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JALT2022 Plenary Speaker • Kensaku Yoshida

Does the New Course of Study Reflect the Reality of the Students' Needs and Desires to Learn English?

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The New Japanese Course of Study is based on very different principles from the previous courses of study. In this paper, I will show how and where the differences are, not simply from theoretical perspectives but also, and more importantly, from the point of view of the needs of the students. I will introduce data collected from approximately 1,000 junior high school students as well as data from over 270 junior and senior high school teachers. The results revealed that the more integrated the skills used by the teachers in teaching English and the more emphasis there is on content—rather than the form of the language—the more the students are motivated to learn English. The results also show that the New Course of Study coincides with the actual needs of the students.

新学習指導要領は従来の学習指導要領とは異なる考え方に基づいて作られた。本稿で、筆者はその違いが何かということを理論的な観点のみならず生徒のニーズと動機づけという観点から論じる。約1000人の中学生を対象とした調査及び270名の中高英語教員を対象とした調査から、教師がより4技能を統合した教え方をし、また言語形式よりも内容に重点を置いた教え方をすると生徒がより動機づけられることが分かった。この結果は新学習指導要領が生徒のニーズや動機づけを従来のものより良く反映していることを示しているといえるだろう。

In 1951, the aims of English education in Japan were given as follows:

> To develop a practical basic knowledge of English as "speech" with primary emphasis on aural-oral skills and the learning of structural patterns through learning experiences conducive to

mastery in hearing, oral expression, reading, and writing, and to develop as an integral part of the same an understanding of, appreciation for, and a desirable attitude toward the English-speaking peoples, especially as regards their modes of life, manners, and customs. (Ministry of Education, 1951)

In fact, this became the basic philosophy based on which all subsequent courses of study were written. It shows that for over 70 years the Ministry of Education (the present Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, MEXT) has consistently emphasized the importance of teaching English as speech with primary emphasis on teaching the four skills, with the learning of structural patterns not as independent entities, but through learning experiences conducive to the acquisition of the four skills. Although the mention of English-speaking peoples has been augmented by the importance of international understanding, overall, the philosophy underlying the learning of English has not changed very much.

Why then do the Japanese still lack the confidence to communicate in English—or any foreign language? If the aims mentioned in the course of study—on which English textbooks are written—were and are performance-oriented, why have the Japanese not acquired the ability to perform adequately in English—after 70 years?

The main reason is that, although the above-mentioned course of study was written as the "goal" which English education was expected to realize, the reality of Japan in 1951 was such that there was no real need for Japanese people to use English other than to acquire knowledge of modern technology and such through written materials. Other than the American military presence, there were very few foreigners in Japan, and very few Japanese had any contact with foreign people. As a matter of fact, when our family went to the United States in 1955, we were the first Japanese family to take Northwest Airlines to the United States. Also, hardly any Japanese English teachers could either listen to and understand or speak English, so, naturally, not many Japanese—including the studnts—felt any real need to acquire English, let alone aura-oral English. In other words, even though the principles of the course of study were based on the needs of the nation, they did not reflect the reality of the Japanese people at the time.

The Great Debate on English Education

Since then, times have changed. With the first Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the Osaka World Expo in 1970, Japanese society gradually began to feel the need to learn practical communicative English. Language schools and language organizations were established (JACET in 1962, Eiken Foundation of Japan in 1963, Interac in 1972, Aeon in 1974, Berlitz in 1980, Nova in 1981, etc.), companies began sending their employees to language schools to study English, and many Japanese people began to flock to these schools to learn English conversation.

It seemed as though, finally, the gap between the ideals presented in the course of study and the needs of the Japanese people was becoming smaller—at least outside the schools. However, in 1974, the so-called *Eigokyoiku Daironso* (Great Debate on English Education) between Wataru Hiraizumi, a member of the House of Councilors, and Professor Watanabe of Sophia University (one of my professors) ignited a huge debate on the meaning of English education in schools. Hiraizumi claimed that English education should produce at least 5% of the Japanese capable of speaking and communicating in English, whereas Watanabe claimed that the goal of "education" was in the training and development of the mind or intellect, and that practical communication ability should not be the goal. Practical communication ability, he claimed, could be acquired by simply living in an environment (foreign or domestic) where English is used (Hiraizumi & Watanabe, 1975). Many English teachers, who themselves could not speak English, sided with Watanabe with the result that, although the Japanese society as a whole began to move towards the need to acquire English for practical purposes, English taught in schools, contrary to what was stipulated in the course of study, did not change.

