

# English Speaking Practice as an Effective Supplementary Activity at University Education

大学教育における効果的な学習支援活動としての英会話練習

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## Abstract

Kansai University of International Studies (KUIS), as an international university, launched a system of English conversation private lessons outside of classes called “English Private Lesson” in 2021 to improve students’ English proficiency, and has made various efforts to increase its effectiveness while making changes to the system. This program has also played a significant role in supporting the preparations of students who would participate in the “Inter-University Exchange Project” designated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology starting in 2022.

In this article, we will report the ideas and issues involved in implementing the program, as well as the prospects for making it a better non-class English learning support program at universities in the future, based on the data obtained during the program implementation in 2022 and 2023.

Key Words: English Private Lesson (EPL), Face-to-Face, Online, Reservation, Connection with Evaluation, Inter-University Exchange Project

## I Introduction

As an international university, KUIS has many partner universities around the world, and it trains students with communication skills to send them out into society<sup>1)</sup>. However, there are large individual differences in language ability, especially English conversation ability, to communicate with people around the world. While some

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students, including foreign students, are close to native English speakers' level, others need to review English learning they had in junior high and high school.

In light of this situation, our university started a system of English Private Lesson outside of class in 2021 for students who were willing to improve their English conversation skills. Initially, three full-time faculty members (one Japanese faculty member and two Filipino faculty members) belonging to the Department of Tourism began offering face-to-face lessons mainly to the students from the Faculty of International Communication. At our university, we named this program “English Private Lesson (EPL),” and we have conducted EPL through various trials and errors.

In 2022, the year after starting this program, our university was designated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as a designated university for the “Inter-University Exchange Project.<sup>2)</sup>” In this project, the students at our university conduct exchange activities with university students from the UK, India, Australia, and Canada on the theme of entrepreneurship. It is also noteworthy that this EPL has been used to improve English proficiency in advance of overseas activities, and that this program has been used more frequently. Due to this situation, another Filipino instructor joined EPL. And now, four members, one Japanese, and three Filipino faculty members, have worked together to manage this program while making necessary improvements.

## **II Purpose of this Practice Report**

EPL is for students who are positive about improving their English conversation skills in an international university, KUIS. It is conducted in a different style from actual classes or online lessons provided by English conversation schools. As we carry out the lessons every day, we come across new discoveries and problems, and hold weekly meetings to improve management and lessons. In the meetings, we have discussed over how to invite more students to lessons, or how to connect their positive attitude with the evaluation of actual English classes and so on. We have not reached the most effective lesson styles for the students even now, but by summarizing and reporting the content of the practice of EPL we have carried out so far, we would like to improve the lessons.

In this practice report, we will use the data obtained so far to make future improvements to this program so that students who are positive about learning English can improve their English proficiency while having fun.

## **III Background**

### **1. Tendency to learn foreign language individually instead of group learning**

Due to the global pandemic caused by COVID 19, major changes have occurred in the teaching style of

university education. During the period when students were unable to come to university campuses, online classes were held using online systems, and even after face-to-face classes resumed, some students with special circumstances attended classes online. Therefore, at KUIS, some classes are offering so-called high-flex classes that combine both face-to-face and online elements.

When we look into national trends, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology compiled guidelines for online classes at universities on March 28, 2023<sup>3)</sup>, and according to the results of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, targeting 60 universities, it was found that in 2021, approximately 60% of classes were conducted remotely. However, in 2023 post-COVID, approximately 40% of classes are still held online.

Furthermore, the number of services in Japan that uses online English conversation and English conversation apps is rapidly increasing, and there are many websites that offer such programs and compare some of them. We believe that in order to successfully integrate these changes in English education styles with the current English education in university classes, we need a system where students can learn English conversation on an individual basis outside of class. This program was established on the premise that if such a system was available in the university, students would be able to improve their English proficiency while having fun without paying extra fees.

## 2. Relation with University Policy

KUIS has established an “educational mission” to show the ideal vision of the Hamana Yamate Gakuin as an educational institution<sup>4)</sup>. Our university aims to send graduates out into the world who can “open up their lives proactively while respecting others.” Specifically, with “Communication, Consideration and Commitment” as the core values, training graduates who can carry out the three Cs<sup>5)</sup> makes up the educational mission of Hamana Yamate Gakuin.

KUIS has three Cs as its educational mission: “Communication,” “Consideration,” and “Commitment.” In these three Cs, Communication is placed first, and the three educational perspectives we want our students to have are “global,” “safety,” and “management.” In these three educational perspectives, “global perspective” comes first. In other words, the keywords of the education that our university aims for are “global perspective” and “communication skills,” and in order to foster them, language skills are the essential part.

