

Effective Implementation of Foreign Language Education Reform in Japan: What More Can Be Done?

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From 2011-2013, the new Japanese Foreign Language Course of Study (CoS) will be implemented to improve foreign language education at the primary and secondary school levels. However, there seems to be a general lack of confidence in effectively applying new national guidelines in local contexts. To address this issue, we review the factors that influence Japanese foreign language education as well as the new CoS revisions. Utilizing literature and personal communication with EFL practitioners, we then put forth the following recommendations for successfully implementing the CoS revisions: (a) adopting theoretical perspectives and pedagogies from successful teaching programs; (b) developing competencies of Japanese teachers of English; (c) reforming assistant language teacher standards and hiring practices; (d) enhancing communication between educators and administrators; (e) integrating a World Englishes perspective; (f) establishing agency and communities of practice among stakeholders; (g) improving entrance examination standards; and (h) promoting more English-immersion education programs.

日本の外国語教育の学習指導要領は目下、大きな変化を遂げているところである。2011年4月より、公立学校の5年生と6年生では外国語教育が義務化された。中学校においても、改訂された外国語教育のカリキュラムが、2年後には実施される予定である。この新しい政策の成功は、教師や学校がいかによく準備をするかにかかっている。しかし、実際の教育現場では、この新しい指導要領を効果的に導入できるかどうか、不安に感じているようである。この論文では、目前に差し迫った外国語教育改訂に関する問題意識を喚起し、またこれらの改訂が教育現場での活動においてどのように効果的に実行され得るかについて探究することを目的としている。そのために、日本における外国語教育方針を過去、そして現在の観点から扱う文献を再考し、更には、この分野の専門家にインタビューし、彼らの見解にも触れる予定である。



UNDER PRESSURE from all segments of society to enact educational reform (Goto-Butler, 2007), the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has issued a new Foreign Language Course of Study (CoS), revised in 2008 and 2009 (Yoshida, 2009), which took effect in April 2011. The revised CoS aims to provide Japanese youth with a more heightened sense of internationalization (Fujita-Round & Maher, 2008). However, effective integration of CoS guidelines may be challenging because the burden of actual CoS implementation has been placed on local school educators and administrators. This has resulted in a disconnect between CoS guidelines and necessary changes in classroom teaching practices. This problem highlights and exacerbates already existing difficulties within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context of Japan.

Closing the gap between CoS guidelines and their implementation requires careful analysis of past and present issues within the Japanese foreign language teaching context. Through a literature review and a series of personal interviews with teaching professionals from all levels of education, we discuss the background of the educational reforms, present reactions to the revisions, and offer suggestions for improving the implementation of CoS guidelines. Our aim is to help develop an understanding between educators, administrators, policymakers, and learners, and foster a community that promotes a positive culture of foreign language learning.

The Japanese Foreign Language Teaching Context: Core Influences

The following core influences on Japanese foreign language education have been identified: the co-existence of traditional and imported pedagogies, the entrance exams and their wash-back effects, workplace conditions and institutional pressures on teachers, and teacher pre- and in-service training.

Traditional Versus Imported Classroom Pedagogy

With the rise of globalization, language-in-education policy reforms have become common in countries where English is learned as a foreign language (Kachru, 1990), along with the importation of western classroom pedagogies (Goto-Butler, 2005; Liddicoat, 2004; Liu & Xu, 2011; Riley, 2008; Yoon, 2004). Kanno (2007) suggested that teachers in Japan, specifically secondary school instructors, may have an imperfect understanding of what the reforms entail. MEXT is calling for more communicative abilities in English, citing specific classroom practices to utilize. However, teaching practices generally remain the traditional *yakudoku*. *Yakudoku*, an adaptation of the grammar-translation method, is a pedagogy centered on the practice of translating English sentences word-for-word into Japanese (Hino, 1988) so that the content can be understood in Japanese, a one-way understanding that does not facilitate communicative abilities (Gorsuch, 1998; Law, 1995; Riley, 2008). This creates a continuing controversy between proponents of communicative language teaching (CLT) and those of the *yakudoku* method. Although MEXT states that certain English courses should be “integrated skills,” incorporating all four language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), more often than not these classes become just another grammar-translation taught English course (Goto-Butler, 2005; Kanno, 2007; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Riley, 2008; Yoshida, 2009).

