

A Case Study on Student Confidence in a Childhood Education Teacher Training Program in Japan in Light of 2020 Elementary School English Class Reform

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Abstract

In 2020, English will become a required subject in Japanese elementary schools (MEXT, 2014b). This is a massive shift from earlier policy, and puts a new burden on elementary school teachers who must implement the curriculum, but have little English pedagogical training. This case study examines an existing elementary school training program for undergraduates at a Japanese university, and its impact on student confidence to teach under the new English policy. The results indicate the curriculum had a positive impact on confidence, though confidence still remained low. Also, additional practical training for students to mobilize their knowledge could improve teaching programs.

Introduction:

English language's status as a lingua franca has been growing in the 21st century (Crystal, 2003), and education reform around the world in non-native English countries to develop primary and secondary school graduates with English communicative competence is on the rise. Japan is no exception in this regard, and Japan's government Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is taking steps with its 2014 Course of Study (CoS) to "develop students' proficiency in English, a common international language, crucial for Japan's future" by making English a mandatory subject in public elementary schools beginning 2020. (MEXT, 2014b)

With this new policy, English will become a main subject to be taught 70 lessons (50 minutes) per year at the 5th and 6th grade level, as opposed to the 35 hours a year which was required up to 2018 (General Union, 2017). Previous MEXT CoSs required only basic "play" with foreign languages in elementary schools, calling the subject "Foreign Language Activities" where the English language was mostly of primary focus, but at the school's discretion it was possible to teach any language or have students learn about other cultures in Japanese. With this new subject to be added to the curriculum, teachers and future teachers alike must now possess knowledge of English, which many do not.

The introduction of an entirely new school subject into elementary school creates problems for practitioners in the field as well as university training programs that now need to shift their entire curriculum to add a new component. The execution of this new curriculum falls on homeroom teachers (HRTs) to instruct students in a subject they have no pedagogic training in (Ruston-Griffiths, 2012;

Tahira, 2012; Gaynor, 2015; Nishino & Watanabe, 2018; Yahata, 2018) and a foreign language they have low skill in (Kano et al., 2016; Yahata, 2018), in addition to their already incredibly heavy school duties (Kano et al., 2016). Universities also need to add new faculty with English language teaching expertise, as well as integrate new subject specific classes into an already tight curriculum.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a look into an existing Japanese university's early childhood education's training program preparing future elementary school teachers to enter into this new scenario where English is a formal subject in elementary school, with the goal of giving other teachers (current practitioners or future teachers) a potential model to implement their own training regimen. In order to investigate a means to fill the gap between policy and practice, this researcher conducted a case study at a university in central Japan, a school which has had English as an elective in its childhood education (Kindergarden to grade 9) major for over 10 years. The researcher wanted to assess student confidence to meet the policies outlined in MEXT's 2014 CoS based on the university's teaching curriculum. Specifically, three points to assess the university's curriculum were chosen from the 2014 MEXT CoS to assess student confidence to meet these parameters, as this would be the teaching environment in place come the establishment of English as a formal subject in 2020. The chosen policies were: student ability to (1) teach with the sounds of English (pronunciation), (2) be in charge of an English lesson and (3) team teach with and manage Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). The results of the attitude survey toward these criteria suggest that the university's curriculum had an increased participant confidence to teach English in elementary schools, however participant confidence was still low. There is also evidence that more on job training contributed to higher confidence levels as evinced between a divide in 3rd and 4th year participant responses.

In the following sections the researcher will describe the 2014 MEXT policy (to become fully implemented in 2020) and difficulties created by those policies for practitioners in elementary school. Next, the university's Childhood Education major will be outlined, and specifically the English elective curriculum and how it prepares students. Following will be a description of the survey and a discussion of the results and implications.