However, when we look at the language proficiency of our students, we find that while there are some students, mainly international students, with TOEIC scores of over 800, there are also students who need to reorganize their English studies learned in junior high and high school.

## IV Content of English Private Lesson (EPL)

### 1. The Nature of the program

#### 1.1. Program Structure:

As an international university, students are given access to English programs. One of which is the “EPL,” which was primarily offered to students in the Faculty of International Communication with its aim to aid students’ English communication skills. Taking part in this program gives students a great opportunity to be exposed to the language on a daily basis. This engagement allows them to “rediscover aspects of themselves and develop a deeper understanding of the people around them<sup>6)</sup>.”

#### 1.2. System of booking - Reservation method:

Details about the program and application procedures are available on the university’s “Universal Passport” website. On the website, students can check the current month’s available schedule. Once they have chosen their desired time and date, they will need to fill out the necessary information. The reservation website can be accessed through the QR code or this link: <https://select-type.com/rsv/?id=2boF7d-eVSo>

#### 1.3. Lesson Types

Each session is good for 25 minutes. The class can be held either face-to-face or online using Zoom, and they can choose whether they want to take individual or group lessons<sup>7)</sup>.

### 2. List of courses offered and the specific fields

#### 2.1. List of courses offered:

- |                   |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| a) Beginner-1     | b) Beginner-2     | c) Beginner-3     |
| d) Intermediate-1 | e) Intermediate-2 | f) Intermediate-3 |
| g) Advanced-1     | h) Advanced-2     | i) Advanced-3     |

#### 2.2. List of specific fields:

##### (1) Daily Conversation

Focuses on refining students’ practical communication skills through interactive activities to help build their confidence in communicating effectively in various real-life contexts.

##### (2) TOEIC

Excelling in the TOEIC exam is of pivotal importance in today’s global workforce, where businesses operate in multinational settings. It does not only indicate a strong command of the language but also acts as a universal benchmark that facilitates seamless communication and collaboration in international settings, which reduces the possibility of misunderstandings and increases efficiency in the workforce. The aim of this course is to enhance students’ test taking skills and test wiseness on the TOEIC. They will have practice tests, strategy sessions, and constructive feedback to address specific areas for improvement.

### (3) Strengthening Listening skills

Various interactive listening exercises will be provided to the students to reinforce their comprehension and interpretation, and to respond effectively in contexts for effective language engagement.

### (4) Active Listening as a vital skill in any workplace

Active listening demands paying attention, demonstrating comprehension, and responding constructively. It "requires listening for the content, intent, and feeling of the speaker<sup>8</sup>." Being an active listener would be greatly beneficial when used in the workplace as it forges professional connections.

### 2.3. International Travel, Travel related phrases, and cultural exchange

This course focuses on fostering students' effective communication skills that covers cultural nuances, practical expressions in the context of global travel, and in-depth insight and understanding of intercultural exchange as they engage in real-world application of the language through diverse cultural settings<sup>9</sup>.

Students are exposed to interactive and realistic learning experiences to foster cultural understanding and language competence within the professional sphere.

### 2.4. Employment (Job Hunting and Internship)

This course offers practical, relevant, and essential skills necessary to prepare the students for their successful internship and career opportunities.

### 2.5. Graduate Studies

Proficiency in English increases students' academic and effective communication skills and expand global opportunities. In this course, students participate in language proficiency enhancement, participating in discussions, immerse in activities related to cultural experience and practice presenting their ideas in English through oral presentations.

### 2.6. Understanding Global Issues

Since the current global issues are increasing day by day, it has become critical to provide students with a global issues education<sup>10</sup>." Having an awareness of the current global issues is vital as it enables one to understand the interrelation of the world and that includes recognition that ideas and practices differ among societies. Moreover, being equipped with the language generates an active and engaging learning experience as they broaden their perspective on the world.

### 2.7. Reading: Article Reading and Discussion

Integrating articles in discussions stimulates students critical thinking, problem-solving and their ability to express their viewpoints to diverse contexts that help broaden their worldview.

### 2.8. Opinion Sharing and Debate Skills

Equipped with communication skills in English, students who take this course strengthens their skills, uplifts

their confidence, and recognizes understanding of diverse viewpoints.

