RESEARCH ARTICLES

Do Education Policies Change Teacher Beliefs? The Impact of 30 Years of CLT in Japan

Steven Lim
Meikai University, Japan

For more than 30 years communicative language teaching (CLT) has been promoted by the Japanese government through its curriculum guidelines. Yet the postponement of the implementation of the four-skills test as part of the university entrance examinations process means that communicative English remains an under-represented aspect of Japan's English education system. This study examined teachers' level of approval of CLT activities and the factors that influence their implementation through a questionnaire responded to by 21 Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) and 29 assistant language teachers (ALTs) at junior high schools. The results indicated that while teachers approve of CLT activities they tend to rely on the audio-lingual method and yakudoku, a translation-based method. The factors influencing teachers' classroom practice vary between JTEs and ALTs, with JTEs reporting entrance examinations and students' expectations as highly influential, whereas ALTs were concerned with the students' speaking ability and the class size. By comparing these results to Gorsuch's (2001) study it can be concluded that though CLT activities are viewed more favorably than 20 years ago, there are a number of factors still limiting their implementation. This suggests that government mandates alone are insufficient to change the culture of a country's education system.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, grammar-translation, curriculum, education policy, teacher beliefs, MEXT

The promotion of communicative language teaching (CLT) in Japan by MEXT (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) can be traced back to the 1989 Course of Study in which it was stated that English should be taught for the purpose of communication (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). The 1999 iteration of the Course of Study reinforced this focus on communication by designating the primary aim of foreign language education as developing English for communicative purposes (Nishino, 2008). MEXT updates its guidelines for school curricula, the Course of Study, approximately every 10 years and includes aspirational goals for how English should be taught and for what purpose. The 2003 Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities stated that through the teaching of basic and practical language the entire Japanese population would be able to have daily conversations in English (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008) and that English classes should be taught in English (Tahira, 2012). The 2008 Course of Study Guidelines increased the hours that English was taught to allow teachers more time to use communicative activities, stressing that grammar instruction should be in support of communication rather than separate from it (Tahira, 2012). But to what extent have MEXT's policies transferred to the classroom?

Using the results of a questionnaire responded to by 876 high school teachers,

Gorsuch (2001) concluded that teachers moderately approved of CLT activities, but certain issues impeded their implementation in the classroom. Class sizes and the teachers' perception of their students' English-speaking ability were the most influential factors, followed by entrance examinations. Older teachers favored *yakudoku*, a pedagogical approach similar to the grammar translation method, and they were a strong influence on their younger colleagues. The high school teachers also approved of activities based on the audio-lingual method (ALM) in which students memorized speech or dialogs and practiced through repeated pattern drills. Pre-service training and CLT teacher-training workshops organized by local boards of education were shown to be uninfluential. One positive factor in the study was the influence of ALTs: teachers who worked with an ALT approved of CLT more strongly than those who did not.

In order to judge whether MEXT's policies have been successful, we need to reexamine teachers' attitudes in respect to CLT activities. It is also important to investigate the extent to which the influence of yakudoku, teacher training, entrance examinations, the classroom environment, and ALTs have changed. By investigating teachers' opinions regarding CLT and the factors that influence their classroom practices, the impact of MEXT's policies on teacher beliefs can be examined.

Teacher Beliefs

Research on teacher beliefs has shown the importance of not only observable actions but also the cognitive processes that teachers go through in determining their actions in the classroom (Fang, 1996). Studies into Japanese teachers' opinions regarding CLT have revealed that while Japanese teachers of English (JTE) tended to approve of CLT activities, they often did not employ them in their classes (Cook, 2012). In interviews with JTEs, Cook found that unfamiliarity with CLT, a dependence on the grammar-translation method of teaching, a focus on university entrance examinations, and classroom environment concerns were all factors that contributed to the discrepancy between teachers' approval of CLT and the failure to use it in their lessons. Nishimuro and Borg (2013) noted that due to the restrictions of the environment in which they operate, teaching practices do not necessarily reflect teacher beliefs and we cannot understand the instructional decisions teachers make without knowing the context under which they work.

Yakudoku

Yakudoku was portrayed by Nishino and Watanabe (2008) as a form of the grammar-translation method in which teachers give explanations of grammatical forms in Japanese. The primary opportunity the students have to speak is in the form of repetition drills. In yakudoku classes, students are often more focused on the Japanese translation of the English text than on the English itself (Gorsuch, 1998). In a class Gorsuch observed, students were not encouraged to produce their own English as the teacher believed it would be too challenging for them. Gorsuch (2001) saw yakudoku as an impediment to bringing about a change in EFL education in Japan.