Background

The Ministry of Education and English Language Learning Policy Over Time in Japan

Since 1947, the Japanese Ministry of Education has created a new Course of Study (CoS) roughly every ten years to guide public school education goals and objectives toward skills they deem the Japanese population need to be competitive in society. A CoS will be released, announcing policy to be implemented in the future, allowing for transition time from the old policy to the new policy. While the policies regarding English language have slowly shifted over time to encourage communicative activities (Yoshida, 2003; Tahira, 2012), there was evidence that teaching practices at the school level remained grammar focused (Hino, 1988) with the main objective being to pass university entrance examinations (Nishino, 2008).

In 2003, MEXT became more focused on Japan's place in a globalized world, and recognized

English as an essential 21st Century skill for Japan to be competitive in the future (Tanabe, 2004; Tahira, 2012). Rating Japanese people’s English ability as quite low (Tahira, 2012), MEXT wanted to take steps to increase Japanese society’s overall English ability to make it more competitive on the world stage. In the 2003 CoS Action Plan, MEXT implemented “foreign language activities” as subject classes at the elementary school level. This was the first step to formally begin foreign language education (primarily focused on English) before the junior high school level (grade 7) in Japanese public schools.

Currently, with the most recent 2014 CoS, foreign language education in elementary schools sits in transition between the former policy of “Foreign Language Activities” and the implementation of formal English classes in 2020. “Foreign Language Activities” in 5th and 6th grade are meant to “foster a positive attitude toward communication instead of teaching language as a school subject” and mandated that homeroom teachers (HRT) would be in charge of these lessons to reduce students’ anxiety and elicit communication (Tahira, 2012). Foreign Language Activities deliberately left out the word “English” from the title of this class because the curriculum was designed to raise interest in foreign languages in general in preparation for formal English class starting in junior high school at the 7th grade, not explicitly teaching English in elementary schools. This caveat allowed HRTs to use Japanese in the classroom, or utilize ALTs as primary teachers, thus evading the lack of their own English training or lead the need to English classes.

However, with the scheduled change to English subject classes in 2020, Japanese elementary teachers can not avoid teaching English. English class is going to become a formal subject (like math or science) taught at the 5th and 6th grade level, and the previous Foreign Language Activities curriculum moving down to the 3rd and 4th grade level. This will lead to a dramatic shift in time allocated to these activities during the academic year (see Table 1) with time increasing to 35 hours to 70 hours at the 5th and 6th grade level, and from 0 hours to 35 hours at the 3rd and 4th grade level by 2020 (MEXT, 2014b). Thus, the HRTs must teach the subject, rather than relying on ALTs who only come to the school on a limited basis.

Table 1: MEXT Timeline for Implementation of New Curriculum

	2017	2018	2019	2020
6 th grade	Foreign Language Activities (35 hours)	English as a subject (15 → 50 hours)	English as a subject (50 hours)	English as a subject (50 → 70 hours)
5 th grade	Foreign Language Activities (35 hours)	English as a subject (15 → 50 hours)	English as a subject (50 hours)	English as a subject (50 → 70 hours)
4 th grade		Foreign Language Activities (0 → 15 hours)	Foreign Language Activities (15 hours)	Foreign Language Activities (15 → 35 hours)
3 rd grade		Foreign Language Activities ((0 → 15 hours)	Foreign Language Activities (15 hours)	Foreign Language Activities (15 → 35 hours)

Additionally, with English as a formal subject, HRTs take on new roles in these classes, now needing to teach targeted phonetics, lead English activities, and have a pedagogic understanding of the content. As outlined in the 2014 CoS, HRTs will now be responsible for being in charge of English lessons and managing ALTs. For required skills, students should “cultivate fundamental knowledge and skills” as well as “the ability to reason (in English)”, “develop a raised interest in English” and “become familiar with the sounds of the language” (MEXT, 2014b). Though these guidelines will likely have an affect on Japanese English proficiency, there are a number of documented findings that shine a light on a gap between intended policy and the practical ability of HRTs’ English ability.

