

High School Teachers' Path to Teach English Classes in English: Students' Influence on the Path

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Five years have passed since the implementation of the 2009 Course of Study and the policy of conducting English classes in English were enacted in 2013. The objective of the policy was “to enhance the opportunities for students to be exposed to English, transforming classes into real communication scenes” (MEXT, 2009, p. 7). However, the policy has not been fully implemented by senior high school teachers. In 2015, MEXT announced the findings of a nationwide survey of senior high school teachers who were in charge of the four-skill Oral Communication I course which is a required course (MEXT, 2015). Among 10,583 English teachers who responded to the questionnaire, only 11.2% answered that most of their utterances were in English, 31.9% answered that more than half of their utterances were in English, 39.6% answered that less than half of their utterances were in English, and 17.8% answered that few of their utterances were in English. The results indicated that many senior high school teachers were not using a great deal of English in classes even after the enactment of the 2009 Course of Study.

Regarding the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach proposed by MEXT, it is reported that various factors have prevented senior high school teachers from implementing it. Those factors include their lack of experience in CLT classrooms as students (Nagamine, 2013; Nishino, 2008), a lack of teacher training (Nishino, 2012a; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004), the large number of students in each class (Nishino, 2008, 2011), their concern about preparing students for entrance examinations (Gorsuch, 2000; Nishino, 2012a; O'Donnell, 2005; Taguchi, 2005), the use of the grammar-translation method for preparing students for university entrance examinations (Nishino, 2008, 2012a; Taguchi, 2005), and the influence of peers (Nishino, 2012b). Students' low English proficiency is also another important factor (Sato and Kleinsasser, 2004) and students' expectations of English classes are also influential factors (Taguchi, 2005; Cook, 2009, 2010; Gorsuch, 2000).

Students' English proficiency and expectations of classes influence teachers' choice of language in classrooms. In Saito's (2015) study of teachers' perceptions of the policy of teaching English classes in English, all three interview participants said that they use some Japanese considering the students' English proficiency. English learners themselves sometimes prefer to have teachers use their first language. For example, in Sad and Qadermazi's (2015) study, learner perceptions on L1 use in EFL classes with an English-only policy in Iran were investigated. The questionnaire results showed that 48 out of the 60 students (80%) agreed with the use of the L1. Wei (2013) investigated EFL university students' perceptions of L1 use at a college in Taiwan where an English-only policy was introduced through a questionnaire and interviews. The researcher administered a questionnaire to 279 students and interviewed six students. The questionnaire showed that 134 students (48%) agreed that it was challenging to respond in English though 238 (85%) students approved of the English-only policy. This study indicated that students experience difficulty in English-only classes in an EFL context even when the students were in favor of English-only policy.

Therefore, it will be important to explore how senior high school students perceive English classes conducted in English and how senior high school teachers conduct English classes reflecting or not students' perceptions under the policy of teaching English in English.

Research Questions

Though there is some research about senior high school teachers' perception toward the MEXT's policy of teaching English classes in English by interviewing teachers and conducting a questionnaire to teachers, there is little research to investigate senior high school students' perception toward the policy and to compare results of it with senior high school teachers' perception toward the policy and their classroom practice. Thus, in this study, how senior high school teachers perceive the policy, how they conduct English classes under the policy, how senior high school students perceive the policy, and how students' perception affect teachers' perception and classroom practice will be investigated.