In order to prevent this regression into predominant methods, the re-culturing of schools, teachers, and teaching conditions is necessary to accommodate the communicative language practices called for by MEXT (Underwood, Myskow, & Hattori, 2012). Furthermore, Liu & Xu (2011) suggested that transformation of teachers’ identities is paramount to implementation of new pedagogies. Transformation includes negotiating new and imported methods with local teachers, respecting their agency, and working towards a culturally-appropriate pedagogy. This

way the integration of improved teaching practices can be accomplished through both top-down and bottom-up efforts.

The Entrance Exam and Test Preparation Wash-Back Effects

The influence from entrance exams on compulsory education, specifically English language teaching (ELT) in Japan, has been paramount. The heavy emphasis on *yakudoku* as a teaching practice is a wash-back effect justified as preparation for tests and perceived as the method for success on exams (Doyon, 2001; Kikuchi, 2009; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; O'Donnell, 2005; Stewart, 2009). In reality, the over-emphasis on *yakudoku* may be doing more harm than good. Gorsuch (1998) found that most university exams do not require students to translate. Underwood (2010) analyzed the National Center Test (NCT, a standardized test and mandatory assessment for entrance to universities) and concluded that the test demanded various reading strategy skills and not translation. The learner should not spend so much time memorizing unnecessary lexico-grammar and instead should focus on high frequency vocabulary enabling better comprehension of texts (Nation, 2001; Underwood, 2010). Test preparation and the overuse of *yakudoku* are also severely demotivating for students, who spend the majority of their years studying English in this manner (Doyon, 2001; Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Kikuchi, 2006; Koga, 2010; Yoshida, 2008, 2009). Teachers implementing *yakudoku* may actually hinder students' success on tests.

Workplace Conditions and Pre- and In-Service Teacher Training

Generally, individual teachers at Japanese secondary schools have extra-curricular and administrative responsibilities (O'Donnell, 2005; Taira, 1982). This drastically limits time avail-

able for lesson planning and constricts teacher development. Institutional pressures on teachers include (a) large class sizes, (b) mixed-ability groupings, (c) MEXT-mandated materials and curricula, and (d) pressure to prioritize *juken benkyou* (test preparation) over pragmatic instruction (Cook, 2009; Doyon, 2001; Koga, 2010; O'Donnell, 2005; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Willis, 2011). These four pressures perpetuate the same teaching practices and hinder integration of innovative teaching methods and approaches.

Regarding teacher training, the vast majority of Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) are literature majors with little to no practical experience in English pedagogy (Goto-Butler, 2005; Nagatomo, 2011; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Sakui, 2004). JTEs are generally trained to engage students in literature analysis and not English communication. In addition, JTEs receive very little teaching practice during their training period. The manner in which JTEs were trained reflects the manner in which they themselves were taught, and subsequently affects the manner in which they teach.

Only those JTEs who are motivated to incorporate communicative practices in their classrooms participate in additional ELT professional development. However, despite learning new pedagogies, these teachers are often pressured by their peers to conform to traditional methods (J. Fanselow, personal communication, April 19, 2011; Kikuchi, 2009; McVeigh, 2004). This pressure is described by some researchers as a sociological condition resistant to change (Hino, 1988; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004).

The body of literature on the core influences on ELT in Japan lead to the following conclusions: (a) The MEXT policy is calling for more communicative English, yet teacher practices remain entrenched in exam preparation; and (b) limited time allotted for pedagogical innovation and teacher education ensure that practices remain the same (Cook, 2009; Doyon, 2001; Gorsuch, 1998; Kikuchi, 2009; Koga, 2010; O'Donnell, 2005; Sato &

Kleinsasser, 2004; Willis, 2011). Whether or not policymakers are indeed aware of these impeding influences, MEXT has nonetheless put forth a revision of the Foreign Language CoS, which will be discussed in the following section.

Revisions to the Foreign Language Course of Study

The revised CoS went into effect in public primary schools in April 2011. Under the new guidelines, fifth and sixth graders will receive exposure to foreign languages, cultures, and communicative practices through mandatory “activities” (i.e., songs, games, and conversational exchanges). In these activities, it is hoped they will learn basic expressions (e.g., greeting others and talking about daily life) and begin developing listening and speaking skills in the foreign language (MEXT, 2011a).

In 2012, CoS revisions will be implemented in junior high schools (JHS). At this level, learners will develop all four language skills, allowing them to comprehend and respond to discourse and utilize the foreign language appropriately for self-expression. Teachers will also be required to begin grammar instruction at this level, focusing on usage instead of prescriptive rule memorization (MEXT, 2011b).

