

AN ARTICLE REVIEW ON TEACHING ENGLISH IN ENGLISH, 'IN PRINCIPLE': THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE CURRICULUM FOR JAPANESE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the article written by Gregory Paul Glasgow entitled "Teaching English in English, 'in principle': The national language curriculum for Japanese senior high schools" published in 2014. This paper aims to examine the author's findings on teachers' perception of new course of study by proposing some theoretical frameworks of communicative language teaching and the planned behavior analysis perspective to support the discussion. The article author raised the issue of Japanese English teachers' perceptions towards the recently launched national foreign language curriculum for Japanese senior high schools including a provision of English classes to be conducted in English. The author tried to clear the issue by revealing how Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) interpreted the new initiative to conduct 'English classes in English' in Japanese senior higher schools and the relationship between official policy expectation and JTEs' perceived new initiative in policy implementation.

KEYWORDS: *Foreign Language Curriculum, Japanese English Teachers' Perception, Teaching English.*

INTRODUCTION

The article written by Paul Glasgow (2014) discussed about the upper secondary school foreign language national curriculum in Japan that required English classes to be conducted in English, which has been implemented since 2013. The focus of inquiry was about how three Japanese Teacher of English (JTEs) interpreted the new initiative to conduct 'English classes in English' in Japanese senior high schools and three JTEs interpretation of the relationship between official policy expectations in schools. The study used the guideline of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) policy as the theoretical framework to link their perception.



The study used qualitative interview and it was as follow up survey study. The participants involved were three JTEs out of a total of 61 private senior high school teachers. Three JTEs used pseudonyms names consisted from one male and two females, who taught in Tokyo metropolitan area. The author chose the participants because the schools could autonomously specialized English curricula and be competitive in the effort to prepare students for university entry exam with communicative teaching methods in creative ways. The study was conducted from January to March 2011. Data were taken from interview results and the text of national policy on medium instruction proposed by MEXT that stated the guideline, goals and objectives, and the content of the explanation guidebook of the course of study for foreign languages which recommended English classes should be conducted in English. Recurring data based on a variety of themes were coded and categorized.

The article revealed the following results: first, three JTEs' perceptions of Teaching English in English had different responses. When the teachers read the policy text containing the directives, they perceived and interpreted the policy ambiguously. Therefore, the author concluded that the policy text had shown the indication of problematic wording that could cause divergence in interpretation among them. Further, in terms of 'communication itself' in English, three JTEs also comprehended it differently.

The policy of MEXT was contradictive with national mechanism which appeared to be a mismatch about the implementation of teaching English in English and the current preparation system for university entrance. Three JTEs questioned the efficacy of the new initiative due to the conflict with their wider socio-pedagogical roles. These roles was mediated through the use of Japanese and also influenced by the pervasive influence of *juken* or preparation for entrance examinations. This policy of MEXT complicated teacher perceptions in the initiative's realization, and also its translation into practice.

Besides, the author revealed beliefs about first (L1) and second (L2) language use related to new curriculum which linked to the three JTEs identities as non-native teachers. They faced dilemma about L1 use because they had to serve target language model use even though they were not confident. Meanwhile, MEXT position on JTEs use of English that acknowledged JTEs concerns about language proficiency did not bode well. Regarding to the second result about the relationship between official policy expectations and JTEs perceived sense of agency, there is no data presented in the findings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article review analyzed the following article: Paul Glasgow, G. (2014). Teaching English in English, 'in principle': The national foreign language curriculum for Japanese senior high schools. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 9(2), 152-161.

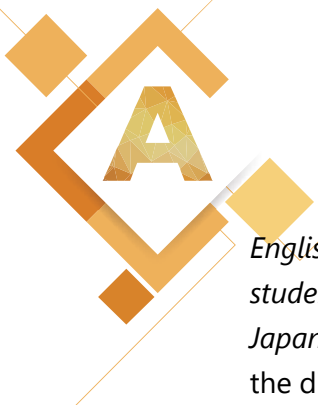
DISCUSSIONS

As a whole, the author presented some evidence concerning the implementation of English curriculum and teachers' understanding to policy statement in Japan. However, this article has some weaknesses and strengths related to the method and results.

In the method section, this study was a follow-up from a survey design; but the author only involved 3 participants out of a total of 61 private senior high school teachers (Paul Glasgow, 2014, p. 155). It means the sample size was not representative enough, and thus, the result could not be generalized to conclude how Japanese teachers of English in private senior high schools perceived the policy. Dworkin (2012) recommends that 25-30 participants is the minimum sample size required. This number is also considered adequate for publication in journals because it maximizes the possibility that sufficient data must be collected to clarify relationship between concept categories and identify variation in processes. Furthermore, the data of in-depth, semi structured interviews did not get detail information from the participants. In this case, the detail information about a person's thought is important to avoid saturation and redundancy in studies (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

In addition, the data analysis was not explained further. The author tried to analyze three JTEs' teaching learning backgrounds, descriptions of working experience at their institution, perceptions of current language use in classroom, and attitudes towards the new curriculum (Paul Glasgow, 2014, p. 155). Also, the author mentioned to categorize the teachers' perceptions of policy goals, the educational priorities of teaching, and the JTEs beliefs about L1 and L2 use (Paul Glasgow, 2014, p.156). However, the author only provided the findings about the teachers' perceptions of teaching English in English, conflict with national assessment mechanism, and beliefs about first and second language use.

