



## 海外大学・大学院が外国人出願者に求める英語力について

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### 研究概要

本研究の目的は、英語で授業を行う海外の大学の出願資格・条件のうち、外国人志願者の英語能力要件について調査することである。本研究を遂行するにあたり2つのアプローチを用いた。(1)北米、ヨーロッパ、オセアニア、アジアの30大学のウェブサイトにはアクセスする方法及び、(2)ヨーロッパの2大学と日本国内にある1大学の国際交流あるいは留学生アドミッションの責任者へのインタビューである。調査対象は主に経営またはビジネス分野に関連した学部や大学院であり、したがって大学院に関してはビジネススクールに焦点をあてた。本調査の結果、英語で授業を行う大学の学部・大学院すべてが、外国人志願者に TOEFL<sup>®</sup> や IELTS などの英語4技能試験における一定以上のスコアを要求していることが判明した。また、出願資格とされているスコアは、例えばインターネット受験の TOEFL iBT<sup>®</sup> で概ね80~100点と非常に高いこともわかった。したがって留学希望者は高度な英語4技能を身につけ、これらの試験で高得点を得る必要がある。さらに多くのビジネススクールでは、出願書類選考で合格した志願者に対して面接を実施していることも明らかになった。これらの結果より面接の重要性を鑑み、本稿の最後には海外留学を志す学生の準備に有用な留学面接質問リストを示した。

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# English Proficiency Requirements for International Students as an Admissions Factor for Overseas Universities

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## 1. Introduction

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2008) addressed the importance of moving towards globalization of Japanese education. Part of this effort is to increase the number of Japanese students who study abroad (MEXT, 2008). In line with this initiative, the *Tobitate* project of the Japan Student Service Organization (JASSO) was launched in 2013 and established the goal of reaching 120,000 Japanese university students and 60,000 Japanese high school students studying abroad before the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Based on the statistical data of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and JASSO, MEXT (2017) reported current rates of studying abroad. The OECD data showed that 54,912 Japanese university students studied abroad in 2014 and 54,676 in 2015, while the JASSO data provided numbers of 81,219 in 2014, 84,456 in 2015, and 96,641 in

2016 (MEXT, 2017). The JASSO data also indicated that the countries with a large number of Japanese students in 2016 were the United States (20,159; an increase of 1,483 compared to the previous year), Australia (9,472; an increase of 1,392), and Canada (8,875; an increase of 686) (MEXT, 2017). The rate of Japanese university students studying abroad increased by 16% from 2014 to 2015 and by 28% from 2015 to 2016 (MEXT, 2017). Although there were some differences between OECD and JASSO data, the number of Japanese students studying abroad seems to be increasing, particularly with regard to those studying for more than 1 year in English-speaking countries.

This trend indicates the importance of English language proficiency for Japanese students who are interested in studying abroad in overseas universities that use English extensively. To substantiate English effectiveness, Japanese students must demonstrate English language proficiency as part of the admissions process for overseas universities. When considering English as a foreign language (EFL) programs in Japan, however, it is thought that Japanese students have been struggling to meet these requirements. Japanese undergraduates have

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little experience with conversation, since the grammar-translation method has been predominant in classrooms (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018). To wit, many EFL learners in Japanese universities are given grammar exercises, assignments to translate written expressions, and spelling quizzes (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018). To be able to study abroad as international students, it is crucial for Japanese undergraduates to learn and acquire English conversation skills so they can discuss and participate in educational programs of overseas universities. Yet, there is still a big gap to overcome between the required conversation skills and the actual skill levels in EFL classrooms. According to the Educational Testing Service (2018), Japanese students' Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL®) speaking scores in 2017 were the lowest not only in Asia but in the world, including 170 countries and regions. Those statistics reflect the need to recognize and address this undesirable gap with effective teaching and learning methods in EFL classrooms in Japanese universities.