Despite MEXT's promotion of CLT, Gorsuch (1998) found that yakudoku was used by most high school teachers. Some teachers interviewed by Nishimuro and Borg (2013) justified their emphasis on grammar instruction as a necessary foundation for accurate and fluent communication. Other teachers did not believe that yakudoku was an effective method of teaching but reasoned that grammar-translation was more suitable for the low English proficiency of their students (Cook, 2012). Teachers often used Japanese almost exclusively in instructions and explanations in order not to confuse and alienate lower-proficiency students (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013).

Gorsuch's (2001) study found that younger teachers were more positive about CLT activities than older ones. Because younger teachers had gone through a more CLT-focused education system as students, this could explain their stronger approval of CLT activities. Nishimuro and Borg (2013) suggested that teachers' own English learning experiences tend to inform the teachers' pedagogies more so than secondary language acquisition theories or methodology do.

Teacher Training

Despite promoting CLT, few changes have been made to teacher training courses (Otani, 2013). Tahira (2012) suggested that as CLT is an approach rather than a method there was ambiguity as to what CLT was. Although objectives were provided in the 2008 Course of Study, MEXT offered no specific definition of CLT, leaving it open to interpretation (Otani, 2013). With little direction regarding CLT, JTEs might feel they only have sufficient training to follow the yakudoku method (Cook, 2012). Otani (2013) recommended teacher training be conducted in English as it was difficult for teachers to use a communicative approach if they themselves had not experienced it. Cook and Gulliver (2014) also noted university students aiming to become language teachers tended to major in English literature or linguistics, and that those courses were taught primarily in Japanese.

Gorsuch (2001) posited that pre-service teacher education programs were inadequate in bridging the gap between theory and practice. She portrayed in-service education programs as similarly lacking, being provided sporadically, and for too short a period. Though the participants in Nishino's (2008) study were knowledgeable about CLT, few had learned of it through the Course of Study, and none had learned of it through workshops held by local boards of education. That the implementation of CLT into the Japanese education system has not been entirely successful is due in part to the insufficient amount of training provided to in-service teachers (Steele & Zhang, 2016). Even teachers with the relevant training and a desire to use CLT were hesitant to do so because of social and contextual factors in their school environment (Underwood, 2012). This was confirmed by Kurihara and Samimy's (2007) study in which they interviewed JTEs who had participated in a MEXT sponsored overseas training program. The JTEs claimed that while the experience had emphasized the importance of using English communicatively, large class sizes, preparation for entrance exams and the need to keep pace with the other teachers in the school had hampered their efforts to implement what they had learned.

Entrance Exams

Kikuchi and Browne (2009) identified the pressure of preparing students for the entrance examinations as causing teachers to abandon the communicative goals of the Course of Study. While junior high school teachers focused on preparing their students for high school entrance examinations, most believed they also needed to prepare them for university entrance examinations (Sakui, 2004). Though teachers justified their heavy focus on translation by claiming that it was the best method of preparing for university entrance exams, more than 20 years ago Gorsuch (1998) showed that the majority of university entrance exams did not contain translation questions. Underwood (2012) found that translation questions were either absent from or very limited in many prestigious universities' entrance examinations, and discrete-point knowledge of grammar was similarly deemphasized. Underwood suggested teachers who claimed that university entrance examinations were central to their teaching practices should be provided with more information regarding the current make-up of said examinations. While teachers might be willing to set aside their own beliefs regarding education to

effectively prepare a student for an examination, their methods may not reflect the demands of the test (Underwood, 2010).

To ensure the more widespread implementation of CLT, Gorsuch (2001) suggested that university entrance examinations should contain questions that tested candidates' communicative ability. In response, teachers would likely utilize more communicative activities to reflect the contents of the high-stakes examinations, a phenomenon known as the washback effect (Saito, 2019). Cook (2012) urged universities to alter their entrance examinations to make them more compatible with the goals of MEXT and proposed that a change in those exams would lead to an adjustment in classroom practices.

In response to such concerns, MEXT's proposal of the four-skills tests, in which speaking would become a part of the university entrance examinations, was a shift towards the curriculum being better represented by the manner of assessment (Allen, 2020). However, the proposal was postponed after being met with resistance due to concerns over its implementation. Allen observed that the potential use of 23 different tests administered by private companies which differed in terms of purpose and target participant was problematic. For the educational system to function correctly, the curriculum, the delivery of the curriculum, and the assessment of the curriculum must work in harmony (Allen, 2020).

