

High School Teachers' Cognition towards the Policy of English Classes in English

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Under the new Course of Study by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), English classes are to be conducted in English in order to change classes into real communication scenes. How teachers perceive the policy of English classes in English and conduct English classes can be affected by various factors such as their educational background, their experience of professional coursework, peer teachers' classroom practices, and their students' English proficiency. Adapting Borg's framework of language teachers (2006), one year after the implementation of the new program, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with three high school teachers to investigate what factors affect high school teachers' cognition toward the policy of English classes in English and their classroom practice, and how they perceive the policy and conduct English classes. The result of the interviews shows that they hold positive cognition toward the policy and conduct English classes in English.

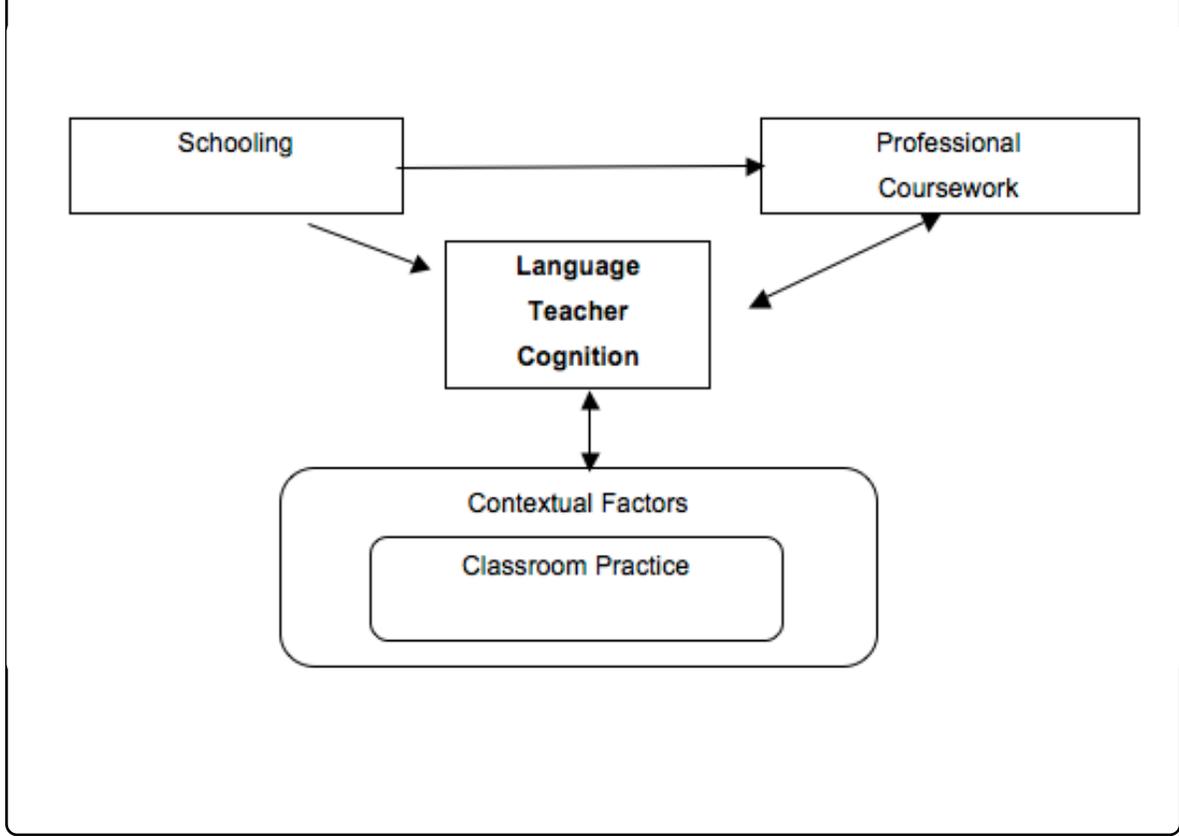
文部科学省の新学習指導要領のもとで、英語のクラスは、教室を実際のコミュニケーションシーンに変えるため、英語で行われるべきであると明記されている。教師が英語のクラスを英語で行うという政策をどのように認識して、どのように英語の授業を実施しているかは、彼らの教育的背景、専門的コースワークの経験、同僚の教師の英語の授業実践、学生の英語能力など様々な要因によって影響を受けうる。Borg(2006)の言語教師の枠組みを応用し、研究者は新学習指導要領実施後1年後の2014年に、どのような要因が英語のクラスを英語で行う政策に対して高校教師の認知に影響を与えるか、政策に対する認知、そして教室での実践に関して、3人の高校の先生にインタビューを行った。結果、様々な要因による影響を受けながらも3人の高校教師は、英語は英語での政策に対して前向きな認識持ち、かつ英語で英語の授業を行っていることがわかった。