Consistent with MEXT's initiative to increase the number of Japanese students studying abroad, a recent policy change made by MEXT focuses more on the development of English conversation skills among Japanese students (Teeter, 2017). This policy change will work for the betterment for Japanese students studying abroad who need to do well in their application process. When considering the situation facing Japanese students who

wish to study abroad, it is important to understand the admissions processes of overseas universities for international students, including Japanese students. Another inquiry concerns whether overseas universities require an interview session for admission of international students. This inquiry directly relates to English conversation skills. Accordingly, our study aimed to answer the following two questions:

- A) What are the English proficiency requirements of international students for admission into overseas universities?
- B) Do overseas universities conduct an interview with international students as part of the admissions process?

## 2. Methods

Our study applied two approaches to the investigation of admissions process of universities that use English in undergraduate or master's programs. The first approach was internet-based research—review of university websites that provide admissions information for international students. We specifically looked for minimum acceptable scores on the TOEFL® and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and interview requirements. Additionally, our study sought information on admissions policies or guidelines from a few universities in relation to international students. Since we are in the faculty of business administration, we chose business schools or management departments,

which include disciplines of general, international, or global business and management. When websites did not specifically provide admissions requirements in relation to management or business departments in their undergraduate programs, we sought general admission requirements for international students. Twelve countries or regions were selected for this study: the USA, Canada, Australia, six European countries, and three Asian countries. The total number of universities at the graduate level was 30 business schools for master's programs, most of which were master's of business administration (MBA) programs, while the number at the undergraduate level was 23 schools with more diversified majors or disciplines.

The second approach was an interview with university admissions directors to obtain rich information regarding admissions processes and policies. We had face-to-face or phone meetings with representatives from KU Leuven, the University of Antwerp, and the International University of Japan (IUJ). Although the third university was located in Japan, English is the official language of courses and most students are non-Japanese.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Internet-based approach

##### 3.1.1. Graduate schools

We investigated English language proficiency requirements for international

students in about 30 graduate schools with MBA or related programs. Several English proficiency examinations are officially used by these graduate schools, including TOEFL<sup>®</sup>, IELTS, Pearson Test of English (PTE), and Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB). Among them, TOEFL<sup>®</sup> and IELTS are used by almost all universities to evaluate English language proficiency of international students; thus, this study investigated the scores of those two tests required for admission. Furthermore, we checked whether 30 business schools conduct an interview with international applicants. Table 1 summarizes English language proficiency and interview session requirements.

TOEFL<sup>®</sup> tests have three formats: paper-based, computer-based, and internet-based. To meet English proficiency requirements for overseas universities, the internet-based type seems most acceptable. In Table 1, we listed both paper-based and internet-based minimum scores of the business schools, if they were available. Paper-based TOEFL<sup>®</sup> scores ranged from 550 to 620, with an average of 578, whereas internet-based TOEFL<sup>®</sup> scores ranged from 79 to 110, with an average of 93. Seven business schools did not specify TOEFL<sup>®</sup> minimum scores. In addition, Erasmus University indicated that it does not initially require international students to submit their scores, but scores may be required later in the admissions process. With regard to IELTS minimum scores, their range was 6.5 to 7.5, with an

