

A Comparative Study of Teacher Education in Japan, Korea and Australia

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1.0 Introduction

In Japan, it is often observed that students cannot communicate in English no matter how hard they study at school. It is also said that English-language teaching in Japan does not help students develop their communicative abilities, but serves only to help students pass university entrance examinations. As a result, English education in Japan is a focus of much criticism and debate (Mastumoto, cited in Hinenoya and Gatbonton, 2000).

Developing teacher quality is the way to improve English education in Japan. It is teachers who have their students acquire English and communicative ability by their teaching. Teachers greatly influence their students whether the students come to like English or not (Saeki, 1992). One recent study shows that students whose classes focused on rapid reading practice and communicative activities had as good or better results in entrance examinations than students who had traditional grammar-focused classes (Suzuki, 1997). This is evidence that teachers' efforts and attempts to develop English education and teaching techniques have made it possible to help students pass entrance examinations as well as enhance their communicative abilities. Since in-service training plays important roles to improve teachers' abilities and skills, it is necessary to enrich the quality of teacher education and to provide teachers with a variety of useful in-service training programs.

2.0 Teacher education in Japan, South Korea and Australia

2.1. Necessity of teacher education

The quality of teaching depends on the teachers (Kanatani, 1995 cited in Mizuno, 1999). Good teachers have some common characteristics such as praising students often, making a lot of jokes and actively use the target language in teaching (Moskowitz, 1976a). The students of good English teachers' "are working positively and independently with a lively expression"(Koinuma, 2000, p.1) during class. According to research conducted by Koike (1988), the character or personality of English-language teachers affects students twice as strongly as those of other subjects. English teachers need to realize the extent of their influence on their students and to have a wide range of appropriate qualities, abilities, and qualifications--including their characters.

Hatori (1978) and other Japanese scholars show specific levels of each skill that English teachers need. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology stipulates the minimum requirements of English teachers. This year, the Ministry decided to include a listening comprehension test in “centrally-convened” preliminary university entrance examinations. Although it is not clear how the listening test will be held, it is predicted that it will greatly influence teaching, teaching skills and English abilities.

Most English-language teachers are dissatisfied with their teaching and realize the necessity for professional development. Teachers are isolated and have difficulty finding good opportunities to interact with other people to solve their worries or problems (Acheson and Gall, 1998). Teachers want more opportunities to interact with other teachers (Mizuno, 1999). A possible solution to their dissatisfaction is to enrich teacher education and have them attend in-service training.

2.2 Problems surrounding teacher education

Teachers are very busy. In Japan, in addition to problems such as student bullying and students’ refusal to attend school, secondary school teachers have a heavy workload and thus their class preparation time is limited. Even though in-service training for teachers is desirable, forcing secondary school teachers, already extremely busy with their regular jobs, to attend the training further exacerbates their busy situation (Ushiro, 2003). In general, the working conditions in private schools are severe and some teachers have to quit if they want to study for longer than the leave period stipulated by their school.

The following table shows problems surrounding teacher education in both Japan and South Korea. It is essential to increase the number of teachers, to reduce their regular workload and other odd jobs, and to guarantee time to attend training. It is also necessary to listen to teachers’ opinions and to provide independent in-service training with styles and content that enables teachers to participate positively (Ikeda, 2003).

Table 1: Reasons why secondary school teachers cannot attend in-service training
(Saeki, 2002)

	Japan	South Korea
1. Too busy with teaching and other work	25(40%)	37(51%)
2. No training they want to attend	7(11%)	5(7%)
3. No official budget	3	3
4. Private financial reasons	0	8(11%)
5. Hesitation that they might bother their colleagues	6(10%)	0
6. Others	2	3

2.3 Present situation of teacher education

2.3.1. Present situation of teacher education in Japan and South Korea

South Korea has sufficient teacher education (Kimura, 2001). In South Korea, English education starts at the 3rd grade of elementary school as a regular subject. Teachers teaching at elementary school have 120 hours of training before teaching: 80 hours for studying listening and speaking, 20 hours for theories and teaching methods and 20 hours for demonstration (Kim, 2003). More than 90% of parents report that they are satisfied with the English teaching at elementary school (Gendaikyoikushinbun, 2003). In Japan, however, specific guidelines have not yet been shown and thus--curriculum and teaching depend on an individual elementary school (Yamashita, 2003).

South Korea has two types of in-service training for English teachers: domestic and overseas. Domestic training has two types: one consists of intensive lectures at graduate school during holidays, whereas the other is conducted during the school term. Training overseas is for one year and for teachers younger than 45 years old who pass a specific examination. In South Korea, all new teachers except those who have graduate schools degrees in education must take 180 hours of training over three years after their official appointment as a teacher. Moreover, some districts set English ability criteria for their teachers (Yoshikawa, 2003).