To reflect the rapid pace of globalization, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (hereafter MEXT) has been changing its language policy dramatically. The new Course of Study was issued in 2009 and has been implemented since 2012 (MEXT, 2009) and it is a drastic change after communicative language teaching (hereafter CLT) was introduced in 1989 (MEXT, 1989). One big change in the new Course of Study is “When taking into the consideration the characteristics of each English subject, classes, in principle, should be conducted in English in order to enhance the opportunities for students to be exposed to English, transforming classes into real communication scenes” (MEXT, 2009, p. 7) Whether the new Course of Study and the policy of teaching English classes in English will lead to success or not largely depends on high school teachers who conduct English classes in classrooms. In this study, by adapting Borg's framework (2006), factors affecting their cognition toward the policy, high school teachers' cognition, and their classroom practice are investigated.

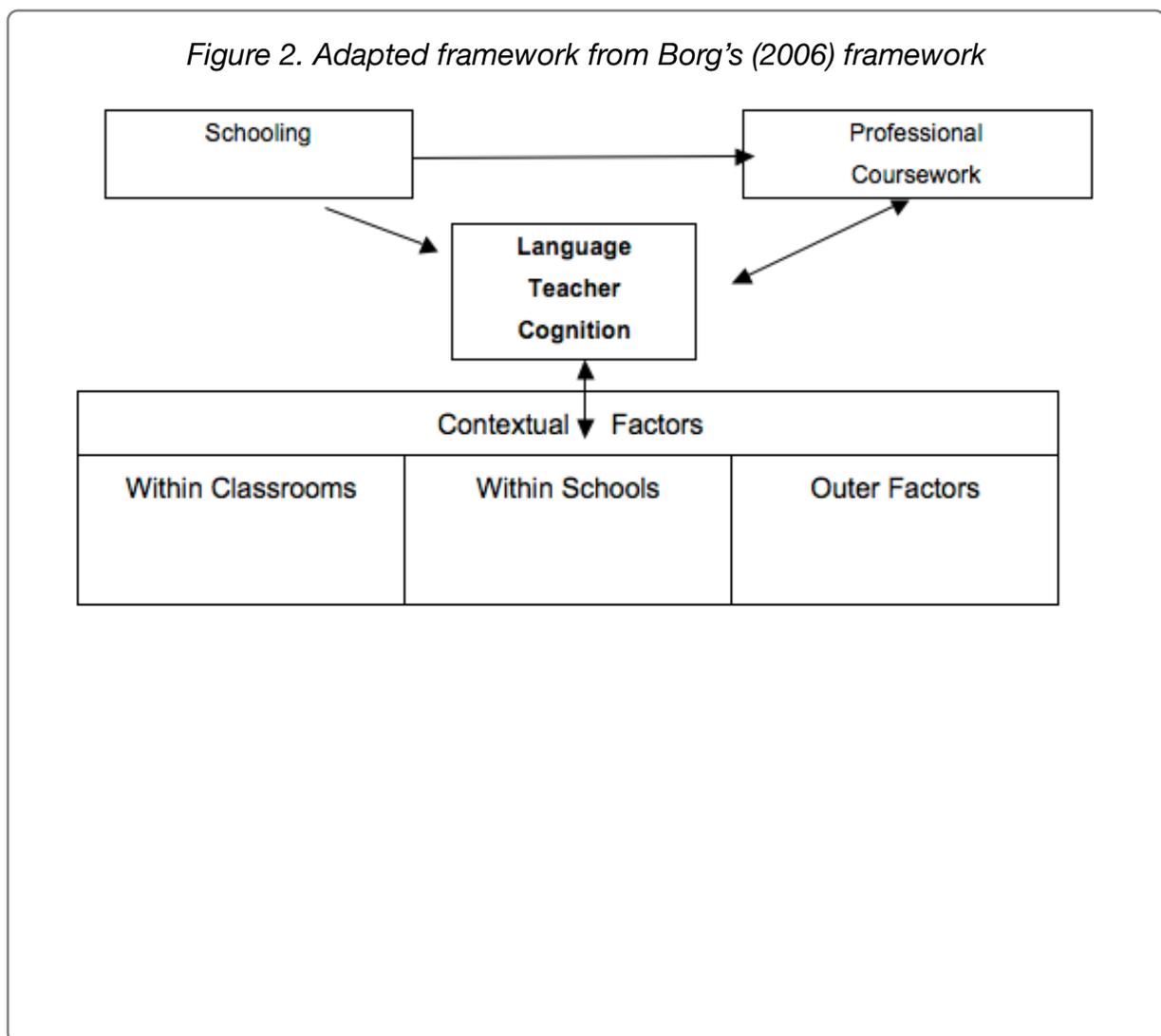
Borg's Language Teachers' Framework and the Adaptation of the Framework