Seventy Years Later

Almost fifty years have passed since the Great Debate on English Education. During this period, the world has changed greatly. People now talk about Global instead of International issues, and the development of digital technology and the Internet have brought about revolutionary changes in the way people around the world interact with each other. The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) provide common issues to be discussed and solved together by people and nations around the world.

Despite these major changes in the world, survey results conducted by Benesse (Negishi et al., 2015) showed that of the approximately 2,000 junior high school English teachers who were surveyed, over 80% answered that their everyday teaching activities included "reading aloud," "pronunciation," "explaining grammar," "doing grammar exercises,"

"listening activities," "answering questions about content given in the textbooks," and "memorizing and practicing key structures." On the other hand, less than 5% answered "debates," less than 10% answered "discussions," and less than 30% answered "have students talk about their thoughts and feelings in English." In other words, even now it seems that most junior high school teachers teach "mechanical skills" and "language forms," and very few teach "communicative English." This tendency is almost exactly the same for senior high school English teachers.

It seems, therefore, that even after 70 years since the promulgation of the first course of study and 50 years since the Great English Education Debate, Japan's English education has not changed very much. One reason for this, which is noted by many people, is entrance examinations. Teachers will teach and students will study what is tested in entrance examinations for high schools and universities. If the entrance examinations have not changed, it is understandable that English education in the schools has not changed either.

Principles Underlying the New Course of Study

For the past 70 years, the course of study has emphasized the importance of teaching English for communication. However, up to now, the references to the communicative goals were relatively vague and general. For example, in the 2008 version of the Course of Study, the following goals are mentioned-for (junior high school: (1)listen to basic English and understand the intentions of the speaker; (2) use basic English, such as being able to express one's thoughts in English; (3) become used to reading in English and be able to read basic English used by the writer and understand the writer's intentions; and (4) become used to writing in English and be able to write about one's thoughts and so forth in basic English (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008). Although the explanations following these goals are communicatively-oriented, they are still very general and vague.

However, the newest Course of Study (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2017) states the goals in more detail. For example, the goals set for listening comprehension include the following elements: if spoken clearly, listen to and understand everyday topics, understand the general idea of the passage, listen to and understand the main idea of social topics, etc. The same can be said about reading comprehension, speaking (divided into speaking interaction and speaking presentation), and Writing. It also further describes in detail what it means to listen and comprehend. For example, it states that students should understand the general idea of what they hear and talk about what they heard in English; that is, the best way to confirm whether one has heard correctly is to see if he or she is able to talk about the content in his or her own words.

These changes were brought about through the introduction of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) as the basis on which the Course of Study was written. In other words, instead of basing the difficulty level of English on structural and formal criteria (e.g., present progressive should come before past tense, which should come before the present perfect, etc.), it was based on what students should be able to do using English (e.g., with sufficient support students will be able to talk about themselves, then be able to talk about themselves with minimum support, then be able to talk about themselves without support, freely and creatively, etc.). The forms of English will not be taught deductively but inductively through noticing and focusing on the necessary forms in a meaningful context.

Do These Changes Reflect Student Needs?

The issue now is whether the changes that have been implemented match the needs Japanese people, and especially students, have in terms of learning English. As mentioned above, in the 70 years since the creation of the first Course of Study, the world has changed. Japan is no longer the secluded monolingual, monocultural, and monoracial society that it was in the 1950s. The world itself has become such that individual countries can no longer survive unless they acknowledge the mutual dependency that exists among all the countries in the world. Geographical differences are becoming much less important than the borderless internet connections that are bringing the world ever closer together. In a survey conducted on future jobs that elementary school children want to get, Benesse (2021) found that the number one job mentioned by boys was "Game Creator, Programmer" and number two was "YouTuber," which was also the third most popular job among girls. Children are already interacting with people, not only in Japan but from around the world. With the coming of the metaverse, they will probably be required to communicate in English even more on a daily basis.