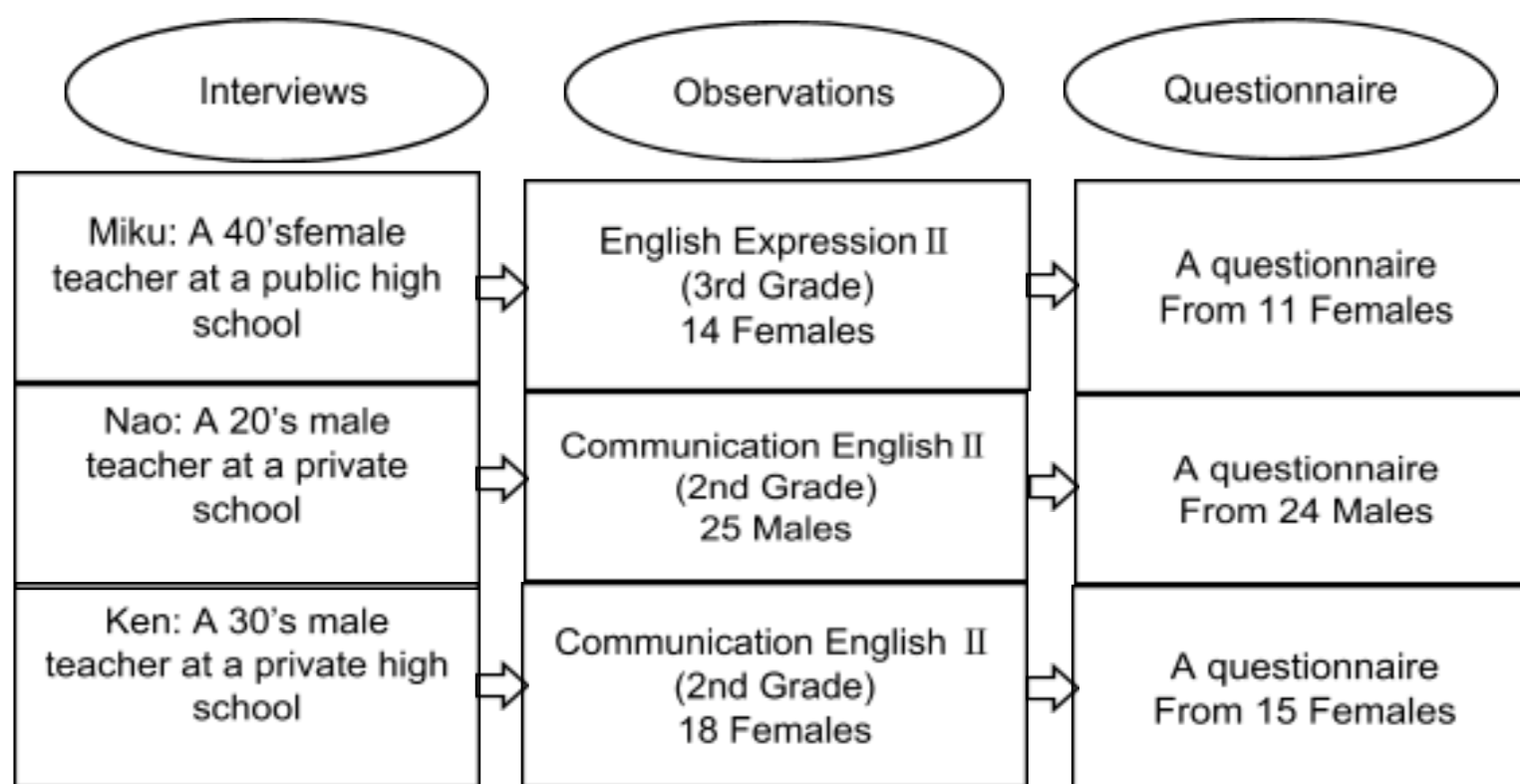
1. How do senior high school students perceive the policy of conducting English classes in English?
2. How do senior high school teachers perceive the policy of conducting English classes in English?
3. How do senior high school teachers conduct English classes under the policy of teaching English classes in English?
4. How does students' perception affect teachers' perception toward the policy and classroom practice?

Method

Research Design and Participants

Participants of the study were three senior high school teachers: Miku, Nao, and Ken (pseudonyms). Miku is a female teacher at a public school in her 40s, Nao is a male teacher at a private school in his 20s, and Ken is a male teacher at a private high school in his 30s. Figure 1 shows the research design of the study.