Table 1. English proficiency and interview requirements of 30 business schools

Areas	Graduate school	TOEFL®		IELTS	Interview
		Paper	Internet		
USA	Columbia		Not specified		Yes
	Duke	577	90	7.0	Yes
	George Washington	600	100	7.0	Yes
	Michigan State University		100	7.0	Yes
	New York University		Not specified		Yes
	Oregon State University	575	91	7.0	Yes
	Rutgers		Not specified		
	Univ. of California, Los Angeles	560	87	7.0	Yes
	University of Chicago	600	104	7.0	Yes
	University of Missouri		93	7.0	Yes
	University of Texas, Austin		Not specified		Yes
	University of Virginia		Not specified		Yes
Canada	British Columbia		90	6.5	Yes
	McGill	567	86	6.5	Yes
	Western Ontario		100	7.0	Yes
Australia	Monash	550	79	6.5	
	Queensland		87	6.5	
Europe	Oxford	600	110	7.5	Yes
	Cambridge		110	7.5	Yes
	ESADE		100	7.0	Yes
	IE		100	7.0	Yes
	IESE		Not specified		Yes
	Antwerp		80	6.5	Yes
	KU Leuven	550	80	6.5	
	INSEAD	620	105	7.5	Yes
	Aarhus University	560	83	6.5	
Erasmus		Not required initially		Yes	
Asia	HKUST		Not specified		Yes
	IUJ	550	80	6.5	Yes
	Nanyang Tech University	600	100		Yes

Note: These scores and requirements are based on information from the university's website in 2018.

average of 6.9. Seven business schools did not report minimum scores for IELTS or TOEFL®. Overall, our investigation illustrates that business schools of overseas universities require international students to take and submit English proficiency scores of internet-based TOEFL® or IELTS. As those two tests include English speaking proficiency,

international students need to demonstrate oral or conversation skills through those English tests.

Most business schools investigated in this study—25 of 30—require an interview session as part of the admissions process. However, this interview is usually limited to those who successfully pass the initial screening process.

Table 2. English proficiency and interview requirements of 23 undergraduate schools

Area	Undergraduate school	TOEFL®		IELTS	Interview Opportunities
		Paper	Internet		
USA	Columbia	600	100	7.0	Yes
	Duke		100	7.0	Yes
	George Washington		90	6.5	
	Michigan State University	550	79	6.5	
	New York University		100	7.5	Yes
	Oregon State University		88	7.0	
	Rutgers	550-600	79-100	6.0-6.5	
	Univ. of California, Los Angeles		100	7.0	
	University of Chicago		18*	7.0	
	University of Missouri	550	79-100	6.5-7.0	
	University of Virginia		Not specified		
Canada	British Columbia	550	90	6.0-7.0	
	McGill	600	100	6.5	Yes
	Western Ontario	550	83	6.5	
Australia	Monash		69	6.0	
	Queensland		87	6.5	
Europe	Oxford		110	7.5	Yes
	Cambridge		110	7.5	Yes
	ESADE		65-93	6.5	
	IE		90	7.0	
	Erasmus		80	6.5	
Asia	HKUST	550	80	6.0	
	Nanyang Tech University		Not specified		

Note: These scores and requirements are based on the information of university' s website in 2018.

\*This score represents "internet-speaking."

Thus, the aim of the interview is not to check applicants' English language proficiency but to examine to what extent applicants are an appropriate fit for the business school from various aspects established by the school. In this respect, beyond English conversation skills, other significant knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics of business school applicants are examined for the selection. Accordingly, the interview session seems much more challenging for international students than the English language proficiency tests.

### 3.1.2. Undergraduate schools

Our study investigated international student admissions requirements of 23 undergraduate schools, including both English proficiency test scores of paper-based and internet-based TOEFL® and the IELTS, as well as interview requirements. Table 2 provides summary information on 23 undergraduate schools.

Two undergraduate schools did not provide specific minimum required scores on the TOEFL® and IELTS. The minimum internet-based TOEFL® scores of the 23

undergraduate schools ranged from 65 to 110, with an average of 91. The minimum paper-based TOEFL<sup>®</sup> scores ranged from 550 to 600, with an average of 566. The minimum scores of IELTS ranged from 6.0 to 7.5, with an average of 6.7. All of the average scores were slightly lower than those at the graduate level. Although several universities interviewed applicants as part of the admissions process, only McGill, Oxford, and Cambridge required interviews. Unlike the graduate schools, the purpose of the interview in the undergraduate admissions process was not to evaluate applicants for selection but to provide an opportunity for the applicants to understand the university and its programs.

