



Castledown

 OPEN ACCESS

Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics

ISSN 2209-0959

<https://www.castledown.com/journals/ajal/>

Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 3 (2), 168-182 (2020)

<https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v3n2.316>

Teacher Praxis within the “Communicative Course of Study Guidelines” in Japan: Post-Implementation Pedagogy



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Abstract

In this paper, Japanese teachers’ experiences under the new communicative course of study guidelines that became fully implemented in April 2016 in the new Japanese high school English Language curriculum, “Communicative Course of Study Guidelines” are examined. The study explored 21 high school teachers from a variety of schools, and with experience ranging from those who have just begun teaching to those who are reaching the end of their careers. It analysed their proficiency and confidence in teaching various skills, the workplace pressures that shaped their pedagogy within the new curriculum guidelines, and whether their implementation of the new curriculum was achieved. Results show that even though there is a willingness among newer teachers to implement communicative approaches within the high school English classroom, the workplace hierarchy and the culture of *senpai-kohai* (senior-junior) influenced the approaches they used within the classroom regardless of what the new curriculum sets out to achieve.

Keywords: CLT, teacher praxis, curriculum implementation, hierarchy, Japanese high school

Introduction

Research into both Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and teacher education in Japan has revealed a diversity of responses from teachers to CLT, both before and during the three-year period from 2013 to 2016 while a new English language curriculum entitled the “Communicative Course of Study Guidelines” was phased in by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT). In general, the results of this research have found negative reactions to MEXT’s determination to introduce this curriculum with a communicative focus (Yokogawa, 2017). Empirical literature findings have attested to the fact that four main factors, teachers’ English language abilities, the examination system, a lack of practical experience and teacher training, and a lingering Grammar Translation Method (GTM) focus are indicative factors as to why the uptake of CLT has been limited

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within this paper.

within Japanese EFL classes even in the post-implementation phase of the new study guidelines, which will be discussed in more detail throughout this paper.

Communicative Course of Study Guidelines

The problem of the prevalence of GTM is not unfamiliar to teachers. GTM was identified by Tsukamoto and Tsujioka (2013) as being a standard method of teaching in Japan, and is often referred to as the *Yakudoku* (“translation-reading”) method. They suggested that in Japan, foreign language classes are mainly taught using GTM as many teachers see it as a proven approach for students to gain high scores on multiple choice questions and reading for information focused tests, as these are the main skills that are tested in both the individual university entrance examinations and centrally administered national admissions examinations.

The effects of GTM were evident prior to and even during the implementation of MEXT’s new English language curriculum, negative reactions to GTM in relation to learner motivation and content retention have been broadly observed in the Japanese EFL classroom. For example, Sakai (2014) stated that GTM contributes to students either dropping out of or losing motivation in English classes because it requires too much preparation and not enough pragmatic usage of English to keep them motivated. In addition, Yokogawa (2017) remarked that students do not have enough time to internalize what they have studied through GTM, because the focus is on translation rather than on the communicative production of the language in a way that is salient and meaningful to them.

MEXT’s new English language curriculum was phased in from 2013 to 2016, with the aim being to move away from GTM methods of teaching in favour of CLT approaches and tasks to facilitate students’ practical use of English in the classroom in order to improve their communicative abilities, resulting in an increase in verbal output in all other subjects. This curriculum was intended to create students who are “individual thinkers and individual learners,” a challenge when considering that education in Japan until the late 1980s leaned towards education of the group rather than on that of the individual. According to MEXT, the new curriculum was designed to address this issue by “creating students who would be able to use English in their everyday lives after high school, and for university graduates to be able to use English in the workplace” (MEXT, 2010, p. 11).

Identified limitations to CLT implementation

Although there is evidence to suggest that student motivation and language retention suffer due to classroom exercises that do not allow for self-expression and opinion exchange (Henry & Thorsen, 2018), some teachers in Japan have avoided encouraging their students to communicate in English either because they do not believe it will work in their classrooms, or because they lack the communicative competence to teach using such a method (Jones, 2019). In an investigation of teachers’ attitudes towards incorporating communicative approaches in the classroom prior to the new curriculum being implemented, Ruegg (2009) and Tanaka (2009), who both used surveys and interviews to investigate teachers’ attitudes towards incorporating CLT tasks, found that teachers who had not seen CLT used in practice by other teachers were reluctant to break away from the currently established GTM method of teaching. A later study by Nishino (2011) showed that teachers who were reluctant to use communicative tasks believed that CLT would take valuable time away from the required content that had previously successfully prepared students for important examinations. (Nishino, 2011) discovered that teachers limited uptake of communicative tasks in the classroom was linked with the poor communicative language abilities of teachers, as well as with a failure to understand the theories and curriculum goals of CLT and its broader objectives.

While the new curriculum was being phased in, Humphries and Burns (2015) investigated Japanese teachers' and students' abilities in the spoken domain. They surveyed teachers' reactions to the new curriculum and concluded that Japanese high school students and teachers were not competent in using English as a tool for communication. This was concerning because the new curriculum was in its final stages of implementation at the time of the research. Along similar lines, Bartlett (2017) pointed out that teachers still viewed the four key areas of language learning (speaking, listening, reading and writing) as being independent skills. Thus, contingent to the focus of the English subject being taught, some teachers saw communicative and speaking-focused tasks as irrelevant for their students' success.