## 2.9. Study Abroad

Study abroad programs are designed to help students become familiar with other cultures, have new experiences, improve their self-confidence, broaden their horizons, and gain exposure to diverse academic approaches in intercultural communication. Proficiency of the language, therefore, is fundamental as it is the primary language of instruction.

## 2.10 Teaching Materials Used:

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### Online Resources:

- *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news>.
- *The Japan Times*. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>.
- *TED*. <https://www.ted.com/>.
- *Harvard Business School*. <https://www.hbs.edu/Pages/default.aspx>.
- *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/>.

## V The Correlation of the EPL to TOEIC

TOEIC is a recognized international standardized test that is intentionally designed to measure the English

Language Proficiency of non-native speakers. Hence, ensuring that students are equipped with the necessary skills, they are encouraged to take EPL as they: familiarize with the test format and assess their progress through practice tests, enhance their listening skills through listening comprehension exercises, test their comprehension with reading tasks, improve language proficiency through delving into vocabulary building sessions, enhance communication skills through speaking and pronunciation practice, time management, writing and grammar activities, as well as providing them with personalized feedback to address their overall language proficiency.

## VI Results and Discussion

### 1. The EPL Timeline: The Change in the Number of Participants over the years.

1.1. December 2021- The EPL program was first made available to Faculty of International Communication students with the intention of serving not only highly motivated students but also shy and less self-assured individuals who wanted to get better at English. This is in line with the university's mission and vision towards inclusive education<sup>11)</sup>, which states that all students should have access to genuine opportunities to maximize their potential<sup>12)</sup>.

1.2. April 2022 to August 2022- This marks the start of the program's expansion. Students who intend to take part in the Global Research Program (GR) began attending the sessions in order to improve their TOEIC score, which is required for application, and to practice having conversations in English with other applicants so they could become more comfortable speaking the language.<sup>13)</sup> During this period, the program was exclusively accessible to all departments at Kobe Yamate Campus.

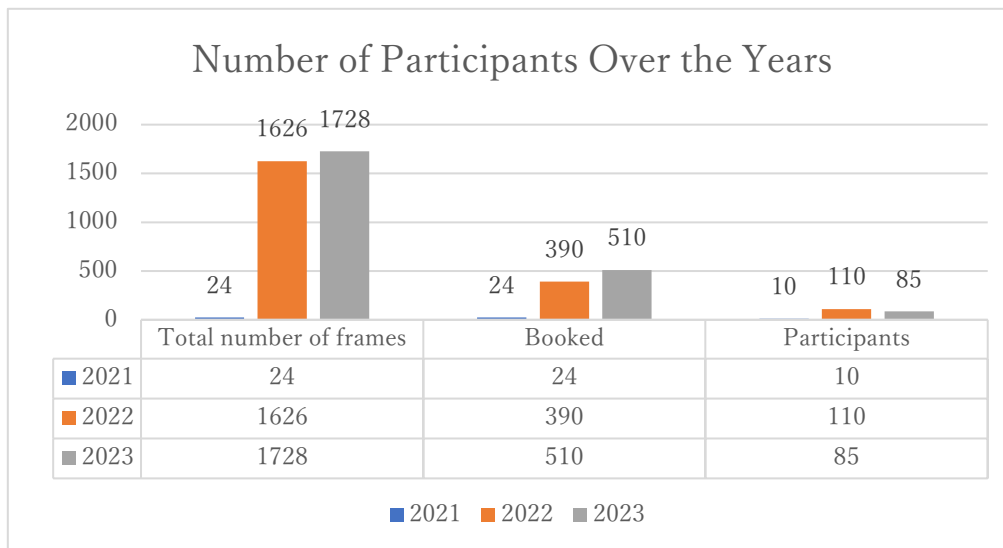


Figure 1. Number of Participants Over the Years

1.3. September 2022 to March 2023- The utilization of the program to all three campuses of the university; Kobe-Yamate Campus, Amagasaki Campus, and Miki Campus began<sup>6)</sup>. Figure 1 shows the increasing number of participants across departments and campuses. Due to significant demand, the number of frames offered in the reservation system was increased over time to accommodate more students.

1.4. April 2023 to Present- The Pre-Departure Business English sessions were offered to delegates of Project to Strengthen Universities' Global Expansion Capabilities; Inter-University Exchange Project-Kobe Program and Sydney Program <sup>14)</sup>. Introduction to Entrepreneurship and Startups has been incorporated into the English sessions as an official pre-departure activity to assist participants in envisioning and developing their business pitch <sup>15)</sup>.

