

Research Note

The Characteristics of English as taught in a British International Primary School in Japan: a case study

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research is to explore the practice of National Curriculum English in a day-to-day environment in a British international primary school in Japan (Years 5 and 6, ages 9-11). In this research, case study will be adopted for methodology, and observation, interview and document analysis will be used as triangulation methods. This research will introduce the day-to-day practice of literacy education in a British school in Japan to the academic world.*

Introduction

According to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), twenty four schools had been approved as 'international schools' in Japan (MEXT, n.d.), and organisations such as the Council of International schools (CIS), Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) have approved forty two international schools in Japan (International School Navi, n.d.). These international schools do not need to follow the Courses of Study, that is the national curriculum of Japan, and the selection of curriculum is left to the discretion of each international school. In Japan, however, twenty schools among the approved international schools follow the International Baccalaureate curriculum (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2011). There is only one British school that follows the English National Curriculum from nursery to sixth form level, which is The Lion International School.

In England, the National Curriculum for Primary School and its pedagogy are undergoing a major transition, shifting to give more freedom of choice to schools and teachers. Nevertheless, the day-to-day enactment of the National Curriculum in these schools is a matter of record. On the other hand, in Japan, the new compulsory subject of English has been introduced in Years 5 and 6 at primary level in 2011, and teaching of English in primary schools needs to be discussed from various perspectives. Taking these factors into consideration, this research focuses on the practice of the National Curriculum and pedagogy in English in a British international school in Japan, Years 5 and 6 (ages 9 to 11).

Research questions for this research

Main question: What are the characteristics of curriculum and pedagogy of English education in a British international primary school in Japan between the ages of 9 and 11?

Subsidiary questions:

- What selection of knowledge is implied by the curriculum in English lessons?
- What are the learning tasks or objectives of English lessons?
- What resources and materials are used in English lessons?
- What activities are adopted in English lessons?
- What kind of classroom organisation is seen in English lessons?
- What criteria are used to assess the ability and progress of pupils in English lessons?

Methodology and methods

Case study approach to this research

This research seeks to explore the characteristics of English as taught in a British international school. Yin (2005, p.381) states that a case study is appropriate when the researcher wishes to illuminate a particular situation in order to get a close, in-depth and first-hand understanding of it. It is necessary for researchers to define the 'unit of analysis' (Yin, 2003, p.23), that is, the 'case' for a case study, and the case for this research will be 'English as taught in a British international school in Japan between the ages of 9-11 (Year 5 and Year 6)'.

Methods for data collection: document analysis, interview and observation

According to Stark and Torrance (in Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p.35), document analysis, interviews, and observations are the most commonly used research methods in case study. So too in this research, the methods for data collection include document analysis, interviews and observations.

First, document analysis will be conducted mainly through the school websites, course descriptions, handouts and children's work. Whereas Scott (1990, p.62) claims that the single most important category of documentary sources is the administrative papers, McCulloch (2004, p.53) suggests the following sources are also significant in document analysis if they are available: policy reports, committee papers, correspondence, school magazines, textbooks, log books, newspapers, local registers and visual sources such as photographs or paintings. Second, interviews will be employed in order to generate rich data. The interviews will be conducted with the class teachers from Years 5 and 6 in the school because they are the people who are teaching English based on the National Curriculum at the school, so they are the appropriate people to ask, which is the 'purposeful selection' sampling of the interviewees (Light, Singer & Willett, 1990, p.88). The style of the interviews will be semi-structured, and the interviews will be conducted based on the prepared interview schedule. Each interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes long. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face at the school, preferably in the classrooms, because it may help the interviewees to refer to materials or documents that are related to the interview questions relatively easily when they need to. Each interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. Two digital recorders (one for unexpected technical problems) and two lapel microphones (one for the interviewee and the other one for the researcher) will be used. Third, observation will also be employed in order to look directly at activities in classrooms and classroom organisation. Approximately 15 non-participant observations will be conducted in the Literacy lessons in Years 5 and 6 over the period of one year. During the observation sessions, the researcher will be seated at the back or in a corner of the classroom, and will take notes in a prepared entry sheet, which will be an observation schedule or a field note.

These three methods comprise methodological triangulation. Cohen, et al. (2007, p.142) emphasise the strength of the use of methodological triangulation for a case study thus: 'triangular techniques are suitable when a more holistic view of educational outcomes is sought...or where a complex phenomenon requires elucidation...triangulation can be a useful technique where a researcher is engaged in a case study'. As this research will be conducted at a primary school and will involve children, the researcher has been issued with a 'Certificate of Criminal Record' by the Metropolitan Police Department of Japan, which is equivalent to the 'Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure' in the United Kingdom, and all of the

information collected through the research will be treated as confidential and pseudonyms will be used where necessary. This research project has already been examined and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education, University of London.

Objectives of this study

Overall objectives of this research will be to:

- illustrate how the National Curriculum and pedagogy of English are enacted and practised in a British international primary school in Japan,
- identify the characteristics of the ways to enact and practice the National Curriculum and pedagogy of English in a British international primary school in Japan,
- investigate the cultural or geographical context of the Japan-based British international school,
- explore the literature and review the background of English education in the Japan-based British international school; and
- establish my own view and position on the enactment and practice of the National Curriculum and pedagogy of English in the British international primary school in Japan.

Through answering the research questions and achieving these objectives together, I will present the details of the enactment of the National Curriculum and the day-to-day practice of teaching of English in a British international primary school in Japan and plan to discuss a range of points pertinent to this topic.

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