Gap Between Policy and Practice: HRT Role as Primary Teacher and Managing ALTs

With major changes made to the curriculum by MEXT at the elementary school level, there are many challenges for teachers. In previous changes to secondary school English curriculums, it has been reported that MEXT policies are difficult to understand and implement (Yoshida, 2003; Tahira, 2012), and even experienced Junior High School English teachers *with training* have difficulty implementing the new policies (Nishino, 2008). For elementary school teachers, it is apparent that many lack sufficient training in English pedagogy, with MEXT reporting that only 5% have English teaching licenses, and only 1% meet the standards of MEXT’s English teaching qualifications (MEXT, 2015 reported in Kano et al., 2016), further confounding the potential for successful implementation of the 2014 CoS. Following will overview literature regarding elementary school HRTs potential to implement two responsibilities outlined for them in the 2014 CoS: (1) executing the English lesson and (2) managing ALTs (MEXT, 2014b).

One major hurdle to the success of these 2014 CoS goals is teacher training and ability to “manage English Lessons.” A fundamental assumption underlying MEXT’s 2014 CoS is that elementary school teachers have sufficient knowledge of English learned during their junior high school and high school years (Scott & Hayase, 2018) to practically teach English as primary teachers, which is not the case in reality. Few practicing teachers are qualified to teach English (Kano et al., 2016), and given the low TOEIC ranking of Japan as second from the bottom in Asia for English performance (ETS, 2017), there is no reason to assume that elementary school teachers have an above average English ability compared to the regular population. Beyond, given the already heavy work elementary school teachers (Kano et al., 2016), insufficient training (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Tahira, 2012; Ruston-Griffiths, 2012; Gaynor, 2015; Yahata, 2018), and lack of confidence to teach young learners (Gaynor, 2015; Yahata, 2018) it is difficult to imagine that these MEXT objectives will be successfully executed.

Additionally, “ALT management” is another major challenge for elementary school HRTs. ALTs have assisted in elementary schools since the 2003 reforms, and regularly teach with HRTs in 5th and 6th grade Foreign Language Activities. However, major communication issues have been reported between Japanese teachers and ALTs (Kano et al., 2016; Scott & Hayase, 2018), with low English ability being a possible factor for this (Ruston-Griffiths, 2012). This difficulty in communication has in many cases lead to ALTs being isolated in elementary schools, and having to prepare lessons on their own (Kano et al.,

2016), and many times become the primary teacher in class. As ALTs are meant to be assistants rather than primary teachers, they usually have little teacher training (Kushima & Nishihori, 2003; Reed, 2016) and could benefit from a more equal partnership in the classroom (Tajino & Tajino, 2000). Elementary school HRTs currently do not have the skills to successfully manage ALTs.

Case Study – Undergraduate Confidence to Teach English Through Curriculum

From the literature review, it is clear that there is a gap between the MEXT 2014 policy and the ability of current teacher practitioners' to teach English as a subject in elementary school due to lack of training. As teachers in the field face barriers to further education due to substantial demands on their time (Kano et al., 2016), it is crucial to equip future teachers, undergraduate students enrolled in teacher training programs, with skills to teach English in elementary schools.

To investigate how students are being trained to teach English in primary school, the researcher looked at a Japanese university's Childhood Education program. This school was selected because English language instruction for elementary school and junior high school has been a part of the program for over ten years. In many cases, as English is not an official subject in elementary school yet, English language instruction is absent from elementary school teacher training programs at Japanese universities. Selecting 3 points from the MEXT 2014 policy, ability to (1) teach with the sounds of English, (2) be in charge of an English lesson and (3), team teach with and manage ALTs, the researcher investigated student attitudes regarding these points. As elementary school teachers in the field lack confidence to teach English (Gaynor, 2015; Yahata, 2018), students' confidence was assessed based on the university's curriculum as to if they felt they could meet the MEXT policy points. The following research questions were asked:

Research questions:

1. How are the “sounds of the language (English)” from the MEXT 2014 Course of Study manifested in the university's curriculum? How has this instruction impacted student confidence to teach pronunciation?
2. How does the university curriculum impact student confidence to “be in charge of an English lesson” and “team teach with and manage ALTs” as specified in the MEXT's 2014 Course of Study?

