the Board of Governors: I would like to see the curriculum . . . providing a more complete reflection of the philosophy and characteristics that have distinguished this institution. An institution's vision should be reflected everywhere throughout the curriculum – in teaching, in research, in administration, in management. Research should include research on adult education. This is, after all, part of liberal arts, and this should be felt throughout the curriculum. We need to set up an academic research centre, including cross-cultural research, a centre that can continue Wenzao's vision and project it into the future. The teaching and learning of languages should include an emphasis on inter-cultural understanding.

The then President: Teaching staff need to develop in a range of areas, including developing genuine international and intercultural perspectives and they need to bring new knowledge and new perspectives into the classroom. One way of doing this is to engage in academic exchanges with other institutions. Another is to undertake doctoral study that is wide-ranging rather than too narrow. Doctoral research should be seen as an opportunity in the broadest sense - not just a way of obtaining a degree, but a way of becoming a permanent member of a research culture, a way of broadening horizons, understanding more about teaching and learning, understanding more about different cultural perspectives, becoming more aware of the ways in which we can enhance our own institution by learning from others. In recruiting new staff members, we need to focus not just on their language competence, but also on their professional knowledge, their understanding of teaching and learning, their awareness of international research, their competence in other professional areas.

We need to open up to the world beyond our immediate context. We need to appreciate and understand other cultural perspectives and bring this appreciation and understanding into our teaching in every area. . . . We are professional educators and this is something we need to take seriously. We need to know as much as possible about teaching and learning and we need to develop our teaching capacity. Our institution is known for its holistic approach to education as well as for its global perspective. This needs to be reflected in our staffing. Staff members need to develop knowledge and understanding that extends beyond their own subject area. We need to develop and maintain a research culture. Research needs to be seen as a critical part of what we do. Making this change is not easy – but it is necessary. Existing staff members need to understand that this is fundamental to our future. All staff members

in any institution of higher learning must engage in research. Otherwise, the institution cannot expect to be taken seriously.

The then Chairperson of the Foreign Language Instruction Department: We need to build relationships of trust and mutual understanding between administration and faculty. We need to streamline administration - reduce bureaucracy, reduce complexity, reduce the number and length of meetings. We all need to understand the pressures on one another and try to ease them wherever possible. Teaching staff are carrying heavy teaching loads at a time of major change. More and more is being expected of them. They need to feel valued and they need to feel that their efforts are appreciated.

The then Chairperson of the English Department: We need a clear, agreed direction so that we all understand what we are aiming to achieve. We need to recognise, and make use of the many strengths that staff have. Above all, we need clear policies about assisting students who are under-performing. It is not in the interests of the institution to have dropouts – and it is certainly not in the students' interest.

Ten year vision

The then President: Taiwan has been isolated for too long. It has lost many opportunities to participate in international organizations. I would like Wenzao to be an institution that is aware of, and responsive to, the outside world, one that is globally connected, an institution that has a unique national position in relation to language education, but also one in which students become socially, politically, culturally and economically aware, an institution that promotes understanding and respect for others and for humanity as a whole. I would like it to have a research centre that takes the lead in language learning nationally and also has a role to play internationally. I would like it to have a European centre too.

The then Chairperson of the Foreign Language Instruction Department: The situation in Taiwan is very fluid, political and economic change are taking place very rapidly, there is too much instability to make it realistic at this point to have a solid vision for the future in terms of the kind of institution that this should be. Whatever that is, whole person education should be at the centre, the holistic tradition should be developed and strengthened. Education is about people. Success isn't just about passing exams. It is about accepting responsibility, about making a contribution, about life and relationships. Above all, I would like to see an institution built on a solid foundation of good relationships – relationships between faculty and administration, faculty and students, relationships among faculty members, relationships built on co-operation and concern for one another. I would like to see a positive atmosphere, a happy place to teach and learn, a challenging place, a place that doesn't crush or overwhelm people, a place that supports people so that they can achieve. I would also like it to be financially stable.

The then Chairperson of the English Department: I would like to see Wenzao as an institution that is distinctive, one that promotes a particular approach to education, one that is united and progressive but one that is not afraid of change, or afraid to be different. . . . Remaining exactly as we are now is not an option. We need to accept the challenge of competition but move forward in a way that is a reflection of who we are and who we want to be.