Borg defined teacher cognition as “what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom” (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Borg's (2006) conceptualized framework of language teacher cognition shown in Figure 1 clearly illustrates the complexity of teachers' cognition and also the factors which interact with one another and affect their cognition and classroom practices. The central factor in the framework is Teachers' Cognition. Schooling refers to the personal histories of learning a language that define teachers' early cognition. Professional coursework includes pre-and in-service teacher training. Contextual factors are factors that can have an influence on practice by modifying cognition directly.

Figure 1. Elements and process in language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006, p.283)



In Borg's framework, contextual factors are considered as one broad category. However, I assume that different types of contextual factors will need to be investigated to understand how different factors within contextual factors can influence teachers' cognition and classroom practices. These include inner factors within classes such as students' proficiency of English, inner factors within schools such as schools' English education policies and other peer teachers' cognition and their classroom practice, and outer factors such as the changes in the Course of Study. Thus, in this paper, I have added the three sub-categorizations. Figure 2 shows the adapted framework from Borg's framework (2006).



High School Teachers' Cognition toward CLT and Factors Affecting their Cognition

High school teachers' cognition toward CLT can be affected by various factors. Nishino (2008) claimed that their lack of learning experience of CLT made it difficult for high school teachers to implement CLT. Another reason for the difficulty in implementing CLT is that English language teachers have few opportunities to receive training in their teaching context (Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Nishino, 2012a).

Furthermore, teachers' cognition and their classroom practices can be affected by within-classroom factors such as students' English proficiency as in Nishimuro and Borg's study (2013) and the number of classes in each class as in Nishino's (2008, 2011) study. Peer teachers might also have an influence on teachers' cognition and their classroom practices. A case study by Nishino (2012b) of one high school teacher showed that the teacher learned from other teachers by talking to them, observing their lessons, and sharing their activities.

Outer factors such as the pressure to let students prepare for entrance examinations were considered to be a hindrance for CLT. Yakudoku has been a preferred method to help students pass competitive university examinations by focusing on translation skills and grammatical knowledge (Gorsuch, 2000; O'Donnell, 2005; Nishino, 2012a). Teachers' indifference to the Course of Study itself (Nishino, 2008; Taira, 2012) and inadequate support from the MEXT could be other reasons for insufficient implementation of CLT (Nishino, 2008).