### 3.2. Interview approach

We conducted interviews from representatives of three universities: KU Leuven, University of Antwerp, and IUJ. KU Leuven is listed as one of the 100 highest-ranking universities by the *Financial Times*; the University of Antwerp is listed among the 100 top executive MBA programs by the *Times*; and IUJ is listed among the 100 top global business schools by the *Economist*. Our interview aimed to understand each university's admissions policy and process with regard to international students. Particularly, we asked what kind of international students they sought, how they selected them, and how the students adapted to globalization. Table 3 shows basic information and data of three schools.

At KU Leuven, we interviewed a professor and an administrative staff member in charge of international affairs. Based on our interview data, the graduate school for economics or management does not require interviews for all applicants. Since their graduate students' performance correlated with scores on the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), the graduate schools focused on the GMAT performance of applicants and did not need to rely on interviews in the admissions process. They mentioned that international students were not always successful in the graduate program; thus, the selection process for international students had to be stricter. They stated that the problem of Japanese students is English language speaking and writing. The school would not increase the number of international students, but it seemed that it would enhance the quality of international students. Yet, the school recognized the importance of globalization with an increase in overall performance. Because English is very crucial in the school, professors and faculty members may need to prove their English proficiency to meet its needs. Those working in the university, including professors and staffs, who were not Belgian also needed to have a certain level of the Belgian language.

We met with a director of international affairs at the University of Antwerp. She was hired to deploy university globalization. At present, the university consists of international students from 75 countries. Its initial master's

Table 3. Three schools' information and data

	<b>KU Leuven</b>	<b>Antwerp</b> (Antwerp campus)	<b>IUJ</b> (Graduate only)
Student numbers			
Total	8000	3000	350
International	5 -10%	20%	90%
Japanese	Very few	<10	10%
International orientation	Maintain	Expand	Maintain
Interview Requirement	No	Yes	Yes
Time		20 minutes	20-30 minutes

program starts at the fourth undergraduate year with an economics background, while the advanced master's program is oriented towards management and business. The MBA program requires international students to submit TOEFL® or IELTS scores along with GMAT or Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) scores and a motivation essay and includes interviews as part of the admissions process. Those requirements are similar at other business schools. The interview appraisal is not a sole deciding factor for selection. According to the interviewee's perception, Asian students are reserved in class activities with less direct communication, and they do not always participate. She mentioned that the graduate school is working to develop more ways to meet people's needs related to globalization, with both short-and long-term graduate programs, summer programs, and student exchange programs. Thus, the school tries to find an overseas university for exchange students that has received international accreditation

such as that of the AACSB.

We interviewed a manager of the admissions office at IUJ. He mentioned that requirements for applicants to its MBA program are similar to those of other business schools. However, interviews are only for domestic applicants in Japan, most of whom are thought to be Japanese. The manager told us that the purpose of the interview was not only to evaluate several key competencies like leadership, communication, maturity, and human and team skills, but also to examine English language proficiency. Thus, it is thought that Japanese applicants need to be prepared for both MBA qualifications and English capabilities. Documents provided about the IUJ admission policy highlight development of tomorrow's global leader, and the school selects applicants with maturity and specific motivations to learn in graduate school, to become a leader, to be willing to communicate and understand people from different cultural backgrounds, and to have the English proficiency necessary for this



MBA program. These admission policies seem to correspond with interview questions. The manager mentioned that interviews were conducted for 20 to 30 minutes with a few professors. Like the University of Antwerp, IUJ uses the interview not as a deciding factor but as one component of the admissions process. He told us that not all Japanese and Asian students are competent in English communication. If applicants need to improve English language proficiency before starting a regular MBA program, they are offered the opportunity to take a summer English program.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Summary of findings**

This study investigated English proficiency requirements of international students who apply for overseas universities, using the internet and interviews as sources. We found that English proficiency tests like TOEFL<sup>®</sup> and IELTS are required as part of the formal admissions process of any overseas university that uses English as an official language in its program. Based on their minimum required scores, international students need to show a high level of English capability through those English tests. Furthermore, we found that interviews are required for applicants selected by a business school as part of its admissions process.