Finally, a new foreign language curriculum will become effective in senior high schools (SHS) in 2013. This curriculum will feature mandatory English Communication I-III courses, where learners will develop integrated communication skills, and optional English Expression I-II courses, which will focus on fostering critical thinking capacities (e.g., debating and giving presentations) in the foreign language. Two other optional courses will also be made available to learners: Basic English Communication, a remedial bridge between JHS and SHS language classes; and English Conversation, a daily-conversation-based course. Another significant change is that English will

become, in principle, the language of instruction in all English language courses (MEXT, 2010).

Common themes permeate all three levels of the new foreign language CoS. A primary duty of language instructors is fostering motivation to learn the foreign language. This is in response to reports of decreasing learner motivation (National Institute for Educational Policy Research, 2005). Instructors are also expected to pay equal attention to concurrent linguistic and cultural development of both Japanese and the foreign language, in order to foster youth who can express themselves in another language while retaining their cultural identity. Additionally, instructors are encouraged to utilize more learner-centered instruction—based on student needs and interests—instead of traditional teacher-fronted instruction. They are also expected to incorporate technological (e.g., multimedia) and pedagogical advances (e.g., cooperative learning). Finally, MEXT would like JTEs to collaborate more with teaching peers, both other JTEs and native English teachers (NETs), to improve coordination of lessons and transitions between different levels of language instruction (MEXT, 2010; 2011a; 2011b).

The new CoS forms the national curriculum in foreign language-in-education policy. However, MEXT has left the curriculum’s implementation to local educational authorities. This may lead to selective following of guidelines, resulting in variable instructional practices and learning outcomes. To minimize this, more top-down and bottom-up measures must be taken by education stakeholders, which will be discussed next.

Eight Recommendations for Implementing the New Course of Study Guidelines

Our research has yielded the following recommendations for successfully implementing revised CoS guidelines:

- (a) adopting theoretical perspectives and pedagogies from successful programs;
- (b) developing competencies of Japanese teachers of English;
- (c) reforming assistant language teacher standards and hiring practices;
- (d) enhancing communication between educators and administrators;
- (e) integrating a World Englishes perspective;
- (f) establishing agency and communities of practice among stakeholders;
- (g) improving entrance examination standards; and
- (h) promoting more English-immersion education programs.

Adopting Theoretical Perspectives and Pedagogies From Successful Programs

One way of improving foreign language education and encouraging local authorities to utilize MEXT guidelines is to adopt theoretical perspectives and pedagogies from successful programs. One such program is the Finnish foreign language education system. This program is notable for its success in fostering multilingual students in an EFL context. Key program features include requiring:

- (a) all teachers to possess a Masters degree in the subject of instruction;
- (b) balancing lexico-grammar instruction with linguistic use and function;
- (c) fostering a tolerance for ambiguity, where learners focus on understanding main concepts instead of details;
- (d) early onset of foreign language instruction, where

learners begin taking classes in the third grade; and

- (e) adopting outward-looking and additive-identity outlooks towards foreign language instruction. (M. Mitutomi, personal communication, November 19, 2011).

This last point is particularly important, since it fosters a mindset in which foreign languages are seen as key to participating in global affairs and adding to, not detracting from, an individual's identity. Takayama (2010) identified other key elements of the Finnish education system, including high-quality teacher education programs, high teacher social status, an extensive library system and high cultural value on reading, and local control of schools over curriculum and administration. However, Takayama also warned against politicizing and romanticizing selective interpretations of international rankings data, and using those interpretations to reinvent Japanese education reform without taking into account local cultures and teaching contexts.

Additionally, in the process of implementing imported pedagogies, teachers' identities and beliefs towards traditional practices need to be negotiated. Liu and Xu (2011) suggested that in order to transform pedagogy, teacher identity must be reconstructed (a) personally, within the parameters of each teacher's experience, and (b) institutionally, by stepping out of prescribed traditions. They concluded that successful implementation of imported pedagogy requires negotiation with local stakeholders and recognition of their agency, with reference to an individual or group's capacity to act and control decision-making in their particular socio-cultural context (van Lier, 2008), rather than top-down imposition. Incorporating imported perspectives and pedagogies into long-term curricular goals would constitute progress towards meeting new CoS guidelines.