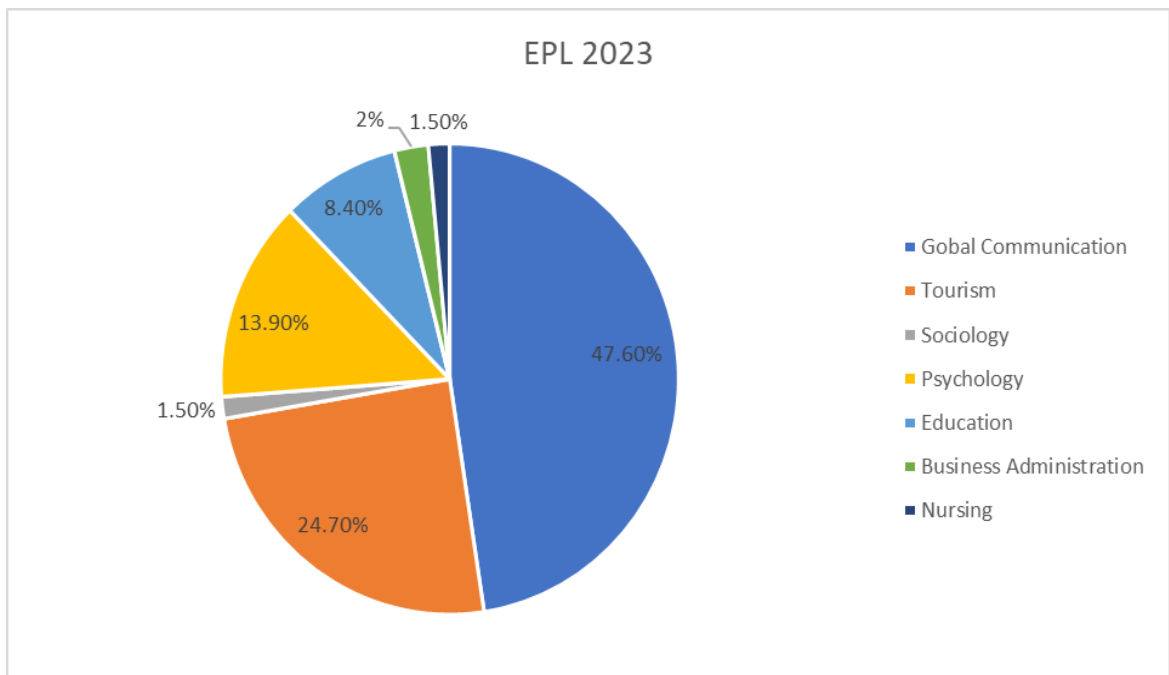


Figure 2. Participants Per Department

## 2. The Comparison of the Participants for Each Course.

The program is open to all the students of the three campuses. The data in Figure 2 shows that there is a substantial difference in the number of participants from the Global Communication Department, Tourism Department, and the rest.

The main reason for this gap is that the majority of the Faculty of International Communication's programs and activities are dedicated to English proficiency exam preparation, culture exchange, presentations, and study abroad <sup>16)</sup>. Furthermore, students in the aforementioned fields want to improve their language and study skills in English. These students are working on five skills: speaking, listening, reading, writing, and note taking. As a result, the department of Global Communication and Tourism has the most participants.



There are eight levels of courses offered in the program: Beginner-1, Beginner-2, Beginner-3, Intermediate-1, Intermediate-2, Advanced-1, Advanced-2, and Advanced-3. The figures for 2022 and 2023 are as follows.