Although research suggests an ongoing lack of understanding amongst Japanese teachers of the wider benefits CLT can have on students' overall language development and motivation, MEXT continues to promote CLT as is evident in the 2016 study guidelines. However, there has been a divide between the goals outlined by MEXT and the goals outlined by senior teachers as to how to teach the new curriculum and fulfil the new curriculum outcomes, while simultaneously preparing students for exams that contain traditional grammar translation questions (Bartlett, 2017). This showed that, even when the new curriculum was being introduced, teachers were not fully prepared for implementing CLT, and as a result continued to teach classes in the same way as the old curriculum due to fears that communicative approaches could have a negative impact on their students' entrance examination results. Part of the problem, as Thompson and Woodman (2019) suggest, is that since teachers themselves had been taught using GTM, they automatically taught using the same method and lacked the appropriate skills to teach using a communicative approach. Teachers were not motivated to adapt to CLT, their teaching styles were influenced by their own experiences and environments, and they were not confident enough in speaking English to do so.

As can be found in empirical literature, the use of CLT was a challenge for high school teachers, and varying factors such as a teacher's communication skills, the examination system and uncertainty about implementing CLT in the classroom were all identified areas of concern even prior to the new curriculum being implemented. Since three years have passed since the "New" English language curriculum was implemented, it is important to investigate whether teacher pedagogy in the high school classroom has started to change to CLT-focused as the guidelines recommend.

Top-down hierarchy and cultural influences on educational praxis

An ethnographic study by Bartlett (2016) that investigated Japanese EFL teachers' attitudes to incorporating CLT in their lessons confirmed findings from earlier studies that suggested that younger teachers usually followed the practices and advice of older teachers in the workplace. This appeared to be the case even if the younger teacher believed that they possessed the skills and knowledge to incorporate CLT tasks, and even if the practices of senior teachers went against what the new curriculum guidelines had instructed teachers to do. In many Japanese workplaces there is a predetermined attitude and need to follow the dictates of senior members. As outlined by Hofstede and McCrae (2016), Japan is a society in which the power divide between ranking and age in workplaces is large, and where uncertainty avoidance is important for maintaining harmony within the workplace. As a result of these cultural and workplace traits, younger teachers have felt pressured to conform to the teaching styles mandated by senior members of staff. Bartlett (2017) found that even though younger teachers seem more willing to incorporate CLT approaches and tasks in the classroom, they were more concerned about how they would be viewed by their work colleagues if they were to incorporate these communicative approaches in a school where senior teachers were not doing so.

When linked with the notion of "Face," we can comprehend why hierarchical structured workplaces in Japan are able to influence the practices of lower ranking individuals. "Face," according to Tao

(2014), is a means to maintain harmony within the group or society in which one finds oneself. The importance of “Face” is demonstrated in the family, school, workplace, and social group. To maintain face means that one is acting in a manner that is in harmony with other people and their social and professional surroundings. This then explains the reluctance of younger and lower ranked teachers to try something new that goes against established practice within the schools in which they are employed based on the “*Senpai-Kohai*” system (system of seniority) found in Japan (see Lassila, Uitto, & Estola, 2018). Because the senior teacher is the leader of the group, or *senpai* (senior), based on age or years of experience (rather than on academic qualifications or English ability), younger teachers, or *kohai* (junior), feel pressured to fall in line with the approaches that are advised by senior management, even when these practices contradict explicit MEXT directives (Bartlett, 2017). The MEXT policy was brought into a country and an educational milieu that, despite having a need to improve communicative competence, was ill-prepared to accept and implement such changes based on teachers’ communicative abilities and the hierarchical “culture” that is dominant within workplaces, schools and classrooms (Bartlett, 2016).

Even though sharing beliefs and ideas about teaching are seen as key tools for teachers to better understand their efficacy and their purpose (Steele & Zhang, 2016), there are few opportunities for open discussion. Based on the socio-cultural boundaries that are prevalent in Japanese workplaces, teachers lack chances to express their opinions within this organisational hierarchy. As was suggested by Nishino (2011), a way to promote better understanding is for teachers to be able to discuss openly their ideas and concerns about CLT in a safe and secure environment. Yet the traditional Japanese hierarchy and the Confucian practice of saving “Face”(mentsu), has made this difficult (Tao, 2014) due to group mentality and a high power distance being recorded. Nishino (2011) recommended that, in order to improve and adapt to CLT methodology, the creation of chances to genuinely and fearlessly speak freely with other colleagues is essential. Nishino (2011) stated:

Opportunities to learn from colleagues are essential as it takes a considerable amount of time for teachers to switch to new ways of teaching, and to overcome obstacles and constraints. (p. 149)

Yet these opportunities are limited within Japanese work environments owing to their hierarchical nature. Research by Thompson and Woodman (2019) established that one of the main ways to improve understanding of a new approach and a new curriculum is for CLT and teaching approaches to be openly discussed by all teachers. Yet Japanese hierarchy has not allowed or even encouraged these discussions to take place in a safe environment, and a culture of hoarding is evident owing to the competitive nature of the current examination system (Kuramoto & Koizumi, 2018).