Main frustrations in attempting to bring about change

The then Dean of Academic Affairs: The main frustration relates to the fact that there is currently too much centralization, too much expectation that things will be handled at the top level of college administration. We need to have more autonomous academic units with the capacity to develop and follow through on developments. We also need a greater level of understanding about the need for research, about the fact that the responsibilities of academic staff are not only teaching, but also research. There also needs to be more understanding of the fact that teaching involves much more than classroom interaction. It involves working together on curriculum matters, considering how best to develop self-access facilities and resources that encourage independence and critical thinking, looking at new ways of assessing performance. It involves working with management to achieve the best possible outcomes, rather than relying on management. It involves being prepared to take the initiative. . . .

I believe that people should work as a team, that there should be intellectual companionship. The support I want is not just support with the implementation of ideas, but also support in the development of ideas and concepts. If people became more involved, they would have more understanding of the issues and would derive intellectual satisfaction from what is achieved. We need to work quickly and efficiently. I sometimes wonder whether we should slow down the pace of change. That is what people seem to want but the result might be that the necessary changes just don't take place. In a competitive environment, people need to be clear about what needs to be achieved and they need to set out to achieve it as quickly and efficiently as possible. Stress and anxiety are inevitable in an environment of change and the longer processes of major change continue, the greater the build up of stress. Logically, what is needed is for people to take a genuine interest in what needs to be achieved and in how it can be achieved and to work together to put the changes in place as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The English Department: Meeting expectations

The then President: There are more students overall and so there are greater demands on the English department, particularly in terms of teaching students who are not majoring in English. The increase in subjects has led to an increase in expectations so far as the English Department is concerned. The timetable is not ideal. Now, for example, what might in the past have been a three hour teaching slot is often divided up into one hour sessions which take place at different times. Also, it is more difficult to find appropriate staff because of the requirement that new staff have doctorates. There is a great deal of competition for staff with doctorates, and even more for staff who have doctorates, are effective and experienced practitioners, have the motivation to continue doing research and improve generally, and an appreciation of what we are aiming, as an institution, to achieve.

It would be helpful if the English Department could review its curriculum and rationalise its offerings – offering fewer options in more concentrated sessions. This would reduce the burden on staff. . . . [The role of the English department] will change as national and global developments lead to changes in the profile of students. The globalisation of English will eventually lead to less need for a focus on English as a subject.

The entire nation is promoting the teaching and learning of English. The English Department should be involved in the debate and should take a leading role in promoting change and development. Its staff members need to . . . play a significant role, take responsibility. They are in an ideal position to promote and facilitate positive developments.

The then Chairperson of the Foreign Language Instruction Department: As we grow and develop, as new departments are added, it will become increasingly important to remember our mission so that we all move in the same direction. We need to find a way of adding that does not diminish or end in a loss of focus.

The English curriculum

The then President: So far as the English curriculum is concerned, we need a curriculum that is theory-driven and research-related. We need to establish clear, uncluttered pathways and clear links into areas such as translation and interpreting. We need staff who have a global perspective, who are aware of the world in which our students will be operating, who understand something of the other subject areas they are involved in, who know what will be required of them in the future.

The then Chairperson of the Foreign Language Instruction Department: I believe that we need better, more integrated courses and materials. In the past, textbooks were often more varied internally, with a range of different approaches, including approaches that were genuinely communicative in their orientation. Now, textbooks tend to be less well integrated and less clearly based on genuine language progression. They tend to focus on skills separately. There is more variety of books, but less coherence. If different courses rely on different books from different series, the sense of overall progression can get lost in the detail. Integrated skills teaching works better. If different courses are taught by different staff members, focus on different skills and use completely different texts, the danger is that there will be no overall coherence. Where courses are taught in blocks by the same staff member and in an integrated way, staff can get to know their students better and can be more efficient in terms of preparation and preparation time. The Ministry of Education requirement for Wenzao to upgrade resulted in a situation in which the focus moved from progressive, integrated skills-based development to an approach in which the skills began to be taught separately and overall coherence of programs became much more difficult to achieve. If it were possible to do so, I would reverse this trend.

The then Chairperson of the English Department: We need to have teachers who take a global perspective, who are not just specialists in one area of language development, such as, for example, writing, but who are flexible, who understand the whole area of language development, all of the skills involved, and can contribute in a general sense. We need to have more integrated courses, courses that involve integrated skills development.