Research Site University's Childhood Education Major

For this article, the university investigated was selected as the site for research of a teacher-training program for undergraduates in Japan due to its already established elementary school English elective program. The university is a private women's college located in central Japan. According to the school website, over 5000 students are enrolled at the school from all over Japan. Specifically in the Childhood Education major, there are 518 students in total with roughly 120 enrolling at the start of each academic year in April. There are 16 full-time faculty in the major, with two full-time faculty and one part-time faculty teaching the majority of classes in the English language elective program.

Students who enroll in the Childhood Education major train to obtain one or more of the following four teaching licenses: daycare, kindergarten, elementary school and junior high school (English subject specialization only). In order to become a full-time teacher at one of those teaching levels in Japan, it is necessary to have this credential, along with a period of student teaching. After the teacher obtains a license they also need to pass a government examination (if they want to work in a public school) to become a full-fledged teacher and be placed by the government in a school. Unlike the United States for example, teachers are contracted through city or prefectural government boards of education, and are moved to different schools (for example, between primary schools, not from primary to junior high school) throughout their career by the local authorities. They may teach any grade at the school they are stationed at, necessitating pedagogic knowledge for teaching any grade at the school they are at.

Returning to the university's curriculum, in order for students to successfully complete the major, students must complete either the kindergarten or elementary school license course curriculum. The daycare or junior high school (English specialty) licenses alone are insufficient for graduation. In many cases license requirements have overlapping requirements, and so students usually elect to take multiple license courses. Participant demographics will be described in detail in the Participant Section, however this case study focuses on students taking the junior high school English language specialization license in addition to an elementary school license. The reason for this is because this elective course, established over 10 years ago, provides pedagogic knowledge for junior high school English language professionals in tandem with elementary school license pedagogy, thus creating a teacher training program for new elementary school teachers past the implementation of the 2014 CoS. Normally, teacher training programs do not have an English language element because until now English has never been a formal school subject in elementary school.

For universities in Japan to maintain accreditation, schools must submit course syllabi and school curriculum in line with the CoS to MEXT for approval. In each MEXT CoS, objectives are spelled out as to what a training university should provide, however, the details are left to each individual university. For the 2014 CoS, there are five primary skills university programs need to demonstrate they are building in their curriculum detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: University Training outlines for MEXT 2014 CoS (MEXT, 2014b)

University training should include:

1. Enhanced phonetics training
2. Enhanced pedagogic training
3. Simulation classes including team teaching
4. Research into education materials
5. How to collaborate between elementary and junior high.

In this article, enhanced phonetics training (Item 1 above) will be focused on because professors in the department reported putting extra emphasis for training on this particular skill in their curriculum. Throughout the English elective program, students take 27 English focused courses ranging from

communication classes, pedagogic grammar classes, to culture classes. Please see Appendix 1 for a more complete list. Of these classes, two are specifically phonetics classes designed to teach students in detail about consonant and vowel sounds in English. In these classes there is a particular focus on sounds that students Japanese students have particular difficulty with such as the distinctions between /r/ and /l/, as well as /f/ and /h/. However, many of the communication classes along with some others also have pronunciation elements to the syllabus. For example, communication classes where students learn about English fairy tales and folklore involve learning and performing a story, where clear pronunciation strategies are included. Thus, the university's English elective program does put a strong emphasis on clear English pronunciation.

Students also have a variety of alternative opportunities that have a focus on pronunciation during their four years at university as well. During their third year, most students participate in a program where they read English books to young children at local libraries. There is also two-week trip to the United States during their third year where students participate in a homestay, as well as have the opportunity to teach in a local elementary school.

Also related to the research questions in this article is student confidence to (1) be in charge of an English lesson and (2) team teach with and manage ALTs. Regarding (1), there are five classes that deal explicitly with English instruction, and the three additional classes that teach about English in the elementary school classroom. For (2), there are no classes that deal specifically with how to interact with an ALT, however 8 classes in the program are taught by non-Japanese teachers, so students do have direct contact expressing themselves to non-Japanese people in English.

