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Tokyo Global Gateway Opens

BOURKE, Gary

Introduction

Tokyo Global Gateway (TGG), Tokyo's latest English language and culture learning facility, opened on September 6, 2018, in Tokyo's waterfront district. The objectives of this purpose-built, English language and culture learning facility are to support school English language education, give young learners the opportunity to communicate with other English speakers in an immersive environment, improve intercultural competence, and raise awareness and interest in overseas study programs.

Yoichi Masuzoe, the then Tokyo governor, initially announced the plan to construct an "English village" in December 2014. English villages, providing English immersion programs, have long been considered an alternative form of English education in many EFL (English as a foreign language) countries including China and South Korea where learners have limited opportunity to use English in daily life. South Korean municipal governments began spending millions of dollars constructing English villages across the country in 2004. Though popular at first, parents later called into question the cost-effectiveness and ability of these short-term courses to improve children's English skills (Korean Times, 2012), which led to a decline in popularity, high levels of debt, and in some cases, closure.

Until now, the Japanese government has shown little interest in constructing specialized immersion language training facilities. Instead, it decided to develop the Japan Education and Training (JET) program, dispatching Assistant language teachers (ALTs) to assist Japanese homeroom teachers. The JET program began in 1987 by recruiting 813 ALTs from 4 countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand), by July 2018 the number had grown to 5,044 ALTs, from 39 countries. (The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, 2018).

This paper looks at the contents of the initial 2015 English Village Council report to understand the reasons behind the construction of Tokyo Global Gateway (TGG) and draw

comparisons with English villages in South Korea. It also includes recent information taken from the TGG website and offers suggestions to ensure its long-term success.

The Initial report

In December 2015, the English Village Council, a group that included Head of Kinki University's English Village, Sachiko Kitazume; KidZania Acting Division Director, Yumiko Kinoshita; ANA Holdings Co., Ltd. Director, Izumi Kobayashi; British Hills President and Representative Director Yasuhiro Murata; and Inspector General of Tokyo's Education Bureau, Kazuhiko Kaneko, published a report titled *Tokyo Ban Eigo Mura Kaisetsu ni Tsuite* (The Establishment of Tokyo's English Village). This 15-page, four-section, report began by stating that after six years of English education in junior and senior high school, Japanese are unable to communicate in English sufficiently. This was backed up with data from national and international English language tests. In 2014, Japan came 138th among 169 countries worldwide in the Educational Testing Services (ETS) TOEFL ranking. In Asia, Japan was placed 27th among 30 countries and came bottom in speaking ability (ETS TOEIC 2015). That same year, the Japanese Education Ministry reported that despite their targets of 50% only 37.7% of 3rd-year junior high school students passed Grade 3, and 31.9% of senior high school students passed Pre Grade 2 of the Ministry's STEP EIKEN English examination (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014). Also, a 2011 survey conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government revealed that only 27.5% of students had considered enrolling in an overseas study program (Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, 2011). The number of Japanese students enrolled in overseas universities peaked in 2004 at 82,945, and despite the introduction of corporate-sponsored scholarships, the number fell to 53,197, a drop of 36 percent in 2014 (McCrostie, 2017). The section concluded that more needs to be done if Tokyo is genuinely committed to nurturing a workforce capable of taking on the demands of an increasingly globalized economy.

The second section outlined the situation of English education in Japanese schools and the planned reforms that are to be gradually introduced to the national curriculum as part of 'English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization by 2020.'

In elementary schools, English education will begin at an earlier age. Formal English classes will replace the 'Foreign Language Activities curriculum', introduced for 5th and 6th-grade elementary students in 2011, while specially selected schools will begin to offer a 'Foreign Language Activities curriculum' from the 1st grade. JET program ALTs will

support elementary homeroom teachers throughout Tokyo's 62 wards, cities, districts and neighborhoods, to give guidance on listening, pronunciation, articulation, reading and writing. The revised curriculum aims to give students the ability to understand and express their ideas and feelings in English.

In 2012, junior high schools increased the number of weekly English classes from three to four, to offer a balanced four-skill (reading, writing, speaking and listening) curriculum. Future revisions will complement changes to elementary schools curricula, by emphasizing speaking and listening to give students the capability to better express themselves and understand others.

Senior high schools began to introduce curriculum reforms from 2013, aimed at building students' working vocabulary and deepen their understanding to allow them to communicate in English proactively. Future reforms will require classes to be conducted in English and students will learn to discuss personal experiences and write structured reports. Students will be graded on their ability to communicate facts and thoughts through written and spoken communication. To better prepare junior and senior high school teachers for these revisions, overseas training courses were introduced in 2015, and ALTs were dispatched to all senior high schools.