This literature review has revealed multiple issues that need to be investigated and that forms one of the key foci of this study: to examine how teachers are enabled to incorporate the new curriculum within their work and classroom environments, and whether they possess the skills and drive to do so.

Methodology

Participants in this study comprised a heterogeneous sample of 21 English teachers from five different high schools in Oita, Hyogo, Kyoto or Osaka prefectures. These teachers represent those who work in both the public school and private high school sector. All participants are Japanese, and are non-native English speakers. Of the 21 participants, four had either travelled overseas to English speaking countries or spent time abroad as part of their university program (with the longest international stay recorded at four months). Teachers in the study represented those with both long-term and short-term teaching experience with years of experience ranging from two years to 26 years of teaching

experience. They also represented both high rank and low rank within the organisational hierarchy of their school. Participants were asked to self-assess, their English proficiency, their confidence teaching different skills in the classroom, their curriculum preferences, and they were also asked about any workplace pressures they felt in their workplaces that dictated their teaching practice. The 21 teachers were provided with a survey in September 2018, and followed up with informal interviews with 12 teachers took place between January and February 2019. The 12 teachers were selected for informal interviews using a google randomiser software to randomly select participants for further interviews.

Table 1. *Data collection and analysis procedures with high school teachers (n=21)*

Data collection stage 1	Survey conducted with teachers online using Lime survey.
Data analysis stage 1	Statistical and thematic analysis of survey results using Lime survey, NVivo and manual analysis
Data collection stage 2	Informal interviews with selected participants (n=12).
Data analysis stage 2	Thematic and descriptive analysis of qualitative data using NVivo and a manual analysis through the creation of codes and word trees.

The data were obtained via mixed methods, first through surveys that contained both multiple choice and short answer questions, and then through informal interviews as a means to gather not only responses about teacher English language proficiency, but also in regard to their pedagogy. Using an exploratory sequential mixed methods research design (Leavy, 2017), quantitative data were collected, and a statistical analysis of the multiple choice answers was undertaken using both Lime Survey and manual analysis to check for consistency and to authenticate the findings. Then, a statistical and thematic analysis of the short answer results was conducted using NVivo and manual analysis. Finally, after data analysis of Stage 1 was completed, follow up questions were created for the informal conversations that were either conducted in person, or via Skype due to participants' varied locations. The informal interview results were then thematically analysed, and a summary is provided in the following section.

Results & Discussion

Section 1: General information about participants

Figure 1 displays the results of the years of experience that the teachers had at teaching EFL in Japanese high schools. Four teachers, 19.1% (n=4) of teachers had 5-10 years' experience, 23.8% (n=5) of participants had 11-15 years' teaching experience, and 19.1% (n=4) had 16-20 years' teaching experience, while 14.3% (n=3) of participants had 20-25 years' experience, and 14.3% (n=3) had more than 25 years' experience. Only 9.5% (n=2) of participants had less than 5 years' experience as English language teachers in Japanese high schools.

According to a survey conducted by MEXT (2018) with regard to teachers' ages, 43.9 % of teachers employed in Japanese high schools were age 50 or over, with only 10.8% of teachers in these schools being younger than 30. As the 21 participants in this study range from over 50 (11 teachers), between 30 and 50 (six teachers) and younger than 30 (four teachers), this study has represented the opinions

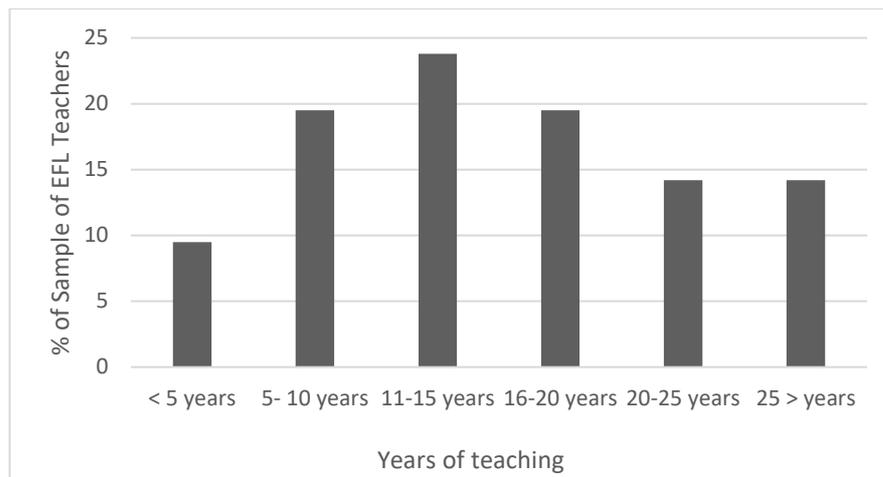


Figure 1. Years of teaching experience ($n=21$)

of all the age ranges stipulated by MEXT (2018). Thus, based on the variety of years of experience of participants in this study and MEXT data about ages, we can deduce that the sample contained a large proportion who would represent all groups of teachers (over 50, below 30 and anywhere in between) and as such were representative of all age groups of teachers who taught in Japanese high schools. Furthermore, the results about teachers’ years of experience were also valuable in being able to assess the impact of senior staff members on juniors, allowing different opinions based on the teachers’ levels in the hierarchy to be explored during the informal interviews.

