In March of 2008 the Monbukagakusho formally notified elementary schools of a new compulsory foreign language course for elementary school fifth/sixth-year curricula. However, 96% of elementary schools had already been teaching English. As a result, new curricula will need to take present teaching-learning realities into consideration, as well as national curriculum changes. However, these teaching-learning environments, particularly teachers’ roles, have not been sufficiently explored. Classroom observations (n=16) and interview results (n=36) suggest that different schools are teaching English within at least four different models. Results suggest that although English teaching-learning environments have many instructional similarities (pronunciation-modeling, oral-assessment, etc), in most contexts, the assistant language teacher’s (ALT) role in the pre/post teaching components of the language instruction was small. Schools including ALTs in the pre/post teaching components, had teachers who were both observed to and perceived themselves as having clear instructional roles. Clear instructional roles, particularly for ALTs, were observed to promote a positive and interactive teaching-learning environment.
PAC7 at JALT2008: Shared Identities

(Central Educational Council) came to the preliminary conclusion that fifth and sixth grade students should have English instruction and that this instruction should be carried out once a week throughout the school year, or for 35 weeks (Monbukagakusho, 2007b). They held that this instruction of English should be for all fifth and sixth grade students nation-wide (Monbukagakusho, 2007b).

In March of 2008, the national curriculum guidelines for English in Japanese elementary schools were set: (1) Fifth and sixth grades received a compulsory English component; the course was titled “Foreign Language Class”. (2) Within fifth and sixth year “Foreign Language” classes, students were to be instructed in English. (3) English classes were to be prepared by homeroom teachers (HRT) or Japanese Teachers of English (JTE). (4) Classes were to be taught by HRT, with the aid of locally available native speakers of English (Monbukagakusho, 2008).

Through the experience of a “foreign language” (any foreign language in theory, but almost always English in practice), the Monbukagakusho expected students to learn about language and culture. These classes were also expected to aid students in the development of a positive attitude towards communication. Finally, the students in these classes were expected to develop a grounding for communication skills, while “getting-used-to” and “being immersed in” foreign language phonology and basic expressions.

The primary purpose of this study was to describe the present roles of native English teacher in Japanese elementary school English classes. Based on the qualitative analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews, suggestions for improving the teaching-learning classroom environment will be outlined.

Methods

Sample

During 2006 and 2007, 16 Japanese public elementary schools were visited and 16 English classes (one from each school) were video recorded. In addition, semi-structured interviews with HRTs (n=16), Native Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) (n=16) and JTEs (n=4) were carried out. In some cases, following the classroom observations, informal interviews with the school’s principal were undertaken (n=9).

Means of analysis

Videos of classes were transcribed (aural and visual components). The transcriptions were analyzed qualitatively, and outlines of the observed classes constructed (e.g. Table 1). The teacher interviews were transcribed, analyzed qualitatively and cross-referenced for content.