Figure 1. Research Design of the Study



Procedures

I conducted semi-structured interviews in 2015 to investigate senior high school teachers' perception toward the policy of teaching English classes in English and their classroom practice. The interviews were conducted at teachers' rooms or cafes which were chosen for the participants' convenience. The interviews took between one hour and two hours. After each interview, I recorded detailed descriptions of the interviews including when and where the interviews were conducted, and

what topics were discussed. I listened to the interviews recorded on an IC recorder several times, and then transcribed the interviews.

Following the interviews, classroom observations were conducted. On the day of the classroom observations, I first talked to the teachers about their students' English proficiency levels, the number of female and male students, and the textbook they were using. In addition, I obtained the materials that the teachers and students used in the class. For classroom observations, I used an adapted scheme from Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching observation scheme (COLT; Allen et al., 1984). The COLT was designed to capture features of communicative language teaching classes and has been applied in studies in Japanese senior high schools by Taguchi (2005) and Underwood (2013). The observation scheme is divided into two parts. Part A of the COLT is focused on five categories of classroom instructions: activity, participant organization, content, student modality, and materials; while Part B is designed to help researchers to investigate teacher–student and student–student discourse in classroom activities (Allen et al., 1984). The adapted scheme for this study is shown in Appendix A. During the observations, I video-recorded the classes and took notes about how much English and Japanese the teacher used, the activities, the time spent on each activity, participant organization, language form (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), language function/use (e.g., summarizing, explaining), the time spent on each language function/use, student modality (reading, speaking, listening, and writing), and the materials (e.g., textbooks, CDs, and teacher-made materials) using the adapted scheme.

A questionnaire survey was conducted several weeks after the classroom observations. The student questionnaire items include questions about whether (a) the classes they take from the teachers are conducted in English, (b) they can understand the classes conducted in English, (c) they think it is good for English classes to be conducted in English, (d) they speak English in class, (e) the teachers speak Japanese, and (f) they want their teachers to speak Japanese. Open-ended questions were also included so that the student respondents could write answers to questions such as when they cannot understand classes conducted in English, why they think English classes conducted in English are good or bad, when the teachers use Japanese in classes, and when they want the teachers to use Japanese. In order to ensure that the students understand the questions, they were written in Japanese. The original Japanese version of the student questionnaire is in Appendix B and the English translation version is in Appendix C.

Results

Miku's interview, observation, and her Students' Questionnaire

In Miku's interview, she indicated, "Basically, it's essential that teachers conduct English classes in English. If teachers don't use English, I think students don't use (English). It's also to make the atmosphere." About her classroom practice, she said, "About Communication English, although what I can do is different depending on students' grades, I've mostly done in English." She indicated that whether she teaches the first, the second, or the third grade students can affect her amount in classes, but she tries to teach English in English. However, she added that she had to change her teaching drastically for third-grade students to prepare for entrance exams in October.

The observation results show that her English utterance time was 10 min 24 s and the Japanese utterance time was 19 min 17 s in a 50 min 18 s lesson time. The ratio of English use was 35.04%, and that of Japanese use was 64.96% in her utterance time of 39 min 41 s. She used English in greetings, writing instruction, introducing next activities and tasks, and repeating words and sentences and used Japanese in explaining answers of listening, explaining words and grammar, and when answering questions from individual students while students were working on a writing task individually.

The following questionnaire results show that 9 out of 11 students think that it is very good that English classes are conducted in English and 2 out of 11 students think that it is good that English classes are conducted in English. For the question regarding teacher usage of Japanese, 2 out of 11 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese a lot, 5 out of 11 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese sometimes, and 3 out of 11 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese a little. As for the open question "When do you want your teacher to use Japanese?",

there were answers such as “the explanation in this class should be in Japanese”, “when the explanation [is] in English [it] is difficult”, “to explain grammar”, and “to point out grammatical mistakes.”