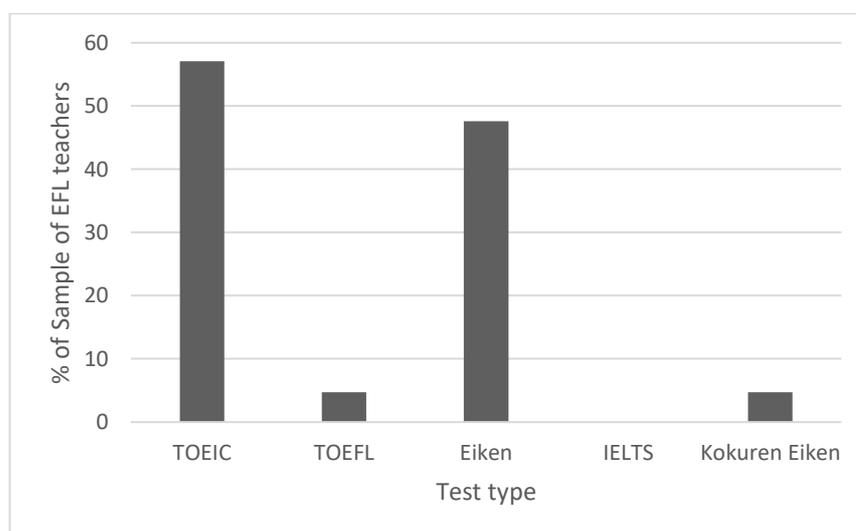


Figure 2. Experience with English language proficiency tests ($n=21$)

As a means to discover the median English language proficiency of the teachers, teachers were asked to select which English language tests and qualifications they had undertaken voluntarily outside their university degrees. The types of tests that the participants had undertaken are outlined in Figure 2. The list of tests was created based on the tests that MEXT considers important for testing teachers’ language proficiency. The quantitative results showed that 57.1% ($n=12$) of participants in the study had taken the TOEIC test, followed by 47.6% ($n=10$) having taken the *Eiken* (a Japan-based standardized test of English Proficiency), with only one participant having taken both the *Kokuren Eiken* (UN Eiken) and the TOEFL test, showing that within this group, the main form of testing was the TOEIC test. A short

answer questionnaire showed that the average score on the TOEIC test was 480, with a high of 740 and a low of 340 being recorded. According to the Waikato Institute of Education ("TOEIC scores and conversion tables," 2019), a score of 405-600 on TOEIC equates to "Elementary proficiency plus," and people with this score can "initiate and maintain predictable, face-to-face conversations and satisfy limited social demands." As the mean TOEIC score in this study was 480, we can deduce that some of the teachers would find it difficult to adapt to students' language learning requirements, and may not be able to use English as creatively as a classroom focused on CLT would require. Even after implementation of the new English language curriculum, issues relating to teachers' language proficiency are evident.

Section 2: Teachers' English Language abilities (self-assessment)

This question asked teachers to self-assess their abilities in English through an open-ended question; in which the six skills of speaking, listening, reading, writing, translation and communicative skills were analysed. The six language skills were selected as these are the types of tasks that students undertake within high schools in Japan (Bartlett, 2016). As illustrated in Figure 3, The results showed that teachers were more confident when it came to the skills of reading, writing and translation, with reading and writing having the highest number of "Confident" or "Very confident" responses recorded, with reading having a total of 20 participants selecting these options, and with writing having 18 participants selecting these option. In comparison, we can establish that only eight participants rated themselves as either "Confident" or "Very confident" in relation to their speaking and listening abilities, with only six participants selecting either of these options in relation to their communicative abilities.