The third section introduced private sector projects providing formal, informal, and 'edutainment' (educational entertainment) type immersive courses from across the country offering students the opportunity to use English outside the classroom. Included were pictures of Kinki University's English Village, Fukushima's British Hills, and Tokyo's KidZania. The report underlined the lack of such affordable facilities, especially in the Tokyo area with its higher percentage of young children and students, highlighting the significance of the project and a rationale for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to construct a Tokyo English village.

The final section briefly described the concept, curriculum, audience and administration of the facility. The main points are outlined below:

I. *Concept*

English village will focus on giving visitors the opportunity to practice communicating in English. The aim is to help students better understand the importance and enjoyment of using English and motivate them to study English every day. Various activities will also deepen students' understanding of their own and other's culture and traditions.

II. *Curriculum*

The aim of the English village is not to teach English. Instead, it is a place to practice English, helping learners understand the necessity and satisfaction of being able to use English. In general, it will give students the opportunity to come into contact with various cultures, exchange points of view and at the same time raise awareness and pride in being Japanese.

III. *Audience*

The facility should offer programs for students from 5th-grade elementary school through to 3rd-grade senior high school students from both inside and outside the Tokyo Metropolitan area. One-day school excursions would allow more students to visit the facility. However, the option of half-day, 4-hour courses, slower paced 8-hour courses and the inclusion of courses for university students and members of the public should be considered. To allow junior and senior high school students to participate in intensive study programs, the availability of private and publicly subsidized accommodation needs to be investigated. Programs on weekday evenings, weekends, national holidays and during long school vacations should be held to allow for repeat visitors.

IV. *Administration*

The facility will be operated by designated publicly funded initiatives (PFIs) and public-private partnerships (PPPs). Entrance fees should be kept low to give all students the opportunity to visit, and consideration should be given to recruiting Japanese English-major students and foreign overseas students.

South Korean English Villages

As with Japanese schools, South Korean schools have a good reputation for providing high-level education in mathematics and science. In 2015, Korean 15-year-olds ranked seventh in both mathematics and reading, and eleventh in science, placing the country well above average in OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)(OECD, 2015). Similar to Japanese schools, South Korean schools have ranked much lower in international English language tables. In 2016, South Korea was placed 84th internationally in Educational Testing Service, TOEFL iBT rankings (ETS TOEFL, 2016).

Because of their willingness to make significant sacrifices to pay for their children's private

tuition, the media has described South Korean parents' enthusiasm for education as a "fever" (The Economist, 2013). Estimates by the Samsung Economic Research Institute show that some households spend as much as 70 percent of their income on children's education. Government and education pressure groups claim "education obsession" is harming individuals and damaging society (Sharma, 2013). Suicide is the number one cause of death among people aged between 10 and 39 (Kim, 2014), and the high price of education is forcing many Koreans to think twice about having children, further exacerbating the country's already low birthrate (Sharma, 2013). Despite repeated government steps to curb parents' education spending, South Korean households pay three times the OECD average on public education (Jeon, 2014). It is estimated that 200,000 middle-class Korean families send their pre-college children overseas to be educated. Mothers often accompany children, while fathers stay in Korea to finance the venture. "Kirogi Kajok", or goose families, is a term used to refer to children making seasonal overseas education visits escorted by their mother, similar to migrating geese. Favored destinations include New Zealand, Australia, the US, Canada and the UK (Chow, 2012). The plan to construct English villages across the country, in partnership with private educational institutes, providing accommodation and quality, short-term, affordable language education was seen as a way to halt this "education exodus" (Chow, 2012).

South Korea opened its first English village in Ansan, Gyeonggi-do province in August 2004 at the cost of around ₩8.5 billion (US$7.6 million). The province opened the second village in Paju in April 2006, at the cost of approximately ₩99 billion (US$88.8 million). This site covered 278,000m², an area two-thirds the size of Tokyo Disneyland. Later that month, a third, ₩67.6 billion (US$60.6 million), village opened in Yangpyeong (Hong, 2016). By 2012, the number of sites had increased to 32 nationwide (Korean Times, 2012). With cobbled streets, town squares, Romanesque town halls, and English signage, villages were designed to resemble a perception of European towns. Classrooms, fitted out to look like banks, department stores, clinics, restaurants, TV studios, and so forth, incentivize students to use English in different situations. One English Village includes a mock airport complete with departure lounge, check-in desks, a duty-free shop, and a real DC-9 passenger aircraft. On-site accommodation, cafeterias, coffee shops, and laundries allow students to stay for weeks at a time.