Nao's interview, observation, and his Students' Questionnaire

In the interview, Nao's positive opinion about the policy is expressed in his remark, “I feel English (should be taught) in English.” He also mentioned “I had wanted to put the classroom in the environment of English.” About English in classes, he expressed his opinion: “I think that it is natural that the proportion of English is larger than that of Japanese because it is an English lesson.” He had a positive view toward the policy; however, he said he uses Japanese flexibly when it is easier to be done in Japanese so that his students can understand well.

The observation results show that in a 50 min 17 s lesson time, his utterance time in English was 15 min 17 s and that in Japanese was 5 min and 31 s. The total time of his utterance was 20 min and 48 s and the ratio of English use was 73.48%, and that of Japanese use was 26.52%. He used English to instruct next activities and tasks, to practice pronunciation of words, to introduce contents of the textbook, and to affirm students' answers by saying “Okay”, and “That's right” while he used Japanese in explaining meanings of words and grammar.

The questionnaire results show that 5 out of 24 (33.3%) students think that it is very good that English classes are conducted in English and 10 out 24 students (66.6%) students think it is good that English classes are conducted in English. About the question regarding usage of Japanese by the teacher, 8 out of 24 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese a lot, 10 out of 24 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese sometimes, and 6 out of 24 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese a little. Regarding the open question “When do you want your teacher to use Japanese?”, there were answers such as “to comprehend reading passages,” “to understand structures of difficult sentences,” “when I can't understand after the teacher's explanation in English,” “to learn new grammar,” “to explain Japanese translation,” “to learn new words,” “when everyone doesn't understand,” and “to explain difficult sentences and words.”

Ken's interview, observation, and his Students' Questionnaire

About the policy, Ken said in the interview, “I do agree (with the policy). I had wanted to do that for a long time, so I agree. But it is difficult. For example, if I am in charge of the second grade students, they studied English in Japanese, I feel sorry for them. If we have to change, we have to change from the beginning. It will not change unless everyone does it (everyone teaches in English).” This implies that teaching English in English to his students who studied English in Japanese from other teachers is difficult. He also mentioned, “No [other] teacher teaches English in English. I do, in English”, which indicates that in one school, teachers' classroom practices are different in terms of language use in classrooms. However, about his Japanese use in his classroom, he thinks it is better to use Japanese if students' motivation may become low by teaching in English.

The observation results show that his utterance time in English is 13 min 56 s and his utterance time in Japanese is 34 s in the total of 40 mins of class time. The total time of his utterance was 14 min 30 s and the ratio of English use was 96.09%, and that of Japanese use was 3.91%. He used English in reviewing the previous class, instructing the next activities and tasks, practicing pronunciation of words, explaining meanings of words, and introducing the textbook. He did not use Japanese except when explaining the meanings of new words.

The questionnaire results show that 5 out of 15 students think that it is very good that English classes are conducted in English and 10 out 15 students think that it is good that English classes are conducted in English. About the question “Do you want your teacher to use Japanese?”, 3 out of 15 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese a lot, 5 out of 15 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese sometimes, 5 out of 15 students answered that they want the teacher to use Japanese a little, and 1 out of 15 students answered she did not want the teacher to use Japanese at all. No answer was provided from one student. Regarding the open question “When do you want your teacher to use Japanese?”, there were answers such as “to comprehend reading passages,” “to understand structures of difficult sentences,”

“when I can’t understand after the teacher’s explanation in English,” “to learn new grammar,” “to explain Japanese translation,” “to learn new words,” “when everyone doesn’t understand,” and “to explain difficult sentences and words.”