Results

Class analysis results

As portrayed in Figure 1, the number of teacher speech occurrences from all teachers present during the class, varied within the 16 different classes observed. Classroom A and classroom D, in particular, make it clear that speech quantity variation was observed amongst sampled classrooms. Teacher speech-count quantities, and the instructional methods used, consistently correlated. For this reason, teacher speech count (high, middle, and low) was used as a criterion for dividing the classes into 3 different
Table 1. Class observation qualitative analysis results: Class outline example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>活動過程 (Procedure)</th>
<th>時間配分 (Duration)</th>
<th>ALT (%)</th>
<th>HRT (%)</th>
<th>総数(回) (Total speech count)</th>
<th>主に活動を進めてい る教師 (Leading teacher)</th>
<th>2006年10月26日 (木)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>子どもたちへの働きかけ</td>
<td>76.2 23.8</td>
<td>606</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>入室すると児童は列ごと (8列) に並び、座って待機。ALTは開始まで入り口に待機し、児童とのインタラクションなし。HRTがALTを入り口まで呼びに行き、授業開始。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>教師間のやりとり</td>
<td>15 23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>入室すると児童は列ごと (8列) に並び、座って待機。ALTは開始まで入り口に待機し、児童とのインタラクションなし。HRTがALTを入り口まで呼びに行き、授業開始。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>開始前</td>
<td>1分30秒</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>入室すると児童は列ごと (8列) に並び、座って待機。ALTは開始まで入り口に待機し、児童とのインタラクションなし。HRTがALTを入り口まで呼びに行き、授業開始。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>11分</td>
<td>89.6 10.4</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>ALT</td>
<td>入室すると児童は列ごと (8列) に並び、座って待機。ALTは開始まで入り口に待機し、児童とのインタラクションなし。HRTがALTを入り口まで呼びに行き、授業開始。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warming up</td>
<td>7分</td>
<td>88.3 11.7</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>ALT</td>
<td>入室すると児童は列ごと (8列) に並び、座って待機。ALTは開始まで入り口に待機し、児童とのインタラクションなし。HRTがALTを入り口まで呼びに行き、授業開始。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main activity</td>
<td>18分</td>
<td>37.2 62.8</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>HRT</td>
<td>入室すると児童は列ごと (8列) に並び、座って待機。ALTは開始まで入り口に待機し、児童とのインタラクションなし。HRTがALTを入り口まで呼びに行き、授業開始。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
categories (high, middle, and low), within which four different instructional methods were found: pattern-practice, communication, stream-teaching and three-teacher.

Figure 1. Teacher speech-count within 16 class observations.

Pattern-practice classrooms
Classrooms D and I had a particularly high teacher speech-count. They were found to have pattern-practice or language instruction focused on the repetition of words and phrases as the salient instructional method in the classroom. Generally, the high teacher speech count was due to a high quantity of teacher-student commands (e.g. repeat after me, louder). Figure 2 contains 2 events from a pattern-practice class, transcribed and coded (included in hard brackets).

Teacher-student language practice:
ALT: How old are you? [Question/Teacher-student exchange]
Student: I ten years old
ALT: No. I am. [correction/assessment]
Student: I am ten years old
ALT: Okay. Very good.[Praise/oral assessment]  

Request for repetition:
ALT: Did you listen carefully? [Modeling/content instruction]
Students: Did you listen carefully? (not in unison)
ALT: No! Did you listen carefully? (warning regarding student pronunciation of “carefully”) [Negative/oral assessment, Modeling/content instruction] Now please speak loudly! Once more again! [instruction/instructions]

Figure 2. Pattern practice event

As described in Figure 3, classrooms within which teacher-student interaction such as praise and language correction are high, but instruction regarding content, the why and what of instruction, are low. ALTs were found to be producing most of the oral instructions within this class-type. ALTs had little or no role within the management and other aspects of the classroom.
Communication classrooms

Classrooms B and K, had a particularly low teacher speech-count. It was observed that the classroom focus was on communication-activities, or activities focused on getting students to interact with each other. Generally, low teacher speech-count was combined with greater student-student interaction and teacher-student communication, rather than commands. As a result, classes of these types have been labeled communication classes. Figure 4 depicts 2 events from a communication class, transcribed and coded (included in hard brackets).

As demonstrated by Figure 5, in communication classrooms, teachers spend a considerable amount of time instructing students in content (the hows and whats of language instruction), relative to assessment, praise and general instructions. In aspects other than content instruction, teaching is evenly divided between ALT and HRT. Teachers spend a large proportion of their instructional time preparing students for student-student communication activities. The ALT is involved in classroom management and other aspects of instruction, but was observed to take a secondary role to the HRT.