In Japan the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has decided to provide all junior and senior high school English teachers with intensive training. This is a five-year project commencing in 2003. The training consists of two types: one is about two-week long and the other has a long-term intensive curriculum held by individual local governments. Class sizes are small and participants can actively participate in most training independently. The other type of training is two-month, six-month or one-year overseas training, held on a nation-wide level. However, teachers employed at private schools are excluded (Ushiro, 2003).

Table 2: What high school teachers desire from domestic training (Saeki, 2002)

	Japan	South Korea
1. Applied linguistics, psychology and other information	7	1
2. Information on teaching skills in genera	13(21%)	6
3. Developing proficiency in English	13(21%)	35(49%)
4. Teaching methods and their application	15(25%)	27(38%)
5. Exchange views with teachers who have similar standing and situations	12	3
6. Others	2	

'Table 2' reveals interesting differences between Japan and South Korea. While few of the South Korean teachers surveyed were interested in information on teaching skills in general, more than 20% of Japanese teachers desired such information. Moreover, approximately half of the Korean teachers desired developing proficiency in English, only about 20% of Japanese teachers did. As for exchanging views with teachers who have similar standing and situations, the difference between Japan and South Korea may reflect differences in cultural values surrounding work (Saeki, 2002).

While universities and secondary schools have close relationships in teacher education in South Korea (Kimura, 2001), universities and postgraduate schools in Japan are expected to play a bigger role in both pre- and in-service training. Numerous teachers in Japan hope that pre-service training in universities will improve in order to allow teachers to acquire greater English proficiency (Mizuno, 1999). Many teachers want Japanese universities to play a more important and extensive role in teacher education and training (National Science Foundation Tokyo Regional Office, 2002). Recently some postgraduate schools have started to offer various programs that enable teachers to acquire a Masters degree without taking leave of their jobs. In most cases, however, teachers need to be full time students for the first year (Shinbori, 1999). It is much preferable that the number and the kind of courses in the evening will increase.

2.3.2. Present situation of teacher education in Australia

Australia has many immigrants from various countries and the indigenous Aboriginal people. For example, about 40% of the population of Queensland is immigrants or descendants of immigrants from more than 200 different nations. Many indigenous people live in Queensland. Under this situation, the state has a need for ESL education (Murakami, Imai, Sugiura, and Takashima, 2003). Australia has also supported LOTE (Language Other Than English) the past 20 years with strong ties to Asian countries economically and geographically. The development of students' communicative skills in L2s was emphasized around the same time (Sato and Kleinsasser, 1999). In Queensland, about 7 languages including Korean and Japanese are taught from third grade of elementary school (Higuchi, 1997).

In Australia, universities and postgraduate schools play a big role in professional development. There are a variety of courses ranging from doing a subject or two within an undergraduate degree to postgraduate certificates and diplomas or masters degree (McArthur, 2003). For example, the MA in TESOL or Applied Linguistics is coursework degree whose duration is 3 semesters for full time students and 6 semesters for part time students in many universities. Most classes for these programs start in the evening such that teachers who work during the day can come to university after

finishing their jobs for the day. These programs at some universities are available by distance education or external education, which allows teachers to study without interrupting their work (Austin, 2003). It is common and natural for teachers in Australia to study for professional development at postgraduate school as part time or full time students.

3.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the working environment in English Language Training needs to be improved. The teacher education system needs to provide varied training or studying opportunities to satisfy the desires of teachers at regular intervals, to some extent both non-mandatory and mandatory. Universities and postgraduate schools should have bigger roles in helping teachers develop and maintain their teaching skills and qualities. Comparing teacher education in Japan with that in South Korea and Australia, it is clear that Japan needs to improve in certain areas. It is necessary for Japan to learn from these two countries, although the situation of each country is somewhat different. Primarily, teachers need to have a better working environment where they can attend in-service training independently. Their workloads must be small enough to enable them to attend training more easily without hesitation that their attending training might bother their colleagues. Job guarantees are indispensable and financial support is necessary for teachers employed at both public and private schools.

If teachers change and improve, their students and their teaching will also change and improve. It is essential to enrich teachers' teaching skills and quality, as well as adjust teacher education according to their work situation. Teachers need to keep improving through professional development. The importance of continuing development is stressed by Desforges (1995, p.2) as follows, "The best of teachers spend a lifetime learning to improve on their professional practice."

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