Classroom Environment

Gorsuch (2001) noted that because classes often contained around 40 students, teachers were concerned about losing control. CLT activities were considered challenging due to the need to rearrange the classroom to allow the students to interact with each other, an issue exacerbated by the number of students (Sakui, 2007). Teachers also worried that individual students' interpersonal issues would be aggravated by CLT activities, and that English ability gaps between students would be exposed, leading to potential embarrassment for lower-proficiency learners (Cook, 2012). For those students, the cognitive demands of understanding the instructions and the purpose of the activities might be as much of a concern as the English used in the activities themselves (Sakui, 2007). When they struggle to understand instructions given in the L2, students prefer the judicious use of their L1 to facilitate communication in the classroom (Clancy, 2018). Grammar-translation English teaching was seen by some teachers as providing a greater ability to manage students (Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004). Sakui (2007) noted that even teachers who believed in the educational benefits of CLT instruction refrained from these activities, choosing to teach grammar instead to avoid potential loss of control of the class.

Average class sizes in Japanese secondary schools have decreased slightly since Gorsuch's (2001) study, but remain above 32 (OECD, 2020). However, since 2011, English has been a compulsory subject in elementary school in Grades 5 and 6. Until reforms in 2020, the curriculum focused purely on oral communication in the form of listening and speaking tasks (A. Nemoto, 2018). As such, students are now likely to be more capable of communicating in English and familiar with CLT activities than the secondary school students of 20 years ago.

ALTs

ALTs provide an avenue for EFL learners to communicate with a native speaker of English (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). The JET Programme, introduced in 1987, brought ALTs into the Japanese education system on a national scale and in mass numbers, but recently there has been a shift towards ALTs being hired through private companies (Martin, 2010). JTEs interviewed by Lamie (2000) saw ALTs as a positive influence in the classroom and beneficial to a focus on a communicative

style of teaching. CLT activities using pair and groupwork configurations were more likely to be implemented in team-teaching classes (Nishino, 2008; Sakui, 2004). Gorsuch (2001) found that CLT activities had a higher approval rate among teachers who worked with an ALT and proposed that this may have been due to the greater ease of modeling pair work in a team-teaching environment. Students' perceptions of the role of ALTs may also influence the use of CLT activities in the classroom: in a study by Kasai et al. (2011) students regarded native-speaker English teachers as being more capable of teaching oral skills than nonnative-speaker English teachers.

While her study acknowledged the influence of ALTs in integrating CLT activities in the classroom, Gorsuch (2001) did not attempt to discern their beliefs and practices. Martin (2010) suggested there had been a change in what is expected from ALTs, from them being participants in a cultural exchange to teachers and employees. Due to the way in which their role has evolved over the past 20 years, it is appropriate to take into consideration their attitudes towards CLT and the factors which influence how they act in the classroom.

Research Questions

Gorsuch (2001) concluded her study by stating it was a period of extraordinary change in the Japanese education system, and that the policy changes laid out in MEXT's 1999 Course of Study and 2003 Action Plan could change perceptions about the viability of CLT activities. This study intends to examine the current status of CLT in the Japanese education system at the secondary level and to what extent it has changed in the last 20 years in relation to teacher beliefs surrounding CLT and its implementation. The purpose of the study was to answer the following questions:

1. What types of activities do junior high school teachers consider appropriate for their classroom?
2. What types of activities do junior high school teachers use in the classroom?
3. What factors influence the classroom practices of junior high school teachers?

Materials and Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were 21 JTEs and 29 ALTs in public and private junior high schools in Japan. The questionnaire used in the study was created using Google Forms and a link was sent to coworkers or former coworkers of mine by email in August 2020. I also utilized snowball sampling to increase the pool of respondents by asking these former coworkers to send the questionnaire on to other suitable candidates. Submissions were accepted until the end of 2020 at which point the survey was closed. The participants gave their informed consent to take part in the study and their submissions were anonymous. No data were missing from the questionnaire responses. The study received approval from the Temple University Institutional Review Board.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the one used in Gorsuch's (2001) study. It was provided in Japanese for JTEs and in English for ALTs. There were three sections to the questionnaire: Section 1 concerned background information, Section 2 concerned activity approval, and Section 3 concerned influences (see Appendix). Some questions were adapted to reflect that the participants were junior high school teachers as opposed to high school teachers. In Section 2 participants read descriptions of classroom activities (e.g., The teacher has students chorally repeat word pairs such as sheep/ship and leave/live) and chose to what extent they agreed that the activity was