Developing Competencies of Japanese Teachers of English

In an environment in which many foreign language instructors are nonnative English teachers, proficiency standards are critical (Andrews, 2007; Kamhi-Stein, 2004). Maintaining the current minimum TOEIC score of 550 to obtain teaching certification means many teachers will continue to have only a basic knowledge and understanding of English. Despite this requirement, statistics indicate that less than 50% of secondary school teachers meet this requirement (MEXT, 2006). Mandating JTEs to achieve acceptable, measurable levels of proficiency, perhaps even requiring that they have cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in English or a Masters Degree in language teaching, would be a clear sign to all classroom practitioners of the heightened importance MEXT attaches to foreign language teaching.

In addition to improving linguistic standards, improving the quality of JTE pre- and in-service training is vital for more effective foreign language instruction (Amaki, 2008; Masataka, 2006; Y. Sekiya, personal communication, April 17, 2011; H. Tanaka, personal communication, May 13, 2011; Willis, 2011). This can be accomplished by incorporating current language teaching theories and pedagogies, lengthening in-service teacher training, and encouraging self-reflective practices in teacher training. Doing so would allow for more in-depth training in communicative language teaching (CLT) and integrated skills practices, which would help develop teachers' confidence in their English proficiency and abilities to put theoretical coursework into practice.

Adopting standardized benchmarks, such as the Classroom Language Assessment Benchmark (CLAB) or the Common European Framework of Reference European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (CEFR EPOSTL), would greatly improve teacher language proficiency and training. Nakata (2010) sug-

gested that the CLAB, which assesses potential teachers' linguistic abilities and use of classroom language, can be utilized for teacher professional development. Kiyota has developed a series of 74 descriptors measuring pre- and in-service teacher self-assessment and integrating the CEFR EPOSTL into the Japanese EFL context for JTE training (Jimbo, Hisamura, & Yoffe, 2009; Y. Kiyota, personal communication, May 11, 2011). Utilizing either of these benchmarks in pre- and in-service training programs could significantly assist JTEs in assessing the new CoS standards in regards to teaching norms.

Reforming Assistant Language Teacher Standards and Hiring Practices

Assistant language teachers (ALTs) play a pivotal role in foreign language instruction in Japanese schools (Fujita-Round & Maher, 2008) in that they team-teach with JTEs in introducing foreign cultures and languages to Japanese students. However, there is confusion surrounding their role within the educational hierarchy, which reduces their effectiveness. While ALTs view themselves as teachers on an equal footing with the homeroom teacher, most Japanese teachers place a higher importance on the literal title of assistant language teacher. Defining and enforcing their roles within the education system will further ensure the maintenance of an effective working environment (Amaki, 2008; Ohtani, 2010; Sakai, 2011) and promote an equal contribution in classroom team-teaching (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2010).

Many native English speaking ALTs have minimal teacher education and pedagogic qualifications or minimal training when they begin their teaching careers in Japan (Ohtani, 2010). By the time most of them become comfortable in their teaching contexts, their short-term contracts expire. These contracts are common for ALTs and result in high turnover rates, often

placing schools in a revolving door conundrum (O'Donnell, 2010). There are numerous ways to address this situation. One is to mandate English-teaching certification (e.g., Certificate for English Language Teaching to Young Learners [CELTYL]). A mandatory component of this certification process should be an extensive pre-service training that includes team-teaching methodologies and practice to facilitate a cross-cultural teaching environment. Another way to alleviate this problem is to increase the use of English-speaking Japanese ALTs. These teachers are trained by nonprofit organizations (NPOs) such as Japan-Shogakko Instructors of English (J-SHINE) (Sakai, 2011). These locally hired, certified teachers offer a communication-facilitating bridge by virtue of their familiarity with the learning dynamics of Japanese schools and the surrounding environment.

The issue of locally hiring teaching professionals plays a significant part in implementing foreign language-in-education policy. Saitama City provides a pioneering example. To set their own standards for teacher hiring and training and increase the quality of communication between ALTs and school staff, the city hires ALTs directly. This eliminates reliance on dispatch agencies to staff schools (B. Semans, personal communication, June 19, 2011) and has the added benefits of developing ALT agency, opening direct lines of communication between JTEs and ALTs, and raising ALT retention rates. Encouraging more school districts to adopt similar measures would improve the working conditions of all school staff and facilitate integration of MEXT policy revisions.

Enhancing Communication Among Educators and Between Educators and Administrators

There is often limited communication between JTEs and ALTs (Amaki, 2008; Ohtani, 2010); amongst JTEs (Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004); and between teachers, administrators, and MEXT (T.