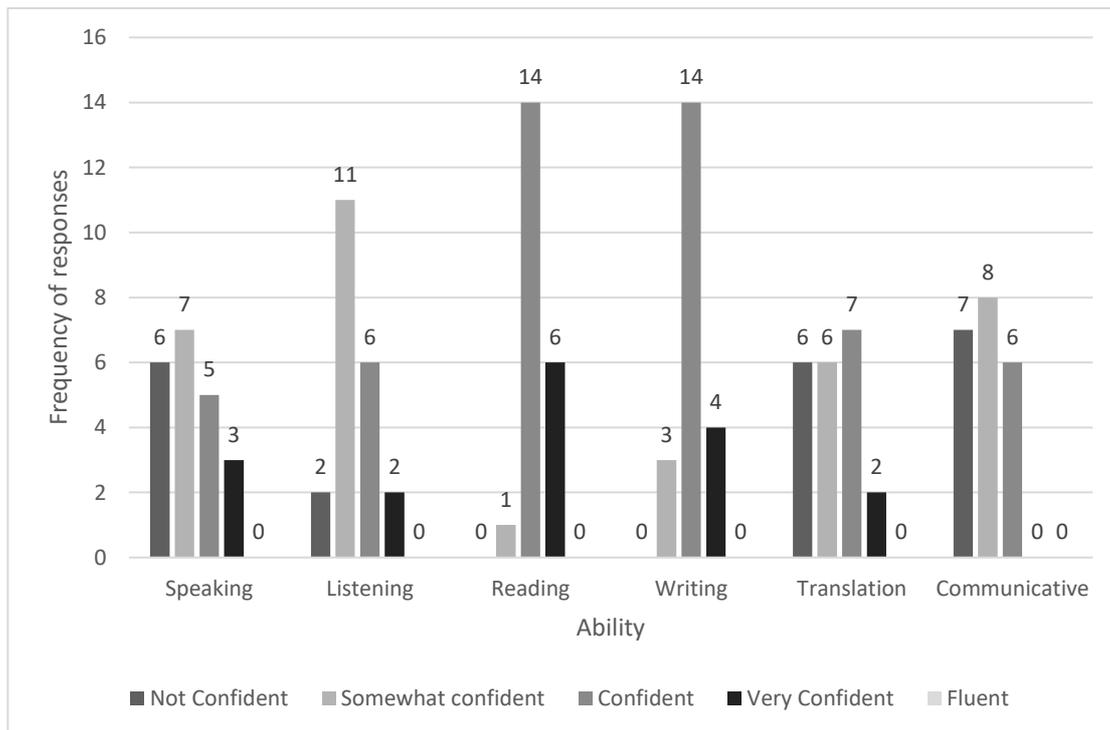


Figure 3. Self-assessment of English language abilities

These responses further reiterate the finding of literature prior and during the implementation of the new curriculum guidelines in relation to teacher practice in Japan still being GTM-focused, and show that even though the new curriculum favours CLT approaches, that teachers responses in relation to their speaking, listening and communicative abilities dictates that they believe that they do not possess

the skill and level required to be able to do so. These results suggested that teachers are much more comfortable focusing on reading and writing skills that allows them to continue to use GTM methods of teaching in lieu of communicative ones, which are recorded as being important for examination success within the Japanese Education system as outlined by Kitao (2007).

Section 3: Abilities to teach certain skills to students

The next section of the survey asked teachers to self-evaluate their ability to teach a full spectrum of skillsets within the foreign language classroom. Figure 4 is a summary of the results attained via Lime Survey. In this question, teachers were able to choose from the responses of “Not confident,” “Somewhat confident,” “Confident,” and “Very confident” in relation to teaching conversation skills, listening skills, reading skills and writing skills to their students. These four skills were selected because they cover all areas and competences required to be covered in the new curriculum guidelines. Participants were able to choose the response that best represented how they viewed their confidence and abilities in teaching and in using the skillsets within their own classrooms, so no definitions were provided beyond the key words in Japanese and English being available for selection in order to not influence participants selections.

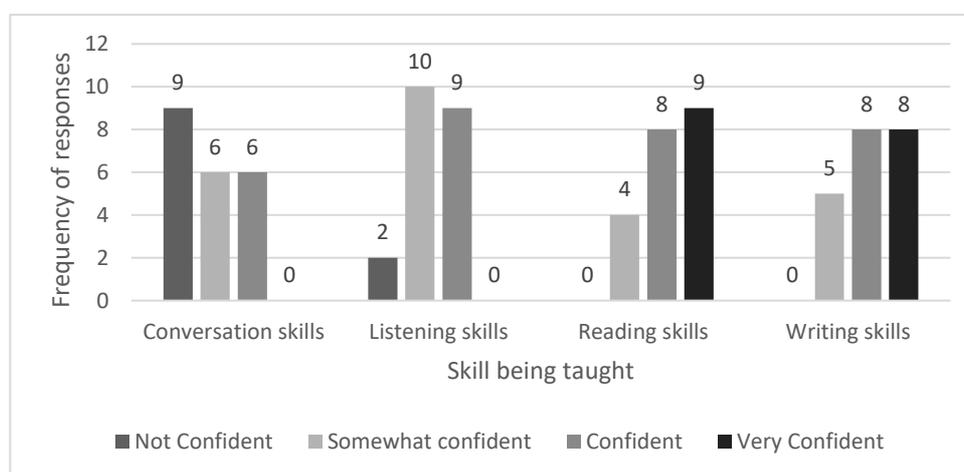


Figure 4. *Confidence in teaching these skills to students*

The results showed that teachers were more comfortable teaching reading and writing, as communication and listening skills were self-assessed as relatively lower when it came to teaching these skills in the classroom. The results therefore showed that these teachers were focused on and more confident in teaching a GTM curriculum that allowed them to teach to the abilities that they were more confident in, which was a focus on reading and writing skills. When this theme was further explored by triangulating the responses with informal interviews, the results showed that the pressures of the examination system, which tests grammar and linguistic knowledge, were highly influential in dictating which approaches were used in the classroom. As per Bartlett (2017), owing to the examinations system’s current and ongoing structure, teachers viewed the incorporation of communicative tasks as a hindrance to students’ test preparation, and they believed that communicative skills are not as important as the skills required to be successful on paper-based examinations. Furthermore, as can be observed from the results displayed in Figure 4, as teachers’ tests scores were deemed to be low, the teachers in this study lacked the appropriate skills and knowledge to conduct classes in a communicative manner owing to their lack of communicative competence and their lower levels of English as a whole.