appropriate for their classroom on a 6-point scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. A follow-up question to determine whether the teacher used each activity in their classroom was included as in Cook's (2012) study. The CLT, ALM, and yakudoku activities in Section 2 were chosen and categorized by an expert panel of four Japanese and four native English speakers with at least an MA in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Gorsuch's (2001) study. Cronbach's alpha for Section 2 was good at α = .82. In Section 3 participants responded to a positive statement regarding influences (e.g., The textbook my students are using influences my classroom practice) on a 6-point scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Cronbach's alpha for the influences in Section 3 was fair at α = .71. While a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used in the studies by Gorsuch (2001), a 6-point Likert scale from 0 to 5 was chosen for Sections 2 and 3 due to the greater potential for measurement precision and to remove the neutral option as suggested by T. Nemoto and Beglar (2014). All analyses were conducted using the statistical program JASP (Version 0.14.1).

Analyses

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all Likert-scale questions including means, standard deviations, and skewness coefficients. A principal component analysis was run on Section 2 to determine if any groupings should be considered beyond the CLT, ALM, and yakudoku method activity distinctions in Gorsuch's (2001) study, and on Section 3 to determine if the 17 influences could be combined under more overarching constructs.

Results

What types of activities do teachers consider appropriate for their classroom?

In response to Research Question 1 descriptive statistics for JTE and ALT activity approval are shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively, in ranked order from highest to lowest mean. JTEs approved most strongly of CLT activities that involve speaking. They approved of all CLT and ALM activities, though they showed only mild approval of the CLT writing activities. JTEs disapproved of two of the yakudoku activities but approved of the unscramble sentences yakudoku activity.

Table 1

Ranked List of JTE Activity Approval

Activity Type	Activity Name	*M*	SD	Skew
CLT	Information gap	4.19	0.60	-0.87
CLT	Opinion gap	4.05	0.67	-0.05
ALM	Minimal pairs	3.90	0.77	-0.56
ALM	Memorize dialogues	3.90	0.70	0.13
CLT	Unscramble paragraph	3.90	1.00	-1.48
CLT	Match story to picture	3.81	0.40	-1.70
Yakudoku	Unscramble sentences	3.71	0.64	0.33
CLT	Picture story prediction	3.57	0.98	-0.75
CLT	Letter to student	3.43	0.75	1.46
ALM	Memorize patterns	3.29	0.78	0.80
Yakudoku	Translate to Japanese	2.14	1.32	-0.29
Yakudoku	Recite translations	1.86	1.15	-0.13

Note. N = 21. Responses on a scale from 0–5.

ALTs showed strong approval of all CLT activities and of the two speaking activities in particular. The CLT activities were the six highest ranked activities, with the ALM activities and the unscramble sentences yakudoku activity also approved of by the ALTs. The other two yakudoku activities had the lowest approval ratings from the ALTs.

Table 2

Ranked List of ALT Activity Approval

Activity Type	Activity Name	*M*	SD	Skew
CLT	Opinion gap	4.45	0.69	-0.87
CLT	Information gap	4.38	0.78	-1.30
CLT	Match story to picture	3.97	0.82	-0.35
CLT	Picture story prediction	3.93	0.92	0.73
CLT	Letter to student	3.72	0.96	-0.70
CLT	Unscramble paragraph	3.62	1.15	-0.70
ALM	Minimal pairs	3.55	1.30	-1.39
Yakudoku	Unscramble sentences	3.55	0.95	-0.83
ALM	Memorize patterns	3.31	1.00	-1.60
ALM	Memorize dialogues	3.31	1.37	-0.52
Yakudoku	Translate to Japanese	2.52	1.15	0.33
Yakudoku	Recite translations	2.24	1.22	-0.02

Note. N = 29. Responses on a scale from 0–5.

What types of activities do teachers use in the classroom?

In response to Research Question 2, the percentage of JTEs and ALTs that use the activities are shown in Table 3 in ranked order from highest to lowest. The JTE and ALT results were combined to better represent what the students experience in the classroom. The two most commonly used activities were ranked sixth and ninth in terms of approval. The activities ranked number one and two in terms of approval were the fifth and third most commonly used activities respectively. The translate English to Japanese activity was the sixth most commonly used activity, despite it being disapproved of by both JTEs and ALTs.

What factors influence the classroom practices of teachers?