High School Teachers' Cognition toward the new Course of Study

Regarding the new policy, non-native English teachers held more negative cognition toward the policy of English classes than native English teachers in Glasgow's (2012) questionnaire-based study. This may reflect non-native teachers' lack of confidence in conducting English classes in English and a lack of experience of teaching English in English. Nagamine (2013), who investigated how high school teachers perceive the new language policy, found that the participants expressed the pressures and anxieties regarding their teaching practices. Students' low proficiency and students' expectation toward the study for entrance examinations influenced teachers' use of L1 (Suzuki & Rogers, 2014). The difference in the degrees of teachers' understanding the policy of teaching English in English can be another issue (Glasgow, 2014). Insufficient resources such as time and training might hinder the adoption of the curriculum (Underwood, 2012)

Research Questions

Though there is some research about high school teachers' cognition about CLT and high school teachers' cognition toward the new Course of Study before its implementation, there is little research on high school teachers' cognition regarding the new policy of English classes in English following the implementation of the new Course of Study. Thus, in this study, what factors affect high school teachers' cognition toward the policy of English classes in English, how high school teachers perceive the new policy, and how they conduct English classes following the implementation of the new Course of Study are investigated by adapting Borg's (2006) framework.

1. What factors affect high school teachers' cognition toward the policy of English classes in English and their classroom practice?

2. How do high school teachers perceive the policy of conducting English classes in English and how do they conduct English classes in English?

Name	Gender	Age	Years of teaching experience in high school	Qualification	School Type
Keiko	Female	20s	6 years	BA in English Literature	Private
Yuki	Female	50s	9 years	MA in TESOL	Private
Miku	Female	30s	15 years	MA in TESOL	Public

Method

Participants

All of the three participants were in charge of first grade students' classes in the first academic year of the new Course of Study from April 2013 to March 2014. I had met Yuki and Miku when we studied together for Master of Arts degrees in TESOL at a graduate school. Keiko was introduced to me by another teacher I know from the same graduate school. (See Table 1). Two of them work for private high schools in Tokyo and one of them works for a public school in Gunma.

Table 1: Profile of the Three Participants (N=3)

I employed semi-structured interviews to explore factors affecting high school teachers' cognition toward the policy of English classes in English, their cognition and classroom practice. For this study, I created an interview protocol based on the adapted framework from Borg's (2006) framework and included questions reflecting each factor therein (Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted at 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 in an IC recorder several times, and then transcribed the interviews. The transcribed data was translated from Japanese to English. The transcribed data was analyzed in terms of the factors in the adapted framework from the Borg's (2006) framework.

Findings

Educational Background

All of the participants in this study had experienced Yakudoku style teaching when they were junior high and high school students and they did not learn English through CLT. At university, Yuki became interested in communicating in English and took classes conducted in English while Keiko and Miku felt unconfident when they took classes conducted in English because both of them felt inferior to other classmates who had experience of living abroad.

On graduating from university, Miku became an English teacher. After three years, she went to the United States to get a TEFL certificate and spent one year in California. She mentioned that this learning experience influenced her teaching: "All of the classes including English grammar class were conducted in English and I learned about English education in English."

After coming back to Japan and teaching for three years, Miku hoped to learn more about English education, so she decided to take a TESOL course at the Japan campus of an American graduate school. Yuki also attended the same TESOL course as Miku and both obtained a MA in TESOL. Both said that the TESOL course had been valuable.

Studying on the TEFL course for Miku and the TESOL course for Miku and Yuki made them feel confident in their English. Both of them mentioned that their experiences of taking TEFL and TESOL made them favor conducting English classes in English even before the introduction of the new Course of Study.

Their Professional Coursework

As for teacher training courses at Japanese universities, all of the participants said they did not learn much from the courses. When asked about teaching practicums at high schools, all of them responded that all of the classes that they had observed were *yakudoku* style teaching.

In the following quote, Keiko explained that she was not confident in her English proficiency and classroom management in English before the implementation of the new Course of Study:

"I do not have much experience of studying abroad or experience of speaking English for fifty minutes, and do not know how to construct English lessons, and I wondered if I could conduct lessons as I had prepared them. I felt anxious about my English proficiency."

Her initial concern about teaching English classes in English has been gradually changed by observing other teachers' classes, and she described this revelations as follows:

"Seeing other teachers working hard in classes, seeing some failures in their classes, and seeing students not responding to teachers, I thought I was not the only one, by which I was encouraged."