Section 4: Class preparation time and classroom English usage

In section four of the questionnaire, teachers were asked how much time they spent speaking English with their students, and how much time they provided for their students to undertake conversations in English in the classroom. The following results were ascertained from the responses to a questionnaire analysed using Lime Survey.

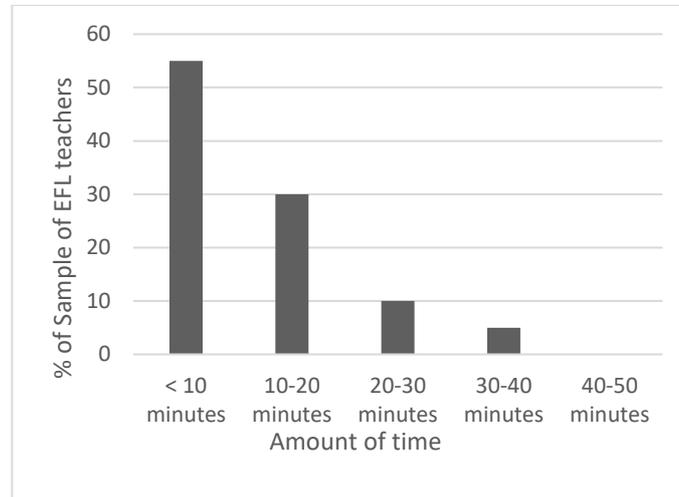


Figure 5. Time teachers spent using English in the classroom

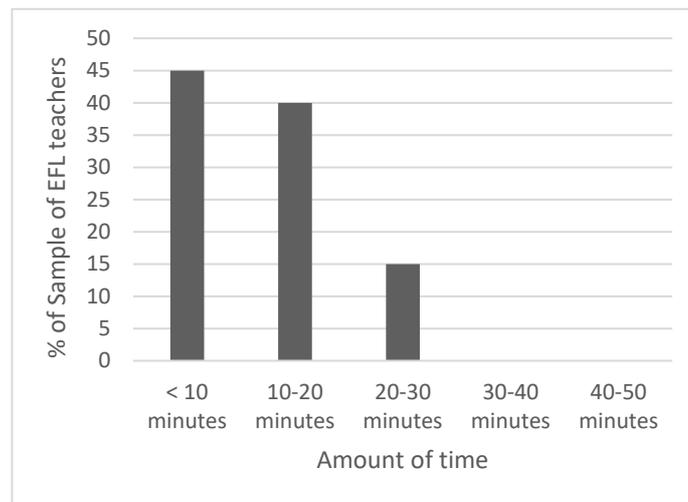


Figure 6. Time students speak English in the classroom

Figure 5 shows the results of the amount of time teachers spend using English in the classroom. The results show that 55% (n=11) of teachers responded that they used English for less than 10 minutes of class time, and that they used a majority of Japanese during their classes. In all, 30% (n=6) of participants responded that they used between ten and 20 minutes of English during the classes, with 10% (n=2) of participants responding that they used English between 20 and 30 minutes of class time, with only 5% (n=1) of participants recording that she or he used English for more than 30 minutes of class time. MEXT (Monbukagakusho, 2010) outlined that at first they wanted teachers to teach the whole class in English, but they changed this policy to teachers using English for the majority of class time and, unfortunately, this study shows that MEXT's goals have not filtered down into teacher practice.

Teachers were then asked about how much time they allotted for their students to speak English during a 50-minute class. As illustrated in Figure 6, 45.0% (n=9) of teachers responded that they provided less than 10 minutes for this task. The second highest number was teachers who allotted 10-20 minutes to the task, a total of 40.0% (n=8) of teachers. Only 15% (n=3) participants stated that they provided between 20 and 30 minutes of time encouraging students to speak English in the classroom. Although the new curriculum stipulates that as much time as possible should be provided for students to practise communication in the classroom, the results from this survey indicated a majority of teachers are not doing so. When teachers were further questioned about whether they were speaking directly with students or whether they were getting students to speak with one another, responses showed that teachers were more likely to choose a student to converse with in front of the class while others students listened to the conversation, rather than getting students to speak with one another, an indicative finding that supports the presence of the cultural constructs of “Face” and maintaining an authoritative stance in the classroom (Tao, 2014). Tao (2014) suggests that the concept of “Face” can have an impact on both teacher praxis in the classroom, as they are seen as the possessors of knowledge and may fear showing their weaknesses, and on student participation within the classroom as they may fear making mistakes in front of their peers and then being judged.