Do These Needs Apply Also to the English Class?

Although the above-mentioned tendency is in the real world, how true is this in the English classroom? It might look as though that teachers are still teaching English in a very conservative manner. There is, however, evidence to show that those who are taught by teachers using all four skills (five areas with speaking divided into two areas: speaking interaction and speaking presentation) in their everyday teaching acquire higher motivation than those taught by teachers who utilize a fewer number of skills in their teaching (Benesse Kyoiku Sogo Kenkyusho, 2018). For example, for the item "It's fun to interact with the teacher and other students in English," approximately 80% of the students being taught by a teacher using all four skills (five areas) answered positively as opposed to approximately 40% of those taught by a teacher using just two skills, and 20% of those taught by a teacher using none (not using English to teach English).

Also, in a survey conducted on approximately 270 junior and senior high school English teachers (Yoshida et al., 2017) it was found that although teachers agreed that teaching English in English is important (26.9%), what was more important was conducting classes integrating all four skills (66.1%). To the question of why the items they chose were important, the main reason was "because the students show interest" (29%) as opposed to the next highest reason "the students have enough proficiency to understand the English used" (14%).

The results of the MEXT Survey on the State of English Education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2022) also showed that the more time teachers spend on getting students involved in activities conducted in English, the more English teachers use in conducting their classes, the higher the level of English attained by the students.

Conclusion and Reflection

The results of these surveys show that the students are becoming used to using English in the classroom, and that the more they are exposed to English provided in integrated activities, the stronger their motivation to learn English becomes. Furthermore, many students use the Internet on a daily basis and their interest in YouTube videos and internet games, and so on will most probablylead to an increase in their motivation to learn English as a more practical tool to communicate with people across borders. In fact, research reports examining the effect of participation in internet games on English development are beginning to appear (cf. Dixon et al., 2022; Sundqvist, 2019)

The state of English education in Japan has reached a stage where finally the needs of the nation, as expressed in the Course of Study, are coming closer to the needs and motivations of the students to study English. The results of the survey of the teachers show that those who are aware of the needs and motivations of the students will use all four skills (five areas) to teach and they will also put more emphasis on content that is of interest to the students. Knowing what motivates the students to study English is the most important factor in improving the way teachers teach. Although no evidence is given concerning the cause-effect relationship between the contents of the new Course of Study and the students' needs and motivations, there seems to be some correlation. It could be said that the changes implemented in the creation of the new Course of Study based on communicative principles came at a very opportune time.

Another important point to note is that with the interests shown by young Japanese people on the Internet, and with the coming of the metaverse, the concept of the "classroom" will probably undergo a major change from the physically confined space we now call a "classroom" to a more diversified, open, and virtual space, where simply learning the forms of the language will be insufficient, and the actual use of English as a communicative tool will be required. When will this change come? Perhaps not too far in the future.

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JALT2022 Plenary Speaker • Yilin Sun

Culturally Responsive Teaching for Equity and Success in ELT

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We are living in unprecedented times, dealing with extreme social and racial inequity on top of the COVID pandemic. For English language education, it is fundamental that ELT educators integrate Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) mind-sets and strategies to achieve equity and success for all students during these challenging times. The author outlines seven key components of CRT, an asset-based, equity-focused pedagogy—not in any particular order—based on her learning from CRT scholars and educators (Gay, 2013; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Muñiz, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017) and her extensive teaching experience with linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. Suggested activities for each component are also included.

We are living in unprecedented times, dealing with extreme social and racial inequity on top of the COVID pandemic. The challenges are even bigger for our students, especially for students from remote areas, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and/or are members of racial or ethnic minorities and other less privileged groups. Far too many students from these historically under-served student populations have difficulty accessing educational resources, including technology and quality instruction. For English language education, it is fundamental that ELT educators integrate Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) mind-sets and strategies to achieve equity and success for all students during these challenging times.

CRT is an asset-based pedagogy that makes meaningful connections between what learners study in school and their cultures, languages, life experiences, and future careers (Gay, 2013; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). These connections assist students in accessing the rigorous curricula, developing higher-level academic skills, and grasping the relevance of what they learn in class and on their own. CRT is not the same as multicultural education or social justice