In response to Research Question 3 descriptive statistics for JTE and ALT influences are shown in Tables 4 and 5 respectively, in ranked order from highest to lowest mean.

JTEs were most strongly influenced by entrance exams and student expectations, followed by their own experience as L2 learners. There was a notable drop-off to the next factors, the textbook and students' English-speaking ability. There were seven influences that averaged less than three points, suggesting they were not especially influential. The three weakest influences were membership of an academic organization, pre-service training, and the principal at their school.

Table 3

Activities Used in the Classroom

Activity	Activity use (%)	Approval *M*	Approval rank
Memorize dialogues	90	3.56	9
Minimal pairs	88	3.70	6
Opinion gap	78	4.28	2
Unscramble sentence	76	3.62	7
Information gap	64	4.30	1
Translate to Japanese	58	2.36	11
Memorize patterns	54	3.30	10
Unscramble paragraph	54	3.74	5
Match story to picture	46	3.90	3
Recite translations	36	2.08	12
Write letters to students	26	3.60	8
Picture story prediction	14	3.78	4

Note. $N = 50$. Responses on a scale from 0–5.

Table 4

Ranked List of JTE Influences

Influence	*M*	SD	Skew
Entrance exams	4.57	0.68	-1.36
Student expectations	4.52	0.60	-0.86
Learning experience	4.19	0.68	-0.25
Textbook	3.62	0.81	0.21
Student speaking	3.62	0.97	-0.55
Curriculum	3.52	1.12	-0.53
No. of students	3.52	1.25	0.03
Teacher speaking	3.38	1.16	-0.85
Syllabus	3.33	0.80	0.61
Co-teacher	3.05	0.81	-0.73
Peers	2.81	1.75	0.24
Private training	2.71	1.19	-0.17
Parent expectations	2.33	1.02	-0.13
In-service training	2.10	1.70	0.11
Academic organization	1.95	1.72	0.15
Pre-service training	1.86	1.42	0.16
Principal	1.71	1.52	0.16

Note. $N = 21$. Responses on a scale from 0–5.

Table 5

Ranked List of ALT Influences

Influence	*M*	SD	Skew
Student speaking	4.34	0.77	-0.70
No. of students	4.21	0.77	-2.37
Textbook	4.07	1.10	-1.53
Syllabus	3.97	0.94	-0.48
Co-teacher	3.93	1.16	-1.18
Peers	3.31	0.89	0.30
Entrance exams	3.17	1.26	-0.81
Teacher speaking	2.93	1.46	0.39
Student expectations	2.69	1.07	-0.63
Learning experience	2.62	1.66	-0.35
Private training	2.14	1.46	0.34
Curriculum	2.10	1.57	-0.00
Parent expectations	1.69	1.11	-0.01
Pre-service training	1.62	1.64	0.56
In-service training	1.38	1.40	0.85
Principal	1.34	1.37	0.93
Academic organization	0.97	1.18	1.05

Note. $N = 29$. Responses on a scale from 0–5.

The two strongest influences for ALTs were the students' speaking ability and the number of students in the class. There were nine influences that averaged less than three points, suggesting that they were not especially influential. Four of the ALT influences averaged less than the least influential JTE influence: parents' expectations, pre-service training, in-service training, and the principal.

Discussion

What types of activities do teachers consider appropriate for their classroom?

JTEs' approval of CLT activities over ALM and yakudoku ones is a positive sign for MEXT's promotion of CLT. The top two ranked activities were CLT speaking activities involving turn-taking and negotiation of meaning, both of which are important in real-world contexts. It suggests that JTEs understand the importance of teaching practical English to their students in line with the goals of MEXT.

The top four ranked activities all involve students speaking English, indicating that JTEs appreciate the importance of teaching English for the purpose of communication. In Gorsuch's (2001) study the two most highly approved activities were both CLT, but neither required the students to produce any written or spoken language, unlike the top four activities in this study. However, as two of those four activities merely involve rote memorization and repetition, it also shows JTEs are currently relying on some older and more conservative methods.

The declining influence of yakudoku is an important trend. Overall, teachers recognized that yakudoku activities are no longer appropriate for their classes. Whereas 20 years prior Gorsuch (2001) viewed the mild approval of all types of activities in her study as cautious and conservative, in this study the JTEs were bolder in their support of activities they approved of and firmer in their rejection of ones they disapproved of. ALTs were even more enthusiastic in their support of CLT activities than JTEs, with all six of the top positions taken up by CLT activities. The results suggest that ALTs understand that their role is not only to foster communicative activities in the classroom,

but to encourage students to use their own linguistic resources to do so.