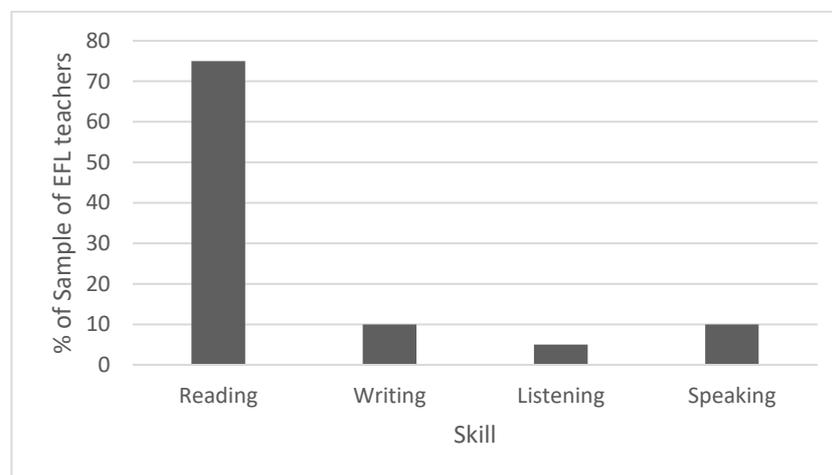


Figure 7. *Skills that teachers focus teaching the most (n=21)*

Next, participants were asked which skill was their major focus. This question was created to investigate whether teachers were still using GTM approaches or had transitioned to communicative approaches in the classroom. As illustrated in Figure 7, 75.0% (n=15) of teachers selected that they mainly focused on reading tasks in the classroom, with 10.0% (n=2) of teachers stating that they focused most on writing, 10.0% (n=2) of teachers asserting that they focused mostly on speaking and 5.0% (n=1) teacher stating that she or he focused mostly on listening skills. These results showed that a majority of these teachers focused on reading.

The results from section three of the survey showed that these teachers spent a majority of their time teaching reading; 17 of the 21 teachers responded that they used less than 10 minutes of English during their classes. This showed that the MEXT curriculum (2010) was not being implemented fully, and that for these teachers their practice was still heavily GTM—and examination—focused due to the fact that their classroom practice was based on reading and writing rather than on speaking and listening, which was the focus of the examinations that their students would undertake at the end of their high school education. Although the guidelines for the new curriculum stated that teachers should be increasing the amount of English they use (Monbukagakusho, 2010), as well as getting students to speak more in the classroom, these results provided a snapshot of the current realities of teachers not fulfilling the requirements laid out in the guidelines. These results indicated that their teaching

practices have hardly changed when compared with the findings outlined in literature such as Humphries and Burns (2015) with regards to a lack of confidence to use English in the classroom.

Section 5: Curriculum preferences

In this section, participants were asked whether they would choose between the old curriculum or the new curriculum to discover which was more suited to their workplaces and teaching styles. The following results showed that a majority of teachers were still heavily influenced by the old curriculum when it came to class preparation, class activities and teaching preferences.

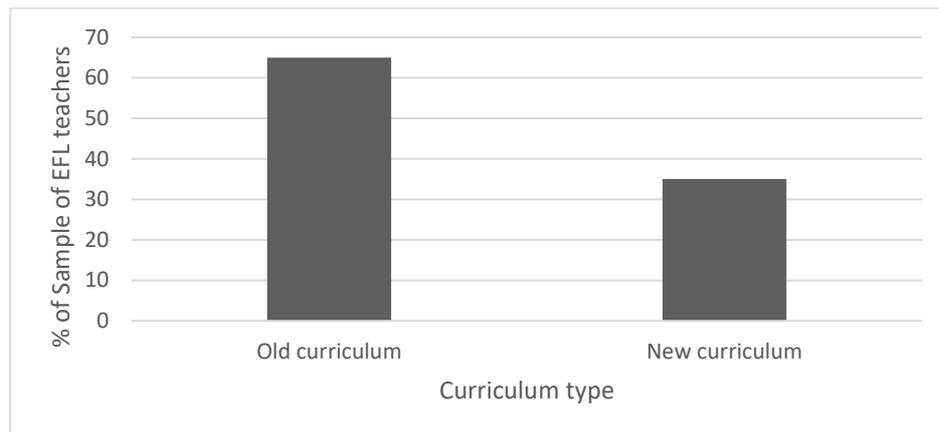


Figure 8. *Choice of which curriculum is easier to prepare for (n=21)*

In this question, teachers were asked whether they found it easier to prepare for classes within the old curriculum guidelines or the new curriculum guidelines. As illustrated in Figure 8, 65.0% (n=13) of participants responded that they found it easier to prepare for classes with the old curriculum, with 35.0% (n=7) of participants responding that they found the new curriculum easier for class preparation. In this question, a further analysis of the participants' age and gender showed that younger teachers who had spent time abroad were more comfortable with the new curriculum, whereas older teachers were more in favour of the old curriculum, a system in which they had worked for most of their careers.

When participants were individually identified, the above results showed that more senior teachers, regardless of gender, were more accustomed to the old curriculum, and had a stronger preference for it. In particular, one teacher who had been teaching in high schools for more than ten years, had a stronger preference for the old curriculum. When we look at younger or newer teachers' responses to the questions in section 3, we can see that these teachers were more willing to put the new curriculum into practice. These results showed that, in educational environments such as Japan, in which the seniority system is top-down in nature, if older teachers who were in positions of power did not agree with teaching in a communicative approach in the classroom, this had an impact on its implementation throughout the whole English faculty. As the results showed, even if teachers were being asked to incorporate CLT by MEXT in the new curriculum guidelines (2010), change would not occur if the senior teachers did not direct them to do so or did not agree with the stipulated changes.