We did have an integrated skills approach in the 1970s. We used set textbooks for integrated skills-based learning. After that, we moved to a separate skills approach, where courses were based on a single skill (e.g., reading). After that, we moved to dual skills courses (e.g., listening and writing). There is no clear rationale for this, or at least not one that is firmly based in theory. What happened was that our curriculum was externally evaluated and it was suggested by the evaluators that it would be better

to divide 6 hour course blocks into smaller blocks with different subject/ skill headings. The main argument for this type of modularization seems to have been that it gave students more opportunity for success. Under the new structure, students who were unsuccessful in one area might be successful in another. Once staff members began to select their own textbooks, the sense of overall coherence began to disappear. Another thing that reinforced this was the introduction, in 1997, of level-based classes (that is, of having different classes for students at different levels who were at the same stage of their program). This meant that the overall sense of program coherence began to be lost. If the level of students at the same stage of the same program is so different that they need to be taught different things in different classes, then it is difficult to maintain any real sense of overall program coherence. . . .

The then Dean of Academic Affairs: The German Department is making use of the Common European Framework, using six general proficiency bands. It is systematising the use of textbooks, teaching materials and test materials. There is a clear sense of direction and progression in the 5-year Junior college program and the 4-year evening college program. What they are doing now has been done in the English department for some time already.

English for specific purposes

The then Dean of Academic Affairs: Language learning takes time and effort. One way of providing students with more opportunities to learn language is to provide them with instructional materials that are effective not only in teaching English, but also in teaching subject content. There are several ways of achieving this. One way is to design English language courses that are specifically linked to students' major subjects such as, for example, international affairs. These English courses would support and reinforce subject area learning.

We need to make a distinction between English for Specific Purposes and subject or content knowledge. There is a role for Chinese in the teaching of subjects but there is also a role for English. For example, readings from general magazines such as *Time* and *The Economist* and from professional journals and magazines can be included in English courses. Evidence from proficiency studies over the past seven or eight years indicates that students have strong listening skills even though there are no listening skills classes in the fourth and fifth years of study. This is related to the fact that they listen to English constantly. If both staff and students are capable of using English in their professional subject areas, then they should do so. This is a niche that we need to pursue. It should not only be the English department that uses English as an instructional tool.

The standard of English proficiency of graduates now and in the past

Former President and Chairperson of the Board of Governors: I believe that standards are not as high overall as they were when there were fewer students. We need to focus on making sure that our students have a solid language foundation and personal formation on which to build their professional skills.

President: I believe that most teaching staff do not believe that proficiency standards have improved overall. . . . It is important to have internationally recognized proficiency standards in all languages. This is why Wenzao intends establishing a proficiency test centre. However, there are all sorts of factors that affect proficiency

achievements over time. We need to think not only about comparing the achievements of our current students with those of students in the past, but also about comparing our current achievements as an institution with those of other institutions. There was much less competition in the past.

It is not only overall proficiency that matters. What also matters is competence in particular areas. Our students need to do well in speech competitions, in public performances of various kinds. They need to learn to respond well to challenges of various kinds.

The then Dean of Academic Affairs: It is always possible to improve the proficiency gains of students. To do this, we need to focus specifically on proficiency. We need to clearly establish proficiency benchmarks and let students know what our expectations are and how they are performing in relation to these expectations. We need to be clear about what students need to do in order to improve their proficiency and we need to re-evaluate our English language programs in relation to proficiency targets. We need to establish a clear correlation between teaching hours and proficiency gains.

The then Chairperson of the Foreign Language Instruction Department: I believe that the overall standard of proficiency is fairly good, not very different from what it was in the past - but more is expected of students now. The main difference is not in what we achieve, but in what others are now achieving. . . . Competition has become a major factor. New colleges are being opened all the time, some of them financed by individuals or companies. In this context, we need to think very carefully about how we are going to develop.

There is also the question of entry standards. We have five year Junior College students when they are younger and we have longer to work with them. In at least one area, entrants to our two-year and four-year programs are less proficient overall than students who have completed three years of our Junior College program. We need to focus on developing teaching methodologies that meet the needs of our older entrants. In some areas, we may need to think carefully about entry requirements.