Considering MEXT policy, current practitioner training, and the university's curriculum designed to create teachers who can negotiate future demands of teaching English in elementary school, it is relevant to see how students are responding to the curriculum. Thus, following is a survey designed to assess the confidence of students in the university's program. This survey will shed light on how students feel the effect of the curriculum is having on their ability to teach English as a subject in the future.

Method

Materials and Procedures

The attitude survey in this study was based on information gathered from 20 students in the research site's Childhood Education Major. The questions were written in both English and Japanese, and after demographic questions (Q1-2) and questions regarding participant English learning prior to university (Q3-7), the remaining questions (Q8-19) were used to assess the research questions and overall participant attitude outlined in the Analysis section. Beyond question 3, all the questions were based on a 5-point Lykert-scale with 1 implying a weak confidence in regarding the question statement, and 5 implying strong confidence. This survey was administered using Google Forms, with descriptive statistics run in Excel 2011. Using Excel, the researcher determined that the responses follow a normal distribution pattern, adding some confidence to the statistics presented in the analysis section.

Additionally, as a follow-up to the survey, the researcher conducted casual, group interviews with

the participants to obtain more detailed information about the survey responses Q8-19. The interviews were administered to the 3rd year participants, but unfortunately, the 4th year students were unavailable for interview.

Participants

The participants in the study were part of the research site's Childhood Education major, and were in a program to obtain both elementary and junior high school (English specialty) teaching licenses. Of the 20 participants, 12 were 3rd year students, and 8 were 4th year students. Among the 3rd years, in addition to the elementary school and junior high teaching licenses, 8 participants were also taking courses to obtain kindergarten teaching licenses. Of the 4th years, 1 participant was taking courses to obtain a daycare teaching license. All participants were female.

All participants were Japanese native speakers with English as their second language. Their preexisting English language ability does have some bearing on this study as it impacts confidence, however the researcher did not have access to participant entrance examination data to gauge how they performed on formal assessment. But based on discussions with the participants' instructors and his own observations, the researcher determined the students have intermediate listening, reading, and writing ability, with slightly low-intermediate speaking ability. Participants can understand the main points of lectures in English and can express opinions and ideas in short, simple sentences. Among the 3rd and 4th years however there was a range of ability, with some students able to express more complex thoughts than others.

Analysis

This survey was conducted with the purpose of assessing if students in the university's Childhood Education major specializing in English feel confident to teach English at an elementary school implementing the MEXT's 2014 CoS. Here, in line with the research questions of this paper, three aspects targeted in MEXT's CoS were selected: (1) student confidence to instruct pronunciation, (2) student confidence to be in charge of an English lesson and (3) student confidence to team teach with and manage ALTs. Different questions in the survey corresponding to the selected points were used to analyze the student opinions. The results of the survey revealed that the 4th year students were far more confident than the 3rd years on all 3 points, however, the reported confidence levels were not terribly high.

For the first research question regarding confidence to instruct English pronunciation, the participants reported relatively high confidence levels compared to the rest of the survey. There were two questions on the survey regarding this point (see Table 3), and it can be seen that 4th year participant confidence is overall higher than the 3rd year reported confidence, more so in Question 11 than in Q17. A response of 1 was considered low confidence, and 5 was considered high confidence.