Informal interview results overview

Informal interviews with participants uncovered reasons why teacher praxis is still heavily focused on GTM over CLT as outlined in the new curriculum guidelines. The results showed that the top-down hierarchy within schools, an examination system that doesn't test students spoken abilities, and teachers limited communicative competence were reasons that dictated approaches in the classroom.

The informal interviews revealed that a top-down hierarchy is still prevalent within the Japanese school system, and that stepping out of line, regardless of whether the teachers were trying to incorporate the new curriculum guidelines, was viewed as divergent behaviour, especially if the senior members were not in agreement with the curriculum guidelines. Such responses as outlined in Table 2 show some of the issues with hierarchy in the participants workplaces.

Table 2. *Participants responses to “Hierarchy”*

Theme	Responses/snippets that represent the whole
Hierarchy	I don't have freedom; my boss dictates how we should teach. I am not able to express my opinion in meetings. When I use CLT, my boss tells me not to [do so]. I wouldn't be able to use CLT at my school. I was removed from a class for not teaching how the senior [boss] prefers.

These results showed that the theoretical model of uncertainty avoidance as outlined by Hofstede and McCrae (2016) is still prevalent within Japanese schools and organisations today, as teachers are conducting classes to align with the expectations of their senior teachers rather than with the MEXT guidelines. The results also suggest that the perceptions of others influence teachers' decisions with regard to teaching in the classroom. This analysis of the informal interview responses showed that, if a teacher uses a certain approach to teaching that may be viewed by the majority as different, then that individual feels pressured to fit in with the group. These responses bore further witness to the *Senpai-Kohai* culture and the concept of “Face” being a relevant and operative aspect of the workplace and an influence in schools.

Results further showed that CLT has not been fully implemented at the classroom level, and that it is not viewed favourably within the current professional strictures of Japanese high schools. As discovered through the informal interviews, the amount of time teachers spent speaking English in the classroom or getting students to speak English averages ten minutes or less per 50-minute class. This indicated that speaking and listening were not the primary focus of English classes at Japanese high schools in which the teachers who participated in this project are employed. As was evident in the teacher results above, owing to the examination system currently in place in Japan, and with success rates in these examinations having a major influence on school ranking along with playing a major role in dictating students' future pathways, it seems that CLT has been forced into a passive role in comparison with GTM. However, according to a majority of the participants in this project, even ten minutes or less of communicating in English in the classroom is an improvement when compared with how they were teaching under the old curriculum guidelines, therefore suggesting that with more time, training and experiences, this number could increase if properly nurtured. Responses from participants in relation to the examination system are outlined in table 3.

Table 3. *Participants responses to “Examinations”*

Theme	Responses/snippets that represent the whole
Examinations	I must teach so my students can succeed on exams. The exam results are most important to my workplace than getting student to speak, so I teach so students can get good results on it. If my students get bad results, I may be given less important work to do.

Informal conversations further uncovered a strong preference to teach reading and writing skills, and that teachers are not only more confident in their own abilities in these skills, but also more comfortable in teaching these skills compared to listening and speaking. The mean TOEIC score of 480 for participants, along with their self-assessment of their skills showing a lack of confidence showed teachers' low level abilities in English, is also a further factor that shows why teachers may be comfortable using grammar translation techniques from a textbook that only has one correct answer, rather than promoting discussion and opinion exchanges, in English, where the student responses would be unpredictable. This unpredictability of responses could make the teacher's low-level abilities evident to students, and once again impact on how the teacher is perceived in the organisation through the cultural constructs of "Face" and *Senpai-Kohai*. This cultural perspective has shown itself to be an influential factor in how teachers approach teaching and creating tasks for classroom implementation, and shows that there is an innate fear among participants to be seen as not conforming to the perceived levels and standards that are dictated based on their position in the school, and to a wider extent, in the social hierarchy.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that overall, teachers felt that they were provided with only minimal opportunities to implement communicative-based tasks within the classroom even though the Communicative course of study guidelines has been fully implemented since 2016. Reasons that became evident after a descriptive statistical analysis of the results showed that factors such as the seniority system within participants' workplaces, the examination system, a self-identified lack of communicative competence, a self-identified lack of CLT knowledge and an uncertainty about how to implement a communicative curriculum were instrumental in shaping teaching approaches at the classroom level. With these findings, further consideration of how to improve the communicative abilities of high school teachers is essential. Discovering ways in which professional development opportunities can be provided not only in regard to their English communication skills, but also how to incorporate CLT within their own classrooms in an educational milieu that is still examination result-focused is the first step in creating teachers that are able to provide students with the communicative focused lessons that the "Course of Study Guidelines" sets out to achieve.

Next, consideration for how the hierarchy within Japanese schools can be relaxed so as to allow younger teachers, who are more in favour of incorporating CLT, opportunities to do so without being scrutinised or punished by senior ranking teachers is also an important hurdle to overcome. If senior teachers were more agreeable with the new curriculum and if they were provided with opportunities to see that CLT approaches can be a supporting tool for examination success, changes could start to be observed. As Japan is quite commonly referred to as a country that is slow to change, waiting for another generation of senior teachers to retire so that newer approaches can be implemented after the fact, is a disservice to the current high school students who not only need to succeed in their university entrance examinations, but also need communicative skills that will be of value to them in their future careers in an ever globalising world.

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