The then Chairperson of the English Department: The range of proficiency achievement is wider than it was in the past. Some students perform better than in the past, but there is a lengthening tail of students at the lower end. . . . Now, the students come from a wider range of backgrounds and there is a more marked difference between the rich and the poor. Many students have less supportive home backgrounds than was generally the case in the past.

Training new and existing staff

The then President: In general, we need to run more workshops in different areas, such as curriculum and teaching methodologies. We need to establish a set of criteria such as, for example, competency standards, supported by workshops, in the use of electronic equipment, computer programs and laboratories. New teaching staff, apart from having a sound orientation . . . also need to be provided with in-service training.

Increasing self-access

The then Dean of Academic Affairs: Nowadays, students are very good at technology.

Also, they seem not to enjoy attending lectures or doing language practice drills as much as they did in the past. It makes sense to create e-learning websites that allow students access at times that are convenient to them. It also makes sense to make use of the things they enjoy in order to achieve the outcomes we want. The more effective our e-learning initiatives are, the more time staff will have to conduct research. Staff members need to be innovative and creative in their approach to teaching and learning. One of our current aims is to increase teaching quality. The Office of Academic Affairs now has a policy that teaching staff should upload their syllabuses before the beginning of the academic year. Staff members now need to create at least one e-course. These courses are evaluated by experts and, where they are judged to be of sufficient quality, the courses are put on line. Teachers have a choice in terms of course delivery modes. Thus, for example, staff members can conduct face-to-face teaching for half of each semester, or they can provide a complete e-learning environment, or have face-to-face teaching for one third of each semester and website learning for the other two thirds. Teaching staff now have options. There is inbuilt flexibility – flexibility for staff and flexibility for students. Students have greater control over their own learning.

The new building will be equipped with a teaching platform, including computers, tape recorders, VCR, electronic blackboards. In the future, teachers will be able to go to class with a USB flash disk only. They will then be able to link to their own website or e-course. Since there will be a video recorder in each classroom, students who need to be absent from class, can view the class videotape. Alternatively, teachers can create videos at home and post them on their web sites.

What all of this should lead to is not only an increase in the availability of web-based e-learning resources with all of the flexibility for staff and students that is associated with it, but also an improvement in quality as different staff members share resources, add to and modify existing courses and adapt courses in line with student responses and learning outcomes. The development of e-courses should lead to a higher level of co-operation among teaching staff.

Where two or more staff members are teaching the same course, a course leader can develop materials – where they have not already been developed – with others contributing ideas, suggestions etc. so that, ultimately, workloads will be reduced and quality will be assured. Internet-based resources will become richer and richer, reflecting the combined efforts of staff members over the years. Self-access provides great opportunities where teaching staff get together and organise and systematise their teaching materials. It involves, too, a gradual transfer of responsibility for their own learning to students who can access resources in a medium that is familiar to them and about which they are generally enthusiastic.

For all of this to succeed, there must be good, systematic course planning and resource planning, planning that is based on a sound understanding of what is needed in order to make overall proficiency gains and specific improvements in particular areas. Students need direction in terms of what to do in resource centres in order to achieve particular outcomes. What we do not want is directionless or aimless activities. Good planning is the essence of good resource development and effective resource use. Teaching staff can make more time available for research and self

development if they are prepared to make the effort in the initial developmental stages.

Further comments

The then President: We need to operate in a way that is consistent with Ministry of Education policy but we also need to take advantage of the liberalization of education. We are free to make many decisions for ourselves and we need to use this freedom in a responsible and creative way. We need to be clear about the philosophy and the theory that drives the curriculum and we need to be theory-driven and consistent in our approach to pedagogy and methodology so that we can justify our position and meet challenges in considered ways. We need to use technology in ways that enhance learning and reduce the burden on teaching staff.

The then Chairperson of the English Department: I think there are three things that are critical:

- Successful teaching needs to be at the centre of everything we do;
- Successful teaching is teaching that is inclusive, teaching that focuses on the needs of all students whatever their capacities;
- Successful teaching needs to be supported by solid, reliable policy-making and good administration.