Table 3: Survey results for questions associated with confidence to instruct pronunciation

	3 rd year mean	4 th year mean	Total mean
Q11. I have confidence in teaching the sounds and rhythms of English.	1.5	3.375	2.25
Q17. After studying phonetics class at the university, my own English pronunciation improved.	3.08	3.75	3.35

With these results, it is clear that there is a difference in 3rd and 4th year confidence. One explanation for this difference with Q11 is that of the time of the survey, 3rd year students had just begun their time to read books at local libraries, and have not yet gone abroad to the United States through the university's program to teach in American elementary schools, so likely their knowledge was not yet mobilized. 4th years had more student teaching, and thus is a likely explanation. For Q17, the likely explanation for the more similar results is that pronunciation classes fall in the 2nd year of the university's curriculum, thus all students have had formal instruction on English consonant and vowel pronunciation. Students clearly have some feeling that their own English pronunciation improved as a result of the curriculum. This trend of a gap between 3rd and 4th year confidence is present throughout the entire survey, and is likely a result of enhanced 4th year opportunity to try their skills with real students.

Regarding research question (2) confidence to be in charge of an English lesson, again the 3rd year mean averages were lower compared to 4th years. Considering the lower 3rd year participant means in table 4, experience and time student teaching could explain the difference in results between the 4th years. Still though, confidence is still relatively low for both the 3rd and 4th year participants.

Table 4: Survey results for questions associated with confidence to be in charge of an English lesson

	3 rd year mean	4 th year mean	Total mean
Q9. I feel prepared to teach English in the future.	1.75	2.63	2.1
Q12. I have confidence in teaching English grammar.	2.33	2.63	2.45

In the interviews with the 3rd year participants after the survey, most students reported that MEXT's emphasis speaking language would be difficult to teach, thus gave them some apprehension. One participant mentioned that grammar focused tests allow for a clear assessment of what the students knows, where spoken language is much more difficult to assess. While pronunciation and giving classroom commands in English for increased input are part of the university's curriculum, it is clear that instruction on spoken language assessment is insufficient for the participants have confidence.

Additionally, one particular participant summarized a prevalent attitude reported among the cohort: it doesn't matter if they are capable of reading and writing in English, if they feel can't speak well then they feel they are not good at English overall. As can be seen in Table 5, 3rd year participants did rate their ability to express themselves in English as low (2.25), thus this lack of confidence likely contributes to a sense of being inadequately prepared to teach and assess English spoken language skills.

Also of interest to this research paper was student confidence to team teach with and manage ALTs.

Several questions in the survey dealt directly with this topic (Table 5) and again 3rd year participants had a lower mean confidence than the 4th years.

Table 5: Survey results for questions associated with confidence to team-teach and manage ALTs

	3 rd year mean	4 th year mean	Total mean
Q10. I feel I can express myself in English.	2.25	2.88	2.5
Q13. I feel I can interact successfully with an ALT.	1.67	3	2.2
Q14. I think can express my thoughts and feelings about the curriculum/lesson plan to an ALT.	1.3	2.38	1.75
Q15. I think I can collaborate with an ALT to successfully team teach.	1.58	3	2.15

Again, confidence reported by the 3rd year participants is lower than the 4th years, in fact almost half despite only a year separating them in the curriculum. Until this point, both 3rd and 4th year students have had access to similar classes, with English communication courses being taught by non-Japanese teachers in English. Despite similar exposure, one potential explanation for this difference is the 4th year participants having had more student teaching time, and also the fact that the 4th years have done a short homestay in the United States through the research site. Again, with research question (1) regarding confidence to teach English pronunciation, this difference in practical teaching time could explain the different confidence levels.

When interviewed as to why the 3rd year participants had particularly low confidence in this category, two particular opinions were prominent among students. The first was little opportunity to use English with non-Japanese outside of class, so it was difficult to build experience speaking to non-Japanese people. Statistically, only around 2% of the population in Japan is made of non-ethnic Japanese residents (Japan Times, 2018), so there really are few opportunities for students to use English outside the classroom. Though the participants do speak in class, most pair work is done with Japanese students, and both usually have little communication barrier and can understand each other relatively well leading to a low level of meaning negotiation. However, there seemed to be anxiety about being unable to negotiate meaning with somebody who does not know Japan well, and who cannot speak Japanese, and a fear of inadequate communication ability to be understood among the participants.