Discussion

My first research question was to investigate how senior high school teachers perceive the policy of teaching English classes in English. All three participants agreed with the policy favorably. One of the reasons why they were for the policy was to make an atmosphere to speak English. All of them said that they conduct English classes in English as much as possible. However, they said they had to change classroom practice focusing more on preparing for entrance examinations when their students become the third grade students. The past studies showed that senior high school teachers were concerned about preparing students for entrance examinations (Gorsuch, 2000; Nishino, 2012a; O’Donnell, 2005; Taguchi, 2005). In this study, it was also found that the teachers were required to change classroom practice focusing more on preparing for entrance examinations. Two of them mentioned that they use Japanese taking students’ English proficiency and understanding into consideration. Regarding communicative language teaching, students’ low English proficiency prevented senior high school teachers from conducting communicative language teaching (Sato and Kleinsasser, 2004). This study also showed that students’ English proficiency affect how senior high school teachers conduct English classes as well as their language use in the classroom.

My second research question was to explore how senior high school teachers conduct English classes under the policy of teaching English classes in English. The ratio of English utterance was higher than that of Japanese utterance in Nao’s talking time and Ken’s talking time respectively. However, the ratio of Japanese utterance time was higher than that of English in Miku’s talking time. This may be related to the grade she was teaching. She was teaching the third grade class and as she mentioned in her interview, she has to change her classroom practice drastically to help them prepare for entrance examinations when they become third grade students. This may indicate why she used Japanese more than English although she said that she uses English in her classes. Miku and Nao used Japanese to introduce activities, to explain words and grammar, and to practice vocabulary words. Though Ken used little Japanese in the observation of his class, he used Japanese for explaining the meanings of new words.

My third research question was to investigate how senior high school students perceive the policy of conducting English classes in English. Most of the students in the three different classes think that it is very good or good that English classes are conducted in English. However, many of them think that they want their teacher to use Japanese to some extent. This reflects Sad and Qadermazi’s (2015) finding that the majority of the students agreed with the use of L1 in the classroom. Also, in Wei’s (2013) study, nearly half of the students agreed that it was challenging to respond in English though most of the students approved of the English-only policy. Although the context is different, the present study also showed students expect their teachers to use Japanese to some degree even though they think that it is good for English classes to be conducted in English. In Wei’s study, one student indicated that using English is challenging because it is difficult to understand some grammatical constructions when the teacher teaches them in English. It was found that in this study, there were specific occasions when they want their teachers to use Japanese such as when they learn grammar, when English explanations are difficult to understand, when they comprehend reading passages, when they need to understand difficult vocabulary and sentence patterns, as well as when they learn new words. In addition, even though the students were learning in the three different schools by the three different teachers, when they want their teachers to explain in Japanese was similar. This implies that senior high school teachers may need to understand when their students expect them to use Japanese for effective learning.

My last research question was to explore how students’ perception toward classes conducted in English affect teachers’ perception toward the policy and classroom practice. It was found that many of the students in this study from different learning contexts think that they would like their teachers to use some Japanese. The students’ expectation to the teachers’ use of Japanese was reflected in the two teachers’ classroom practice in the observations. Even though the one teacher used little Japanese in the observation, he said he used Japanese taking students’ English proficiency into consideration. Student responses to when they want their teachers to use Japanese were similar to when the teachers used Japanese in the

observations such as when the students learned grammar and vocabulary. These results indicate that the teachers conduct English classes taking the students' need and expectation into consideration.

Conclusion

Though the policy of English classes in English was introduced in the 2009 Course of Study, the policy has not been fully implemented. However, the same policy is presented in the new Course of Study, which was issued in 2018 and will be enacted in 2022. As one of the reasons why the policy has not been fully realized, senior high school teachers' consideration of students' English proficiency and expectation to English classes has been indicated. Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand students' perception toward English classes in English. In fact, this study shows that the students have their own clear opinions and expectation toward their teachers' use of English and Japanese. Thus, it is also important for teachers to conduct English classes while considering when to use English and Japanese for their students' better understanding during English classes. In the 2009 Course of Study (MEXT), it is stated that the judicious use of Japanese was allowed and Japanese can be used to explain grammar as long as language activities are the center of classes. However, senior high school teachers may think that they have to use English all the time under the policy or they are not sure when they can use Japanese effectively. For students' effective learning, regarding judicious use of Japanese, having a guideline or a suggestion about when Japanese should be used in English classroom may need to be provided based on empirical research results.