Identifying the major issues emerging from the interviews

The interviewees identified a number of factors that are currently having an effect on higher education institutions generally and on the teaching and learning of English in particular. These include *political, economic, demographic and social considerations, including industrial and commercial globalisation, the ongoing globalisation of English, the spread and increasing sophistication of technology, and the effects of technology and the ready availability of a wide range of consumer goods on learner attitudes and approaches and on teaching styles.*

Their concerns relate to *increasing competition in the education marketplace* and hence to *the need for an improved research profile* (seen largely in terms of staff capabilities and research capacity, to be achieved through the appointment of appropriate staff and the development of existing staff), *distinctiveness* (achieved, in this case, through retaining as much as possible of the original mission of the institution and designing an overall curriculum that is holistic and coherent and centres on languages and liberal education), *teaching and learning excellence leading to increased proficiency gains and success in other acknowledged tests of language skills such as speech competitions* (achieved through a more systematic approach to curriculum and syllabus specification, improved teaching and learning materials, more innovative approaches to assessment, the effective use of internationally recognised proficiency benchmarking, and the creation of language courses that relate directly to other subject areas as well as the teaching of some subject areas through the medium of English), *flexibility and adaptability* (achieved through willingness to transform the institution in line with national aspirations and student needs and the increased use of technological resources in order to improve flexibility), *responsiveness to individual student needs and aspirations* (achieved through the use of self-access, web-based materials and a focus on all students, including those who are less able), and *employability of graduates* (achieved through collaboration with national and

international educational, industrial and commercial organisations, and through ensuring that a high level of language proficiency is accompanied by global awareness, adaptability, creativity and the ability to acquire new skills readily). In addition, so far as the institution as a whole is concerned, there is a recognition that Taiwan, in common with many other countries, is undergoing rapid change and that, in order to be responsive to changes as they take place, *administration needs to be efficient, streamlined and less bureaucratic.*

There is general agreement that there is now *a wider range of ability among students.* It is considered that the highest achievers do extremely well, but that there is a lengthening tail of students who are performing less well. There is also a general feeling that the increased influence of Western culture, the increased availability of consumer goods, and the increased availability of information (through the world wide web) have led to a situation in which *students generally expect more instant gratification than they did in the past.* Students are perceived as being less willing to participate in more traditional approaches to learning (such as lectures), less willing to devote time to gaining language skills and, therefore, more likely to focus on *fluency rather than accuracy.*

In this context, it is considered important to capitalize on those things that students respond positively to (such as *e-based learning*) at the same time as attempting to ensure that *language learning is purposeful*, that it is based on *coherent programs* that are designed to underpin *genuine proficiency gains*, that *both accuracy and fluency are treated as being equally important*, and that *individual skills development does not replace integrated skills-based teaching and learning.* In a more general sense, it is considered important that *professional training should not replace education.*

As the institution grows in size and is required to be more competitive, it has become *more difficult to cope financially, more difficult to attract appropriate staff* (staff who are not only well qualified, but are also effective teachers and researchers), *more difficult to maintain a sense of distinctiveness, more difficult to maintain a supportive environment* in which staff and students feel valued and appreciated. Increase in size and diversity have also led to *more timetable problems and a greater need to rationalize offerings.*

Repeated references were made by these managers to *the need for staff to understand the position of management in changing times and to co-operate and collaborate with management in effecting change.* Many, perhaps all, of these difficulties are also being experienced by other higher education institutions both in Taiwan and in other parts of the world.

Endnotes

1. In 2005, the Taiwanese government spent NT\$445,697,170 on education, that is, a total of 18.53% of government expenditure in that year, and the number of students in Taiwanese universities and colleges (of which there were 145) was 938,648 (Ministry of Education (Taiwan), 2006).

2. Following the Ministry of Education's Sixth National Conference on Education, a Committee for Deliberation on Education Reform was established and produced an Advisory Report on Education Reform. The emphasis was on greater access to education, more personal attention to students, increased routes to advanced study, increased quality and a

move towards lifelong learning. In 1998, NT\$150 billion was allocated to a five year plan, beginning in 1999, which involved: building a complete education system, popularization of kindergarten system, building complete systems for teacher training, promotion of improved technical education, promotion of lifelong learning and online teaching, furthering home education, improvement of education for handicapped people, improvement of education for Aborigines, easier access to higher education, creation of new student counseling systems, increase of education funds and expansion of research into education (Department of Statistics (Ministry of Education), 2005, pp. 6-7).

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