This leads to the second point mentioned by participants, particularly in response to Q14, that they do not know the proper vocabulary to express their ideas about pedagogy to ALTs. Participants expressed that though they do feel capable to some degree to talk about daily routines in English, they are unfamiliar with school vocabulary and explaining a lesson plan. All participants should have received training as to how to create a lesson plan in their 2nd year at the university, but this does not seem to translate to confidence in describing a lesson plan to an ALT. Thus, it seems that in addition to low confidence in expressing themselves in English there is low confidence in interacting with ALTs as

well.

Regarding the overall impact of the curriculum on student confidence, there seems to have been a positive impact. While students still report low confidence in their English and as reported in Table 4 also reported low confidence in teaching English, the data in Table 6 indicates that curriculum did raise confidence. While participant confidence is still low, there is an implication when comparing Q8 to Q16 and Q18 that participant confidence would be lower without the instruction in the program. It can be said then that though the curriculum is raising student confidence, more could be done address more specific issues such as how to teach speaking skills in English, and how to explain lesson plans in English.

Table 6: Overall impact of curriculum on participant confidence

	3 rd year mean	4 th year mean	Total mean
Q8. I am confident in my English now.	1.83	2.5	2.1
Q16. The curriculum at my university had an impact on my English confidence.	2.67	3.88	3.15
Q18. The classes I took at my university improved my ability to express my thoughts in English.	3	4	3.4

A consistent gap exists between 3rd and 4th year participant averages throughout the survey, so it would be worthwhile to continue this research and survey 3rd years again when they become 4th years. Including future students in the survey would boost statistical power and support finding larger trends regarding the university's Childhood Education curriculum's affect on student confidence.

Discussion

How are the “sounds of the language (English)” from the MEXT 2014 Course of Study manifested in the university's curriculum? How have has this instruction impacted student confidence to teach pronunciation?

From interviews with instructors in the university's Childhood Education major and inspection of the curriculum, particularly the English elective course, it is clear that the skills to teach the “sounds of English” as marked in the MEXT 2014 CoS are present in the curriculum. In the English elective course in particular, these skills manifest themselves explicitly in two pronunciation classes, and implicitly in communication and skills classes. For the communication classes, instructors include both phonetic and supraegmental feature instruction, and also help students learn clear pronunciation of English stories (folk tales, fairytales) they can use in the field. Outside the English elective course, there is an Elementary School English course open to all students in the cohort, and the course is regularly attended by approximately 90 of the 120 students in each Cohort. This class is taught by the advisor of the English elective, and also covers basic English pronunciation skills such as phonetics.

This instruction does seem to have had an impact on participants in the survey as they reported with 3.35 confidence that the Childhood Development curriculum had positively impacted their pronunciation

ability. As was present throughout the entire survey, the 4th years (3.75) expressed a stronger feeling that the 3rd years (3.08) in this regard, but in this case the difference was not substantial. Participant confidence *to teach* pronunciation however was lower with an overall mean of only 2.25. While the 4th years expressed some confidence to teach (3.375), the 3rd years were much lower (1.5). The interviews did not reveal any insight into this, but judging from the 1.8 confidence difference between 3rd and 4th years, it is likely that confidence to teach manifests itself later in the program. One explanation is opportunity late in the program to mobilize knowledge of skills through volunteer programs at local libraries reading in English to children, and practice in the field such as in library volunteer time and teaching in the United States teaching in American elementary schools.

One finding from the data to improve university teacher training programs is that it would be worthwhile to implement more opportunity for practical teaching time into curriculum to give students confidence to teach in the field. As 3rd year students expressed during the interview that they don't know how to teach speaking skills, instructor feedback would also be useful during practical training for students to understand the difference between effective and ineffective practices. Without confidence to teach going into the workplace, there is a possibility that young teachers could fall into the ad hoc, improvised teaching methods used by untrained teachers currently in elementary schools, thus negating the whole 4 years in the university program.

How does the university's curriculum impact student confidence to “be in charge of an English lesson” and “team teach with and manage ALTs” as specified in the MEXT's 2014 Course of Study?