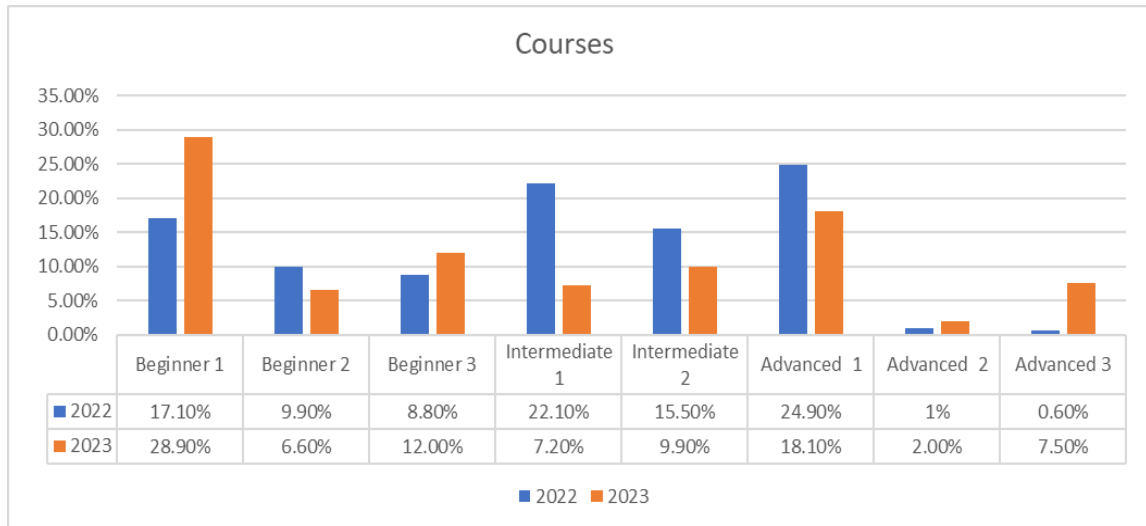


Figure 3a. Courses

Participants taking Beginner-1 increased from 17.10% in 2022 to 28.90% in 2023; Beginner-3 increased from 8.80% to 12.00%; Advanced-2 increased from 1% to 2.00 %; and Advanced-3 increased from 0.60% to 7.5%. The key findings emerged.

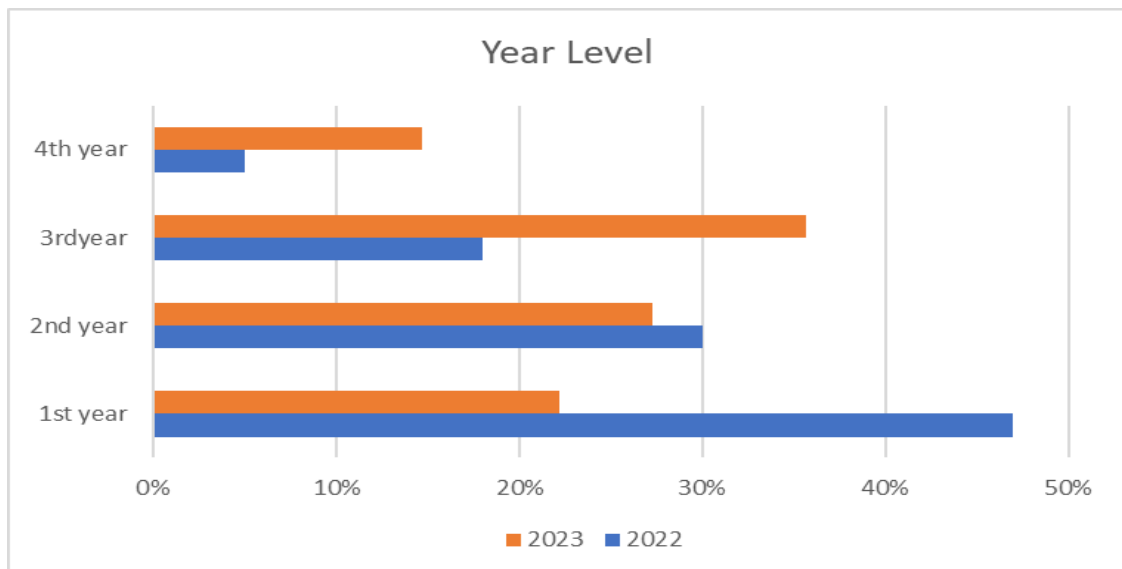


Figure 3b. Year Level

A. The new first-year students who study Beginner-1 and Beginner-3 are the ones who want to apply for the GR (Global Research) and GS (Global Study) programs, and their departments strongly encourage them to engage in the English sessions for supplementary practice<sup>16)</sup>.

B. Figure 3b reveals that the year level with the most participants is the third year. Students who take Advanced-2 and Advanced-3 courses this year are the ones preparing for internship or in the process of job hunting in preparation for career opportunities and job interviews<sup>17)</sup>.

C. Pre-departure training and briefing for the delegates of Sekai Tenkai Ryoku (Kobe Program and Sydney Program)<sup>14)</sup> and several GS (Global Study Programs)<sup>18)</sup>

D. With the ongoing cooperation of members of the Faculty of Global Communication Department as well as the Tourism Department, the program's growth and utilization have strengthened its purpose by introducing EPL as a supplementary activity for the English classes and providing incentive in the overall class evaluation of the students for positively participating in the program throughout the semester.