Observing other teachers' classes helped her to understand when and how to use Japanese. Now she opts to use Japanese to explain English grammar.

Inner factors within classrooms

Students' English proficiency also has an influence on classroom practice. Yuki agreed with the policy of English classes in English. Even though Yuki has been using English, she described how she uses Japanese sometimes while taking her students' English proficiency into consideration:

"I thought if I spoke English to the first grade students all the time, they would not be able to understand. I sometimes use Japanese, but if they have come to understand English, I try to convey what I can do in English."

Students' responses to a new way of teaching have affected Keiko's cognition and classroom practice, too. She said, "When I added some activities in English, they went well. And this successful experience has changed my teaching style."

Prior to the new Course of Study, her teaching focused on grammar and *Yakudoku*. After the implementation, she changed her way of teaching dramatically by mainly using English in her classes. Though she was not confident in classroom management in English at first, her students' positive response toward her teaching has made her confident in her classroom practice.

Inner factors within schools

Teachers' cognition toward the policy of English classes in English can be affected by other peer teachers. Miku was able to start working in a team with two other teachers who have experience of studying abroad. She described these meetings and talks with her colleagues about how they teach their classes:

"Our teaching styles happen to be the same. We have all experienced studying abroad and have the same aims in English education. We can confirm what our aims are and take turns to make classroom activities and lesson plans and have the same lesson plans."

Keiko mentioned that there is one peer teacher who plans and implements study meetings where teachers can share classroom experiences and listen to lectures given by teachers from other schools. She repeatedly mentioned the name of the peer teacher and the good influence of the teacher on her.

Interestingly, peers have had positive effects on Keiko not only in her classroom practice but also in her English proficiency. She said, "I sit next to a native English teacher and we teach classes together. We do team teaching, which forced me to speak English."

She mentioned that though she was not confident in her English and though she did not have enough time to improve her speaking outside school, conducting classes in English and talking with her team teacher has improved her speaking ability.

Outer factors

All of them view the new Course of Study and the policy of English classes in English favorably though Keiko was reluctant to follow the policy before its implementation. However, Keiko's cognition toward the policy has changed dramatically over one year, and she even hopes that the Course of Study will become a strong outer force on teachers who are reluctant to follow the new Course of Study. Keiko described this influence as follows:

"If all of the teachers experience [teaching] the first grade students, I think our school will change drastically. I think everyone says they do not want to do it, but I think they should."

This indicates that the new Course of Study has become a strong outer force which affects teachers' cognition and classroom practice.

Discussion

My first question was to investigate what factors affect teachers' cognition toward the policy of English classes in English and their classroom practice. The participants' schooling experience affected their cognition and classroom practice both negatively and positively. Keiko's initial lack of confidence derived from her school experience as a junior high and high school student who was mainly taught English grammar and translation. Some high school teachers find it difficult to implement CLT because their lack of experience of learning English through CLT (Nishino, 2008). Yuki's and Miku's positive attitude toward using English in their classes has been affected by their experience of taking classes conducted in English in their graduate courses: TEFL and TESOL in Miku's case and TESOL in Yuki's case. Observing other teachers' classes in the case of Keiko which positively affected their cognition and classroom practice. Initially, Keiko did not feel confident in conducting English classes under the new Course of Study, but after observing aspects of other teachers' classes that did not go well, it made her think that she was not the only one experiencing this. Teachers can learn from other teachers through observing their lessons and sharing activities as in Nishino's case study (2012b). Through the interviews, the importance of study meetings and observation of other teachers' classes was highlighted in terms of the teachers' cognition and classroom practice. Yuki has increased the amount of English use in classes whilst taking her students' comprehension levels into consideration. Keiko code-switches from English to Japanese when she explains grammar. Teachers' preference for Japanese in grammar instruction and their belief that it leads to students' better understanding of grammar was also noted by Nishimuro and Borg (2013). Miku said that she code-switches when she disciplines her students. All of them negotiate their

use of Japanese with students' English proficiency and responses. Students' English proficiency and responses toward English classes conducted in English are important factors which affect teachers' classroom practice.