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Note from the author:

This is based on the following paper written in Japanese, but I revised it adding observation results and translating it from Japanese to English.

Saito, Y. (2017). 「英語の授業は英語で」に関する高校教師の認知調査と授業実践-High school teachers' cognition of the policy of "English Classes in English," and their classroom practice. *The Language Teacher* 41(1), 3-8.

Appendix A

Teacher's name	Class	Grade	Number of Students (F/ M/ T)	Date & Period		Textbook	
Activity	Time	Teacher's use of English or Japanese		Teacher's use of English or Japanese		Participants' organization TC CL PA GR	Content Form Vo Pr Gr
		English Time	Japanese Time	English Time	Japane e Time		
Content Function/ Use Summarizing Explaining			Material textbooks, CDs, teacher-made materials			Other remarks and comments	

Note. TC = Teacher centered; CL = Class; PA = Pair Work; GR = Group Work; Vo = Vocabulary; Pr = Pronunciation; Gr = Grammar.

Classroom Observation Scheme

Appendix B

STUDENT PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT ENGLISH USE IN ENGLISH CLASSES

(JAPANESE VERSION)

英語の授業における英語使用に関する高校生の認識調査

私は、テンプル大学博士課程で応用言語学を学んでいます齋藤裕紀恵と申します。私は現在、高等学校の英語の授業で先生や生徒が英語を使うことにどのように感じて、また授業がどのように実践されているかについての調査を行っています。このアンケートは英語のクラスで授業がどのように行われているかについてのアンケートです。このアンケート結果はあくまでも調査と研究の一環でみなさんのプライバシーが表に出ることはありません。また皆さんの成績に影響を与えることは一切ありません。選択肢が与えられている場合はチェックを、記述欄には記述をお願いいたします。

1. 所属学科 () 学年 ()
2. 性別 男 / 女
3. 英検取得級 ()
4. 現在、この授業は英語でおこなわれていますか。
 - ほぼ英語で行われている
 - 半分以上英語で行われている
 - 半分未満英語で行われている
 - 英語で行われることはほとんどない
5. 英語でこの授業が行われる際に授業を理解することができますか。
 - ほぼ理解できる
 - 半分以上理解できる
 - 半分未満理解できる
 - ほとんど理解できない
6. どんな時に英語で行われる授業を理解できませんか。
7. 英語の授業がほとんど英語で行われるのはいいことだと思いますか。
 - 大変いいことだと思う
 - いいことだと思う
 - あまりいいことだと思わない
 - 全くいいことだと思わない
8. 左記で「大変いいことだと思う」、「いいことだと思う」、「あまりいいことだと思わない」、「全くいいことだと思わない」を選んだ理由を記入してください。
9. あなたは英語で行われる英語の授業にて英語で話していますか。
 - ほとんど英語で話している
 - 半分以上英語で話している
 - 半分未満英語で話している
 - 全く話していない
10. 上記で「あまり話していない」または「全く話していない」を選んだ人はなぜか理由を記入して
11. 先生はこの授業で日本語を話しますか。
 - ほとんど日本語で話す
 - 半分以上日本語で話す
 - 半分未満日本語で話す
 - ほとんど日本語を話さない
12. 先生はこの授業で日本語を使う場合は、どのような時に日本語を使用していますか。具体例を記入してください。
13. あなたは先生に英語の授業で先生に日本語を使って欲しいですか。
 - 非常に使って欲しい
 - 時々使って欲しい
 - 少々使って欲しい
 - 全く使わないで欲しい
14. 日本語を使って欲しい場合はどんな時に日本語を使って欲しいですか。
質問項目は以上になります。アンケートご協力ありがとうございました。

Appendix C

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT ENGLISH USE IN ENGLISH CLASSES (SPQEE)
(ENGLISH VERSION)