What types of activities do teachers use in the classroom?

Approval of an activity does not equate to its incorporation in the classroom: the top two most commonly used activities were the ALM activities which ranked sixth and ninth in terms of approval between the JTEs and ALTs. However, both the first and second most approved of activities, the opinion gap and information gap, were used by the majority of teachers. The two CLT writing activities are likely at the bottom of the list due to their novelty when compared to many of the other activities which often appear in teaching manuals and textbooks. Of greater concern is how widespread the use of the yakudoku translation activity is, despite teachers not approving of it.

What factors influence the classroom practices of teachers?

The results further entrench the notion that JTEs are concerned with the ultimate aim of junior high school education: to prepare students for high school entrance examinations. Concerns regarding the implementation of CLT activities were deemed of lesser importance. Until the exams reflect the communicative goals of MEXT, CLT activities might be viewed as an unnecessary distraction for both teachers and students.

The third strongest influence for JTEs, their own experience learning English, could be a positive indication for the future. For the younger teachers who were brought up through the education system during a time in which CLT has been encouraged, it may explain their approval of CLT activities. In Gorsuch's (2001) study it was largely the older teachers who disapproved of CLT activities, and in the intervening 20 years it can be assumed that a significant number of them have retired. If new JTEs have been positively influenced by their experiences with communicative English teaching, then in the future the trend towards the approval of CLT activities should continue to gather pace.

Disappointingly, training was as uninfluential for JTEs now as 20 years ago. What JTEs are taught in university to prepare them to teach bears even less influence now than it did in Gorsuch's (2001) study when she decried pre-service training programs as lacking practicality and providing only shallow instruction into teaching methodology. In-service training fared little better, suggesting that teachers are still too busy to attend, or that the training sessions they do attend fail to leave a lasting impression on them.

ALTs are most strongly influenced by the immediate concerns of teaching lessons and are not especially affected by influences beyond the scope of the classroom. As their responsibilities in a school are limited to the classroom and considering that ALTs are less knowledgeable than JTEs regarding the curriculum and entrance exams, this is unsurprising. The high school teachers in Gorsuch's (2001) study shared the same top two priorities as the ALTs in this study: the students' speaking ability and the number of students in the class. However, the high school teachers of 20 years ago were probably concerned with the relatively new methodology they were being asked to use and could have seen those two factors as justifications for abandoning CLT activities. One of the roles of an ALT is to facilitate the use of CLT activities in the classroom, so they likely see the students' English ability and the class size as logistical factors to be taken into consideration rather than impediments.

ALTs' relationships with their JTE co-teachers are more influential for them than for JTEs. As JTEs will almost always be present in ALTs' classes but ALTs are present in comparatively few of the JTEs' classes, this is to be expected. For ALTs to have a productive relationship with their JTEs is a necessity; for JTEs it is merely desirable. This

is still an improvement from Gorsuch's (2001) study in which ALTs were only the 14th strongest influence on the high school JTEs. In this study the junior high school JTEs ranked their ALT co-teacher 10th, slightly above fellow JTEs. This suggests JTEs consider ALTs to have a more prominent role in the classroom than previously.

Conclusion

The present study sought to examine the attitudes of junior high school teachers towards CLT and the factors that influence their classroom practices. The results reveal that though approval for CLT activities is higher than 20 years ago, many of the activities which actually take place in the classroom bear a striking similarity to those from before MEXT began its promotion of CLT. As such, the 30-year transition from the grammar-translation method to CLT cannot be considered a success.

The results of this study indicate that rather than promotion of CLT, some of the changes made by MEXT to the educational environment could lead to CLT finally becoming the dominant teaching methodology in Japan. One such change is that in 2020 English became a compulsory subject for Grades 3 and 4 with 35 hours per year, while the number of hours for Grades 5 and 6 increased from 35 to 70 per year. This increase in English lessons was for the express purpose of developing communicative English skills, with listening and speaking the primary foci (A. Nemoto, 2018). In addition, recent secondary school textbooks have placed a greater emphasis on the use of English as a communicative tool as opposed to achieving grammatical accuracy. Finally, though delayed, English speaking will likely become part of the university entrance examinations process. Since high-stakes entrance examinations are such an influential factor in Japan, the hope is for a washback effect to occur on teaching and learning throughout the secondary school system (Saito, 2019) leading to greater prominence of CLT activities. Future studies on a larger scale should be conducted to determine whether the change in university entrance exams brings about the desired effect in the beliefs and practices of teachers in secondary schools. As shown by this study, change in the Japanese English education system is slow to happen. However, if anything can bring about a more rapid and emphatic shift in how English is taught in Japan, it will likely come through a change to the entrance exams. Education policies do not change teacher beliefs and practices in and of themselves. Instead, changing the educational environment is necessary to bring about real change.