At first, with a ratio of twenty-four applicants for every student place, Gyeonggi-do's English villages proved very popular (Korean Herald, 2010). However, this popularity waned

on the back for negative impressions regarding the cost and ability of the short-term programs to noticeably improve students' language skills. One of Gyeonggi-do's villages came under police investigation when it began charging students ₩15.4 million (US$13,695) for an eight-week SAT preparation course, drawing criticism that the publicly funded village only offered programs to students from wealthy families (Korean Times, 2012). An English village on the southern island of Jeju was forced to suspended operations in the summer of 2012 after parents complained about the quality of classes and demanded refunds (Ibid.). English villages across the country struggled with low attendance. Paju English Village suffered losses ranging between ₩1.4 billion and ₩6.3 billion (US$1.2-5.3 million) every year between 2008 and 2015, for a total deficit of ₩21.9 billion (US$18.4 million) (Hong, 2016). Other municipal governments, including Daegu and Incheon, used taxpayers' money to cover deficits. Officials attributed their financial difficulties to oversupply and lack of quality programs to meet the expectations of students and their parents (Korean Times, 2012). Gyeonggi-do province closed its Ansan and Paju villages in 2012 and 2016 respectively (Hong, 2016),(Choi, 2016).

Nevertheless, many English villages are still in operation today; Daegu-Gyeongbuk English Village (DGEV) is just one example. This 121,977m² site, constructed in 2007 by the city of Daegu, is administered by Yeungjin University. Courses include one-day kindergarten visits, three-week TOEFL courses, and teacher training courses. Three dormitories can accommodate up to 800 students, instructors, and members of staff. DGEV employs 55 qualified instructors on one-year contracts from the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. All job applicants must also undergo a national criminal background check and submit documentation proving they do not have a criminal history of sexual or violent abuse involving children. The popular three-day elementary school program costs ₩446,000 (US$400), of which ₩300,000 (US$269) is subsidized by local governments. Elementary students from low-income families can attend for free. DGEV plans to hire five additional instructors and will begin construction on a fourth dormitory in 2019.

Tokyo Global Gateway

The working name, 'Tokyo English Village' was changed to Tokyo Global Gateway and registered as a limited company in February 2016 (Tokyo Global Gateway, 2018). The three-story, 7,000m² facility opened on September 6, 2018. The entrance, designed to resemble the inside of an airport terminal building, gives students the feeling they are about

to embark on an overseas journey. The second floor contains what are known as the 'Attraction' and the 'Active Immersion' areas. The Attraction Area is divided into three zones; Travel Zone, Hotel Zone and Airport Zone. These zones are further subdivided. The Travel Zone contains a travel agency, a pharmacy and a fast-food shop. The Hotel Zone contains a hotel, a clinic and a grocery store, while the Airport Zone includes a restaurant, a souvenir store and a mock-up of the inside of a passenger aircraft. The Active Immersion Area is divided into four conventional classrooms. There is also a Kids' Zone for younger learners. The third floor includes a craft and science lab, a cooking studio, a research lab, two tech/media labs, a gymnasium, and a Japanese culture space. Australia's Queensland government has formed a partnership with the Tokyo Board of Education to provide an authentic, immersive program. The QLD room (Queensland room), is where teachers from Queensland state schools will teach STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) classes.

Curriculum and instructors

Elementary, junior high and senior high school courses will be streamed into beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. Instructors known as 'agents' will help students complete specific everyday tasks based on 'Can Do' statements, a methodology developed by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). The statements are divided into six levels of difficulty from breakthrough to level 5. These levels correspond with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) six benchmarks from A1 through to C2. The Active Immersion Area hosts classes that including giving directions, programming, marketing, performing arts, tea ceremony and ecological responsibility.

Over the past year, TGG job vacancies have been advertised online. In August 2017, GaijinPot, a leading recruitment website for English speakers, hosted an advertisement by English Language Education Council Inc. (ELEC), for teaching positions at TGG beginning from April 2018. Applicants required a university degree, native level English ability, a recognized teaching qualification, and preferably 2-years teaching experience in the field of English education. In August 2018, TGG's website advertised positions in Japanese for applicants with 'native level' English ability with no requirements for formal qualifications or previous teaching experience. On August 8, Wing, a provider of instructors to companies and schools in the greater Tokyo area, posted an online advertisement for a 'Part-time Immersion English Guide' for September 6, Tokyo Global Gateway's grand opening. The job description read:

… Escort and advise Japanese students taking part in the various weekday, holiday, and overnight programs. Participate in role-plays and encourage students to speak in English. Provide a scaffolding (sic) for conversation. Students range in ages from elementary school children to senior high school students.