**Figure 3. Pattern-practice classroom type**

**Figure 4. Communication class event**
Within these classrooms, students were divided into two groups, based on their confidence and perceived language competencies. As result of this “streaming” of students into different competency groups, this class type was labeled “streamed-teaching”. After a brief explanation—as a larger group—regarding the days activities and goals, the students are divided into a high-group and low-group; depending on the day, either group could be taught by either teacher (ALT or HRT). The high-group students are then provided with instruction and activities that challenged them; the low-group was instructed at their confidence and competence level. The high-level group students received reduced teacher-student instruction and engaged in long and challenging pair/group communication activities. The low level group received larger quantities of modeling (teacher, teacher-student and student-student) and sufficient repetition to ensure they gained confidence with the material. Generally, the two groups came back together for the final portion of the class: one final group activity and a review.
The streamed-teaching classroom (see Figure 6) had a—comparatively—low teacher speech-count. One striking difference, when compared to the previous two class types described, communication and pattern-practice, is the quantity of participation on the part of the ALT. ALTs were observed to produce a low number of general instructions compared to the HRT. This may be attributed to the fact that during this observation, the ALT is teaching the high group on his own with a communicative approach, while the HRT is teaching the low group (confidence/proficiency) with a pattern-practice approach.

The following excerpt from a streamed class, displays the two types (HRT/JTE) of instruction predominant in these classroom types. Two transcribed and coded (coding is included in hard brackets) events from a streamed class can be seen below in Figures 7 and 8:

**ALT supporting the HRT**

**HRT:** Bag and pencil case under the chair.

**Students:** (putting away their bags and pencil cases)

**ALT:** (For students that do not understand, the ALT explains with gestures.) [Modeling/content instruction]

**Figure 7. Streamed class event: ALT support**

**Streamed-teaching**

**HRT:** Next lesson, two group. Okay? Group A is me. (Very slowly). Group B is ~(ALT’s name). You choose A or B. (Gives ALT the picture cards) Group A, here.

**ALT:** Group B. (calls the students and sits them down)

(While showing them the cards) What’s this? [Instruction/instructions; Questions/Teacher student exchange]

**Figure 8. Streamed class event: Dividing into groups**

**Three-teacher classrooms**

A second type of classroom that was found to have an intermediate quantity of teacher speech-count was the three-teacher classroom (Figure 9), so labeled because three teachers were present and involved in the observed classroom instruction (ALT, HRT, JTE). Schools with this classroom type, tended to have a strong emphasis on student-student interaction. In these contexts, either the JTE or HRT (or both) had a meeting with the ALT before the class started. Presumably as a result of this, both the quantity and nature of all teachers’ roles were perceived to be consistent and clear (see Figure 9). Of the three teachers present, the ALT had the strongest role within each of the categories. While the quantity of the ALT-student speech was generally lower than what was observed in the communication classroom type, ALTs were observed to be involved in all aspects of classroom instruction, management and other categories.
Teacher interviews
Teacher interviews (n=36) were an opportunity to ascertain teachers’ (ALTs’, HRTs’, JTEs’) perceptions of the ALTs’ classroom role and better explain what those perceptions might be related to. Interviews (see Table 2) suggests that if ALTs are involved in class-planning, class-reflection and pre-class meetings, they would be more likely to perceive their instructional role (i.e. what they felt their job within classroom instruction was) as being one of general support for the HRT/JTE, as well as the students. Also, they are less likely to feel their role to be one-dimensional: just HRT support, pronunciation or student entertainment.

During teacher interviews, the researcher asked an ALT who had been working in a three-teacher environment, “What is important for team-teaching?” The ALT A responded, “Listening to each other’s ideas and requests, and constructing the class together.” In contrast, ALT B who had not been included in meetings and class reflection stated that “I am just receiving money for class time; I don’t want to be involved in class reflection and preparation.” ALT B’s comment may have been related to his personal feelings on the topic, but may also have been related to his teaching environment: one with little support and opportunity for pre/post class input and interaction.
During teacher interviews, JTE A suggested that meetings with ALTs were helpful “… to ensure that the ALT feels included, it is important for them [JTEs] to be open to their [ALTs] ideas and requests” and that meetings were where this happened. JTE B said that “We bring our reflections regarding the previous class to the meeting for the next class, this way the quality of classes improves…. We share our ideas and experiences.”