References

Allen, D. (2020). Proposing change in university entrance examinations: A tale of two metaphors. *SHIKEN*, *24*(2), 23–38. http://teval.jalt.org/sites/teval.jalt.org/files/24_02_Complete.pdf#page=25

Clancy, G. (2018). Student views on the use of L1 in the foreign language classroom. *TESOL International Journal*, *13*(1), 1–19. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1247212.pdf

Cook, M. (2012). Revisiting Japanese English teachers' (JTEs) perceptions of communicative, audio-lingual, and grammar translation (yakudoku) activities: Beliefs, practices, and rationales. *Asian EFL Journal*, *14*(2), 79–98. https://asian-efl-journal.com/wp-content/uploads/mgm/downloads/95972300.pdf#page=79

Cook, M., & Gulliver, T. (2014). Helping Japanese teachers of English overcome obstacles to communicative language teaching in overseas teacher development programs. *Asian EFL Journal Professional Teaching Articles*, *79*, 24–46. https://tinyurl.com/456d72h8

Fang, Z. (1996). A review of research on teacher beliefs and practices. *Educational Research*, *38*(1), 47–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/0013188960380104
Gorsuch, G. J. (1998). Yakudoku EFL instruction in two Japanese high school classrooms: An exploratory study. *JALT Journal*, *20*(1), 6–32. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED451717.pdf#page=10
Gorsuch, G. J. (2001). Japanese EFL teachers' perceptions of communicative, audiolingual and yakudoku activities: The plan versus the reality. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *9*(10), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v9n10.2001
JASP Team. (2020). JASP (Version 0.14.1) [Computer software]. https://jasp-stats.org/
Kasai, M., Lee, J. A., & Kim, S. (2011). Secondary EFL students' perceptions of native and nonnative English-speaking teachers in Japan and Korea. *Asian EFL Journal*, *13*(3), 272–300. http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/PDF/September-2011.pdf#page=272
Kikuchi, K., & Browne, C. (2009). English educational policy for high schools in Japan: Ideals vs. reality. *RELC Journal*, *40*(2), 172–191. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0033688209105865
Kurihara, Y., & Samimy, K. K. (2007). The impact of a US teacher training program on teaching beliefs and practices: A case study of secondary school level Japanese teachers of English. *JALT Journal*, *29*(1), 99–122. https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/art5_4.pdf
Lamie, J. M. (2000). Teachers of English in Japan: Professional development and training at a crossroads. *JALT Journal*, *22*(1), 27–45. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED451719.pdf#page=31
Martin, R. (2010). Team-teaching in Japanese public schools: Fissures in the ALT industry. *Language, Culture, and Communication: Journal of the College of Intercultural Communication*, *2*, 145–152. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/293140201.pdf
Nemoto, A. (2018). Getting ready for 2020: Changes and challenges for English education in public primary schools in Japan. *The Language Teacher*, *42*(4), 33–35. https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf/42.4-tlt.pdf
Nemoto, T., & Beglar, D. (2014). Developing Likert-scale questionnaires. In N. Sonda & A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2013 Conference Proceedings*. JALT, Tokyo. https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf-article/jalt2013_001.pdf
Nishimuro, M., & Borg, S. (2013). Teacher cognition and grammar teaching in a Japanese high school. *JALT Journal*, *35*(1), 29–50. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTJJ35.1-2
Nishino, T. (2008). Japanese secondary school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching: An exploratory survey. *JALT Journal*, *30*(1), 27–50. https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf-article/art2_8.pdf
Nishino, T., & Watanabe, M. (2008). Communication-oriented policies versus classroom realities in Japan. *TESOL Quarterly*, *42*(1), 133–138. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2008.tb00214.x
OECD. (2020). Average class size, by type of institution (2018) and index of change between 2005 and 2018: By level of education, calculations based on number of students and number of classes. *Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/954446a9-en
Otani, M. (2013). Communicative language teaching in English at Japanese junior high schools. *Journal of Soga University*, *35*, 285–305. https://www.soka.ac.jp/files/ja/20170429_001652.pdf
Sato, K., & Kleinsasser, R. C. (2004). Beliefs, practices, and interactions of teachers in a Japanese high school English department. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*(8), 797–816. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.09.004