Given the already low confidence levels in English language ability (2.1) among the participants, it is not a surprise that participant confidence to teach an English lesson (2.1) and successfully interact with an ALT (2.2) is low. While more practical experience could lead to more confidence, even the generally more confident 4th years expressed low confidence to lead an English classroom (2.5). Considering that the 3rd years expressed opinions during the interviews that inability to *speak* English lowers overall confidence despite perceived high reading, writing, and grammatical ability, it is logical to incorporate more speaking practice into the curriculum. This of course must also be balanced with the opinion voiced from the 3rd years that insufficient opportunity to interact with non-Japanese speakers makes them uncertain of how non-Japanese people will react to their English, so technology based classrooms connecting courses with students abroad could be an answer. An interesting follow-up study would be to see how a collaborative class with students from the research site and a class outside Japan where English was the means of communication would affect student confidence.

Conclusion

Given the gap apparent between the 2014 MEXT CoS policy for elementary school English and current practice in the field, there is a need to not only train teachers with skills to implement the next CoS, but create capable practitioners who can grow and adapt to the changing needs of English education moving forward. The university's Childhood Education Department has created a curriculum

in line with the 2014 CoS policy, but it seems that there is still a need for improvement to give students in the program sufficient knowledge and confidence to become effective teachers in the field. While the university has had success in some areas such as pronunciation where a strong effort has been made, there are still additional areas to consider especially student interaction with ALTs and team teaching education.

Findings in this study indicate that there are some student attitudes that need to be addressed in order to become successful teachers. Participants indicated that they feel their English level is low because their speaking skill is low, and that will impact their ability to effectively teach communication skills, and also assess them. Without teachers who can effectively teach communication skills which are emphasized in the 2014 MEXT CoS, then there is likely to be little improvement in the next generation of students spoken English ability. That said, additional student practical teaching experience does seem to have had an effect to give 4th year students more confidence than 3rd year students not as far along in the curriculum, so the addition of further practical training could have a positive impact on teacher confidence. Additionally, given the constraints on practicing teachers in the field to seek further training in English, there is a need to have teachers entering the work force able to train veteran teachers in new techniques and English pedagogy (Tahira, 2012). Thus, without young teachers confident in their ability to leave a grammar focused, test centered curriculum, the cycle will continue.

That said, it is clear that the university's program did have an impact on participants confidence based on student feeling toward their communication and pronunciation improvement. So with more attention to specific points of student anxiety coupled with the needs established by the government in Japanese classrooms, it is likely that student attitudes can be changed. Moving forward, more data collected on the specifics of what current students are apprehensive about regarding becoming teachers, as well as what current teachers in the field think they could use more training about would be a positive direction to take to create a more targeted teacher training curriculum. One other direction is to do research into the impact of English confidence among Japanese students in teacher training programs before and after a collaborative course with online participants from overseas.

In the end, there are deeply ingrained attitudes of difficulty for Japanese people to learn English, and traditions on grammar focused written tests that need to be overcome in order to successfully enact the communicative policies of the Japanese Ministry of Education at the elementary school level. Confident and capable teachers are necessary in order to achieve this paradigm shift, and therefore successful teacher training programs are also necessary. While it is clear that there are many challenges in the future, continuing research and effort in this undergraduate teacher training can make a difference in the field.

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Appendix I

The Research Site's University Childhood Education English Elective Course List

April – July Semester	September – February Semester
English Communication A	English Communication A
English Communication B	English Communication B
English Communication C	English Communication C
English Communication D	English Communication D
English Communication E	English Communication H (5)
English Communication F	English Instruction A
English Communication G (7)	English Instruction C
English Instruction A	Elementary School English
English Instruction B	English Grammar for Communication B
Cross Cultural Studies	Introduction to English Literature
English Grammar for Communication A	Elementary School English Instruction Practices
Introduction to English Studies	English Discourse
English Pronunciation	Seminar
Seminar	