My second research question was to investigate teachers' cognition toward the policy of English classes in English and their classroom practice. In previous studies by Glasgow (2012, 2014), and Suzuki and Rogers (2014), teachers tended to have negative attitudes towards conducting English classes in English. However, in this study, all of them have looked upon the new Course of Study favorably although Keiko was not positive before its implementation. The initial difference in their cognition was mainly derived from their educational backgrounds and appeared to result from whether they had experienced graduate study such as TEFL or TESOL or not. Keiko overcame her initial reluctance to teach English classes in English, and she dramatically changed her teaching style and started teaching English classes in English, and including speaking activities. Teachers tend to lack in confidence in teaching English in English (Suzuki & Roger, 2014), but Keiko, nevertheless, made an effort to follow the policy of English classes in English because she believed the policy would enable students to acquire communicative skills in English. All of the teachers in this study tried to conduct English classes in English as much as possible, but they sometimes incorporated Japanese into lessons when explaining grammar as in Keiko's case, or when they felt it was necessary for students' comprehension as in Yuki's case, or when disciplining students as in Miku's case.

Conclusion

Adapting Borg's (2006) framework of language teachers' cognitions by dividing contextual factors into inner factors within classes, inner factors within schools, and outer factors, it was found that students' English proficiency and responses, the presence of supporting peers, and the new policy itself under the new Course of Study as well as their educational and professional experience were influential factors to affect their cognition and classroom practice. Whereas previous studies (Glasgow, 2012, 2014, Underwood, 2012, Nagamine, 2013, Suzuki and Rogers, 2014) were conducted before the implementation of the new Course of Study, the result of this study one year after the implementation of the new Course of Study was able to capture how the teachers' cognition and classroom practice were influenced and formed by those factors which interact with one another. To make the policy of English classes under the new Course of Study be successfully implemented, those influential factors need to be taken into consideration. For more detailed analysis of complex features of teachers' cognition toward the policy of conducting English classes in English, quantitative analysis of teachers' cognition to the policy of English classes in English using questionnaires as well as follow up interviews and classroom observations of real classrooms will be expected.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

A. Demographic Questions

1. Could you tell me about your age group?
2. Would you let me know about your educational background?
3. Can you tell me about your teaching experience?
4. Can you tell me about any experience of living abroad you have?
5. Do you work at a private high school or a public school?
6. Can you tell me about what classes you are teaching to the first grade students?

B. Schooling

1. How was English taught when you were at junior high school, high school, and university?
2. If you have any experience of learning English outside a junior high school, high school, and a university, can you tell me how English was taught?
3. What experience have you had of content classes taught in English?
4. If you have studied abroad, can you tell me about that?

C. Professional Coursework and Training

1. What did you learn about teaching English in your teacher training course in college or graduate school?
2. How was English taught in the school where you did your teaching practicum?
3. What training or courses have you taken since you started teaching?
4. Before the implementation of the new Course of Study, did you attend any orientation or study meetings? If so, can you tell me about these meetings?
5. Did you join in any study groups related to the new Course of Study on your own accord before and after the guideline change?
6. After the implementation of the new Course of Study, were there orientations or study meetings? If so, can you tell me about these meetings?
7. One year has passed since the new Course of Study was implemented. Do you understand the changes in the new Course of Study?
8. Would you let me know if there were trainings to teach English in English?

D. Contextual Factors

1. How has English been taught at your school in the past five years?
2. How are your colleagues responding to the new Course of Study?
4. What do you think students want to learn in English classes?
5. Have students' responses in lessons changed since the implementation of the new Course of Study?
6. How do your school's administrators perceive the new Course of Study?

E. Current Teacher Cognition and Classroom Practice

1. Do you agree or disagree with policies in the new Course of Study?
2. Have you changed the contents and/or teaching style since the implementation of the new Course of Study?
3. According to the new Course of Study, English classes are to be conducted in English to get students exposed to English and to make classes into a real communication setting. What is your understanding of this?
4. What do you think of the policy of conducting English classes in English introduced by MEXT?
5. Do you teach English classes in English?