Plaza, personal communication, May 1, 2011; Sakai, 2011; R. Schirmer, personal communication, March 10, 2011). This lack of communication fosters a negative environment for implementing new CoS guidelines. More severely affected is the coordination of curricular standards and teaching practices. Thus, maintaining open communication between all education stakeholders is paramount (Sakai, 2011; B. Semans, personal communication, June 19, 2011).

Ensuring open communication between JTE-ALT team-teachers is imperative. According to Nakai, communication between ALTs and homeroom teachers must often be done through their supervisors (Sakai, 2011). The Saitama City school board has addressed this issue by formalizing direct lines of communication between JTEs and ALTs in the form of regular staff meetings (B. Semans, personal communication, June 19, 2011). Furthermore, open communication can be facilitated by urging JTEs and ALTs to develop proficiency in English and Japanese, respectively, and integrating intercultural awareness and team-teaching practices in teacher training (Amaki, 2008; Carless, 2006; Ohtani, 2010).

Integrating a World Englishes Perspective

It was noted previously that many JTEs lack adequate English proficiency for practicing CLT. However, many proficient JTEs lack confidence in their English communicative abilities, despite their proficiency. This is because they maintain socio-psychological and cultural beliefs about teaching English and native speakers of English that cause anxiety in their teaching. Machida (2011), in his research on Japanese elementary school teachers, revealed unwelcoming attitudes and anxiousness about teaching English on the part of JTEs. He talked of a lack of confidence in using English in the class despite the training teachers may have received. Many JTEs harbor fears over their real or perceived inability to use English and their unfamiliarity with the subject because many have not utilized English since

their college years. Nishino and Watanabe (2008) argued that insufficient proficiency in English among Japanese educators would lead to the decline of teachers' authority. They stated that "because many Japanese English teachers perceive their speaking skills as weak and believe that their authority might be tarnished if they make mistakes in front of students, they may not have the confidence to use English" (p. 134).

Furthermore, Machida (2011) argued that JTEs are obliged to communicate with the native ALTs in their team-teaching. This was a huge adjustment for teachers in regards to their teaching styles because elementary school homeroom teachers had been the main teachers in their classrooms and had never shared their classes before. Compounding this adjustment with a lack of confidence in their English abilities, it is easy to understand why JTEs are hesitant to communicate in English in their classrooms.

Anxious teachers tend to avoid using the target language in class (Horwitz, 1996), which does not create a good model for the students. As a result, many JTEs question their effectiveness as language role models (Fukada, 2011). Integration of a World Englishes perspective in Japanese foreign language education is a possible solution to these confidence issues (Brown, 1993; Brown & Peterson, 1997; Matsuda, 2003). Against the global backdrop of English proliferation and the rise to prominence of nonstandard English varieties, this would result in a "world view...[that is] more consistent with the sociolinguistic realities of the spread of English as an international language" (Brown and Peterson, 1997, p. 44).

Supporting World Englishes would involve a meta-theoretical shift requiring a revision of concepts of interlanguages, errors, and viewing the L2 speaker as an inferior communicator. Instead of seeking to emulate native-speaker models, JTEs would be urged to become exemplar negotiators of English as a mutually communicative medium (Firth, 2009; H. Tanaka, personal communication, May 13, 2011). This is supported by Yoshida,

who stated that the JTE communicator is the ideal model for Japanese L2 English learners (Sakai, 2011). Learners would be motivated to learn English by observing JTEs negotiate and co-construct meaning in English with native-speaker ALTs.

Practically, integrating a World Englishes perspective would also involve incorporating World Englishes courses into JTE and ALT training (Brown, 1993; Matsuda, 2003). Jenkins (1998, 2002) also recommended constructing curricula around international intelligibility, that is, an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) core and accommodation strategies. It is important to expose learners to other varieties of English and successful nonnative English users, in order to make them aware that English is not a language exclusively for native speakers of the language (Matsuda, 2009). Legitimizing new varieties of English contributes to better attitudes towards learners' own use of English. To promote this would be more universal, teachable, and learnable than content based solely on native-speaker models.

Establishing Agency and Communities of Practice Among Stakeholders

Establishing agency and communities of practice (CoP) is another method of encouraging educators to embrace MEXT policies (H. Tanaka, personal communication, May 13, 2011). As mentioned previously, instructors would develop agency—they would become active participants in their educational communities and in their own professional development. This can be accomplished by forming or joining a CoP, a group of people who share an interest, craft, or profession and are dedicated to working together to collectively improve their expertise. CoPs connect learning to real-world application and foster continuing interest in learning beyond periods of training (Wenger, 2006).