Requirements:
- Fluent English speaker
- Live in Tokyo area
- Work or student visa.
- Fun, friendly, outgoing, and responsible
- Teaching experience preferred, not required

The job description appears to be for 'agents' and a much longer term than just one day. Although paid training was offered, the willingness to employ staff without experience, qualifications or carrying out criminal background checks elicits severe doubts about TGG's commitment to providing a safe, quality learning experience for young learners. Parents knowing this may be reluctant, or even refuse, to send their children to attend courses at TGG.

Fees

Course fees differ depending on where students reside (See table below). Individuals can sign up for courses via the TGG website. A 50-minute Kids' MBA Experience course for elementary students costs ¥5,000, while a 90-minute English Challenge course costs ¥6,900. Junior high school aged students can sign up for a 3.5-hour Full English Village Experience for ¥5,000. A 60-minute Bloomberg investment class for ¥9,800 is also on offer (Tokyo Global Gateway, 2018).

TGG Day Courses		
	Metropolitan area residents	Outside metropolitan residents
Full-day course	4,800 yen	6,800 yen
Half-day course	2,400 yen	3,500 yen

Tokyo Global Gateway Website (September 2018)

Conclusion

Similarities exist in the way English has been traditionally viewed and taught in both Japan and South Korea, and in recent decades both countries have taken steps to improve their English curricula. South Korean parents frustrated at the ineffectiveness of these reforms to produce results spent significant amounts of money sending their children to schools overseas; prompting the government to construct specialized immersive English village facilities across the country. In Japan, the government continued to develop its JET program, giving students the opportunity to allay anxieties about speaking in English by interacting with ALTs on a regular basis and build intercultural communication competence in the classroom. Japanese parents have been apathetic about the inability of this approach to improve English capabilities, and unwilling to send their children to study overseas. So, while the South Korean government constructed English villages to stem the flow of students leaving the country, Tokyo Metropolitan Government has built TGG to encourage students to study overseas, develop an appreciation of diverse culture, and prepare them for the challenges of working in the increasingly globalized economy of the 21st century.

Future considerations for the longevity of TGG

While the novelty of the modern facility may do much to attract schools and individuals at first, effective class content and capable instructors are essential if TGG is to be a long-term success. At present, it is still unclear how TGG's assortment of courses will support ongoing revisions to the national English curriculum and more information on course content, including Australia's Queensland STEM courses, needs to be made available.

Online job vacancies show that qualifications and previous experience requirements for TGG agents have been relaxed over the past year. Tokyo Metropolitan Government's involvement in TGG will prompt many parents to assume their children are receiving guidance from experienced, qualified instructors. If parents knew otherwise, they might be unwilling to pay for their child to attend TGG. The need for rigorous and robust due diligence when recruiting personnel to work with children can never be overemphasized. Sexual harassment in Japanese schools used to be taboo; however, reports on sexual offences committed by teachers are now commonplace in the Japanese media. In 1990, only three teachers were dismissed for committing obscene acts. In 2016, that number had risen to 226 (Iketani, 2017). Teachers found guilty of committing such acts are dismissed and have their teaching accreditation invalidated. But loopholes exist; those who voluntarily resign

before being fired get to keep their teaching qualification, allowing them to take up teaching positions in other parts of the country. The Japanese Education Ministry has asked for stricter penalties for teachers found guilty of sexual offences and plans to introduce a system to check the status of teaching licenses. In Europe, North America, and South Korea, criminal background checks are mandatory for all candidates applying for posts that involve coming into contact with children. Parents expect their children's safety to be given the highest priority, so TGG should take the initiative to introduce background checks on all staff, including those coming from overseas.

Unlike TGG, South Korea has constructed the majority of English villages in rural areas where land is more affordable and allows for the construction of large-scale training facilities that include ample bus parking and accommodation. Schools charter buses to transport students to and from the English villages. The on-site dormitory-style accommodation reduces cost and encourages students to use English throughout their stay. Alternately, Tokyo's congested transportation system makes access to TGG's central location difficult for large groups of school students. TGG does not have on-site accommodation, so students signing up for short-term courses will need to find nearby accommodation and leave the all-English environment. Furthermore, the recent sharp increase in the number of tourists and tighter government regulation on private vacation lettings has resulted in a shortage of affordable accommodation in the capital. This could also impact on TGG's ability to attract students to enroll on long-term courses.

Course fees should be kept in check. Unlike Osaka's English Village (opened 2015), and contrary to the guidelines set out in the initial committee report, lesson fees are relatively expensive. This could lead to criticism that the public-funded facility only offers programs for students from wealthy families. Although the early application process has proved very popular, the above considerations will ultimately have a significant influence on whether the public's interest can be maintained over the medium to long-term.

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