Saito, Y. (2019). Impacts of introducing four-skill English tests into university entrance examinations. *The Language Teacher*, *43*(2), 9–14. https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf/43.2-tlt.pdf#page=11
Sakui, K. (2004). Wearing two pairs of shoes: Language teaching in Japan. *ELT Journal*, *58*(2), 155–163. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.2.155
Sakui, K. (2007). Classroom management in Japanese EFL classrooms. *JALT Journal*, *29*(1), 41–58. https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/art2_11.pdf
Steele, D., & Zhang, R. (2016). Enhancement of teacher training: Key to improvement of English education in Japan. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *217*, 16–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.02.007
Tahira, M. (2012). Behind MEXT's new course of study guidelines. *The Language Teacher*, *36*(3), 3–8. https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf-article/36.3_art1.pdf
Underwood, P. (2010). A comparative analysis of MEXT English reading textbooks and Japan's National Center Test. *RELC Journal*, *41*(2), 165–182. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0033688210373128
Underwood, P. (2012). Teacher beliefs and intentions regarding the instruction of English grammar under national curriculum reforms: A theory of planned behaviour perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *28*(6), 911–925. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.04.004

Appendix

This link contains the English questionnaire https://forms.gle/soLPaRdgZtRsY8yK6
This link contains the Japanese questionnaire https://forms.gle/LnbhvKoj6Drzo8xAA

Activity Descriptions
1. The teacher asks students to translate English phrases or sentences into Japanese as preparation for class.

2. The teacher has students look at a page that has a picture strip story. Students can uncover only one picture at a time. Before uncovering the next picture, the students predict, writing the prediction in English, what will happen in the next picture. Students can then look at the next picture to confirm or disconfirm their predictions.

3. The teacher has the students work face to face in pairs. One student sees a page that has some missing information. The other student sees a different page that has that information. The first student must ask questions in English to the other student to find the missing information.

4. The teacher asks students to translate English phrases or sentences into Japanese in preparation for class. Then in class, the teacher calls on individual students to read their Japanese translation of an English phrase or sentence, and the teacher corrects it if necessary and gives the whole class the correct translation with an explanation.

5. The teacher has students chorally repeat word pairs such as sheep/ship and leave/live.

6. The teacher has students memorize and practice a short English sentence pattern. The teacher then gives the students a one-word English cue and has the students chorally say the sentence pattern using the new word.

7. The teacher pairs off students. Then the teacher asks the students to write a letter in English to their partner.

8. The teacher has students memorize an English dialog and then has the students practice the dialogue together with a partner.

9. The teacher has pairs or small groups of students ask each other and then answer questions in English about their opinions.

10. Students read a sentence in Japanese, and then see an equivalent English sentence below where the words have been scrambled up. The students must then rewrite the English sentence in the correct order suggested by the Japanese sentence.

11. On one page students see a picture. Underneath the picture are several short English stories. Students have to choose which story they think best matches the picture.

12. On a page, students see an English paragraph in which the sentences have been scrambled. The teacher then asks the students to put the sentences into order so the paragraph makes sense.

Influences

1. The Monbusho guidelines influence my classroom practice.

2. High school and university entrance exams influence my classroom practice.

3. The textbook my students are using influences my classroom practice.

4. The teaching license program I completed at university influences my classroom practice.

5. In-service teacher education specifically designed for English teaching offered by my prefectural or municipal board of education influences my classroom practice.

6. The way I learned a foreign language as a student influences my classroom practice.

7. My peers (fellow Japanese English teachers or fellow ALTs) influence my classroom practice.

8. The principal at my school influences my classroom practice.

9. Teaching courses I have taken privately influence my current classroom practice.

10. My membership in a private academic organization influences my classroom practice.

11. The syllabus used at my school influences my classroom practice.

12. The number of students in my class influences my classroom practice.

13. My co-teacher (Japanese English teacher or ALT) influences my classroom practice.

14. The expectations of my students' parents influence my classroom practice.

15. My students' expectations about how to study English influences my classroom practice.

16. My students' abilities in English influences my classroom practice.

17. The Japanese teachers' English speaking ability influences my classroom practice.

About the Author

Steven Lim has been teaching at various positions in Japan since 2005 and is currently working as an assistant professor at Meikai University. He graduated from Temple University, Japan Campus with an M.S.Ed in TESOL. His research interests include teacher beliefs and practices, speech modification, and the use of technology in education. stevenmenjinlim@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2955-1933