The first finding of the article presented three JTEs' perceptions about 'Teaching English in English in principle' of teaching method and course goal. The course of study in 'English Communication I' states: '(1) the following language activities, designed for specific –use situation in order to **encourage** students to apply their abilities to understand and convey information, ideas, etc., **should be conducted in English**' (p. 154). Here, three JTEs perceived it differently. Three JTEs said "80%... especially grammar explanation 20% in Japanese...", "not exactly sure about exact amount, but we do not use



English in classroom... government says use English in the classroom means to motivate students and teachers using English”, and “English classes are taught only in English no Japanese. That’s my understanding, if I understand correctly”. The author concluded that the divergence of understanding and interpretation happened because of problematic wording of phrases found in a new course of study.

However, the problem is not about the context of the policy text, rather it is because three JTEs perceptions are subjective. The author did not examine it from another perspective; the planned behavior perspective. The planned behavior analysis is appropriate with the author’s aim to reveal the JTEs perceptions and beliefs (Burns, Houser, & Farris, 2018). It is important to find out a number of teaching-learning background, working experience, motivation, and commitment factors. These factors may give influence to shape three JTEs perceptions and beliefs towards the new course of study. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the potential importance of background factors in providing a deeper understanding of the underlying foundations of beliefs by extension behavior (Underwood, 2012). The reason is also strengthened by Altinyelken (2010) on how teachers play a pivotal role in reform processes, and factors such as their background, training, subject matter knowledge, motivation, commitment to teaching, and attitudes towards proposed innovation, influencing their capacity and willingness to implement a change.

In accordance with the relation for teaching English class in English, the text of course of study states: ‘...**communicative ability** is the characteristics of each English subject, classes, **in principle should be conducted in English** order to enhance the opportunities for students to be exposed to English, transforming classes into real communication scenes. **Consideration should be given to use English in accordance with the students’ level of comprehension**’ (p. 154). Here, three JTEs comprehended ‘communication itself’ conducted in class by responding: ‘*English-only*’ or *English classes are taught only in English, no Japanese* and ‘*80% English*’... *it will just motivate teachers to use English in class...*” In this case, the author did not explore more detail about what the JTEs meant by ‘communicative’ and interrelate to communicative language teaching perspective whether teachers’ misunderstanding of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or their low competence to implement curriculum that create an ambiguous perception. There is no more information. The author needed to ask more about their knowledge of teaching pedagogical aspect. This condition indicates there is misconception about interpretation of English in English in principles particularly first language use (Japanese) is regarded ‘forbidden’ in the English classes.

This argument is supported by Nishino about Japanese high school teachers (as cited in Tsukamoto & Tsujioka, 2011) that many know about CLT, but few of them implement

it in their lessons. Most of the teachers have not taught English using communicative activities and they are not accustomed to CLT. There are some obstacles to teaching in a communicative way (p. 312) because teachers' understanding of CLT has been quite varied and some of them implement CLT in an ineffective way regarding as a teaching method. Communicative language teaching leading to the teaching of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

In terms of conflict with the national assessment mechanism, three JTEs said *"the government wants us to follow their policy, if the exam does not change what should we do? The policy little strange... of course there are some Japanese teachers who cannot speak English at all at certain level high school", "students have to get grade into a higher university". "We are private schools... do not have to follow the curriculum... the parents want us to teach English for the entrance exam not practical"*. Here, the author linked the mismatch of related issue of language use to course assessment in current preparation system for university entrance is extreme. The policy of MEXT complicate teachers' perception into practice.

In this part, the author gave a positive point. Teachers should provide students with the knowledge to pass examinations rather than to become enhanced communicative language users even after implementation of the new curriculum. Even though the policy focuses on learning shift, the mismatch occurs because the central government's policies and the course of study's also stress on the national-level university entrance exams while the exam does not require 'depth' of knowledge. As a consequence, English language teaching in English shows less progress in classrooms (Bartlett, 2016; Kimura & Tatsuno, 2017).

Related to three JTEs beliefs about first and second languages use to the new curriculum, L1 and L2 use is closely to their identities as non-native English speaking teachers. All participants were not confident or did not believe in such an implementation of the course of study: *"I am Japanese and I am not a native speaker and my pronunciation is bad so they, so some students who can speak English very much, how to say, they speak at a high speed and I cannot understand what they said"*. In this case, the author connected these reasons to the fact that there is no resource on MEXT position stating about L1 and L2 use into practice.

In personal attributes, three JTEs tended to avoid using English in class because they lacked confidence in their own ability or believed they did not possess the required communicative language teaching to teach in English. The teachers tended to perpetuate the methodological status quo; that is, to teach using grammar translation methods. Many of them were less confident about their speaking abilities. The teachers

also avoided oral communication activities, or only used them very occasionally (Abe, 2013).

Finally, as a whole this article has tried to describe relevant information on JTEs' views on the new course policy; however, the author should cover more insights to understand deeper the teachers' perceptions based on the new course study implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

The article discussed how JTEs interpreted the new initiative to conduct 'English classes in English' in Japanese senior higher schools. The author has attempted to explore the JTEs' perceptions on the government policy. Future research should focus on JTEs perspectives in-depth by looking at the implementation of the new initiative in English classrooms in Japan.

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