Conclusion
Within the four types of classroom instruction observed, ALTs tended to have consistent roles:
1. Pattern-practice: Pronunciation modeling and language instruction
2. Communication: Communication with students and some classroom management
3. Streamed-teaching: Communicate with students and large amounts of classroom management.
4. Three-teacher: Pronunciation modeling, affective regulation of students and language instruction.

Within most of the Japanese elementary school English classrooms observed, ALTs were found to be primarily responsible for language modeling and secondarily language instruction. For the main class activity, depending on the instructional method being applied, ALTs instruction role was found to vary considerably. In some contexts ALTs were found to be just observing and others actively participating by modeling with the HRT/JTE or students, interacting with the students during the activity and aiding in classroom and affective management.

Interviews and classroom observations suggested that ALTs within the 3-teacher classroom appeared to be better prepared for class as a result of their involvement in all teaching components, pre and post. Teacher-roles within the 3-teacher classroom were observed to be very clear and consistent; again, interviews suggested that this may be the result of regular meetings with the ALT and appropriate preparation.

The Monbukagakusho has determined that classroom plans are to be constructed by the HRT or JTE. However, the actual English class is taught through “team-teaching” and ALTs are to be employed in classroom instruction.

Based on the analysis presented here, for the creation of a positive and coherent teaching-learning environments to
arise within Japanese elementary school English classrooms, ALTs need to be a part of all aspects of the teaching learning environment: pre/post meetings, lesson planning, and reflection.

**Future directions**

If elementary school classrooms are to meet the demands of the Monbukagakusho, they will need greater participation on the part of ALTs. The results of this research suggest that this might be accomplished by increasing the participation of ALTs in the planning, meeting and reflection components of the classroom.

The current focus on the instruction of fifth and sixth year elementary school students has prevented teachers from taking students’ development into consideration when organizing curricula. Some schools, contrary to the Monbukagakusho’s guidelines for elementary school instruction, were observed to be teaching all years, first through sixth grade. This was evident in the developmental approach taken in the design of their respective curricula. The general expansion of the Monbukagakusho’s guidelines to include the instruction of all grades within elementary schools, would allow teachers to consider such matters when developing future curricula.

Presently, the Monbukagakusho primary expectation of ALTs in elementary school English instruction is to provide students with pronunciation practice, model common expressions and interact with students in their foreign language. However, the results of the study suggests that in most schools, ALTs spend the majority or entirety of their classroom instruction focused upon pronunciation and common expression modeling, and rarely have much opportunity for teacher-student interaction. This may be, in part, due to the reality that most ALTs are unsure about how the class will proceed, often having very little opportunity to interact with the HRT/JTE before and after class. As already suggested, this situation may be improved by greater inclusion of the ALT in all aspects of the elementary school English classroom.

Currently, training seminars for teachers are held separately: HRT/JTE have training together; JET (Japanese Exchange Teaching) ALTs at the elementary, junior high and high school level often each have separate seminars; and finally local-hire ALTs often have no formal training seminars. If the quality of elementary school English instruction is to improve, such seminars must include ALTs and HRT/JTEs. The inclusion of ALTs will both improve their understanding of the teaching-learning context and increase the necessary understanding between HRTs/JTEs and ALTs. After such training schemes were in place, providing money was available, the Monbukagakusho should eventually seek to expand the number of ALTs who work at one elementary school as their primary position, rather than the one-day ALT who has little connection to the elementary school, its teachers and curriculum. ALTs working permanently at one elementary school will be able to be apart of the institution, and take part in a wider variety of classes and school activities, bringing the role of the ALT as a “daily guest” at elementary schools to an end.
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References