## **VII The Transformation of EPL**

### **1. Challenges**

While the implementation of EPL in the university has been largely successful, it has not been without challenges. One major obstacle is motivating more students to join the program. Motivating Japanese students living in a monolingual society to study English can involve understanding and addressing specific factors influencing their motivation. Gömleksiz (2010) pointed out that a learner's attitude toward learning the language is one of the leading predictors of success in learning English.<sup>19)</sup> In addition, You et al., 2006 demonstrate that variables pertaining to attitudes toward language learning and motivational effort, both elements of the socio-educational model, maintain the strongest influences on motivation<sup>20)</sup>. Therefore, to address this problem, these factors are being used to attract more students to join the program. For instance, effective communication, highlighting the program's benefits, and creating an engaging learning environment were some of the specific ways to encourage students.

Another challenge is simultaneously accommodating all the English language training programs at the university. In recent years, there has been an increase in global language programs among all departments in the university which signifies a strategic commitment to preparing students for a globalized world. This trend is expected to continue, with EPL playing a pivotal role in the success of these programs. However, to accommodate all programs, a comprehensive and strategic approach, involving input from the teachers in charge and making informed decisions about program offerings ahead of time, is crucial in navigating this issue.

Other challenges include overbooking which means taking lessons beyond the allowed number of times, and absence without notice from the students. Also, the lesson time was reduced from 30 to 25 minutes for teachers' preparation time in between consecutive lessons. Besides, Le (2023) found that the activities that last too long

would not be in the same vein as the students' interests<sup>21</sup>). In addition, Singh et al. 2023 suggest that private institutions should invest in professional development opportunities, collaborative platforms, and a supportive organizational culture to further enhance teacher collaboration<sup>22</sup>). Thus, addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach involving educators, administrators, and advisers to ensure the success of English language programs at the university.

## 2. Future Plans

Improving the EPL involves a comprehensive approach that considers various aspects. In the future, more academic and extracurricular activities will be offered to cater to students' diverse interests and learning styles; and to continue to enhance students' language skills, cultural understanding, and overall educational experience through exploring more opportunities for collaboration with other departments and universities, literary events, and workshops. Zaff et al. (2003) highlighted the positive association between students' participation in extracurricular activities and their positive learning outcomes<sup>23</sup>). Moreover, Saifullah and Yawan (2023) suggest that it is important for universities to provide extracurriculars such as English clubs, organizations, and group activities that focus on some English skills for students in order to give them more space and room to explore and develop their English skills<sup>24</sup>.

English proficiency is increasingly important in Japan for reasons such as job hunting, cultural exchange, tourism, global study, etc. Many Japanese companies require or prefer employees with a certain level of English proficiency, and some use standardized tests such as TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) as part of their hiring process. For example, a study by Takamatsu (2014) found that the high value placed on English language proficiency has been helpful in raising women's wages in Japan<sup>25</sup>). In addition, a study conducted by Yamauchi (2001) showed that most Asian countries have been paying increasing attention to English education on a national level as well as at a private level, while in Japan the English program is being cut back in secondary and higher education<sup>26</sup>). Hence, in the future, additional test courses will be added to the program including EIKEN, IELTS, and TOEFL to accommodate these changes and the needs of the students in all areas. However, success in any improvement initiatives depends on co... collaboration between faculty, students, and administrative staff, as well as continuous feedback loops and assessments, which will help ensure the future enhancement of EPL.

## VIII Acknowledgement

We looked back on past efforts as well as the current state and issues with the university-wide rollout of EPL, which was launched on a small scale in 2021. We hope to continue to manage this system. May this practice report enable reflection and consideration of future prospects.

Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to everyone who has helped EPL operation run smoothly thus far, especially the Media Support Center staff who have continually provided support for the reservation system, and the students who have made great use of the lessons. They have demonstrated a strong

commitment to their academics.

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## 抄 録

関西国際大学は、国際大学として、学生の英語力向上を目的として、課外において英会話の個人レッスンをを行う制度「English Private Lesson」を2021年度より開始し、そのシステムに変更を加えながら、その効果を高めるためのさまざまな取り組みを行っている。またこのプログラムは、文部科学省から本学が指定され、2022年より始まった「大学の世界展開力強化事業」に参加する学生の準備段階における支援という重要な役割も果たしている。

本稿では、「English Private Lesson」を実施する中で得られた2022年と2023年のデータをもとに、今後このプログラムを、大学教育における英語学習支援プログラムとしてよりよいものとしていく展望と併せて、本プログラムを実施する上での考え方や課題について報告するものである。