Two examples of CoPs formed by stakeholders with agency are the Meisei Summer School Project (MSSP) (Y. Fukada, personal

communication, May 4, 2011; Tanaka & Ogane, 2011) and the Institute for Research in Language Teaching (IRLT). During the MSSP, Japanese university students collaborate with international NPO-sponsored volunteers to plan and teach language lessons to elementary and JHS learners. These transnational partnerships motivate the Japanese participants to utilize their English skills and negotiate meaning in an authentic context as well as develop identities as members of a cooperative team (Tanaka & Ogane, 2011). IRLT is a Kanto-based organization of in-service and pre-service primary and secondary school JTEs. In 2011, monthly meetings were held where members viewed MEXT-circulated video recordings of model English lessons. The instructors constructively critiqued the lessons and freely engaged in idea sharing and discussion about teaching practices. The formation of similar CoPs nationwide at the local and regional level would assist stakeholders in integrating new CoS guidelines in their classrooms, as well as provide them with a forum to freely share instructional and learning practices with their peers.

Improving Entrance Examination Standards

In order to improve the validity of English sections of entrance examinations, MEXT's National Center for University Entrance Examinations added a listening component to the National Center Test (NCT) in 2006. More universities have since begun incorporating listening sections in their individual entrance tests (Y. Sekiya, personal communication, April 17, 2011) as well as alternative oral interviews or presentations (H. Tanaka, personal communication, May 13, 2011). However, issues such as widespread exclusion of speaking components from entrance exams and low test validity and reliability continue to draw criticism from scholars and impede effective implementation of CoS revisions.

One recommendation is for the government to establish a College Board that would uphold exam validity standards and

collaborate with *juku* (cram school) test specialists (Murphey, Kato, & Fukuda, 2010). Increasing the ratio of listening and extended-production items, such as essays (Y. Fukada, personal communication, May 4, 2011), or incorporating a supplementary oral interview (M. Watanabe, personal communication, March 27, 2011) would increase test validity. Removal of nonpractical subjects (e.g., Classical Chinese Poetry) from exams would lighten the preparation load on test-takers (M. Iino, personal communication, Feb 17, 2011). Finally, Murphey et al. (2010) suggested encouraging universities to include high school records, extracurricular activities, and other achievements in admissions procedures, rather than relying exclusively on exam results. This would urge university applicants to develop more holistic English language portfolios. These recommendations could improve English education at the secondary level and facilitate implementation of new CoS guidelines.

Promoting more English-Immersion Education Programs

MEXT's implementation of the Special Education Zone School system has fostered positive results worth exploring. Gunma Kokusai Academy (GKA), a private K-12 English immersion school established in 2006 in Gunma, is a pilot project initiated by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. With MEXT's approval, GKA delivers its curriculum primarily in English. Results already indicate that the institution's English immersion system is successful. Even though the National Achievement Test is in Japanese, GKA students obtained a mean of 80% in 2007, surpassing the national average by 17% (Gunma Kokusai Academy, 2011). The school's first year JHS students posted a 477 average on the TOEIC, outperforming Japanese university freshmen majoring in English or English literature (Matsuzawa, 2009). These accomplishments mirror the results of a study on French immersion in Canada. Cummins (1998) found that "stu-

dents gain fluency and literacy in French at no apparent cost to their English academic skills” (p. 34). Thus, immersion education programs in Japan could produce fluent English-speaking Japanese without detracting from their L1 Japanese language abilities. Introducing more immersion programs in Japanese schools could support new policy implementation.

Conclusion

Discontent with current foreign language education practices in Japan has prompted MEXT to revise the Foreign Language CoS. Successful implementation of new policy directives depends on many factors. By considering the eight suggestions put forth in this paper, Japan would (a) create a teaching workforce that is well-trained and informed in current theories and pedagogical practices in EFL, (b) establish a more democratic working environment that takes into account both top-down and bottom-up initiatives in deciding curricular content and delivery, and (c) facilitate the empowerment of the stakeholders of English education—students, parents, local educators and administrators—and the creation of a community where a positive culture of English language learning could thrive at all levels. Following these recommendations would be integral to the success of the new CoS and the betterment of English education in Japan.

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