### **4.2. Interview requirements**

We attempted to explore this interview requirement within the business school. As described, the interview is not a deciding factor but remains crucial. Thus, if international students, including Japanese students, want to obtain an MBA degree, they need to carefully prepare for the interview. Through this preparation, they can use the interview to demonstrate particular skills or competencies expected by business schools, as discussed by IUJ. As another example, the Anderson School of Management at the University of California at Los Angeles (2018) uses the interview to evaluate applicants' communication and social skills as well as their readiness for its MBA program.

### **4.3. Interview questions**

As mentioned in the introduction, MEXT wants to increase the number of Japanese students who study abroad. Considering the application process and its frequent interview requirement, it will be important for students to practice interviewing if they are interested in studying at a business school. We propose several relevant interview questions that may be useful preparation for undergraduate students who want to study abroad in the area of business administration.

#### **General Questions**

- Please introduce yourself briefly.
- Why did you choose this country to study in?

- Why are you interested in this university?
- How did you learn about this school?

### Specific Questions

#### A. *Motivation*

- What motivates you to come to study in this department?
- Can you tell me more about why you are interested in business or management?
- What major are you interested in? Why are you interested in it?
- Among courses in your major, which course most interests you? Why?

#### B. *Career*

- Which organization/firm would you most like to work for? If you do not have a specific organization in mind, what industry are you interested in? Why?
- Tell me more about your career. What career goals do you have after graduating from this school? How is your future learning at this school related to your career goal?
- Think about your career success in 10 years. Tell me about it.
- What kind of skill or capability do you want to develop more for your career success? Why do you think you need that?

#### C. *Interpersonal relationships*

- Have you ever worked as part of a team, either in school or in another environment? Tell me what you think constitutes a good team. What is your role in that team?

- If you came to this university, how would you contribute to other students' learning?
- What was your most challenging situation involving interpersonal relationships? How did you cope with the situation?

#### D. *Leadership*

- Tell me about your leadership experience. What did you learn from it?
- What would be your ideal leadership role? Why do you think so?
- If you want to develop leadership skills, how would you go about it?

#### E. *Cross-cultural competency*

- To what extent are you open to new cultures?
- If in class you need to work with people who are culturally different from you, what is your approach? How do you work with them?
- Have you ever been abroad? What was your best experience? Tell me what you learned from it. What was your worst experience? Tell me what you learned from it.

#### F. *Personal characteristics*

- Tell me more about yourself. What have been your best experiences in life? What did you learn from them?
- What are your strengths? How did you develop them?
- How about your weaknesses? How would you improve them?
- Whom do you respect most? What do you think you can learn from him or her?

The next step would be to develop ways to effectively practice interviews in EFL classes in order to improve communication skills relevant to those questions.

admissions/requirements#interview.

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to investigate English proficiency requirements of international students as part of the admissions process of universities using English in their program. We took two approaches to the investigation: (1) accessing 30 universities' websites and (2) interviewing those in charge of international student admission at two European universities and one Japanese university. Our targeted departments or schools were associated with management or business areas; thus, the investigated graduate schools were mostly business schools. We found that English proficiency tests like the Test of English as a Foreign Language and International English Language Testing System test are mandatory in the formal admissions process of any overseas universities that use English as an official language in their undergraduate as well as graduate program. Considering their minimum required scores, it is necessary for international students to demonstrate a high level of English capabilities through those English proficiency tests. Furthermore, we found that most business schools require interviews of applicants who successfully pass the initial screening process. Finally, we propose relevant interview questions to prepare those who are interested in studying abroad.

Keywords : English proficiency, admissions processes, international students, interview requirements, overseas universities

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